



Year in Review

Fiscal Year 2026



About Us

The New Jersey State Council on the Arts, created in 1966, is a division of the NJ Department of State and a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts. The Council was established to encourage and foster public interest in the arts, enlarge public and private resources devoted to the arts, promote freedom of expression in the arts, and facilitate the inclusion of art in every public building in New Jersey. We believe the arts are central to every element we value most in a modern society including: human understanding, cultural and civic pride, strong communities, excellent schools, lifelong learning, creative expression, and economic opportunity.

Commitment to Public Benefit & Equity

In New Jersey, we know that diversity is one of our greatest strengths. The Arts Council embraces the principles of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion in all aspects of our work. With a focus on learning, data, and accountability, we will continue to assess and challenge inequities, identify gaps in engagement and service, and focus on the details that shape change.

“New Jersey has always been a trailblazer in the arts. Some of the world’s most creative thinkers, inventors, and creators have made their mark here, nurtured by communities and industries that value self-expression, connection, and innovation. That legacy has been true throughout history and continues today through the artists and cultural organizations that bring people together and celebrate the stories that define us. I am proud to work with the State Arts Council to support New Jersey residents, families, and communities now and for generations to come.”

Lieutenant Governor Dr. Dale G. Caldwell, Secretary of State

“Every day, the arts help people connect, learn, and celebrate what makes their communities special. Beyond their cultural value, the arts are an important economic driver, supporting local businesses, creating jobs and contributing to thriving communities throughout our state. The Arts Council is committed to supporting opportunities for residents of all ages and all walks of life to have meaningful arts experiences. This report reflects the remarkable work happening in New Jersey and the value the arts bring to our lives.”

Felicia Grant, Chair

“This year’s report shows a record number of grants and services and highlights the importance of sustained investment in New Jersey’s essential arts industry. Reliable funding for artists and arts businesses means New Jersey communities reap the benefits across the board. As we look ahead, we remain committed to strengthening partnerships, expanding opportunities, and ensuring the arts continue to thrive across our state.”

Allison Tratner, Executive Director



FY26 Grants

Snapshot

State support for the arts through the State Arts Council comes from the Hotel/Motel Occupancy Fee, a renewable revenue source the arts industry helps to generate, as well as a partnership grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. With a combined \$33,652,538, a record number of grants and customized services reached all 21 counties in support of NJ communities, families, and individuals.

➤ **Operating Grants**
\$18,964,300
106 grants

➤ **Local Arts Program**
\$6,259,987
676 grants

➤ **Project Grants**
\$2,598,000
50 grants

➤ **Individual Artists**
\$2,475,260
207 grants





Operating Grants

The majority of Council grants provide the type of funding most challenging for nonprofits to find: reliable, flexible operating support. Multiyear, flexible support helped nonprofit arts organizations pay for basic operations.

Local Arts Program

New Jersey's network of 21 County Arts Agencies (CAAs) extended the reach of and access to Council dollars. CAAs support local arts development programs and regrant funds to community-based organizations and projects.

Project Grants

Based on changing needs in the field, these programs focused on arts education, lifelong learning, professional development, cultural access, public art, economic development, and more.

Individual Artists

Individual Artist Fellowships provided the means to sustain and strengthen the careers of artists at the heart of our state's creative industries. The Heritage Fellowships recognized artistic excellence, lifetime achievement, and contributions to New Jersey's traditional arts heritage.



In FY26, the Council supported a record **1,039 grants**, which included an increase of **50 regrants** through the Local Arts Program. We exceeded the South Jersey funding target by **\$451,661**.



"The Council's operating support is a critical investment in George Street Playhouse and the communities we serve. This funding enables us to leverage additional contributed and earned revenue, multiplying the impact of every public dollar invested. The result is world-class theatre, transformative educational programs for young people, meaningful employment for artists and creative professionals, and accessible cultural experiences that bring people together. Council support helps ensure that the arts remain a powerful force for learning, connection, economic vitality, and cultural enrichment throughout our state."

