



April 30, 2021

**Dr. Quinton Morris,**  
Co-Chair  
Seattle University

**Sarah Wilke, Co-Chair**  
Meany Center for the  
Performing Arts

**Cassie Chinn**  
Wing Luke Museum

**Dawn Chirwa**  
Philanthropy Northwest

**Kayla DeMonte**  
Citizen University

**Steve Galatro**  
Pratt Fine Arts Center

**Vivian Hua**  
Northwest Film Forum

**Holly Jacobson**  
Path with Art

**Yeggy Michael**  
Artist, Yeggy Studio

**James Miles**  
Mentor Washington

**Chieko Phillips**  
4Culture

**Vanessa Villalobos**  
Artist, Balorico Dance

**Racquel West**  
Bill Holm Center

**Mikhael Mei Williams**  
Seattle Art Museum

Mayor Jenny Durkan  
City of Seattle  
600 Fourth Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Written comments required by Seattle Municipal Code 3.14.830G, as amended by Ordinance No. 123460 (2010)

*“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.” – John F. Kennedy*

Dear Mayor Durkan,

For more than a year now, Seattle has been enveloped in chaotic, stressful and at times, inhumane moments that have tarnished our beloved city’s reputation. The haunting ripple effect of the global pandemic; the rise of racial injustices affecting people of color; economic devastation in artistic and cultural communities; and the downward spiral of the emotional, mental and physical health of our city. People are suffering and our community is in crisis. At this point of devastation, what do we do? How can we evolve and change so that people from all walks of life, regardless of where they live in the world, perceive our city as a place that is comforting to call home and a safe place to visit?

On July 29, 2020, I wrote on behalf of the Seattle Arts Commission to both you and Seattle City Council to request that as little harm come to the arts and cultural community, which includes many marginalized people from the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and all people of color that includes Latino/x, Asian Pacific Americans and the spectrum of Immigrant/Refugee communities) community. Yet, there are so many people who are continuing to suffer and struggle, amid the many crises our city has experienced. As a Black artist, Seattle native and co-chair of our Seattle Arts Commission, we are deeply concerned about the people in our community that we love so much. It is going to take a village to bring Seattle out of this crisis. More than 62% of artistic and creative workers have become fully unemployed, 95% of them have experienced significant income loss and 71% of arts organizations indicate that the financial impact has been “severe” due to the pandemic.

For the past year, the Office of Arts and Culture has served as an important partner in the COVID response initiative. The Office’s success can be attributed to strong



partnerships it has maintained with our arts and cultural communities. The arts and cultural sector are uniquely positioned to unite and help bring feelings of safety and solace back to our city's residents during this crucial COVID recovery period.

I recognize that this letter is probably unconventional and unlike others that you have received from my predecessors. I acknowledge the gracious support for Seattle's arts and cultural communities which you have provided in the past. You have invested in those communities and because of such, we have thrived and been able to carry a tradition of artistic and cultural excellence. I applaud the exponential velocity with which the City moved to provide relief for arts and cultural organizations and artists, which we recognize was both the first cultural relief package in our country; and was also among the very first actions you took to address the pandemic. In the last year, artists created connections over screens, on pieces of plywood protecting buildings, and through their professional practices. These actions made people who were scared feel connected, gave communities whose voices had been silenced a microphone and created moments of joy and relief in an unprecedented time. Your actions with the Office of Arts and Culture alone employed close to 100 artists who were employed through various Hope Corps projects that provided key support for the community in the areas of arts education, documentation, and connecting our community last year. More than 5,000 people have viewed the Creative Advantage teaching artist videos that were created in response to the pause of in-person education. For these actions, I am forever grateful.

However, a lot has changed in a year. The severe statistics and percentages, along with the countless stories that I've heard at numerous Arts Commission meetings have been heartbreaking. As we begin to rethink how to "re-open" and "revitalize" the vibrant, fantastic city we were "pre-pandemic", I invite you to collaborate with the arts and cultural community so we can get people back to working. This will only be achieved through the following recommendations for American Rescue Plan fund distribution:

- 1. Invest in individual artists:** The City Artist grant program has received 10x the number of applications it has funds to grant. There simply isn't enough funding to address the significant need in our community. We need another plan of action to address this need.

I respectfully request that you invest in individual working creatives in two areas:

- Allocate \$15 million to serve as a stimulus towards individual working creatives in Seattle. These creative workers have been deeply impacted, with nearly ¾ out of work. Working artists can create welcoming and unique physical distancing markers for local businesses, bring people together safely with public art performances like music or dance or other performances in parks and public spaces, support storytelling and sharing with interviews, videos and written narratives, and document recovery events and infrastructure. There are so many ways that creative workers can support the City



as it works to Reopen safely, while the City supports creative workers to remain as vital, respected members of our community.

- Invest seed funding of \$1 million annually for a period of three years towards Hope Corps, a strategy which centers the restoration of wealth to those who have been disproportionately impacted, both physically and financially, by COVID-19, people of color, while meeting civic needs.

