

Kentucky Arts Council Board Meeting

Woodford Theatre 275 Beasley Rd, Versailles, KY

Friday, September 19, 2025, from 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm Eastern

Staff present (in person): Chris Cathers, Tamara Coffey, Sarah Schmitt, Macie Lowe, Leeann Potter, Vinh Dao

Staff present (online): Brett Ratliff, Mark Brown

Board (in person): Ken Burney, Everett McCorvey, Stephanie Renner, Lynn Schrader, Lennon Michalski, Marcheta Sparrow

Board (online): Margaret Prim, Janell Oliver, Brook Forrest White, Wally Dant

Call to Order & Welcome

Meeting called to order by Everett McCorvey. Attendees introduced themselves, both in-person and online.

Chris Cathers, executive director of the Kentucky Arts Council (KAC) reads Land Acknowledgement. Acknowledged the unique and enduring relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. Honored both past and present American Indian Tribes represented in the Commonwealth.

Cathers opened with remarks about attending the world premiere of the film “Rising” in Prestonsburg at the Mountain Arts Center, as guests of the Governor.

The film focuses on Eastern Kentucky flood survivors and highlights the resilience of eastern Kentuckians and the role of state parks and communities in disaster response.

Host Venue Remarks – Woodford Theatre

Representative from Woodford Theatre provided an overview:

Theatre founded in 1988 by Pam Jackson with early performances at Midway University amphitheater. Current facility built in 2002 under first Artistic Director Beth Pirtle; Woodford Theatre later added. All actors are volunteers; theatre seeks to instill pride and growth in participants. Core values: Perseverance, Excellence, Acceptance, Community, Empathy. Offers youth programs and fall theatre classes; flyers provided. Board members invited to tour the facility after the meeting.

Sebastian Kitchen, Deputy Secretary Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet

Ongoing and planned renovations to Jenny Wiley (marina, lodge, campground). Cabinet oversees 44 state parks: continuing visits and staff engagement.

State parks' role in emergency sheltering:

Still 150 Kentuckians (and pets) housed in 4 parks following the 2022 floods. Parks provide three meals a day, laundry access, and temporary stability. Highlighted the Governor's policy of opening state parks to disaster survivors as a key achievement of this administration.

High-Ground Communities Initiative:

New, safer communities being built on reclaimed coal mines to move families out of flood zones while keeping them near home, schools, and community. Multi-agency effort (Transportation, Tourism, Historical, Public Protection, etc.); described as unprecedented.

Film "Rising": Produced entirely by the Governor's communications team in-house. Shows coordinated response of state parks, nonprofits, and local governments. Additional screenings planned; Secretary encouraged members to attend.

Major Arts & Tourism Events mentioned:

Louisville Orchestra at Cumberland Falls (with Sam Bush). Healing Appalachia (Tyler Childers' festival; recovery-focused, alternating WV/KY, with Chris Stapleton and Tyler Childers headlining). Louder Than Life and Bourbon & Beyond in Louisville (large-scale festivals). Secretary thanked the Council and staff, reiterated commitment to arts, tourism, and recovery, and then departed to travel to his next event.

McCorvey thanked the Secretary and Governor. Praised the use of state parks for emergency shelter as "brilliant" and transformative. Strong support for high-ground communities as a visionary, long-term solution. Requested appreciation be conveyed to the Governor on behalf of the Council.

McCorvey asks for a motion to accept the June meeting minutes. Stephanie Renner moves, Ken Burney seconds, all approve motion passed.

KAC Staff Reports – Teaching Artist Residency Program & Annual Report Sarah Schmitt

Teaching Art Together. This year, based on researching other states and looking at application numbers from previous years, Cynthia, in advisement with Tamara, moved our teaching artist residency program, Teaching Art Together, to a rolling deadline, rather than a biannual one, to accommodate school, teacher, and district schedules and calendars. To make this possible, you all voted to approve our spending up to \$16,000 for this program. In turn, we promised a report of grants to date in September, which you'll find in your packet. So, there is no vote, just an FYI. This move toward a more agile program for schools aligns with several key objectives of the strategic plan's goal: "Support Arts Education and Expand Lifelong Learning Through the Arts." Schools have easier access to teaching artists; teaching artists have better access to paid work. And we're doing it without compromising our commitment to artistic excellence.

