

Kentucky Arts Council Board Meeting

Tourism, Arts & Heritage Cabinet Office of the Secretary Conference Room

Mayo-Underwood Building, 500 Mero Street, 5th Floor, Frankfort, KY

Friday, March 20, 2026, from 10 a.m. – noon Eastern

Staff present (in-person): Chris Cathers, Sarah M. Schmitt, Macie Lowe, Tamara Coffey and Dave Blevins

Staff present (online): Leeann Potter and Brett Ratliff

Board present (in person): Randall Vaughn, Dior Cotten, Brook Forrest White, Nathan Mick and Lynn Schrader

Board present (online): Margaret Prim, Marcheta Sparrow, and Lennon Michalski

Call to Order

- Meeting called to order by KAC Vice Chair Dior Cotton in the absence of Chair Everett McCorvey, who was traveling for conducting obligations.
- Roll call completed and attendance recorded.

Land Acknowledgement

A land acknowledgement was presented recognizing the enduring relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. The statement noted that more than 170 American Indian Tribes are represented by members living and working throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The Board recognized the importance of honoring both past and present Indigenous communities and continuing stewardship of the land for future generations.

Approval of December 2025 Meeting minutes

Motion made by Mick, Vaughn seconded, all in favor motion passed.

Consent Agenda: Review of abstentions and grants

Grant & Program Reviews

Board reviewed and discussed several grant programs and directories, including:

Arts Miles Directory

- Connects Pre-K–12 schools with arts-related field trip destinations.
- Schools must select destinations from the approved directory when applying.
- FY2026 board previously approved up to \$10,000 for transportation assistance.
- 18 applications approved to date.

Teaching Artist Directory

- Roster of adjudicated professional teaching artists qualified to work in educational settings.
- Recommendations for new directory inclusions reviewed.

Arts Access Assistance (AAA) Program

- Supports underserved populations.
- Flexible program historically used to support Appalachian communities, veterans, military families, and other priority populations.
- Discussion emphasized ability to quickly deploy funding without creating entirely new grant structures.
- Board expressed concern regarding limited funding resources despite strong application quantity.

Approval of grants: Arts Miles Directory, Teaching Artists Directory, Arts Miles Program Grant, Arts Access Assistance Grant.

Motion to approve made by Sparrow, Mick seconds, all in favor motion passed.

Staff Reports: Sarah M. Schmitt and Dave Blevins

Schmitt: Arts Access Assistance Report

Arts and Health Partnership Funding

Staff reported that in fiscal year 2026, the National Endowment for the Arts offered state arts agencies the opportunity to apply for up to \$75,000 in additional partnership funding to support arts and health initiatives.

The Kentucky Arts Council submitted a proposal emphasizing Kentucky's longstanding use of the arts to support healing, strengthen communities, address isolation, and bridge divides across the commonwealth. The proposal identified two primary areas of focus:

- Strengthening Kentucky's creative infrastructure surrounding disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.
- Expanding the Arts Access Assistance grant program to support arts and health initiatives led by nonprofit organizations.

Arts Access Assistance Microgrant Program

Staff reported that the Kentucky Arts Council received the full \$75,000 award.

Due to the delayed timing of the federal award, the agency implemented a six-month microgrant cycle rather than a larger 12-month grant opportunity. Nonprofit organizations were invited to apply for grants of \$2,500 or \$5,000 for projects using arts-based strategies to improve health and well-being throughout Kentucky.

Eligible project themes included:

- Promoting mental health
- Encouraging belonging and social connectedness
- Combating loneliness and isolation
- Supporting addiction recovery
- Responding to public health concerns
- Promoting health equity
- Supporting healthcare workers, caregivers, patients, and families
- Encouraging resilience and community engagement

Applications were reviewed through two remote panel processes involving arts and disability experts, social workers, art therapists, disaster recovery professionals, and specialists in addiction recovery and aging populations.

Staff reported that:

- 35 eligible applications were received
- Total funding requests exceeded \$157,000

- Twelve projects were funded across communities including Pikeville, Paducah, Murray, Danville, and Frankfort
- The full \$50,000 allocated for grants will be expended

Staff noted that the demand for funding significantly exceeded available resources and emphasized the continuing statewide need for arts and health programming support.

Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Convening

Staff reported that the remaining \$25,000 in arts and health funding will support disaster preparedness and recovery initiatives in Eastern Kentucky.

The Kentucky Arts Council partnered with CARENet to organize a convening in Estill County focused on developing artist-led approaches to disaster response and long-term recovery.

