

Washington State Arts Commission

Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, August 5, 2026 / Virtual

Commissioners Present

Robin Avni, Second Vice Chair
Mary Big Bull-Lewis
Michael Cade
Claudia Castro Luna
Representative April Connors
Jackson Cooper
Lou Oma Durand
Tony Ginn
Tisa Matheson
Terry Morgan
Noël Moxley
Catherine Nueva España
Charlie Robin, Chair
Star Rush
Krishna Thiagarajan
Senator Lisa Wellman
Representative Sharon Wylie

Commissioners Absent

Chonchol Gupta
Jasmine Mahmoud, PhD, First Vice Chair
Bennyroyce Royon

ArtsWA Staff Presenters

Daniya Baisubanova, Wellness, Arts & the Military
Program Specialist and PEAR Team Leader
Angelena Campobasso, Tribal Cultural Affairs Program
Manager
Miguel Guillén, Grants to Organizations Program
Manager
Karen Hanan, Executive Director
Valerie Peterman, AIPP Senior Project Manager
Aaron Semer, Creative Districts Program Manager
Deane Shellman, Deputy Director
Mike Sweney, Art in Public Places Program Manager
Michael Wallenfels, Communications Manager

Guests & Speakers

David Foster, Creative West lobbyist
Thomas Grant Richardson, WACultures Executive
Director
Shannon Halberstadt, Creative Economy Sector Lead,
Department of Commerce

For a full transcript of the meeting, please view the recording at: [ArtsWA August 5, 2025 board meeting](#)

Call to Order / Land Acknowledgement / Roll Call

Robin, ArtsWA Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Campobasso read the land acknowledgement. Roll call was conducted, and a quorum was verified. Public comment rules were shared.

A MOTION to approve the agenda was made by Ginn, seconded by Moxley and passed unanimously. Rules for public comment were shared.

Board Chair's Report

Robin reviewed his report (packet page 1). This is a time of deep uncertainty, and he applauded everyone's patience and courage to carry on in support of the arts, culture and

humanities. His term as Board Chair comes to an end after this meeting. He said it has been a privilege and an honor to lead the Board in the last two years.

Director's Report

Hanan reviewed her report (*packet pp. 4-10*). The state budget is estimated to face another \$720 Million shortfall in the next few years. ArtsWA has already taken cuts to its budget. The proposed federal government budget includes a slightly higher amount for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) due to extra projects such as America 250. The Senate is recommending that current NEA funding levels be maintained. Cuts on the House side are severe. Hanan is working with regional and national advocacy groups to craft messaging to speak to Congress about the importance of maintaining NEA funding. She provides talking points in her report for both state and federal level funding. A major role of commissioners is advocacy.

The Tribal Cultural Affairs (TCA) program is crafting a native arts and crafts act for Washington state and working to define what is considered a genuine native American artwork in modern times. The Department of the Interior has created a solid draft for an Indian Arts Act, that is being discussed amongst tribal nations, but with staff cuts, momentum to complete this work has slowed. ArtsWA used the federal government draft, with its approval, to develop a Washington-based version hoping to get it adopted into law in our state. Campobasso confirmed ArtsWA is consulting with all tribes in developing this proposed law.

Washington State Poet Laureate Derek Sheffield is already very busy. Wallenfels confirmed that Sheffield will lead a workshop at the Serving Those Who Serve conference in Yakima, that will help veterans with processing transition to civilian life and processing battle traumas, work that he has already been doing prior to his appointment. He also has many plans to work with youth.

Six ArtsWA staff are working alongside the committee to ensure the Billy Frank Jr. statue project continues to move towards completion. Casting for the full-sized statues is out for bid. The winning bid will be announced in September. The current plan is to install the statue in June 2026.

Cade, Robin, and Gupta are working with Hanan on the Own Washington Art project, to find one or more financial institutions that would agree to support and engage in the financial aspects of this program.

Hanan continues work on the two-year initiative Art prescribing/social pharmacy. Reliable data from existing programs nationally and worldwide shows that this approach works. Hanan is focused on raising funds to begin a pilot program in Washington State.

ArtsWA staff are working with the Washington State Historical Society on America 250 with a small NEA grant for Washington to fund celebrations that highlight our state's history.

