



DC COMMISSION^{ON THE} ARTS & HUMANITIES

Strategic Plan | Needs Assessment Findings April 20, 2026

Opportunity Consulting team: Lyndsay Brown, Ed.L.D., Anannya Sharma, Nisha Julien, Ph.D.

In this document:

- Part 1: Overview (pages 2 - 8)
 - [Strategic Plan Context](#)
 - [Process Overview](#)
 - [Research Questions](#)
 - [Summary: Findings](#)
 - [Summary: Emerging Considerations and Recommendations](#)
- Part 2: Findings (pages 9 - 18)
 - [By Research Question](#)
 - [By Role](#)
- Part 3: Emerging Considerations & Recommendations (pages 24 - 31)
- Appendix:
 - Key Terms
 - Sources
 - Budget Information

Part 1

Overview



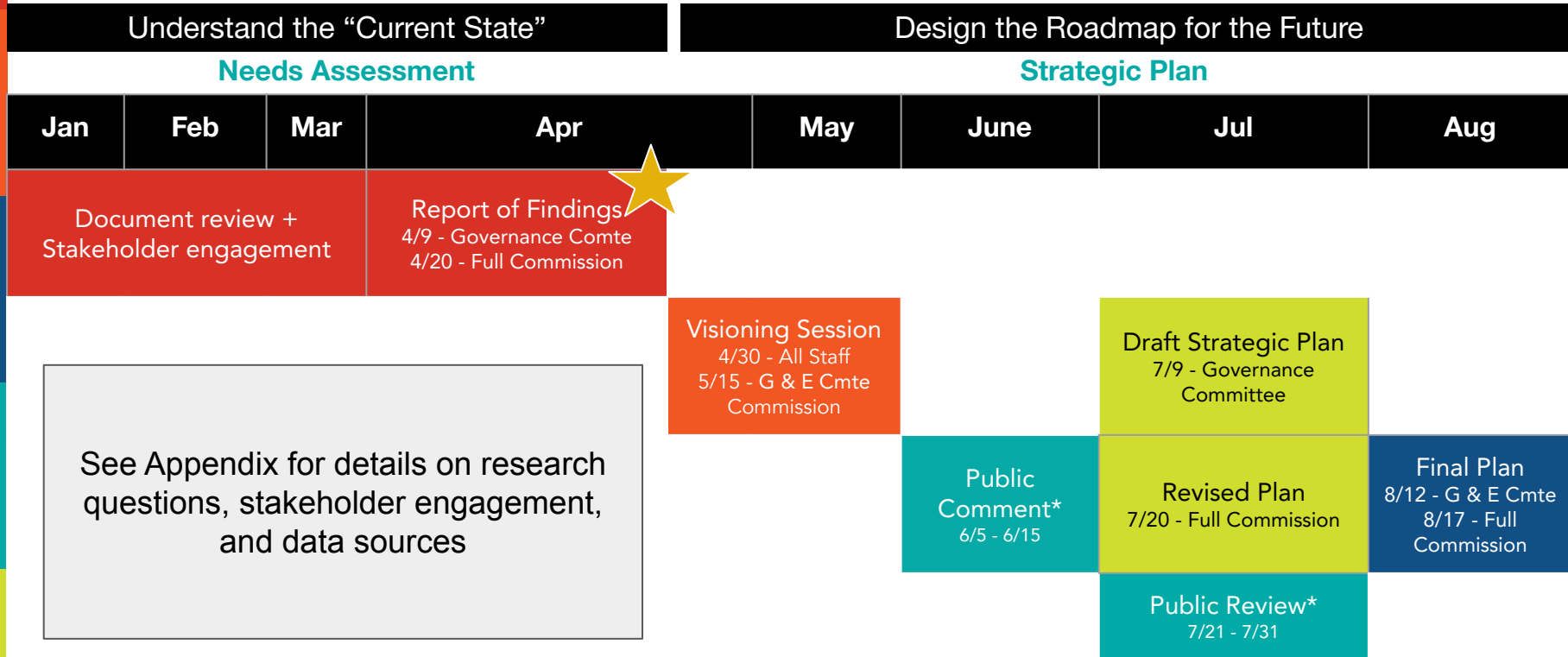
Strategic Plan Context

The 2026 – 2029 Strategic Plan offers an opportunity to establish, communicate, and manage performance against a single integrated plan across the agency.