Planned convening discussions include:

- Sharing current mitigation and recovery efforts
- Exploring how artists and creative practitioners can support those efforts
- Identifying partnership opportunities and service gaps
- Developing concepts for ongoing statewide infrastructure and networks

Staff emphasized that the initiative seeks to integrate artists not only into emergency response, but also preparedness, mitigation, and long-term community resilience **efforts**.

Creative Aging, Creative Futures Program

NASAA Grant Award

Staff announced that Kentucky was selected as one of 28 states to receive \$77,500 in funding through the Creative Aging, Creative Futures initiative supported by E.A. Michelson Philanthropy and administered by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies.

The initiative will support high-quality arts learning opportunities for older adults throughout Kentucky.

Program Goals and Partnerships

The project will focus on preparing Kentucky Arts Council Teaching Artists Directory members to design arts curriculum and programming specifically tailored to older adults.

Participating teaching artists will collaborate with public libraries through the Creative Chapters Library Program to implement grant-funded residencies and arts learning activities.

Staff further reported that Kentucky Community Scholars trained in oral history, photography, and ethnographic methodologies will document both the process and outcomes of the initiative.

Implementation Updates

Staff noted that the initiative is structured as a multi-year grant program.

Art education director Cynthia Warner will assist with initial implementation efforts by incorporating discussions into upcoming teaching artist orientation sessions. These conversations will focus on identifying training needs, resources, and support structures necessary for successful creative aging programming.

Staff indicated that additional updates will be provided to the Board as the program develops.

Blevins: Kentucky Crafted Market 2026

- Attendance was 6,800 over three days
- 87 buyer businesses pre-registered, but only 56 attended the show:
 - Additional wholesale questions added to survey
 - Future discussions on WS day format planned
- Exhibitor attendance was 132 total (highest at HP)
- Artist attendance includes 16 new at Market
- Booth awards:
 - Best in Show, Worker Bee
 - Best Design, Pottery by Thomas
 - Best Access, EarthyBrowns
- Programming:
 - Stage – (10) performers or groups from KAC PA directory
 - Kids Activities – (3) KAP groups from around the state offered arts programming to approx. 200 kids

- Folklife Zone – guitar maker from Bowling Green, Sonic Landscape exhibit, music culture of south central KY
- Guests:
 - Friday agency head meeting upstairs
 - KFTA table at main entrance

Executive Director Report:

National Endowment for the Arts Update

The Board congratulated Mary Anne Carter on her confirmation as the 14th chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. It was noted that Carter has served as senior advisor to the NEA since January 2025 and previously served as chairman during the first Trump administration. Staff expressed enthusiasm about continuing collaboration with the agency under her leadership.

Kentucky Arts Day

Staff reported on the annual Kentucky Arts Day event held in Frankfort on January 22. The event brought together arts advocates from across the state to emphasize the importance of the arts to Kentucky communities, schools, and the economy. Discussions focused on continued advocacy for increased arts funding and arts-friendly public policy.

Creative Industry Summit Series (CISS)

Staff provided updates on the 2026 Creative Industry Summit Series webinars and programming opportunities for artists, educators, arts organizations, and community members.

Highlighted webinars included:

- **Jan. 28** – *Carrying Traditions Forward: Foodways, Foraging, and Folk Healing in Kentucky* featuring traditional artists participating in the Folk and Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program.
- **Feb. 10** – *Collecting Creativity: Pairing Carl the Collector with Ability-Inclusive Art Activities*, presented in partnership with Kentucky Educational Television and Arts for All.

- **Feb. 11** – *Ready to Respond: An Interactive Workshop for Emergency Response* presented in partnership with the Kentucky Heritage Emergency Response Network (KHERN).
- **Feb. 19** – *Overview of Copyrights for Creatives* focusing on copyright protections for artists.
- **April 1** – *Reading Between the Lines: Common Contract Traps for Individuals in the Creative Sector* led by attorney Yuha Jung.

Poetry Out Loud State Championship

Staff reported that the 2026 Kentucky Poetry Out Loud State Championship was held February 12 at the Farish Theater within the Lexington Public Library.

Participating schools included:

- George Rogers Clark High School
- Walden School
- Beechwood High School
- Pendleton County High School
- Elizabethtown High School
- Kentucky Country Day School
- Williamstown High School

The Board recognized Bella Slone of Beechwood High School as state champion and Rush Clagett of Elizabethtown High School as runner-up.

Kentucky Crafted Market

Staff announced that the 2026 Kentucky Crafted Market would return March 6–8 at the Alltech Arena at the Kentucky Horse Park.