2024-25 Biennium 8th Quarter Report

Hanan and Shellman, Deputy Director, reviewed the 2024-25 Biennium 8th Quarter Report (packet pp. 11-25). The budget is on track to be spent by the end of the fiscal year. Spending all budget funds is very important to our agency. All funds not spent by the end of the fiscal year are reclaimed by the state. Private and federal funds can be carried over from one fiscal year to another, but state general operating funds cannot be rolled over into a future fiscal year.

CRM / Strategic Plan Dashboard

Wallenfels, Communications Manager, provided an overview of reports the new Customer Relations Management (CRM) database will generate. Commissioners will be able to make requests to staff for reports on activities within their districts prior to meetings with legislators.

Rep. April Connors, ArtsWA's newest legislative commissioner, was introduced.

Consent Agenda

A MOTION to accept the consent agenda of minutes for the April 29-30, 2025 Board Meeting (packet pp. 26-33) was made by Ginn and seconded by Cade. There were no changes. The motion passed unanimously.

Art in Public Places

Sweney, AIPP Program Manager, introduced the Public Artist Roster (packet pp. 34-35) and Valerie Peterman, AIPP Senior Project Manager, to discuss the process.

Peterman explained that the Public Artist Roster (PAR) is the primary tool used by the Art in Public Places program (AIPP) to select artists to create new works for the State Art Collection. The process to develop the roster takes a lot of work for the acquisitions team and they did an amazing job. This team effort is cumulative from the work done four years ago to make the roster more accessible to artists.

A more diverse roster increases opportunities for local selection committees to find an artist that speaks to their community. A record 779 applications were submitted. The panelist is recommending 595 artists to be approved, which is a 76% acceptance rate. County representation grew from 23 to 29 in 2025, to include six new counties.

Matheson, who served on the panel as a board representative, said it was an exhausting experience, but she appreciated gaining a sense of what artists are doing and how they are seeking to represent their communities. She admitted that reviewing over 700 applicants is a huge lift for panelists. Peterman agreed and said if the application pool continues to grow, changes will be considered for the panel process.

A MOTION to approve the review panel's recommendation of artists to be included in the 2025-2029 Public Artist Roster was made by Nueva España and seconded by Durand. There were no conflicts of interest. The motion passed unanimously.

Creative District Program

Semer, Program Manager, reviewed Creative District program certification (packet pp. 50-51). The program began in 2018 and currently has 20 certified districts as shown on www.arts.wa.gov.

Pioneer Square was not recommended for certification at this time. Semer has provided feedback, and the Pioneer Square cohort is working on those recommendations for a possible future certification.

Hillyard, a neighborhood in Spokane, has a strong sense of community pride. They addressed potential gentrification and incorporated guardrails like tenant protections and sustainable growth management. This is meant to ensure that the people who are there and building the creative district can remain living and working in the area.

Woodinville Creative District will foster inclusive for seniors, youth, and underserved populations. The panel requested more specific plans for inclusion of the Latino population. The panel also recommended focus on the core urban area to ensure physical upgrades for safety and access.

A MOTION for the Board to approve the panel's recommendation for Hillyard Creative District and Woodinville Creative District was made by Moxley and seconded by Morgan. There was one conflict of interest: Nueva España. The motion passed unanimously with one recusal.

Cade complimented Semer and ArtsWA staff on the recent Creative Districts convening in Tenino. It was informative and energizing, and the feedback from Thurston County and Tenino is wonderfully positive.

Grants to Organizations

Guillén, Program Manager presented panel recommendations for three grant programs. Project Support is for one-year project specific support. General Operating Support for midsized, and for large organizations, allows organizations to spend the funds where it is

needed to keep the organization operating. Both operating support grants have two-year funding. Today's motions ratify funding for the first year only.

A MOTION that the Board ratify the Executive Director's Approval for FY26 Project Support grants totaling \$109,130 as provided in the packet (packet pp. 52-58) was made by Castro Luna and seconded by Cooper. There were no conflicts of interest. The motion passed unanimously with one recusal.

A MOTION that the Board ratify the Executive Director's Approval for FY26 General Operating Support for Midsize Organizations grants totaling \$110,000 as provided in the packet (packet pp. 59-66) was made by Thiagarajan and seconded by Cade. There were three conflicts of interest: Castro Luna (Jack Straw), Cooper (Social Justice Film Institute/NW Architecture League) and Nueva España (Partners in Print/Support of Old Lady Artists). The motion passed with three recusals due to conflict of interest.

