

Proposal to Community Livability and Public Safety Committee: Transition to a Sponsored Approach for Cultural Event Programming

Recommendation for Community Livability and Public Safety Committee:

Approve the proposed shift to a sponsored cultural event model and authorize the necessary budget adjustments to support its implementation.

Executive Summary

This proposal outlines a strategic shift in the City's approach to cultural event programming. The current model, which relies heavily on partnerships for event implementation, has proven to be unsustainable due to limited staff capacity and available resources. To ensure the continuity and growth of cultural events in Olympia, we propose transitioning to a sponsored approach. This will involve reallocating City resources to provide more funding and support to current cultural event partners, enabling them to operate with greater independence while reducing administrative support previously provided by City staff.

Background

Since June 2021, the City has partnered with community organizations and leaders to co-host public events for Juneteenth, Black History Month, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month; Hispanic Heritage Month, and Indigenous Peoples' Day. The partnership model is unique in that the partnering organization or leader envisions and implements a community cultural event, while being provided with significant support and collaboration from the City.

Goals of Cultural Event Program

1. Supporting cultural awareness and celebration opportunities for our community
2. Building trusting relationships with cultural or ethnic communities and underrepresented groups
3. Authentically honoring culture and heritage by amplifying the vision of cultural or ethnic communities and underrepresented groups
4. Maintain a sustainable funding and resourcing model
5. Transparent and inclusive funding process that prioritizes the needs and initiatives of underrepresented communities

Under this partnership model, the City of Olympia provides most of the event funding and in-kind contributions including City staff time (dedicated staff for administrative support, day-of-event staffing, marketing and graphic design services), planning tools and resources, facilities use and/or rental procurement, and City Council recognition.

2024 Allocated Resources

- Operational budget for the Cultural Events program was \$64,000, with \$58,000 allocated for partnered cultural events (Black History Month, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander Heritage; Juneteenth, Lula Fest, Indigenous Peoples' Day).
- Per event, administrative staff spent an average of 678 hours. That time was spread out over six to nine months. (Cultural Event Program Process Improvement Project, Standard Work Audit, 2024)
- Two full time staff were dedicated to Cultural Events in 2024: A Cultural Event Program Specialist (6 months), and an Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Specialist (12 months). Other staff support included Communications, Parks Maintenance, Parks Recreation, Parking and Permitting, Public Works, Police, Fire, Legal, and various staff supporting day-of-event across multiple departments.

While these Cultural events add to our City's vibrancy by fostering community engagement, tourism, and economic development, we have also faced challenges in managing and supporting these events effectively due to:

1. **Limited Staff Capacity:** Our current model requires significant staff time to coordinate, promote, and execute cultural events, diverting valuable resources away from other essential City functions.
2. **Resource Constraints:** The growing number of cultural events and initiatives has outpaced available funding and infrastructure, limiting the City's ability to equitably support events.
3. **Increased Demand for Cultural Programming:** Community interest in cultural events has grown, and the need for more sustainable, independent event management has become clear. This model will allow for the City to support more community-led cultural programming.

As a result, it has become evident that a new approach is required to ensure the longevity and success of cultural events in our City.

Proposed Solution: Transition to a Sponsored Event Model

We propose a shift from a partnership model to a sponsored event approach. We anticipate this to be a two year transition. Under this new model, the City will provide financial support and planning resources to established cultural event partners, supporting their autonomy and independence in managing and executing their events. This model will also allow the City to eventually expand support to more cultural celebrations. Key elements of the transition include:

1. **Increased Financial Support:** The City will allocate a larger pool of funding to event organizers, allowing them to cover key expenses such as venue costs, marketing, production, and performer fees.
 - **We recommend offering up to \$12,000 per each established partnered Cultural Event for 2025.** This will be an increase of \$5,000 for most events except for Juneteenth, which will see a \$1,000 decrease.
2. **Reduced In-Kind and Administrative Support:** The City will shift from a hands-on partnership role to one that primarily offers financial sponsorships and access to planning tools. Event organizers will be expected to take on logistical and administrative responsibilities.
 - **We recommend offering some Communications support which includes social media reposts; resource documents that include planning templates, marketing contacts, vendors and service providers; and invitations to participate in City Council Proclamations for respective heritage months. City owned facility rentals will incur a rental fee.**
3. **Clear Expectations and Accountability:** The City will establish clear guidelines for event organizers, including timeline for support requests, requirements for transparency, financial reporting, and alignment with the City's cultural event goals.

- **We recommend a proposal from event partners that outlines scope of work and planned expenses; and expected recognition and involvement as a sponsor.**
4. **This proposal will be in effect during the transition years of 2025-6, with the expectation that starting in 2027 a grant process to support cultural events will be identified.** Event partners (and other cultural event planners) will be encouraged to apply for grant funding to cover future event costs and grow the programming. This may include or be in addition to available funding resources such as Inspire Olympia or the Lodging Tax Fund.

Benefits of the Sponsored Event Model

1. **Sustainability:** This model provides a more sustainable framework for cultural programming, allowing event organizers to become self-sufficient and less reliant on City staff involvement.
2. **Increased Efficiency:** By shifting administrative responsibilities to event organizers, the City can streamline its operations and reduce the strain on staff resources.
3. **Stronger Community Engagement:** Giving event organizers more independence allows them to tailor events to local needs and interests, fostering deeper community engagement and participation.
4. **Economic Growth:** With more funding and support, cultural events can grow in scale, attracting more visitors, boosting local businesses, and contributing to the City's economy.
5. **Enhanced Collaboration:** By focusing on sponsorships rather than partnership management, the City can foster a more collaborative environment between diverse community, businesses, and local leaders.

Implementation Plan

1. Phase 1 – Transition Planning (3-6 months):

- Conduct a review of current events and their funding needs.
- Schedule conversations with each cultural event partner.
- Begin developing planning resources and draft 2025 implementation strategy.
- Present Transition Proposal, seek review and approval from Community Livability and Public Safety Committee.

2. Phase 2 – Sponsorship Rollout and Resource Development (6-12 months):

- Begin offering sponsorship opportunities for the next cycle of cultural events.
- Provide resource documentation for organizers transitioning to greater independence.
- Monitor the progress of events and adjust resources as necessary.
- Research other City event funding models and work with staff to develop a draft grant strategy for 2027.

3. Phase 3 – Plan for 2027 and Beyond (12-24 months):

- Review the success of the new model through surveys and feedback from event organizers.
- Adjust funding, resource allocation, and support based on ongoing needs and feedback.
- Draft implementation strategy and Cultural Event Grant Process.
- Present final Cultural Event Grant Process, seek review and approval from Community Livability and Public Safety Committee.

Budget Considerations

The transition to a sponsored model will require an initial investment in increased funding for events but that cost will be offset due to the salary savings from reduction in staff. In anticipation of this transition, up to \$12,000 per five current partnered events has been allocated in the 2025 budget. No additional funding is anticipated to implement this model change.

Conclusion

By transitioning to a sponsored approach for cultural events, the City can ensure a sustainable, efficient, and dynamic cultural landscape. This new model will empower event organizers, reduce the strain on City staff resources, and help foster more vibrant, independent events that reflect the diversity and creativity of our community. We ask the City Council to support this proposal to create a more sustainable and impactful cultural event program for the future.