Edgar Herrera, Executive Director | George Street Playhouse

"General Program Support from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts gives the South Jersey Cultural Alliance the stability to connect artists, cultural organizations, and communities across our eight-county region. The Council's investment does not stop with SJCA. It ripples across South Jersey, helping arts and culture remain visible, accessible, and essential to community life."

Julie Hain, Executive Director | South Jersey Cultural Alliance

"Every day at JAZZ HOUSE KiDS, we invest in young people, helping them develop the skills, confidence, discipline, and leadership needed to thrive in their communities and contribute to New Jersey's future. Operating support from the Council strengthens this work by expanding access to high-quality music education so that young people can experience the arts as a vital part of their development. We are deeply grateful for the Council's continued commitment to sustaining the arts in New Jersey and for recognizing that vibrant communities are built not only through opportunity, but through meaningful access to creative expression and cultural life."

Melissa Walker, Founder + President | JAZZ HOUSE KiDS



Programs & Services

Recognizing the unique position the arts and artists have as positive forces to shape contemporary issues, the Council continued cultivating statewide, regional, and national cross-sector partnerships that support New Jersey communities, strengthen arts infrastructure, and incentivize additional resources and investment for benefits that have a ripple effect statewide. Programs and services occur in four areas of focus: **Artist Services, Arts Education & Lifelong Learning, Creative Communities, and Folk & Traditional Arts.**



In FY26, the Council worked with **42 government agencies and 25 non-government organizations** across sectors to carry out a portfolio of **31 programs and services.**



Artist

Services

Artists are the creative capital of our communities. The Council supports artists in several important ways, through programs that recognize, encourage, and showcase their talents. In addition to providing direct funding to individual artists, the Council supports initiatives such as professional development sessions, paid calls for art, and showcase opportunities.

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“You changed the way I view my work. I always felt I was outside the scope of public art, and now I know that is not the case.”

Making It Public
Professional Development Participant

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1,336

**artists featured in
Senior Citizen Art Shows
across the state.**

1,182

**artists engaged through
professional
development programs.**

893

**applications received from
21 counties for Individual
Artist Fellowship program.**



Arts Education &

Lifelong Learning

10,758

students from 68 schools participated in Poetry Out Loud, placing NJ 2nd in the nation for school participation.

145

teaching artists engaged in the Teaching Artist Community of Practice.

\$300,000

supported 30 Creative Aging Initiative projects across 14 counties.

The Council has a longstanding goal to ensure all New Jerseyans have access to quality, lifelong arts learning. The Council works with an array of partners to place teaching artists and arts programs in schools and communities, supports training for teaching artists, and participates in regional and national affinity groups to ensure New Jersey remains at the forefront of arts education and lifelong learning.

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“The arts are a crucial component for education in justice settings. By working with the Arts Council to support the creation of The Transformative Power of Art: A Guide to Arts Learning for Systems-Impacted Youth in New Jersey, we are able to bring a much greater whole-child focus to the work done in justice settings.”

Dr. Joseph Papika, Director of Education
NJ Youth Justice Commission

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Creative

Communities

Working with public and private entities, the Council establishes and sustains cross-sector partnerships that strengthen New Jersey's arts industry and communities statewide. Initiatives focus on placemaking, economic development, arts access, equity and inclusion, and cultural tourism.

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"The NJ Arts & Culture Administrators of Color Network has been a powerful reminder that community, culture, and connection are essential to our growth. The network's gatherings, programming, and shared resources have supported my growth as an arts administrator and also nurtured my personal journey by creating a space where I feel seen, empowered, and connected to a vibrant community of arts leaders who inspire and uplift one another - and that is golden!"

Olivia Duho Sterling, NJACAC Member

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233

organizations participated in the Families First Discovery Pass - the first time all 21 counties have been represented.

714

engaged with the Cultural Access Network's Access Thursday professional development series and Annual Access Summit.

285

individuals have joined the NJ Arts & Culture Administrators of Color Network.