Opportunity Consulting, a dba of IBG Consulting Group, is partnering with CAH to facilitate the development of the plan.

- In December 2020, **CAH's Task Force on Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging** delivered a report with 44 I.D.E.A recommendations
- In June 2021, CAH adopted the **2021 – 2023 Strategic Plan** with five focus areas: I.D.E.A., Pandemic Recovery, Community Awareness and Connectedness, District Government Alignment, and Governance and Organizational Culture
- In January 2023, the Commission received a report with recommendations: **"COVID-19's Impact on DC's Arts and Cultural Sector"**
- In July 2023, the Commissioners voted to
 - **Expand** the 2021 – 2023 Strategic Plan by incorporating the findings and recommendations from *"COVID19's Impact on DC's Arts and Cultural Sector"*
 - **Extend** the 2021 - 2023 Plan to coincide with the end of fiscal year 2024
- In 2025, Commissioners received a "close out report" on the **Task Force recommendations**
- In December 2025, CAH released its **FY26 Public Art Plan**
- Work is ongoing around the next evolution of the I.D.E.A efforts – a "community-centered framework of equality, cultural awareness, universal access, and community engagement," including:
 - In 2025, a comprehensive bylaws update to align to the updated framework
 - In April 2026, guidance in grant materials

Strategic Planning Process Overview



*Finalizing plan to include virtual, in-person

Research Questions

The needs assessment was designed to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the **current challenges and opportunities** for the DC arts and humanities ecosystem?
2. What **national, regional, and local socio-political factors** influencing the arts and humanities landscape should be considered in the development of CAH strategic plan?
3. How do stakeholders, including Commissioners, staff, art professionals, and the general public **perceive the role and impact of the Commission**?
4. To what extent are **current services and programs** (e.g. grants, technical assistance) reaching DC communities and what barriers limit participation?
5. How is the Commission currently **collaborating** with other key organizations and agencies?
6. In what way do **internal processes, procedures, and resource allocation** support or constrain its efforts and impact, including in alignment with its community-centered framework goals?

Summary: Key Findings

Details in subsequent pages 14 - 22

1. The DC arts and humanities ecosystem is rich in talent and diversity but strained by the affordability crisis, capacity and connection gaps, and persistent equity challenges that demand connection, resources, and professional support. It needs more than funding; it needs connectivity, infrastructure, and sustainability supports.
2. As CAH navigates resources constraints and a shifting policy environment, it will require strategic discipline, transparent prioritization, and stronger communication.
3. CAH is well-respected as an anchor, artist-centric funder. Stakeholders hope it can play a more explicit and effective role as a broader ecosystem leader. Doing so will require defining priorities, deliberate planning, and efficient execution.
4. CAH has continued to grow its applicants, grantees, and programming due to a combination of funding, technical assistance, and engagement strategies. Determining whether this reach is sufficient, equitable, or aligned with intended impact requires clearer goals and aligned data sets - particularly in a resource-constrained environment requiring more explicit prioritization and trade-offs.
5. CAH has made meaningful progress in improving accessibility of grant opportunities and programming. However, persistent barriers to awareness, access and representation will require intentional expansion beyond digital channels, alignment of capacity with demand for community engagement, and more localized strategies that leverage collaboration.
6. CAH benefits from committed and skill staff, improving culture, and strengthened governance foundations. The absence of clear, shared strategic priorities and an infrastructure to plan, progress monitor, and manage performance against those priorities is a barrier to effectiveness and efficiency across grantmaking, outreach, collaboration, and talent development functions. Gaps in operational leadership limit overall effectiveness and efficiency.

Summary: EMERGING CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Details in subsequent pages.

1. Establish plans, routines, and clear roles/responsibilities for long-term planning, annual planning, and annual performance management.
2. Refine, clarify, and communication grantmaking strategy and funding model across the portfolio
3. Leverage the introduction of new grant portfolio to strengthen internal workflows to address pain points
4. Build on inclusive programming that generate skills, communities, and visibility for diverse voices
5. Embrace role as arts champion and integrate signature activities, including ArtsWeek, into annual planning
6. Strengthen governance through clearer roles, structured onboarding, and expanded engagement models
7. Address gaps in operational leadership and organizational capacity

Part 2

Findings



Key Findings: By Research Question

What are the current challenges and opportunities for the DC arts and humanities ecosystem?