More than 120 Kentucky artists and craftspeople are expected to participate. The event will include artist demonstrations, live music, and hands-on activities. Remarks from Andy Beshear and Executive Director Chris Cathers emphasized the Market's economic and cultural impact statewide.

Grant Opportunities

Staff reviewed current grant and award opportunities, including:

- Individual Artist Fellowship (\$7,500) – Deadline March 15
- Emerging Artist Award (\$1,000) – Deadline March 15
- Kentucky Touring Grant – Deadline March 31
- Folk and Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Grant – Deadline March 31
- Creative Chapters Library Program Grant – Deadline April 30

NASAA Creative Aging Grant

Staff announced that the Kentucky Arts Council received a \$77,500 grant through the Creative Aging, Creative Futures initiative administered by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy.

The funding will support arts learning opportunities for older adults through partnerships with public libraries and teaching artists. The initiative will also include oral history and ethnographic documentation components involving Kentucky Community Scholars.

Executive Director Chris Cathers stated that the initiative supports lifelong learning while creating additional opportunities for teaching artists and expanding accessibility for older Kentuckians.

Board members discussed the importance of clarifying that Kentucky Arts Council staff are legally restricted from direct legislative advocacy and that advocacy efforts must be led externally through organizations such as Kentuckians for the Arts.

Concerns were raised that legislators often misunderstand these restrictions, highlighting the need for stronger communication and education around ethics and advocacy limitations.

Discussion centered on creating a formal advocacy structure connected to Kentuckians for the Arts while protecting Arts Council staff from conflicts or inappropriate advocacy involvement.

Members emphasized the value of coordinated messaging, advocacy alerts, and outreach campaigns encouraging supporters and arts organizations to contact legislators regarding Arts Council funding priorities.

It was noted that Arts Council funding significantly declined following the 2008 recession and subsequent statewide budget cuts, including repeated reductions over multiple years and the removal of \$1 million from the Arts Council budget in 2018–2019 that was never restored.

Participants agreed that recent advocacy efforts have improved relationships with lawmakers and increased awareness of arts funding issues, though consistent long-term advocacy is still needed.

Discussion included challenges with maintaining accurate advocacy contact information among funded organizations and improving participation in statewide sign-on efforts.

Members praised recent organizational growth and advocacy coordination efforts by Kentuckians for the Arts, including advocacy days, webinars, and legislative engagement.

Advocacy Committee Discussion

Board members discussed the growth and professionalism of Kentuckians for the Arts (KFTA), particularly highlighting the organization's advocacy day efforts and preparatory webinars. Appreciation was expressed for the organization's advocacy work and its partnership with the arts community. Members noted that the development of a KAC board advocacy committee could strengthen communication, learning, and collaboration around legislative advocacy efforts.

Discussion included whether the board should formally explore establishing an advocacy committee aligned with the structure of existing board committees. It was noted that the former constituencies committee is no longer active, and several members expressed support for developing a new advocacy-focused structure.

Board members emphasized that any advocacy-related work must remain separate from Arts Council staff responsibilities and should instead be led in coordination with KFTA to ensure appropriate boundaries and compliance. Members stated that the committee would serve as a learning and collaborative body for the board, while advocacy leadership and guidance would come from KFTA.

Motion

Mick made a motion that establishing infrastructure for a standing advocacy committee of the KAC Board, with a report to be presented at the June board meeting. The motion further stated that the effort would be developed in partnership with Kentuckians for the Arts to provide guidance regarding structure, board and staff relationships, committee activities, and reporting obligations.

Motion was seconded by Schrader, motion passed.

Additional Discussion & Updates

- Members discussed the importance of using staff expertise strategically while maintaining ethical advocacy boundaries.
- Comparisons were made to tourism advocacy models that successfully secured dedicated statewide funding through coordinated industry advocacy.
- Board members discussed the need to better communicate the statewide impact of Arts Council funding beyond existing KAP-supported counties.
- Several participants volunteered interest in participating in the advocacy committee exploration process.

Regional & Organizational Updates

- Local arts leaders shared updates on ongoing advocacy work, exhibitions, theater programming, gallery events, and Kentucky Crafted Market feedback.
- Positive feedback was reported regarding the Kentucky Crafted Market and staff organization efforts.
- Leadership introductions were made, including new executive leadership at Yeiser Art Center.

Closing Reminders

Members were reminded about upcoming Kentucky Writers Day activities on April 24.

Staff were thanked for their work supporting the Kentucky Crafted Market and ongoing Arts Council initiatives.

Motion to adjourn made by Vaughn, Mick seconds, meeting adjourned.