I'd also like to call your attention to our **2024 annual report**. We are statutorily obligated to provide this to the governor's office every August, so you can expect to receive a new one each September. For those on Zoom you can access it on the front page of our website. It's worth the effort because this retrospective helps us document our state plan progress, our commitment to our mission, values, and end statements, and informs our state partnership grant application and reporting to the NEA. This is a massive undertaking for a staff with no graphic designer or layout team, etc., but Leeann wrote it, Mark and Macie proofed it, and I edited it. Nicole crunched the numbers. Vinh made graphs. And of course, Tamara, Cynthia, Brett, Dave, and Mark gave us something worth writing about all year long. I encourage you to use the stories, data, descriptions, etc., in this document to make your cases for the value of the arts.

CONSENT

Two consent agenda items:

The first are the panel recommendations for the **America250Ky grant program**. This is a partnership between the arts council and the historical society, which administers the America250Ky commission. This grant is an opportunity for applicants to explore the people, places, and events that created our shared history over the past 250 years, commemorate this anniversary, and interpret its themes through the arts. We had a rapid turnaround for this grant and received 60 eligible applications, making it very competitive. I believe there are 28 total applications recommended for your approval.

The second item in the consent agenda is a request from the staff, specifically me, who oversees our commitment to the state plan. We're requesting that an additional goal of

“Expanding statewide delivery of arts services and experiences” be added for the remainder of 2025 and 2026, after which the current plan expires. I provided some extensive (probably too many) notes in your packet in the way of justifications for this change. But briefly, the world moves more rapidly than it used to – once upon a time, a four-plan might have been fresh for its entire lifespan. But you can see how a plan based on data collected in 2021 and 2022 might already need a few tweaks for implementation in 2026. Furthermore, 2026 is our 60th anniversary, and just like any significant milestone, we’ve got to look in the mirror and reckon with some realities – good and bad. You can glean the good from the annual report. But the bad or “needs improvement” is that we don’t serve everyone we could be serving. While our end statement of statewide delivery is implicit in other plan goals, we’d like to make it more explicit. We are requesting the prerogative to review our data, identify gaps, and attempt to bring new orgs and artists in during 2026. This addition would not interfere with or overwrite any other goal – in short, it won't be a burden, but a freedom. Strategies and objectives in this goal include literal mapping, conducting listening sessions, and seeking to meet and form new partnerships while responding to their feedback. Taking this time to visit, survey, adjust programs, and more will enable us to enter the 2027-2030 planning much stronger and better informed of our role and relevance.

Consent Agenda: Review abstentions, panel recommendations for the America 250 grant program, and addition of the new strategic goal on statewide service delivery.

McCorvey asks for a motion to approve the consent agenda. Marcheta Sparrow moves, Lynn Schrader seconds, all approve motion passed.

Executive Director Report Chris Cathers

Exhibitions & Public Programs

Celebrating the Black Experience Exhibit opening at Stephens Library, Hazard Community & Technical College on Sept. 2. Artist reception & narrative interview: Sept. 18, 5:30–7:30 p.m., featuring Nzingha Beverley Sweeney-Sheppard and Ed White. Interview facilitated by Emily Hudson, Community Scholar and Director of the Southeast Kentucky African American Museum and Cultural Center. Exhibit relocates to the Berea Arts Council the following week. Reception & narrative interview in Berea: Sept. 26, 5:30–7:30 p.m., with artists Donyalle Jackson and Bradley Gilmore, facilitated by Aaron Banther, founder of Our Land of Promise.

Arts Education Initiatives: Poetry Out Loud (POL). National high-school poetry recitation program; free instructional resources provided. Eligible for Kentucky students in grades 9–12; schools may apply through a designated representative. Each participating school receives: an artist residency, a school-level competition and eligible advancement of the school champion to the state finals. Registration deadline: Oct. 3, 2025.

Community Outreach & Fair Participation: Staff engaged with visitors from across all 120 Kentucky counties at recent statewide fairs. Outreach focused on promoting grants, programs, and resources for artists, educators, and communities, while collecting stories that inform future initiatives.