Key Takeaway: The DC arts and humanities ecosystem is rich in talent and diversity but strained by the affordability crisis, capacity and connection gaps, and persistent equity challenges that demand connection, resources, and professional support. It needs more than funding; it needs connectivity, infrastructure, and sustainability supports.

Themes:

- **Affordability crisis:** Cost of living and lack of space are existential threats to the creative workforce.
- **Capacity gap:** Many artists and organizations lack business/operational skills and infrastructure to sustain themselves.
- **Equity gap persists:** Despite progress, historically marginalized communities still face systemic barriers to opportunity and visibility.
- **Connection gap:** There is a strong desire for community, but limited infrastructure to support meaningful, ongoing connections across disciplines and roles.

What national, regional, and local socio-political factors influencing the arts and humanities landscape should be considered in the development of CAH strategic plan?

Key Takeaway: The DC arts and humanities sector exists in a climate of uncertainty, vulnerability, and pressure. As CAH navigates resources constraints and a shifting policy environment, it will require strategic discipline, transparent prioritization, and strong communication to drive decisionmaking and demonstrate continued value and impact.

Key Themes:

- **Vulnerability:** Growing concern that arts and humanities are politically and culturally “under attack,” raising the need to actively protect artistic freedom, authenticity, and diverse voices.
- **Regional complexity:** Some perceive the DC-MD-VA dynamic as being unfair to DC residents, while others see opportunity for regional collaboration.
- **Cultural preservation urgency:** Strong desire to protect and invest in DC’s Black cultural identity.
- **Leadership transition:** Upcoming DC Mayoral/Council changes create both uncertainty and opportunity for positioning of CAH and the arts and humanities ecosystem
- **Known funding declines** (including expected \$6.7 million decrease in FY27) and further uncertainty demands discipline and transparency:
 - Instability in public funding and broader economic pressures heightens demand for funding
 - Less funding will require tradeoffs in grantmaking and programming that are not always widely understood or appreciated by stakeholders
 - Clarity and transparency about funding priorities, grant awards, and other activities can support alignment, trust, and perception about efforts and value

Budget Information: The CAH Budget and Grantmaking is defined by the following statutory requirements decided by City Council.

- Since the agency became independent in 2019, the CAH budget is determined as a **portion of District sales tax revenue**. These thresholds are subject to change each year at the discretion of Council and have been reduced since FY26.
- Statute requires that the CAH **budget is allocated per the table** to the right.
- In addition, in recent years, **Council has mandated specific allocations be made to specific institutions**, reducing the amount of discretionary funds available CAH for administering in grants programs.

Percent of CAH Budget	Allocation	
<20%	Administrative Costs	
>80%	Grants	
	12%	Capital projects in support of eligible arts and humanities organizations
	50%	General Operating Support grants • Reviewed in budget size cohorts • Tiered awarding relative to budget size • Awards of organizations with budgets \$115k+ may not exceed 50% of annual operating budget
	22%	Art grant programs
	4%	Humanities Grant Program
	12%	Large capital grant program

How do stakeholders, including Commissioners, staff, art professionals, and the general public, perceive the role and impact of the Commission?

Key Takeaway: CAH is well-respected as an anchor and artist-centric funder. Stakeholders hope it can play a more explicit and effective role as a broader ecosystem leader. Doing so will require defining priorities, deliberate planning, and efficient execution.

Key Themes:

- CAH can and does play additional roles within and beyond grantmaking, but these roles are not fully defined, resourced, or aligned internally.
 - **Capacity Builder:** Strengthening skills, infrastructure, and community among art professionals and organizations through training, strategic support, and community-building opportunities.
 - **Broker/Connector:** Facilitating purposeful relationships between artists and opportunity holders to help work reach new contexts and audiences.
 - **Convener:** Leading cross-sector dialogue and collective problem-solving to address systemic challenges in the arts and humanities.
 - **Champion:** Advocating for the creative ecosystem, the value of arts and humanities, and the needs of art professionals – elevating visibility, influencing policy, and mobilizing support for the field.
 - **Curator:** Elevating, presenting, and stewarding artistic work, particularly through public art and art bank.
- Core identity as important anchor funder for the arts; however its funding and role supporting humanities is not clear to stakeholders.

To what extent are current services and programs reaching DC communities and what barriers limit participation?

