

Our mission: To foster and serve our community through inclusive programming, cultural and artistic exchange, and developing people-centered spaces.

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VENTURA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

800 S. Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Subject: Appreciation for Arts Grant Funding and Concerns Regarding Allocation

Dear Members of the Ventura County Board of Supervisors,

I am writing on behalf of OPAC, the Oxnard Performing Arts Center Corporation. We are the nonprofit arm of the Oxnard Performing Arts & Convention Center, established in 1998, which welcomes 350,000 patrons to 1,500+ events every year. First and foremost, I would like to express our sincere gratitude for your leadership and commitment to recognizing the importance of providing financial support to the arts sector, particularly in light of the challenges we - especially within the performing arts - continue to face coming out of the pandemic.

We acknowledge the efforts put forth by the Board with its initial \$1 million designation for the arts from its American Rescue Plan Funding and County staff who presented a just and equitable grant program at your November 7, 2023 meeting. Your understanding of the positive impact that the arts can have on the well-being of our residents and the immense contribution our sector has on the economic vitality of the County is greatly appreciated.

However, I write with immense disappointment and concern regarding the allocation of funding, specifically the \$400,000 in support intended for large organizations. Your decision to: 1) not proceed with an **open and transparent** grant application process for large organizations, 2) give this funding instead to just 2 organizations who lobbied behind closed doors and come from some of the wealthiest communities in the County, and 3) not require that these groups secure matching funds was an insult to the rest of us in the creative sector. Your decision belittled and devalued our work, our contributions, our constituents, and our place in this County.



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As outlined in the proposed grant structure, OPAC would have been eligible for up to \$200,000, which could have had a transformative effect on our ability to meet the needs of our **underserved** community. Oxnard was by far the most impacted city in this County by the pandemic, as noted by LA Times writer Gustavo Arrellano -

This working-class, super-majority Latino city remains the brown-skinned stepchild of a county where the split between wealthy suburbs and agricultural towns is straight outta the 1950s. So it's little surprise the coronavirus has disproportionately ravaged Oxnard: The city represents 25% of the County's population but 40% of its COVID cases and 37% of its deaths." - Feb. 2021

Our nonprofit has fought to keep the Center open and vibrant while other cultural anchors shutter around us (Carnegie Art Museum = closed, Gullwings Children's Museum = closed). You may recall City of Oxnard budget cuts nearly closed the Performing Arts Center as well in 2019. OPAC navigated this, a restructure in 2020, and then the pandemic. Our doors never shuttered. We are nothing short of resilient, resourceful, and innovative and this is without any operating support from the City of Oxnard.

During the pandemic, we were the first COVID testing site opened in the County and the last to close. We held emergency blood drives, PPE giveaways, and vaccine clinics. In addition to COVID relief and recovery, we were an important partner in Census Outreach and continue to work on public health initiatives such as mental health, extreme heat and sustainability.

This is on top of our rich and robust cultural and artistic programming that reaches over 100,000 individuals annually:

- Artists in Schools Residency Program - **Free!**
- Performing Arts Exposure Program for Schools - **Free!**
- Children's Art Program Classes + Camps - **Free!**
- Teen Art Program Classes + Camps - **Free!**
- DJ Program for Teens & Transitional Age Youth - **Free!**
- Audio Engineering Program for Teens & Transitional Age Youth - **Free!**
- Gallery at the Mexican Consulate - **Free!**
- Public Art & Community Engagement - **Free!**



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...and our signature events and festivals including:

- Native Plant Fest
- RescueCon (animal welfare)
- Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Celebration
- IchigoCon: Gaming & Anime Convention
- Chelita: Arts, Music and Miches Festival
- Sight + Sound Film Festival
- Trunk or Treat
- Dia de los Muertos Celebration

Our attendance numbers and ticket purchases show that we not only serve much of the County and region, but also attract visitors from 38 different states. We are a cultural anchor in this County and deserved equal consideration as New West Symphony and The Rubicon Theater. We deserved a chance to apply for this funding. Now we are to compete with the mid- and smaller-tiered organizations for the remaining available funding, which is **unfair** to our colleagues.

In light of these concerns, we would like to express our willingness to work more closely with the Board of Supervisors in the future. We believe that a collaborative effort between OPAC and the County can result in **more effective and equitable distribution of resources** to support the diverse needs of our community. By fostering open communication and collaboration, we hope to contribute to the development of policies and programs that will have a lasting and positive impact on Ventura County's arts community.

Thank you for your continued dedication to supporting the arts in Ventura County. We look forward to the opportunity to work together to ensure a vibrant and **inclusive** arts landscape for all residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carolyn Merino Mullin".

CAROLYN MERINO MULLIN
Executive Director, OPAC

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Blum".

GARY BLUM
Chairperson Emeritus, OPAC