



DC COMMISSION ON THE ARTS & HUMANITIES

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Aaron L. Myers II, Executive Director

March 18, 2024

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The following is a summary of the agency's activities and operations.

### 1. Staff Updates

CAH has hired a new Grant Manager who will begin employment at our offices in May. Additionally, we have three open positions that will soon be posted to the CAH website: an Assistant Registrar, a Public Arts Manager, and a Grants Manager.

### 2. Music Census:

CAH held the first public community meeting on the DC Area Music Census March 12<sup>th</sup>. Thank you to the nearly 80 people who joined us for our kick-off event at Songbird. Please note that the Census will capture key information about the DC area music economy to help the District and the community make informed, data-driven decisions to support the music ecosystems. The next couple of weeks are focused on informing the community about the actual April 8<sup>th</sup> Census launch date and getting community partners to register on the website and to spread the word. The local media is also spreading the word with articles at WUSA (9) and the Capital Bop online magazine. The DC Area Music Census is part of a national cohort of cities organized by Sound Music Cities that include, Baltimore, Cleveland, New Orleans, and Minneapolis.

### 3. Budget Oversight Hearing:

CAH is scheduled for its annual Budget Oversight Hearing March 29<sup>th</sup> at the Council of the District of Columbia's Committee of the Whole. As always, we encourage you to sign up at the Council's website to testify.

I would like to remind our grantees that for all funds designated to our budget, the Commission is committed to a system of fair and equitable distribution. If the budget projections are lower than anticipated, we may see the 102-percent cap come into play. This will result in less revenue for the agency (a cut if you will).

Coming to the Commission nearly a year ago, it was clear that this agency, while given an increase in its budget and the additional work required to accomplish its charge, was severely understaffed. I have tirelessly worked both internally and with our sister agencies to ensure we had the ability to increase staff to meet the communications needs, the public engagement needs, the diversity, equity, and inclusion needs, as well as the grant management needs of the agency. Last year, we presented a budget addressing these concerns based on our required tasks.

However, instead of the additional funding requested for staffing the agency, we were faced with reductions in some of those positions, specifically grant managers.

Please understand that the Full-Time Employee (FTE) requests were to only meet the minimum needs to address the agency's ability to carry out its charge effectively and efficiently. Still, we endured the cuts to personnel. In our budget proposal to the Council, we have once again requested the needed personnel that allow us the ability to adequately fulfill the charge required by District residents. Once the budget is complete and gone through the necessary process, no matter what the outcome, the Commission will continue its commitment to achieving the outlined goals of the agency to the best of our ability.

If there are cuts to either the budget or personnel, this will result in fewer awards at decreased amounts, having a negative impact on staff and grantees. We at CAH will do our level best to minimize these challenges and strive to keep the funding for our grantees stable.

**4. Space Needs Survey:**

The Commission has launched the space needs survey. Many of you may have received an email with the Google Document Form to complete describing your space needs. Make sure to include the purpose, the length of time needed, and the required square footage. Please take the time to finish the survey and encourage other creatives to complete it as well. Once all the data is aggregated, the Commission will work with our counterparts in the Deputy Mayor's office to address possible solutions.

**5. Grants:**

We are working diligently to complete the grants awards process. The Grants department has awarded a historic number of grants, totaling 400 additional grantees in FY24 than in FY23. They have successfully executed more grants year-to-date than in years past. More than 80% of our grantees have received their purchase orders and that number continues to climb daily. Now, our delays have shifted from processing to assisting grantees solve issues with DIFS and compliance. I want to remind our grantees that they must have an updated clean-hands certificate and a designated bank account for direct deposit. This will ensure that your funds reach you in a timely manner. Also, if any of you are still having problems navigating the DIFS system, the Grants Department is continuing to hold training for both current and prospective grantees every Tuesday at 1:30pm through March 26, 2024. A huge thank you to our dedicated grant managers for making this possible.

6. This month Public Arts will launch the new “Thriving Families” art exhibition that is a partnership with DC’s Child and Family Services Agency. The Public Arts team will have more on that during their report.

7. **Poetry Out Loud:**

This past Saturday, CAH held its annual Poetry Out Loud competition for DC area high school students. There were nearly 20 students participating in “Poetry Out Loud,” “Words on Fire,” and the poetry writing contest. I would like to thank CAH Arts Learning Coordinator Andrea Brown for her hard work and dedication organizing this successful event.

I would also like to thank our staff for their hard work and dedication. We have all witnessed first-hand their due diligence in action. I am grateful to work with this team.