Key Takeaway: CAH has continued to grow its applicants, grantees, and programming due to a combination of funding, technical assistance, and engagement strategies. Determining whether this reach is sufficient, equitable, or aligned with intended impact requires clearer goals and aligned data sets – particularly in a resource-constrained environment requiring more explicit prioritization and trade-offs.

Key Themes:

- **Demand exceeds resources:** Funding demand continues to outpace available resources, creating ongoing pressure on allocation decisions.
- **Financial constraints may lack transparency:** While CAH is an independent agency, its grantmaking is informed and constrained by statutory requirements and budget decisions set by the Mayor and City Council. Based on those requirements and funding limitations, there are inevitable tradeoffs that are not fully articulated, deliberated, or widely understood.
- **“More” without defined success:** Applications, numbers of grants, grant award rates, and numbers of new grantees have grown. Without clear goals it is unclear whether growth or current distribution of funding within the grant portfolio reflects the intended populations, disciplines, or outcomes, especially as overall funding levels have changed and will be declining.
- **Available data not yet leveraged to communicate reach and impact:** CAH has rich data on applicants, grantees, and programming that is not yet leveraged for internal decision making, progress monitoring, transparency, and grantee storytelling. There are some efforts underway to translate existing grant data into actionable tools that can be scaled strategically.

To what extent are current services and programs reaching DC communities and what barriers limit participation?

Key Takeaway: CAH has made meaningful progress in improving accessibility of grant opportunities and programming. However, persistent barriers to awareness, access and representation will require intentional expansion beyond digital channels, alignment of capacity with demand for community engagement, and more localized strategies that leverage collaboration.

Key Themes:

- **Technical assistance is a critical access lever:** Robust, multi-modal support (GAAP team, web chats, office hours, 1:1 assistance, follow-up to unsuccessful applicants) is visible, valued, and lowers barriers and enabling broader participation
- **Programming is a strong driver of engagement and ecosystem-building:** High-quality, skills-based workshops and community-building events are consistently valued as spaces for learning, connection, and professional development
- **Digital-first engagement creates structural access gaps:** Heavy reliance on digital outreach continues to exclude less-connected communities, newer residents, and emerging artists, limiting equitable reach
- **Place-based engagement** Strong demand for more consistent, in-person, and neighborhood-based outreach and programming.
- **Representation and inclusion matter:** Who is featured in communications and programs directly influences whether communities feel seen, welcomed, and able to participate.
- **Cautious optimism about new grant platform:** Expected to improve efficiency and reduce burden, but ultimate impact TBD

How is the Commission currently collaborating with other key organizations and agencies?

Key Takeaway: There is potential to strengthen informal collaborations to become an enabling strength toward meeting CAH goals and priorities.

Key Themes:

- **Some expanded community engagement collaborations** to expand awareness and reach of programs/services
- **Education sector, embassies, neighborhood-focused organizations, and discipline-specific collaborations** are consistently identified as untapped opportunities
- **Community engagement collaboration:** Some progress in building collaborations to support outreach and awareness with priority populations.
- **Prior proof of concept:** Previous successful efforts collaboration in convener or connector/broker role can serve as model
- **"Clarify the ask" and the plan:** Clear goals and dedicated staffing will support strategic collaboration
- **Showcasing limitations:** Staff are interested to explore appropriate strategies to surface and highlight the organizational collaborations that are supported through grantmaking.

In what way do internal processes, procedures, and resource allocation support or constrain its efforts and impact, including in alignment with its community-centered framework?

Key Takeaway: CAH benefits from committed and skill staff, improving culture, and strengthened governance foundations. The absence of clear, shared strategic priorities and an infrastructure to plan, progress monitor, and manage performance against those priorities is a barrier to effectiveness and efficiency across grantmaking, outreach, collaboration, and talent development functions. Gaps in operational leadership limit overall effectiveness and efficiency.

Key Themes:

- **Gaps in strategic alignment and performance management:** Inconsistent planning, progress monitoring, and performance management drive misalignment in priorities and outcomes. Current data practices fall short in supporting decision-making, performance tracking, impact measurement, and continuous improvement. There is cautious optimism for a strategic plan and performance management strategy that is actively used; existing staff interest and skills in these areas present an opportunity to strengthen these functions.
- **Governance foundation improved, but role clarity needed:** Updated bylaws and meeting culture; areas highlighted as needing alignment include inconsistent onboarding, expectations around Commissioners' constituent engagement, and Commissioner/staff interaction.
- **Advancing CAH's emerging community-centered framework requires coordinated integration to support impact:** The I.D.E.A. framework was a valued starting point, with recognition of both early progress and siloed efforts. As CAH's work evolves around the new "community-centered framework of equality, cultural awareness, universal access, and community engagement," staff seek to be more fully engaged in shaping, understanding, and operationalizing expected shifts in practice to ensure impact.

