

FINAL REPORT

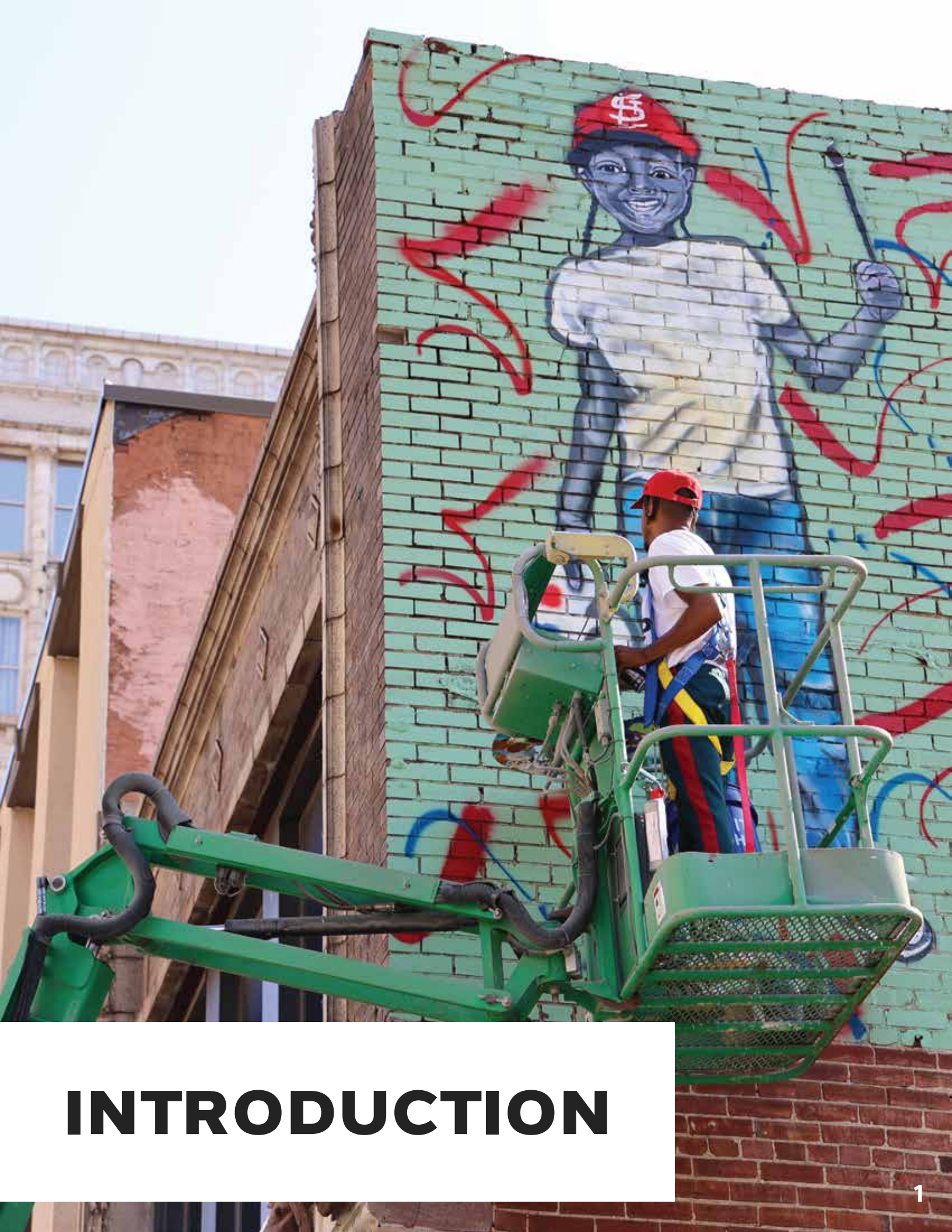
ADVOCATE PARTNER CATALYST

**A STRATEGIC PLAN TO STRENGTHEN RAC'S
LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE ST. LOUIS REGION**



**REGIONAL ARTS
COMMISSION
OF ST. LOUIS**

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INTRODUCTION



Since 1985, the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (RAC) has proudly served as the largest public funder of arts and culture in St. Louis City and St. Louis County. In the last 40 years, RAC has invested over \$115 million in artists and organizations through more than 7,300 grants. This investment has helped grow a sector that contributes nearly \$1 billion in economic benefit to the region. Our arts and culture sector provides significant local tax revenues and thousands of jobs, attracts millions of tourists, and makes St. Louis a great place to live, work, play, and visit.