Folk &

Traditional Arts

New Jersey's many geographic and demographic settings are interwoven with ethnic, cultural, and occupational networks, creating a dynamic array of communities. In them, folk and traditional arts are valued ways of expressing identity and strengthening group ties. To support this cultural richness, the Council supports a multifaceted Folk & Traditional Arts Program, including project grants and regional folklife centers.

In FY26, the Council and the NJ Folklife Centers Network debuted *Paved with Promise*. This multimedia project explores the experiences of local residents who immigrated to New Jersey after the passing of the Hart-Celler Act of 1965. The project includes a series of video documentary interviews as well as a traveling exhibition that visualizes these stories.

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“Support for folk and traditional arts is, for me, an acknowledgment of our existence as a people. We are no longer spoken of only in the past but mentioned in the now and revered for the future. Receiving the Heritage Fellowship was not just for me; it was for all those before me who were never mentioned, now through me, for the contributions that will bless our community for the next seven generations.”

Tyrese “Bright Flower” Gould-Jacinto
FY26 Heritage Fellow

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Arts &

Health

As more organizations throughout our state formalize work at the intersection of arts and health, the Council reaffirms our belief that the arts improve health and well-being through the programs we provide, and we will continue to convene and connect stakeholders across sectors to expand the reach of the arts to meet people where they are. We hope continued engagement and conversation will remove silos and allow for rich partnerships that serve both sectors and ensure the well-being of individuals, families, and communities across New Jersey.



"The Arts in Health convening demonstrated the power of bringing together artists, healthcare professionals, educators, and community members to celebrate and advance the growing arts and health movement in New Jersey, with a special focus on Southern New Jersey. Arts Council funding allowed us to shine a spotlight on the incredible work happening throughout the state, building new partnerships and strengthening a shared commitment to the role of the arts in healing."