A MOTION that the Board ratify the Executive Director's Approval for FY26 General Operating Support for Large Organization grants totaling \$110,000 as provided in the packet (packet pp. 67-75) was made by Cade and seconded by Nueva España. There was one conflict of interest: Robin (Capitol Theatre). The motion passed with one recusal.

WACultures

Thomas Grant Richardson, Ph.D., Director, reviewed the panel's recommendation for the new cohort of Heritage Arts Apprenticeship Pairs (HAAP) (handout). There were 54 applications to fill 16 available slots due to funding limitations. This program becomes more competitive each year as word gets out and constituents understand and support the goals of this program. Each master artist receives \$4,000 and each apprentice receives \$1,000.

A MOTION to approve the Heritage Arts Apprenticeship Program grants for 16 pairs as outlined in the handout was made by Avni and seconded by Morgan. There were no conflicts of interest. The motion passed unanimously.

Governor's Arts and Heritage Awards

Hanan and Wallenfels previewed plans for the 2026 Governor's Arts & Heritage Awards (packet p. 76). It will be the 60th anniversary of the Governor's Arts Awards. Heritage Awards were added in the 1980s. The challenge is to plan a big celebration for this award without the state funding that was provided only for 2024. It is important to have the awards showcase the agency's work. Wallenfels thanked Commissioner Terry Morgan for his work on the 2024 event. His efforts were instrumental its success.

Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Committee. Activity Recap / Update

Nueva España described a new tool for commissioners that involves sharing resources through a commissioner access only webpage to align board equity and anti-racist work

with the work of agency staff for alignment in serving the state. This tool may be introduced at the November board meeting.

Baisubanova explained that the Office of Equity is changing its program name from Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) to Impact to shift the focus to how government work is making a difference in the lives of the people of Washington state through its impact. The mission remains the same, the language is changing (packet pp 77-83).

Avni asked if IMPACT work includes support for the Jewish community, as antisemitism is impacting the arts community. Nueva España confirmed the commissioner resources page will include awareness of antisemitism. Karen affirmed the agency includes this work.

2026 Advocacy Strategy Discussion

Thiagarajan, Advocacy Chair, encouraged commissioners to take every opportunity to educate legislators that a strong support for the arts best serves diverse communities for mental health and wellbeing, and economic impact. Art is a powerful integrator of society. When we have conversations, we need to find a way to respectfully and peacefully stand our ground when it comes to misinformation. When we know the facts, and the facts are true, that we stick to the facts. Strive not to allow narratives that are not fact based to take hold.

One-pagers

Commissioners reviewed the one pagers and provided feedback. It will be a challenging supplemental budget year. ArtsWA is limiting its requests to meaningful maintenance issues.

State's creative economy strategic plan and future directions

Shannon Halberstadt, Creative Economy Sector Lead, Department of Commerce, said Commerce is focusing on work that does not require budget funding, such as developing policies and supporting implementation of Cultural Access WA on the local level.

Strategies and Action Items for Commissioners

Between now and the November board meeting commissioners are encouraged to meet with and meet and continue to develop relationships with district legislators. Having relationships in place before January helps, especially in a short session where timelines are shorter. Focus on developing relationships that educate on the value of the arts, especially the economic drivers of the arts.

Hanan said thank you for the work to come. This November, it will be Governor Ferguson's first budget proposal. There may be more cuts to agency budgets. Whatever comes, your advocacy and support are critical.

Survey of NEA grant recipients

Michael said ArtsWA conducted a survey of WA state grantees in May when NEA grant cuts were announced. The results are heartbreaking, with vulnerable populations being adversely affected. It illustrates the hard reality of these cuts.

Nominating Committee Report

Avni and Nueva España, Nominating committee co-chairs, provided an overview of input from the commissioner survey (packet pp. 84-86). The proposed slate of officers included: Thiagarajan, Chair; Mahmoud, 1st Vice Chair; and Durand, 2nd Vice Chair.

A MOTION to accept the slate of officers as presented in the handout was made by Castro Luna and seconded by Nueva España. Thiagarajan recused himself due to conflict of interest. The motion passed with one recusal.

Robin reviewed various committees that commissioners can participate in, and their essential purpose. This information can be found in the Board Toolkit.

Public Comment

No members of the public were registered for comment.

Adjourn

Robin adjourned the meeting at 12:49 p.m. and virtually turned the gavel over to Thiagarajan as the new Board Chair.