Grantmaking & America250 KY: With support from the Kentucky Historical Society, the Arts Council awarded \$211,000 in America250 KY grants. Funding supports artists, organizations, and communities interpreting key events, stories, and histories leading into America’s 250th anniversary. Projects span public artworks, community programming, and cultural storytelling, creating a lasting statewide legacy. Additional program highlights are available via the current episode of the Kentucky Arts Cast.

Online Events Calendar Launch: A new statewide Arts Events Calendar is now active on the Arts Council website. Artists and partners may post their events directly to improve public access and statewide visibility.

Upcoming Events & Artist Showcases: Kentucky Crafted artists will appear at the Waveland Art Fair and in workshops on ceramics, printmaking, pumpkins, and more. Exhibits on display include Poetry Connected, textile/fiber arts, and work by Patricia Ritter. Stakeholders are encouraged to use and contribute to the public calendar to expand awareness of arts opportunities.

Literary Programming: Voice & Vision summer reading series finale. Presented by Spalding University’s Naslund-Mann Graduate School of Writing, The Louisville Review, and 21c Museum Hotel. Scheduled for Aug. 21, 2025, 6:00–7:30 p.m., at 21c Museum Hotel, Louisville. Featured authors: Kathleen Driskell, David Flores, Ellen Hagan, Michelle Tyrene Johnson, and Jeremy Paden. Hosted by Katy Yocom and Flora K. Schildknecht. Includes an art talk by Ashley Rowland, Area Museum Manager, on the exhibition Super Natural 2.0.

Economic Impact & Public Engagement: Recent tourism data announced by Gov. Beshear reported: \$14.3 billion overall economic impact. \$6.9 billion attributed to Kentucky’s arts and cultural sector. Represents 51,094 jobs statewide. Public support—attending events, festivals, performances, and purchasing Kentucky-made art—continues to sustain this growth.

Advocacy & Funding Update – Kentuckians for the Arts: Lori Meadows and Teresa Day

Federal NEA Funding: Thanked those who signed the NEA support letter to Kentucky's congressional delegation (813+ individual signatures, 13 organizations). House recommendation: \$135 million for NEA. Senate Interior Subcommittee recommendation: \$207 million – considered a significant positive step but still politically sensitive because it exceeds the administration's request. Possible negative amendments may be introduced; ongoing vigilance is needed. Potential federal government shutdown would halt NEA operations temporarily, including processing grants and appeals.

Clarification on funding cycles: NEA partnership funds that support KAC's FY26 budget are the ones currently in play. KAC's FY25 operations are funded with already-approved federal FY24 funds. Any cuts now will impact FY27 KAC funding. NEA funds represent ~34.4% of the Arts Council's budget; reductions would be significant.

State Funding – Restoration Request: Kentuckians for the Arts is advocating to restore state funding for the Kentucky Arts Council to the 2001 level of \$4.5 million. Current state appropriation is approximately \$1.86 million, reflecting ~59% reduction since 2001. Adjusted for inflation, \$4.5 million in 2001 ≈ \$7.3 million today, showing the depth of erosion. Restored funding would: strengthen arts infrastructure statewide, allow KAC to better reach areas that currently receive little or no support, and directly support the new strategic goal of expanding statewide delivery of arts services.

Role of KAP Organizations & Board Members: KAP organizations (approx. 100+ statewide) will be directly contacted with their award amounts, advocacy guidance, and instructions to contact legislators, especially budget and leadership members. Board members are asked to: meet with their own legislators, share KAC impact in their districts (grant lists provided last year as a model), invite legislators to events in their communities, not just to the Capitol.

Kentucky Arts Day: planning underway; tentative dates in late January (21, 22, 27, 28, or 29). Capitol building will be closed for several years, so logistics will change; details to follow.

McCorvey thanked current members and expressed the goal that 100% of KAC board members be dues-paying members of Kentuckians for the Arts. Urged anyone unsure of their status to check and renew.

Board & Staff Closing Comments

Board members and staff briefly shared local arts highlights and upcoming events in their communities (not fully captured in transcript).

Executive Director reiterated appreciation for: Staff working evenings/weekends, board support for strategic changes and advocacy, and ongoing commitment to equity and statewide service.

Next board meeting scheduled for December 12; location to be determined (Berea has been typical but not confirmed).

McCorvey asks for a motion to adjourn. Ken Burney moves, Marcheta Sparrow seconds, all approve, meeting adjourned.