Research Question 6 (continued)

- **Staff culture improving, strain remains:** Positive momentum in staff culture and team cohesion, but persistent silos; grant cycle burnout, and limited routines for staff alignment, shared planning, and reflection, continue to create strain.
- **Talent development:** Staff are committed, skilled, and demonstrate desire for improvement. There is not yet alignment between organizational, departmental, and individual goals. Onboarding and ongoing training strategies are inconsistent. There is an opportunity for structured, equitable talent development.
- **External engagement improving, but constrained:** Reliance on digital channels and limited cross-functional coordination constrain reach, requiring clearer planning, roles, and resourcing to expand community-based engagement.
- **Disjointed oversight and coordination over internal operations hinders execution:** Staff perceive an absence of senior operational leadership that contributes to gaps in systems coordination, prioritization, and execution. Multiple workflows and decision pathways are experienced as unclear, opaque, and inefficient. Challenges are amplified across planning/performance management, talent, IT, and data management functions, particularly where cross-agency coordination is required.

Key Findings: By Role



Role: Funder (*Grant Portfolio*)

STRENGTHS

- **Sustained grantmaking despite budget constraints** (1,157 in FY25; 1,152 in FY26)
- **Expanded applicant pool** (10–30% growth) driven by outreach and technical assistance.
- **Increased inclusion of new and underrepresented grantees:** FY26 = 154 first-timers, expanded Ward 7/8
- **Expanded public art investment**
- Existing “**Grant Revamp**” process serves as a foundation for a robust, annual review of grant portfolio

CHALLENGES/IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Some staff/Commissioners demonstrate **lack of alignment around funding philosophy**—including tensions around definitions of artistic practice that are worthy of public funding, concerns about grantee financial dependency on CAH grants, and transparency around grant outcomes/impact.
- **Demand for funding outpaces available resources**, creating trade-offs between reach (number of grantees) and award size.
- **Some art professionals are ineligible** due to lack of non-profit status
- **Staff interest** in more robust reflection on and staff role in designing overall portfolio to support innovation and impact;
- Desire to explore possibilities and limitations of **outcome-based grantmaking**
- Interest in stronger and more visible **humanities-related grantmaking**
- **Public and stakeholders not fully aware of investments, diversification;** grantee data is “hidden” in reports and web
- Explore feasibility of **leveraging grants** to support convening and connecting needs
- Explore **new grant opportunities** designed to reach specific populations (disciplines, tenure, communities, neighborhoods)

EMERGING IDEAS

- Articulate CAH’s **grantmaking philosophy** across grants to create alignment, transparency, and awareness/education
- **Establish baselines and targets for annual grant portfolio** growth and diversification, based on funding
- **Build on Grant Revamp process** with a portfolio visioning session designed to center data, new voices, and innovation
- Explore **outcomes framework** that reflects the full range of artistic impact (creative, community, and sustainability outcomes)
- Translate existing grantee data (available through PDF reports into a dynamic **grantee database** with data visualizations



Role: Funder (Granting Process)

STRENGTHS/SUCCESSSES

- **Outreach and accessibility has improved** as evidenced by growth in visibility, applicant pool, grantee diversification
- **Noted** improvements to panelist process
- **Expanded technical assistant for applications noted and appreciated** (GAAP team, web chats, weekly in-person chats, office hours, 1:1 assistance)
- Optimism about new (long-desired) **grant management platform** to reduce burden, improve efficiency for CAH staff, applicants, and grantees

CHALLENGES/IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- **Grant volume** stretches program teams significantly
- Capacity constraints limit ability to provide **high-touch support** at scale due to the “tied to the desk” realities of grant timelines
- Staff desire to explore **alternative grantmaking timelines** that could distribute grantmaking activities.
- Not yet using and reporting **desired applicant, grantee, and panelist data**
- Opportunity to explore **appropriate, legally sound, embedded data collection**
- **Silos, lack of role clarity, unclear/delayed decision pathways, manual decision making process** are perceived to reduce efficiency and effectiveness
- Some delays in **payment timing** are out of CAH control (DIFS)
- Transition to new grantmaking platform is **opportunity to improve workflows** beyond digitizing existing workflows