In 2020, RAC released its five-year strategic plan, “Advocate, Partner, Catalyst.” The plan resulted from an extensive, collaborative visioning process and a thoughtful, inclusive planning methodology. Research for the plan began in 2017 with a regional study of what artists and arts organizations needed RAC to focus on for five years to advance the sector. It also included a robust survey of arts and culture audiences.

Released in early March 2020, the strategic plan included four key priorities:

- Grow and develop the capacity of artists and arts organizations
- Advance the education of young people in and through the arts
- Increase equity in the arts through leadership and collaboration
- Strengthen key organizational infrastructure

By addressing these priorities, RAC aimed to ensure that St. Louis would be known as a vibrant, creative, and equitable community.

Immediately following the plan’s release, the world was struck by the COVID-19 pandemic. The social and economic impact of the pandemic fundamentally changed RAC’s entire operating environment.



In a mid-year report released after June 2020, RAC detailed how the pandemic upended its programs and disrupted operations during the first half of the year. Despite significant cuts to RAC's revenue due to a massive decline in hotel/motel occupancy across the region, the organization worked to ensure that the working artists and arts organizations that relied on RAC for funding still received financial support. In the fall of 2020, RAC partnered with 16 other arts organizations throughout St. Louis to raise more than \$350,000 through Arts United STL, a free virtual benefit concert to give emergency grants to those that needed them most.

As hotel and motel tax funding continued to collapse, RAC's new President & CEO, in partnership with Commissioners, made the difficult decision to drastically reduce staff and reconsider its priorities. Strengthening key organizational infrastructure became the top priority for RAC in recovering from this unprecedented circumstance.

In October 2021, more than 100 arts organizations came together to call on St. Louis City and St. Louis County to use federal pandemic funding to help support the arts. After a historic regional advocacy campaign, RAC received \$10.6 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding from the City of St. Louis in October 2022. The federal funding came at a critical time following a dramatic downturn for the arts and culture sector brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In partnership with the city's Community Development Administration (CDA), RAC created the ARPA for the Arts program to distribute these vital funds quickly and effectively through revenue replacement and tourism recovery grants.



During the pandemic, RAC adapted its work to uplift and support the arts and culture sector. Although this meant stepping beyond the original strategic plan, RAC made an intentional and values-driven choice to meet the sector's most pressing needs.

The Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis remains committed to transparency, and this report reflects our ongoing promise to keep the community informed and engaged with the vision we set forth in 2020. As RAC looks ahead, the organization is excited to continue this vital work and build an even more vibrant and inclusive future for the arts in the region.





STRATEGIC PLAN PILLAR #1

GROW AND DEVELOP CAPACITY OF ARTISTS AND ARTS ORGANIZATIONS



Create arts management training for nonprofit arts and culture organizations and working artists to encourage, grow, and maintain a thriving arts and culture sector.

GOAL #1: IMPLEMENT CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM FOR ORGANIZATIONS

In 2022, the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis completed the Capacity Building: St. Louis Program (CBSTL), facilitated by the University of Maryland's DeVos Institute of Arts Management. A cohort of 31 arts and culture organizations participated in the 24-month program, which provided core arts management training, coaching, and implementation support. The Centene Charitable Foundation co-funded this tuition-free program.

By completing the program, RAC helped strengthen the arts ecosystem across all artistic disciplines.

GOAL #2: INITIATE ARTIST COUNT II SURVEY

In 2023, RAC partnered with WolfBrown, an arts and research consulting firm, to implement its newly named Creatives Count survey, a research study of the region's creatives. For the first time since the original Artist Count survey in 2013, the research gave RAC more robust and valuable insight into the creative practices, career goals, employment, income, resources, and systemic barriers impacting creatives in the St. Louis region.

More than 1,500 creatives completed the survey. It was open to those 18 years or older who were involved in the production or presentation of creative products, including music, fine or folk arts, creative writing, fashion, film/media, social practice, makers, and other cultural works, whether for financial gain or personal satisfaction.



GOAL #3: LEVERAGE ARTIST COUNT II SURVEY DATA FOR ARTIST PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

In 2024, RAC used some of the Creatives Count findings to inform its artist grants, programs, and services. RAC continues analyzing the results and is creating strategies to implement the findings into its grantmaking. The next Creatives Count survey will be produced in 2028.

GOAL #4: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM FOR INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS

RAC partnered with the Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA) to bring Artist INC to the St. Louis region - a cutting-edge professional development program that empowers artists to take control of their careers and create opportunities to grow their audience and visibility.

The virtual program, Artist INC Express, addresses the challenges artists face every day. The in-person program, Artist INC LIVE, allows artists to learn business skills specific to their art practice and how to apply those skills cooperatively with their peers. The eight-week program accelerates learning through artist-facilitator mentoring, small group application activities, large group discussions, and multimedia workshops. RAC and M-AAA have completed two years of a three-year agreement for Artist INC (2023 and 2024).



