

Minutes

Metro Arts Commission Board Meeting

Thursday, September 25, 2025

12:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Historic Metro Courthouse

Basement Floor-Jury Assembly Room

1 Public Square

Nashville, TN 37201



Commissioners Present: Campbell West (Chair), Tré Hardin (Vice Chair), Heather Lefkowitz (Secretary), Evan Brown, Brittany Cole, Timothy Jester, Jilah Kalil, Shawn Knight, Dawana Wade, and Ashley Bachelder (Interim Executive Director, ex-officio)

Commissioners Absent: Camille Greer & Mayra Yu

Staff Present: Vivian Foxx

Metro Legal: Macy Amos & Kelli Woodward

A. Call to Order, Welcome, and Land Acknowledgement

Chair West called the meeting to order at 12:06 and confirmed quorum.

B. Public Comment

The following members of public provided public comments:

1. Princella Smith: Ms. Smith spoke about her Thrive grant application.
2. Nane Smith: Ms. Smith spoke about Princella Smith's Thrive grant application.
3. Isabel Tipton-Krispin spoke about Nashville Shakespeare Festival's Operating grant application.

C. Featured Artist: Devin Kern

Featured artists Devin Kern gave a presentation titled "Allowing Art: The Connection between Criticism and Collaboration." He spoke about his experience as an FY26 Thrive grant panelist and his role with Creative Mornings, highlighting monthly gatherings for Nashville creatives.

D. Approval of Minutes: August 28, 2025

A motion was made to approve minutes from August 28, 2025, by Commissioner Kalil and seconded by Commissioner Jester.

E. Action Items/Discussion

1. Public Art Committee – Nashville Youth Campus for Empowerment

Atilio Murga provided an update about the Nashville Youth Campus for Empowerment (NYCE) public art selection. He provided a brief reminder about the project details, and stated that the selection panel has concluded its work and selected an artist. The recommended finalist, William Denton Massey, was selected by the panel for his strong community engagement commitment and experience, trauma-informed process and design approaches, and artistic approaches and methods of using repurposed materials to create artworks. Discussion emphasized Massey's qualifications and ability to work within the project's accelerated timeline.

A motion was made by Commissioner Tre Hardin and seconded by Commissioner Heather Lefkowitz to approve William Denton Massey as the final artist for the Nashville Youth Campus for Empowerment public art project. The motion passed.

Staff will begin next steps to communicate the selection results to all finalists and next steps with Mr. Massey.

2. Nominating Committee

Commissioner Jester provided an update from the Nominating Committee, which recommended the following slate of officers for the 2025-2026 years: Chair Campbell West, Vice Chair Tré Hardin, and Secretary Heather Lefkowitz. Officer terms begin on November 1, 2025. After officers are confirmed, the Chair is responsible for making committee appointments. Committee rosters are effective beginning January 1, 2026.

A motion was made by Commissioner Tim Jester and seconded by Commissioner Wade to approve Chair Campbell West, Vice Chair Tré Hardin, and Secretary Heather Lefkowitz to serve as the Arts Commission officers for the 2025-2026 year. The motion passed.

3. Grants & Funding Committee

Commissioner Heather Lefkowitz provided an overview of the action items being brought to the Commission, including allocation decision, approval of Thrive grants, and approval of General Operating grants. She noted that the grants committee is bringing recommendations, and that the Commission may have conversation about all the decisions and outcomes being considered. She noted important considerations for discussion including the large number of applications received this cycle, the implementation of standing policy, and the Commission's goal and commitment to authorize grants and award funds by the end of the calendar year.

Macy Amos provided an overview of conflict-of-interest procedures, noting Commissioner's duty of independence and instances where Commissioners should recuse themselves from voting. Ashley Bachelder stated that she has copies of all Commissioners submitted conflict of interest forms and will facilitate the grant approvals so that Commissioners may recuse and abstain from voting as appropriate.

Ashley Bachelder provided an overview of a memo she prepared and sent to Commissioners in early September, noting an overview of grant policies and procedures, ongoing policy goals, and limitations and priorities for continual policy and procedural work to be done. She explained that the first action item is to approve the allocation between General Operating and Thrive grants. The Grants Committee recommended allocating 60% of the budget to Operating and 40% to Thrive. This recommendation maintains the Commission's commitment to growing the Thrive program and balances administrative capacity and operational support.

A motion was made by Commissioner Jilah Khalil and seconded by Commissioner Tim Jester to allocate 60% of the FY26 grant budget to General Operating Support grants and 40% to Thrive grants. The motion passed.

Ashley Bachelder provided a brief report to lead into recommendations for Thrive grant funding. She stated that there were 275 total Thrive applications. 57 were denied in technical review, and 218 were reviewed by the panel. The top 86 applications are recommended for funding, which amount to \$1,305,273. Discussion included noting the growth from 75 Thrive grants in FY25 to 85 in FY26, that all applicants who do not receive funding may request and be given their panelist scores, refinements to the rubric that was implemented for FY26, various eligibility requirements, and the need to require panelists to provide mandatory comments. Ashley explained that award notifications will be sent the day following the meeting.