Morgan Yacoe, Director
George Family Center for Healing Arts

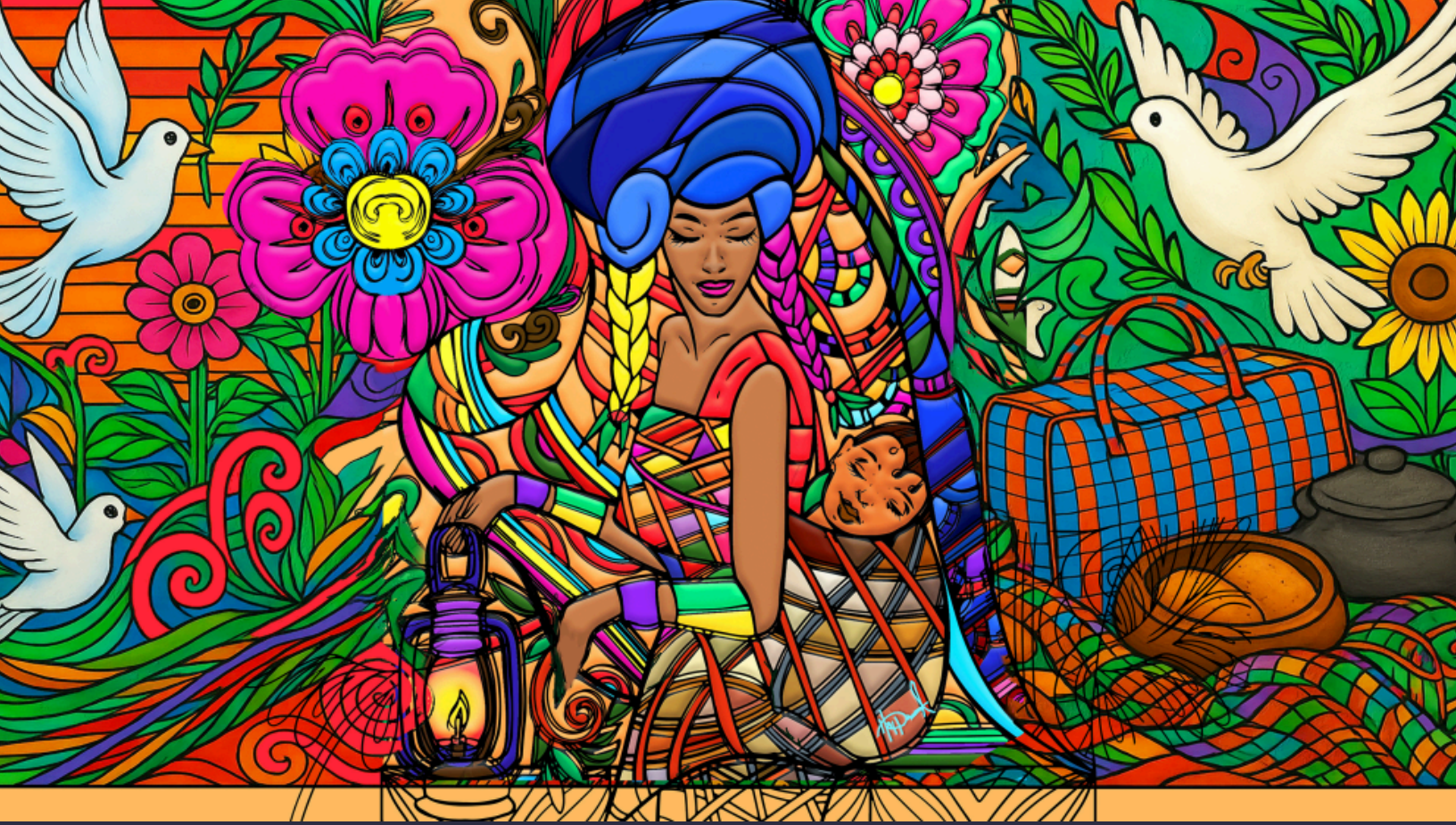


353

people engaged in the
Council's Arts and Health
Roundtable Series.

241

free and reduced registrations
supported by the Council to arts
and health convenings.



FY26 Council Members

Felicia Grant, Chair | Elizabeth Mattson, 1st Vice Chair | Carol Ann Herbert, 2nd Vice Chair
Sharon Burton Turner, Vedra Chandler, Joyce C. Goore, Jeremy Grunin, Robin Gurin, Gina Hulings, Ruth Lipper, Evie McGee Colbert, Kevin M. O'Brien, Vivian Scott Chew | **Ex Officio:** Lt. Governor Dr. Dale G. Caldwell, Senator Holly T. Schepisi, and Assemblywoman Marisa Sweeney

Council Staff

Allison Tratner, Stella Baldwin, Michelle Baxter-Schaffer, Christopher Benincasa, Andrew Binger, Danielle Bursk, Lindsay Dandeo, Diane Felcyn, Jessica Gaines, Ashley Gomez-Jimenez, Stephanie Nerbak, Samantha Patel Clarke, Tammy Rice Herman, Sally Van de Water, Aja Webber, Doug West, Robert Worshinski

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Pg 2: "See it Now: Contemporary Art from the Ann and Mel Schaffer Collection," VIP Opening. Photo credit: Alex Pavljuk, Montclair Art Museum.
Pg 3: Rythmika Beats at Dance NJ's Show UP & Dance '26 at Stockton University Performing Arts Center. Photo credit: Stephanie Gamba.
Pg 4: Jazz House **KiDS** Academy Showcase, Photo by Richard Conde.
Pg 5: Ritz Theatre. Photo credit: Zachary Moore Photography.
Pg 6: "Access to Art" program session with the Atlantic County ARC at the Noyes Museum of Art of Stockton University.
Pg 7: Segunda Quimbamba Folkloric Center at Thomas Jefferson Intermediate School, photo courtesy of Young Audiences NJ and Eastern PA.
Pg 8: People & Stories/Gente y Cuentos. Photo courtesy of State of the Arts.
Pg 9: Tyrese "Bright Flower" Gould-Jacinto. Photo courtesy of State of the Arts.
Pg 10: Elizabeth Strong-Cuevas, Arch II, and Walter Dusenbery, Rocchetta, photo: David Michael Howarth Photography
Back Cover: Happiness Akaniro's "Lullaby for Happiness" at Newark Terminal A.