STRATEGIC PLAN PILLAR #2

ADVANCE THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN AND THROUGH THE ARTS



Increase the exposure and access to arts education for every child in every school through collaborative programming.

GOAL #1: CONDUCT “STATE OF THE ARTS” EDUCATION RESEARCH

In 2022, Americans for the Arts contracted with RAC to produce the sixth iteration of its Arts and Economic Prosperity Study (AEP6). The study, conducted approximately every five years, measures the sector’s economic impact in St. Louis City and St. Louis County.

According to AEP6, the nonprofit sector contributed \$868 million in economic benefit to the region. The sector provided nearly 12,000 jobs to residents and \$611 million in wages. The study also found that 8.1 million local and out-of-town visitors attended theatre performances, concerts, art fairs, festivals, and more.



The arts mean big business in St. Louis. Arts and culture events continuously generate income for local businesses, such as restaurants, parking garages, hotels, and retail stores. On average, a local art patron spends about \$31 every time they attend an arts and culture event in St. Louis, while out-of-town tourists spend more than \$53.

GOAL #2: LAUNCH AND IMPLEMENT ARTS EDUCATION COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVE

RAC engaged in several strategic partnership and merger conversations with the Arts & Education Council to meet this objective. While the organizations were unable to reach an agreement, the discussions surfaced valuable insights for the future.



STRATEGIC PLAN PILLAR #3

INCREASE EQUITY IN THE ARTS THROUGH LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION



Support arts and culture organizations through diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives - providing targeted management and infrastructure support for organizations led by and/or supporting communities of color.

GOAL #1: DEVELOP COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI) EFFORTS

In 2021, RAC's executive leadership focused on embedding DEI principles into core organizational operations and culture.

The intention was to build an equitable environment for all stakeholders, regularly measure progress, and adapt strategies based on feedback and learning.

Over the past three years, RAC has enhanced its hiring practices, offered regular DEI training opportunities for board members and staff, encouraged open community dialogue, and actively tackled systemic barriers in its grantmaking and program practices.

RAC increased the frequency and transparency of its communication with stakeholders and boosted outreach efforts to strengthen relationships with diverse artists and organizations.

GOALS #2-5: SUPPORT EQUITY TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR ARTS LEADERSHIP, EVALUATE EQUITY TRAINING FOR ARTS LEADERSHIP, IMPLEMENT CAPACITY BUILDING INTENSIVE PROGRAM FOR ORGANIZATIONS OF COLOR, AND CONTINUE TO FUND EQUITY TRAINING PROGRAMS

Considering the financial and operational impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, RAC directed its efforts toward securing funding from the municipal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). However, to make some progress toward these goals, in 2021, the Missouri Arts Council awarded RAC a one-time grant of \$20,000, enabling RAC to provide a special grant to five diverse-led arts organizations participating in Capacity Building STL.

RAC staff offered one-on-one consultations to the executive directors on their chosen topics and brought the group together to promote peer-to-peer learning. Furthermore, in 2024, to assess its operations, RAC partnered with Forward Through Ferguson, a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing systemic change for racial equity in the St. Louis region.



GOAL #6: OPTIMIZE PIPELINE FOR ARTS ADMINISTRATORS OF COLOR

In partnership with the Gateway Foundation, RAC developed a program to increase diversity in arts administration careers. The Gyo Obata Fellowship, a 10-week paid summer fellowship, provided 10 college students with a hands-on introduction to nonprofit arts administration in St. Louis City and St. Louis County.

The program matched undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds with host nonprofit arts organizations to grow their professional and personal development. RAC completed three cohorts of the program. In 2024, the Gateway Foundation began independently managing the Gyo Obata Program.



STRATEGIC PLAN PILLAR #4

STRENGTHEN KEY ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE



Strengthen RAC's internal organizational infrastructure, including grantmaking, technology and data, management, and governance, to support the strategic plan.

GOAL #1: OPTIMIZE GRANTMAKING PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT DEI OBJECTIVES

RAC experienced a 47 percent revenue decline during the pandemic. It prevented the organization from providing new grants to the arts and culture sector in 2020 and 2021. All but one of its programs were canceled, and the multi-year General Operating Support grant commitments made in 2019 were reduced by 75 percent. RAC's hotel and motel tax revenue did not exceed pre-pandemic levels until 2023.

In June 2022, RAC returned to new grantmaking, announcing more than \$1.15 million in grants to arts and culture organizations, programs, and artists.