EMERGING IDEAS

- Document **comprehensive process mapping** for grantmaking process, including administrative, financial, legal, and communication steps, to optimize new software, clarify internal workflows, and ensure functions are properly assigned
- **Incorporate staff feedback and process learnings** from grant management platform pilot before scaling organization-wide
- Provide **transparent public info** on website tracking grant status (e.g. notification, award, payment pending)
- Establish **best-practice key performance indicators** to capture time from application to notification to payment to demonstrate improvements and where delays sit outside of CAH



Role: Capacity Builder

STRENGTHS/SUCSESSES

- **High-quality programming:** Diverse range of events, with the BoTA series noted for especially rich content
- **Effective, accessible workshops:** Sessions are clear and actionable, helping demystify complex processes and encouraging participation.
- **Community-building impact:** CAH events are a key space for art professionals, where participants build connections and engage with peers.
- **Peer interactions:** Structured peer interaction (Q&A, breakout groups) drives deeper engagement and increases perceived event value.
- **Operational excellence:** Events are consistently well-run, with strong logistics, thoughtful timing, welcoming staff, and positive environments contributing to satisfaction.
- **Clear shift toward relational engagement:** Intentional focus on building networks, visibility, and support beyond funding.

CHALLENGES/IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- **Skills building needs:** Art professionals seek skills building in a variety of key content areas, especially around BoTA
- **Limited neighborhood reach:** Current programming does not sufficiently reach or engage participants at neighborhood level.
- **Diversity in featured voices:** Events do not consistently reflect a diverse range of leaders, presenters, panelists; representation not always experienced as meaningful/authentic.
- **Engaging facilitation:** Existing facilitation approaches do not fully maximize deeper/sustained participant interaction.
- **Desire for continued opportunities for community building.**
- Opportunity leverage and distribute content from capacity building sessions for more and continued reach
- **Scaling capacity building** may require dedicated staffing

EMERGING IDEAS

- Leverage the **Business of the Arts** series' content for repeat and additional modes of learning opportunities
- Diversify **venues and locations** through collaborations with community-based spaces
- Diversify **individuals authentically included** as presenters, panelists, or performers during events to avoid tokenization
- **Integrate artist** showcases, performances, and exhibitions into programming to elevate local creative voices.
- **Clearly communicate entry points** for engagement (e.g., artist opportunities, community participation, event involvement)
- Explore **hosting events in targeted neighborhoods** to expand reach and test localized engagement models.
- Explore grant-making that **distributes leadership in supporting capacity building activities and connecting activities**



Role: Champion

STRENGTHS/SUCCESSSES

- CAH has platform and reputational authority to communicate the needs of the creative ecosystem
- Co-Hosted 2025 CODAsummit in collaboration with CODAworx, bringing 500 professionals to DC and creating additional visibility for local artists
- Co-hosted DC Art All Night
- Collaboration with business leaders to generate additional funding to address gaps

CHALLENGES/IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Some CAH leaders and Commissioners desire exploring additional strategies to **generate high-visibility events** that generate awareness, funding, and “city wide activation”
- Some activities intended to bring visibility and support to the local arts ecosystem are not **fully integrated into annual plans and staff roles**
- **Perceived limitations in featuring** grantees’ activities / events that are not free and open-to-the-public, and avoiding perception of “playing favorites”
- Grantee activities and impact may be **underutilized as storytelling opportunities**

EMERGING IDEAS

- Explore publishing possibilities of every few years generating a **“state of the arts” report** for DC that supports data collection, story telling, impact of the arts
- **Establish** multi-year event plan to ensure events are planned, staffed, budgeted, and executed without disruption and without taxing staff, creating dysfunction
- **Establish** metrics and measurement strategy for reach, participation, and impact
- Explore establishing an **interactive, filterable map/directory of grantees**
- Strengthen **storytelling and communications** to highlight impact, promotion of grantee work and public-facing initiatives.

