



Vivian Phillips, Chair
Seattle Theatre Group

Terri Hiroshima, Vice Chair
University of Washington

Juan Alonso-Rodriguez
Artist

Jeff Benesi
Landscape and Urban Designer

Cassie Chinn
Wing Luke Museum

Dawn Chirwa
Philanthropy Northwest

Jonathan Cunningham
Seattle Foundation

Priya Frank
Seattle Art Museum

Steve Galatro
Pratt Fine Arts Center

Ana Lester
Get Engaged Program

Quinton Morris
Seattle University

Tracy Rector
Longhouse Media

S. Surface
The Alice

Sharon Williams
CD Forum

April 3, 2017

King County Council
King County Chinook Building
401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 800
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: Access for All

Dear Councilmembers,

The Seattle Arts Commission (SAC) promotes the cultural vitality of our region by supporting arts and culture through a lens of economic, geographic and racial equity. While our charge is limited to the City of Seattle, we are acutely aware of our role within the cultural fabric of our county and our responsibility to serve a much broader region. With that in mind, we strongly encourage you to consider placing *Access for All* on the August ballot for voter consideration in King County.

Investing in a Healthy Community

The arts are vital outlets for expression, fostering creativity, innovation and the exchange of ideas. At SAC, we recognize that while this statement may resonate with those who are predisposed to support the arts, it leaves many others without adequate explanation. A comprehensive case for support of the arts must also articulate its vital contributions to the greater health of our community including,

but not limited to, the following:

- The arts are valuable partners to other human services such as public education, healthcare, crime prevention, community development, environmental protection and more.
- The arts preserve, affirm and advance heritage, promoting inclusion and connection to cultural backgrounds.
- The arts build bridges, dismantling systems of historical divide and inspiring cultural empathy.
- The arts help our children grow up to be more successful and more competitive in our creative economy.
- The arts make neighborhoods safer, more vibrant, more desirable places to live.



- The arts are proven to have positive economic returns including the generation of jobs, tax revenue and consumerism.
- The arts are the third highest contributor to the national economy at over \$700 billion annually.

The arts serve as powerful agents of compassion, justice, wellness, and prosperity. As such, an investment in the arts through *Access for All* is an investment in a healthy community that promises enormous yields for every citizen in King County.

Restoring Access to Arts in Education

Over the last decade, funding for arts and cultural programs across Washington has been cut in half. Art and music programs in our public schools were the first to face cuts during the recession, when school budgets decreased, and these programs were never fully restored. These cuts particularly hurt under-resourced communities: low-income kids and families and communities of color.

We know that arts education plays a critical role in the development of our most precious assets, equipping our youth with the necessary tools to become successful and productive citizens. Arts education has proven to promote creativity, boost academic performance, build confidence and prevent delinquency. The arts cultivate valuable skills that prepare young people to be successful in any career path they may choose. Perhaps the most important work we can and will do is to put arts back into classrooms in our public schools.

Access for All proposes a \$14M+ annual investment in public school programming that will bring free arts access to youth in all 19 King County school districts. This is an opportunity that we simply cannot afford to forego.

Protecting the Values of Our Region

We are faced with a challenging political climate in our nation. A stark cultural divide has called our values into question and inspired many of us to mobilize in efforts to defend the principles we hold dear. The field of arts and culture has not been immune from vulnerability and *Access for All* offers our region the opportunity to respond with a powerful statement of support.

In their most recent funding cycles, the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities provided nearly \$11M in support of arts and culture in our state. Unfortunately, the federal government recently proposed their elimination, thereby challenging our belief that tax dollars are well spent on arts and culture. This elimination proposal is in contrast with the values of our



county, whose citizens have demonstrated broad support for tax measures that fund arts and culture time and time again.

Access for All is not only an opportunity to replace the funds we stand to lose from the federal government, it is an opportunity for our county to protect the values of its citizens and demonstrate to the nation how investments in arts and culture lead to positive community outcomes.

Ensuring Equity & Accountability

Even as our region experiences strong economic growth, there is a significant gap between those who have opportunities and ability to access arts and cultural experiences and those who do not. As such, equity has been and continues to be a primary concern of the Seattle Arts Commission.

Modeling our city's Race and Social Justice Initiative, SAC has become a champion for equity. We have equipped ourselves with the resources and expertise to evaluate programs through an equity lens. We have applied this lens to our assessment of *Access for All* and we have been vocal about its shortcomings.

It is obvious that *Access for All* will provide a huge financial boost for arts organizations across the county and allow them to expand their programming in significant and meaningful ways. Far less obvious is how *Access for All* will be implemented in an equitable way.

Over the past year, SAC has actively engaged with both Cultural Access WA and 4Culture to ensure that *Access for All* achieves the maximum possible equity. This dialogue contributed to positive changes in both organizational funding categories:

- For larger, regional organizations we support the new requirements that ensure the geographic distribution of programs and increase affordability for low-income communities.
- For smaller, community-based organizations, we support the creation of a simplified application process with multi-year funding commitments and a funding multiplier for culturally specific organizations.

We support these significant changes because they hold regional organizations to a much higher standard of equity while ensuring that smaller organizations have much easier access to funding.

Parallel to our endorsement of *Access for All* is our commitment to accountability. We recognize that the success of *Access for All* and its equitable application, will



require rigorous oversight and strict governance. To that end, we offer to serve as part of its formal governance structure, in whatever capacity the county council may desire.

Conclusion

We believe that access to the arts is not a privilege. It is a basic human need and a vital contributor to the health of our society. We recognize that there are many other needs that are also worthy of county support and we do not view *Access for All* as being in competition with them. Rather we assert that arts and culture have important roles to play in cooperation.

With respect, we ask that you advance *Access for All* to the ballot and let the voters decide if it is worthy of their tax dollars at this time.

Thank you for your consideration and your ongoing efforts to foster a healthy King County community.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Seattle Arts Commission

By:

Vivian Phillips, Chair

Cc: Seattle City Councilmembers (email only)
Randy Engstrom, Director, Office of Arts & Culture (email only)
Amber Rose Jimenez, Racial Equity & Seattle Arts Commission Coordinator,
Office of Arts & Culture (email only)
Amanda Standley, Policy Coordinator, Office of Arts & Culture (email only)
Seattle Arts Commission (email only)

Encl: April 3, 2017 Letter