RAC distributed the grants after making significant changes and updates to its grantmaking practice to support its DEI objectives and the sector's overall needs. They included:

- Ending the matching grant requirement
- Updating and streamlining applications
- Fulfilling grant payments in-full and upfront
- Simplifying annual reporting requirements
- Increasing DEI training for grant reviewers

GOAL #2: RELAUNCH REGIONAL ARTS COMMISSION OF ST. LOUIS WEBSITE

In December 2020, RAC unveiled a redesigned website—its first major update in six years. With improved navigation and regularly refreshed content, the new racstl.org became a more welcoming and valuable resource for grant seekers, artists, organizations, and the broader community. As a result of these enhancements, the site attracted over 100,000 users between 2022 and 2024.



GOAL #3: EVALUATE AND OPTIMIZE STRATEGIC INITIATIVE PROGRAMS

RAC evaluates its programs annually to ensure fiscal responsibility and organizational efficiency. Due to the pandemic, several programs were put on hold or sunset.

InSITE STL

The four site-specific, temporary public artworks project in Downtown St. Louis was completed in 2023. InSITE STL was produced through a collaboration between Greater St. Louis Inc, Explore St. Louis, and RAC.

The Gyo Obata Fellowship

The program was designed to match undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds with host nonprofit arts organizations for a paid summer fellowship.

The Community Arts Training Institute (CAT)

The program is a comprehensive training experience that prepares artists and their community partners to collaborate in creating and sustaining transformative arts experiences and programs that improve community well-being. After a three-year pause, the program resumed in 2023 with a revamped curriculum.

The St. Louis Teaching Artist Institute

In partnership with Wells Fargo Advisors, Springboard to Learning, and NCCJ St. Louis, RAC created a training program for teaching artists focused on K-12 education. The curriculum was inspired by the Lincoln Center Institute. This program ended in 2021.

The St Louis Canvass Project

Developed in partnership with Wells Fargo, this free youth engagement program allowed middle school students to discover St. Louis's arts and culture treasures. Professional teaching artists staffed and guided the program. It was sunset in 2021.

RAC extends heartfelt gratitude to the artists and arts organizations whose unwavering support has shaped its programs over the years. The vibrant impact on community would not be possible without the passion, resilience, and dedication of those in St. Louis's arts ecosystem – individuals committed to making this region a dynamic and inspiring place to experience and learn through the arts.



GOAL #4: DEVELOP REGIONAL MARKETING PROGRAM TO SUPPORT ARTS AND CULTURE AWARENESS

In April 2023, RAC launched a new initiative to attract more tourists to the region to experience the arts: StLouisArts.org. The tourism-based brand provides an immersive arts experience to residents and potential tourists.

RAC launched its cultural tourism marketing campaign in key markets using social media, digital, and traditional marketing to increase awareness and engagement with StLouisArts.org. In 2023, StLouisArts.org garnered 124,000 unique users. In 2024, the website saw a 1,109 percent increase in traffic, reaching a milestone of 1.5 million unique users. Additionally, StLouisArts.org's Instagram account has become the premier place for finding new and interesting arts happenings in the region, increasing its followers by 111 percent year over year.

GOAL #5: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT MASTER FACILITY PLAN

In response to national public health mandates at the height of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, RAC's Community Resource Center and administrative offices at 6128 Delmar closed to the public, and staff were required to work from home. As restrictions eased, RAC shifted to a hybrid workplace model, increasing efficiency and productivity while creating a more positive work-life balance for staff.

During the closure, RAC recognized that its reach and impact extended beyond its physical location. After extensive financial, administrative, and environmental analysis, the Board unanimously voted to put the property on the open real estate market. By selling the building, RAC saved \$300,000 in annual operating expenses and generated \$2.5 million in one-time revenue to start an endowment to ensure RAC's sustainability and guard against future financial crises.

In 2023, RAC moved its staff to a co-working space on the Cortex Innovation District campus and secured special event and exhibition space at City Foundry STL. The City Foundry space is funded through ARPA for the Arts.



CONCLUSION



LEARNING FROM CRISIS: INCREASING RAC'S FUNDING BEYOND THE HOTEL/MOTEL TAX

Over the last four years, RAC has increased its efforts to diversify funding sources beyond hotel/motel occupancy tax revenue, including securing \$10.6 million in ARPA funds from St. Louis City.

Nearly \$3.5 million in Revenue and Income Replacement Grants were distributed to St. Louis City artists and arts organizations who suffered financial loss due to the pandemic.

Over \$6 million in Tourism Recovery Grants were awarded to nonprofit arts and culture organizations to support programming that generates tourism to St. Louis from local, regional, national, and international individuals and groups. Grant recipients committed to efforts that would increase audience development and engagement, support future emergency preparedness and recovery, and advance their marketing and communications.