Part 3

EMERGING CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



EMERGING CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are meant to inform visioning sessions and future direction

1. Establish plans, routines, and clear roles/responsibilities for long-term planning, annual planning, and annual performance management.
2. Refine, clarify, and communication grantmaking strategy and funding model across the portfolio
3. Leverage the launch of a new grant platform to understand and strengthen internal workflows
4. Build on inclusive programming that generate skills, communities, and visibility for diverse voices
5. Embrace role as arts champion and integrate signature activities, including ArtsWeek, into annual planning
6. Strengthen governance through clearer roles, structured onboarding, and expanded engagement models
7. Address gaps in operational leadership and organizational capacity

EMERGING CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish plans, routines, and clear roles/responsibilities for long-term planning, annual planning, and annual performance management.
 - o Operationalize the strategic plan with **robust annual planning and progress monitoring** at the organization and department level.
 - o Define and designate **performance management duties**
 - o **Establish baselines and targets for key performance indicators (KPIs), including within the grantmaking function**, to inform prioritization amid reduced funding.
2. Refine, clarify, and communicate grantmaking strategy and funding model across the portfolio
 - o Articulate CAH's **grantmaking philosophy and funding model** to create alignment, transparency, and awareness among internal/external stakeholders
 - o **Build on the existing Grant Revamp process** to center data, new voices, and innovation in alignment to the philosophy and KPIs
 - o Explore the design of an **outcomes framework** that reflects the full range of artistic impact (creative, community, and sustainability outcomes)
 - o Translate data into a dynamic, publicly accessible **database**

EMERGING CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Leverage the launch of a new grant platform to understand and strengthen internal workflows

- Conduct and document **comprehensive process mapping** for grantmaking process, including administrative, financial, legal, and communication steps.
- Engage staff in **developing process improvements** to optimize new software, clarify internal workflows, ensure functions are properly assigned, and improve performance on key performance indicators
- Establish and publicly report **best-practice KPIs** related to these processes to define success, demonstrate improvements, and to surface key bottlenecks internally or in cross-department coordination.
- **Incorporate staff feedback and process learnings** from grant management platform pilot before scaling organization-wide
- Provide **transparent public info** on website tracking grant status (e.g. notification, award, payment pending)

EMERGING CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Build on inclusive programming that generate skills, communities, and visibility for diverse voices

- Leverage the exist **Business of the Arts** series' content for additional (multi-modal) programming
- Diversify programming **venues and locations**, including **in targeted neighborhoods** to expand reach and test localized engagement models.
- Diversify **individuals authentically included** as presenters, panelists, or performers during events to avoid tokenization
- **Integrate artist** showcases, performances, and exhibitions into programming to elevate local creative voices.
- **Clearly communicate entry points** for engagement (e.g., artist opportunities, community participation, event involvement)
- Explore grant-making that **distributes leadership for this type of capacity-building and connecting activities**

EMERGING CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Embrace role as arts champion and integrate signature activities, including ArtsWeek, into annual planning

- **Establish** multi-year event plan to ensure events, including ArtsWeek, are planned, staffed, budgeted, and executed without disruption and taxing staff, creating dysfunction
- Explore possibilities of generating a “**state of the arts**” reports every for years that supports data collection, story telling, impact of the arts
- Establish **interactive, filterable map/directory of grantees**
- Strengthen **storytelling and communications** to highlight impact, promotion of grantee work and public-facing initiatives.

EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Strengthen governance through clearer roles, structured onboarding, and expanded engagement models.

- Reinforce established **roles, responsibilities, and engagement expectations** for Commissioners and staff, including in committee operations
- Formalize the **onboarding/orientation process and annual training arc** for Commissioners
- Explore **establishing advisory groups** to complement formal Commissioner roles to build a leadership pipeline, engage community members as ambassadors, and elevate diverse, representative voices across disciplines, career stages, and grantee types

EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS

7. Address gaps in operational leadership and organizational capacity

- Explore needs/solutions for senior oversight over **operational functions**, including planning/progress monitoring, talent development, processes, technology, and data.
- Align **organization, department, and employee goal setting processes** to support individual and collective growth and progress toward goals.
- Strengthen **onboarding, training, and professional development systems**, in ways that are aligned and equitable.
- Create regular structures for **collaboration, communication, and shared planning** across teams
- Develop, train staff on, and reinforce **SOPs**
- Identify opportunities to improve **pacing and support during granting cycles**
- Align capacity with intentions around “beyond digital” **community engagement**

APPENDIX



Key Terms used

Working definitions of key, reoccurring terms that aim to ensure technical consistency throughout all discussions around CAH's strategic planning process:

1. **CAH/the Commission:** The DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (CAH) is the District's official arts agency. An independent government entity responsible for funding, supporting, and advancing arts and humanities programs, policies, and partnerships across the District of Columbia.
2. **Commissioners:** One of 18 Mayor-appointed individuals who serve on the Commission. Commissioners represent public interest, provide oversight, and contribute to strategic decision-making, including approval of the strategic plan.
3. **CAH leadership:** Senior agency leadership responsible for guiding strategy, operations, and decision-making. Primarily the Executive Director, Deputy Director, and key senior staff involved in the strategic planning process.
4. **CAH staff:** Full-time employees across Commission departments (e.g., Grants, Community Engagement, Public Art) who implement programs, manage operations, and execute the agency's mission.
5. **Stakeholder:** Any individual or group with a vested interest in CAH's work, including:
 - a. Arts professionals
 - b. Arts and humanities organizations and cultural institutions
 - c. Community members and residents
 - d. Potential, current, and recent applicants, grantees
 - e. Organization and government partners
6. **Constituents/Community members:** Residents of DC and participants in the arts ecosystem who are served by or impacted by CAH programs.
7. **Arts professionals:** Individuals who actively create, produce, support, or sustain arts and humanities work as a core part of their professional practice or livelihood. This includes both independent creatives and those working within organizations.
8. **Needs assessment:** A structured research process used to understand the current state of the DC arts and humanities ecosystem, including challenges, opportunities and stakeholder perceptions on program reach and internal capacity. It draws on surveys, interviews, focus groups, and document review to answer key research questions.
9. **Strategic plan:** Multi-year roadmap defining CAH's priorities, goals, and actions to advance arts and humanities in DC.

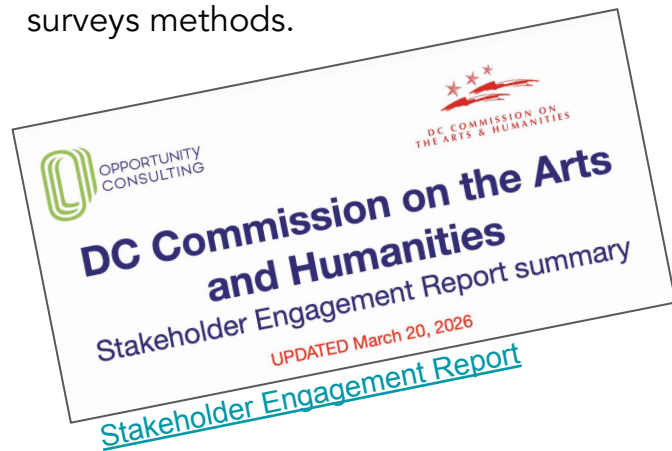
Summary: Stakeholder Engagement

The stakeholder engagement process was designed with CAH team.

The process included:

- CAH Staff interviews
- CAH Staff focus groups
- CAH Commissioner interviews
- Stakeholder surveys

Multiple pivots made including timeline extensions and alternative surveys methods.



Stakeholder Surveys

400+ respondents across 2 surveys, including

- Current/recent grant applicants, recipients, and panelists
- Arts professionals
- Residents and community members
- Agency and organizational collaborators
- Commissioners
- Staff

1:1 Interviews

9 Commissioners (all invited)
8 Staff Leaders

CAH Staff Focus Groups

Each CAH unit or department

Summary: Data and Information Sources

- 2026 Strategic Plan
 - Staff Interviews / Focus Groups
 - Commissioner Interviews
 - Community survey
- Document and data review (Governance materials, prior strategic plans, Taskforce recommendations, annual grant reports, recent grant data, oversight and budget hearing testimony, staff handbook, bylaws, statute)
- Prior Surveys
 - Capacity Building Event surveys
 - 2025 BotA Tax Considerations for Artists
 - 2025 BotA Business of Public Art Feedback Survey
 - 2025 BofA Business of the hustle
 - 2025 BofA Navigating DCs Literacy Scene
 - Applicant feedback
 - 2025 - FY25 Grant Application Feedback Survey
 - 2026 - FY26 Grant Application Feedback Survey
 - 2026 - FY26 Grant Application Feedback Survey
 - Community building events
 - 2025 Centering the Arts and Humanities Feedback Survey
 - 2025 Creative Chill Feedback Form
 - 2025 - FY25 Grantee Meet Greet
 - 2026 - FY26 Grantee Meet Greet
 - 2024 DC Creative Space Needs Survey