This allocation of funding would demonstrate your desire to assist the BIPOC community who are exhausted from the aftershocks of state-sanctioned murders, COVID-19, and persistent race-based injustices. This investment also carries out the sound findings from the Creative Economy report, which recognizes the need to address inequities in the sector while also pointing to its central economic role within our City. With this commitment, your leadership will fuel our work to sustain and build wealth in these communities.

- 2. Invest in Cultural Communities:** I am requesting that you make an investment of \$20 million towards cultural organizations, who will assist in the economic recovery of the city. Cultural organizations will play a significant role in encouraging Seattleites to re-engage with their neighborhoods while attending events safely and return to supporting their local businesses. As the city reopens, cultural facilities and activities will rebrand our city as a safe place for tourists to visit and attract local and regional visitors, who will visit downtown and the various cultural communities that make the emerald city so vibrant. A \$20 million investment would match what King County and the State have announced and will demonstrate that the City of Seattle takes our role as a leader in the cultural sector seriously and is ready to invest in ensuring our cultural anchors, which will be the last businesses to reopen, and who were already on razor thin margins, have the support of the City to weather this storm. This is an investment in the heart and soul of our City, as well as the economic recovery that comes with our community spending money on leisure and healing activities.
- 3. Cultural Space:** In my letter to you, addressed on July 29, 2020, I requested support from both you and the Seattle City Council regarding the protection of our cultural spaces. Because of the COVID-19 and social issues that have permeated our city, many cultural spaces have suffered significantly, losing revenue and resources. These organizations need time to recover and rebuild as the city begins to open up. While Governor Jay Inslee's eviction moratorium will continue through June 30th, I am fearful that once it is lifted, we will see an enormous uptick in evictions in the arts and cultural spaces. These evictions will exacerbate the mass migration of Seattle's cultural anchors, and with them, our identity as a creative capital, outside of the city limits. Because of this, I am requesting that you forgive all rents for 2021-2022 for arts and cultural organizations and artists who call the City a landlord.



I appreciate your support of the Cultural Space Agency and am so pleased that this new entity exists to develop and steward permanently affordable space for arts and culture. Having your support to anchor Seattle's vibrant cultural communities in place by providing additional capital to advance the development projects chosen by the community constituency of the Cultural Space Agency will provide further resources to secure the arts and cultural life that makes our City so special, support social cohesion, and further business activity, all rooted in our City's BIPOC communities and neighborhoods. This is truly a BIPOC-centered wealth building strategy that simply needs to be resourced to fulfill its potential.

Regarding the 2022 budget, I'm requesting that financial cuts, resulting from diminished Admissions Tax collection, be paused, and that the Office of Arts & Culture's budget be supplemented to match their 2019 adopted budget total, before pandemic impacts. In this time of dire need for this sector, we cannot undertake austerity.

Finally, I request that the city invest in digital equity for all, which will have significant impact for artists and arts organizations and their audiences in our city. It is essential that our community has access to Wi-Fi. We humbly request that the city invest immediately in keeping our community digitally connected to the world and to each other, which so heavily relies on technology, and is absolutely essential in this moment of virtual presentations.

I recognize that we are living and experiencing unprecedented times. While I applaud the availability of resources that you have provided for our work, I remain cognizant of the growing pressures people feel daily that result in racial injustice and the decrease in affordability and sustainability in our arts and cultural communities. I am writing as a very concerned Seattle native who wants what is best for our city. I believe you, as a Seattle native, do too. Therefore, I feel this is a time to engage in uncomfortable conversations and make unprecedented requests. I believe that these activities will empower us to work towards solutions that will create a more racially inclusive and equitable distribution of available support. I acknowledge and appreciate your support in the work that you have done towards the preservation of cultural space and support for BIPOC communities. Our goal at the Arts Commission is to work with you in implementing these strategies and support the work you are already doing at the policy level.

Recently, I met with Deputy Mayor Tiffany Washington and we were able to speak about some of the same issues that I've raised in my letter to you. It was lovely to meet her and it seems that she shares a lot of the same concerns. I informed her that I would request a meeting with you so we could discuss some of these requests. I have since followed up and am awaiting confirmation on our meeting.

As co-chair of the Seattle Arts Commission, I speak on behalf of all of my colleagues when I express my appreciation for your support in preserving the incredible arts and cultural city that we are known to be. I appreciate the action you have taken towards helping to sustain our arts community and the



confidence you have in our Arts Commission in serving as allies in accomplishing the goals and initiatives you have already put in place.

As you complete your term as Mayor, I believe that your legacy will be secured through your support of empowering and re-inspiring the arts and cultural community in our city. Please allow the Seattle Arts Commission to play a role in helping you. We stand with you in solidarity towards supporting the great work of Seattle arts and culture and appreciate your continued ongoing support, in advance.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Q Morris", is written in a cursive style.

Dr. Quinton Morris, co-chair  
Seattle Arts Commission

Cc: Tiffany Washington, Deputy Mayor for External Relations, Mayor's Office (email only)  
Dominique Stephens, Co-Director External Relations and Outreach, Mayor's Office (email only)  
Adrienne Thompson, Policy Director, Mayor's Office (email only)  
Pamela Banks, Recovery Director, Mayor's Office (email only)  
Calandra Childers, Acting Director, ARTS (email only)  
Seattle Arts Commission (email only)