In addition to a generous anonymous contribution of \$100,000 in general operating support in 2024, RAC's fundraising efforts are laying important groundwork for future growth. RAC remains focused on exploring and strengthening fund development partnerships to expand revenue and deepen impact.



CELEBRATING THE LAST 40 YEARS AND PREPARING FOR THE NEXT 40 YEARS AND BEYOND

Though the last five years have been challenging, RAC staff and Commissioners have persevered and continued to invest in the arts and culture sector. Though RAC did not achieve all the goals in the “Advocate, Partner, Catalyst” strategic plan, the organization is extremely proud of its accomplishments.

RAC has been proud to serve the community for the last 40 years. Looking forward to the next 40 years and beyond, RAC will continue to have a meaningful and positive impact on the arts and culture sector. RAC’s impact would not be possible without the amazing artists, arts programs, and arts organizations that call St. Louis home. The best and brightest days are still ahead. Thank you!

THANK YOU & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

2020 2021 2022 2023 2024

GROW AND DEVELOP CAPACITY OF ARTISTS AND ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

Implement Capacity Building Program for Organizations					
Initiate Artist Count II Survey					
Leverage Artist Count II Survey Data for Artist Programs and Services					
Develop and Implement Capacity Building Program for Individual Artists					

ADVANCE THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN AND THROUGH THE ARTS

Conduct State of the Arts Education Research					
Launch and Implement Arts Education Collective Impact Initiative					

INCREASE EQUITY IN THE ARTS THROUGH LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Develop Communications and Engagement Strategies for DEI efforts					
Support Equity Training Programs for Arts Leadership					
Evaluate Equity Training Programs for Arts Leadership					
Implement Capacity Building Intensive Program for Organizations of Color					
Continue to Fund and Evaluate Equity Training Programs					
Optimize Pipeline for Arts Administrators of Color					

STRENGTHEN KEY ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Optimize Grantmaking Programs to Support DEI Objectives					
Relaunch RAC Website					
Evaluate and Optimize Strategic Initiatives Programs					
Develop Regional Marketing Program to Support Arts and Culture Awareness					
Develop and Implement Master Facility Plan					



RAC HOTEL/MOTEL REVENUE TRACKER | 2019 - 2023

	<u>2019 ACTUAL</u>	<u>2020 ACTUAL</u>	<u>2021 ACTUAL</u>	<u>2022 ACTUAL</u>	<u>2023 ACTUAL</u>	<u>2024 ACTUAL</u>
JANUARY	\$ 25,648	\$ 20,077	\$ 19,494	\$ 20,110	\$ 63,696	\$ 21,299
FEBRUARY	\$ 1,367,350	\$ 1,406,128	\$ 503,766	\$ 1,071,475	\$ 1,330,089	\$ 992,632
MARCH	\$ 48,900	\$ 48,512	\$ 78,902	\$ 147,291	\$ 237,852	\$ 505,127
APRIL	\$ 11,956	\$ 42,733	\$ 12,517	\$ 39,590	\$ 27,472	\$ 164,851
MAY	\$ 1,317,970	\$ 786,514	\$ 621,868	\$ 1,075,597	\$ 1,396,829	\$ 1,287,347
JUNE	\$ 46,620	\$ 125,741	\$ 53,762	\$ 209,899	\$ 152,633	\$ -
JULY	\$ 28,410	\$ 27,903	\$ 23,451	\$ 19,523	\$ 62,609	\$ 290,428
AUGUST	\$ 1,870,545	\$ 295,303	\$ 1,197,936	\$ 1,652,882	\$ 1,777,671	\$ 2,013,585
SEPTEMBER	\$ 60,275	\$ 82,768	\$ 84,792	\$ 62,226	\$ 242,530	\$ 156,354
OCTOBER	\$ 33,708	\$ 71,422	\$ 23,126	\$ 197,329	\$ 40,414	\$ 60,529
NOVEMBER	\$ 1,846,453	\$ 537,871	\$ 1,366,133	\$ 1,794,899	\$ 986,317	\$ 1,666,198
DECEMBER	\$ 62,004	\$ 83,266	\$ 144,943	\$ 252,123	\$ 965,317	\$ 229,834
H/M TAX TOTAL	\$ 6,719,838	\$ 3,528,238	\$ 4,130,690	\$ 6,542,944	\$ 7,283,429	\$ 7,388,184
YOY % CHANGE	n/a	-47%	17%	58%	11%	1%
COMP TO 2019	n/a	-47%	-39%	-3%	8%	10%



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