

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: February 13, 2026

To: Marcelia Nicholson-Bovell, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Guy Smith, Executive Director for Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: Fund for the Arts Community Survey

File Type: Informational Report

REQUEST

This report is for informational purposes there is no request at this time.

POLICY

Wisconsin State Statutes:	
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	
Specific Adopted Budget:	
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	2021 Adopted Budget Amendment 1A020
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	

BACKGROUND

In 2021, the Parks Department was asked to administer the County’s Fund for the Arts under advisement by the Cultural, Artistic, and Musical Programming Advisory Council (CAMPAC). CAMPAC was created by the County Board in the 1980s to advise on grant making decisions related to the arts.

In File 21-90 the County approved a funding formula to guide grant making that was supported by CAMPAC. From 2021 through 2024 there was a gradual transition from the prior funding formula to the new formula.

In September 2025 the County Board and Parks Committee approved a slate of grants made from the County’s Fund for the Arts. The County Board amended the Resolution approving these grants to state the following –

“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the current distribution model shall be deemed null and void upon completion of the 2025 grant allocations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, DPRC is requested to collaborate with CAMPAC to develop a new funding formula, in consultation with the United Performing Arts

Fund (UPAF), and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the new distribution formula shall take into account the track record and performance of each applicant, the size of each arts organization, and its inclusiveness in serving the residents of Milwaukee County; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that CAMPAC and DPRC are requested to present their recommendations for revised grant criteria to the County Board by the June 2026 meeting cycle for review and approval.”

Prior to providing that recommendation sought by the June 2026 meeting cycle, this report is an opportunity for dialogue between the County Board, CAMPAC members, and County staff regarding preferences that should be included in that future recommendation.

To inform a future recommendation, Parks and CAMPAC produced and distributed a community-wide survey regarding preferences for future funding consideration. The survey was live on Parks’ website and promoted by arts groups from Jan 16-28, 2026.

- Responses – 327
- Respondent Type -
 - Community stakeholder – (151 responses, 46.3%)
 - Organization that has received County arts funding – (117 responses, 35.9%)
 - Other – (33 responses, 10.1%)
 - Arts funder – (25 responses, 7.7%)

The survey contained one question and an open field for feedback. The question and response is listed below. Other feedback provided in responses is included in the attachment to this File.

“Question: Please select one option from the list below as your top choice for how Milwaukee County should prioritize grants made from its Fund for the Arts. Which funding scenario do you most prefer?”

1. Equal distribution – distribute funding for the arts equally to all qualified arts organizations.
2. Align with City Arts Board funding model – the City of Milwaukee Arts Board provides funding in two tiers - \$6,000 to large organizations, \$3,000 to small organizations. Milwaukee County should align with this two-tiered model.
3. Prioritize small organizations – provide funding only to organizations with small budgets (for example, under \$1,000,000 in annual expenses). This approach supports small and emerging groups that may struggle to generate funding from other sources.
4. Prioritize large organizations – provide funding only to organizations with large

budgets (for example, over \$1,000,000 in annual expenses). This approach supports organizations with a larger impact that serve the most people.

5. Provide funding to organizations of any size with more funding provided to larger groups on a scale that matches their impact.
6. Provide funding in a way that supports achieving racial equity. The Fund for the Arts could support racial and health equity goals by using this funding to establish measurable goals for arts organizations that support this vision.”

Result (ranked preference) -

- Prioritize small organizations – provide funding only to organizations with small budgets (for example, under \$1,000,000 in annual expenses). This approach supports small and emerging groups that may struggle to generate funding from other sources. (119 responses, 36.8%)
- Provide funding to organizations of any size with more funding provided to larger groups on a scale that matches their impact. (83 responses, 25.7%)
- Provide funding in a way that supports achieving racial equity. The Fund for the Arts could support racial and health equity goals by using this funding to establish measurable goals for arts organizations that support this vision. (45 responses, 13.9%)
- Equal distribution – distribute funding for the arts equally to all qualified arts organizations. (37 responses, 11.5%)
- Align with City Arts Board funding model – the City of Milwaukee Arts Board provides funding in two tiers - \$6,000 to large organizations, \$3,000 to small organizations. Milwaukee County should align with this two-tiered model. (32 responses, 9.9%)
- Prioritize large organizations – provide funding only to organizations with large budgets (for example, over \$1,000,000 in annual expenses). This approach supports organizations with a larger impact that serve the most people. (7 responses, 2.2%)

The survey included a field for open-ended comments. There were several comments provided with the survey responses, general themes of these comments include –

- The County’s goals related to achieving racial equity are laudable but could be embedded as a criteria within the grant making framework rather than a standalone consideration.
- Support for a two-tiered system that maintains support for all organizations and provides an additional incentive related to impact.
- Questions were raised such as “How do you measure impact?” The size of the organization as represented by its budget is not a perfect measure. “How do you measure depth or quality of impact?” “If impact is self-reported by the applicant how does the grant making body verify what is reported?” “Are we funding performing arts or all fine arts?”
- Significant support for small organizations for various reasons.
- Consider allowing support for for-profit arts-based organizations in addition to non-profit organizations.

Related File No's:	File 21-90 - LINK File 25-552 - LINK
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the objectives in the [strategic plan](#):

- 1A: Reflect the full diversity of the County at every level of County government - Sharing results of a community-wide survey that should inform future decisions on how to distribute the Fund for the Arts
- 1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government
- 1C: Increase the number of County contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses
- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity
- 2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered
- 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions
- 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities
- 3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

FISCAL EFFECT

None

TERMS

None

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

CAMPAC Members

PREPARED BY:

Jim Tarantino, Deputy Director, Milwaukee County Parks

APPROVED BY:

Guy Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks

ATTACHMENTS:

Fund for the Arts Community Survey Results

CC: David Crowley, County Executive
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
Sheldon Wasserman, Committee on Parks & Culture Chairperson
Steve Taylor, Committee on Parks & Culture Vice Chairperson
Priscilla Coggs-Jones, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Jack Eckblad, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Felesia Martin, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Juan Miguel Martinez, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Anne O'Connor, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Mgr, Office of the County Clerk
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services
Joseph Lamers, Fiscal & Budget Director, DAS
Vince Masterson, Fiscal & Strategic Asset Coordinator, DAS
Pamela Bryant, Capital Finance Manager, Comptroller's Office
Justin Rodriguez, Capital Finance Analyst, Comptroller's Office
Allyson R. Smith, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk
Anthony Rux, Budget & Management Analyst, DAS-PSB
Sandy Saltzstein, Research and Policy Analyst