Ashley explained that applications will be approved one-by-one that need separate votes due to conflicts of interest, followed by group approval for the remaining. Ashley read through the applicants and fiscal sponsors, where applicable, and called for abstentions where needed.

A motion was made to approve Andrés Bustamante with the fiscal sponsor Aventura Community School by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Wade and Commissioner Brown abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Leah Langley-McClean with the fiscal sponsor Arts and Business Council of Greater Nashville by Commissioner Lefkowitz and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioners Cole, Brown, and Hardin abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Martha Morales Purucker with the fiscal sponsor Actors Bridge Ensemble Theater of Nashville by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Wade and Commissioner Lefkowitz abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Allison Jiménez Brazzel with the fiscal sponsor Tennessee Performing Arts Center by Commissioner Lefkowitz and seconded by Commissioner Brown. Commissioner Wade and Commissioner Knight abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Trina Hewell with the fiscal sponsor North Nashville Arts Coalition by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Cole. Commissioner Brown abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Christian Sinclair with Soul'd Creative Collective by Commissioner Lefkowitz and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Brown abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Stephen Joel Watts with the fiscal sponsor Black Mental Health Village by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Wade and Commissioner Brown abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Shawna Clay with the fiscal sponsor Corner to Corner by Commissioner Lefkowitz and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Wade abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Joseph Gutierrez and the organization API Middle Tennessee by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Wade abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Jess Williams and the organization The Equity Alliance by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Hardin. Commissioner Wade, Lefkowitz, Brown, and Cole abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Dr. Gatluak Thach with Nashville International Center for Empowerment by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Wade abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Mark Schlicher with Friends of the William Edmondson Homesite Park and Gardens by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Brown abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Todd Lawrence with Urban Green Lab by Commissioner Lefkowitz and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Abstained by Commissioner Brown abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Randy Taylor with fiscal sponsor North Nashville Arts Coalition by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Brown. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Amanda N. Ewing with fiscal sponsor Friends of the William Edmondson Homesite Park and Gardens by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Brown abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Erihii Nyamor with fiscal sponsor North Nashville Arts Coalition by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Brown abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Christina Odessa Thomas with fiscal sponsor North Nashville Arts Coalition by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Brown abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Windship Boyd with fiscal sponsor Arts and Business Council of Greater Nashville by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Abstained by Commissioners Cole, Hardin, and Brown. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Meaghan Hall with fiscal sponsor North Nashville Arts Coalition by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Brown abstained.

A motion was made to approve Sai Clayton with fiscal sponsor COOP by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Cole. Commissioner Brown abstained. Motion approved.

A motion was made to approve Kim Albritton with Arts and Business Council of Greater Nashville by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Lefkowitz. Commissioners Cole, Hardin, Brown abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Cynthia Harris with the fiscal sponsor Actors Bridge Ensemble Theater of Nashville by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioners Wade and Lefkowitz abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Courtney Adair Johnson with fiscal sponsor North Nashville Arts Coalition by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Brown abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Ruben Torres-Rodriguez with fiscal sponsor The Quiet Voice Fund by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Brown abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Kamilah Sanders with fiscal sponsor The Forge Nashville by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Brown abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Richard Audet with the organization Germantown Historic Neighborhood Association by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Kalil abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Nina Adel with fiscal sponsor The Porch by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Kalil abstained.

A motion was made to approve Sonceria Radford with the organization NIA House Montessori School by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioners Brown and Wade abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Maria de la Paz Suay Tejon with COOP by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Brown abstained. Motion passed.

Ashley explained the remaining Thrive recommendations for funding can be taken as a group motion for approval.

A motion was made to approve funding for the following applicants along with their respective fiscal sponsors or the applicant organization as named (below) by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Cole. Motion approved.

Project Title	Applicant Name	Organization (if applicant)	Fiscal Sponsor
1979	Jessika Malone		Kindling Arts
Souls of St. Cloud Hill: Living History Tour	Deyonna Fairbanks		FellaVision Foundation
23rd and Osage Block Party	D'arayah Brown		Gideon's Army
Blackout Cypher	Rasheedat Fetuga	Gideon's Army	
Arte para todos: Building community through participatory art workshops	Brenda Perez	Workers' Dignity Project	
Oasis Advocacy Calendar 2027	Daniel Furbish	Oasis Center, Inc.	
The Mink Slide Feature Film Experience: From Page to Stage	Owen Woodard		The International Black Film Festival
Unbroken: A Radical Celebration of Black Girl Magic	Simone McCord		6 Square Academy

ABC Amigos: Animals That Bring Us Together	Mike Quinones		La Misión ConArte
Satellite Dance Presents: Dark Side of the Moon	Sarah Atenhan	Satellite Dance Inc.	
Nashville Women in Jazz, Redefining the Standards: A Concert Series	Alayna Anderson		North Nashville Arts Coalition
Divine Intervention Zines / DIZines	Rhu Blue		The Forge Nashville
Art of Belonging	Ashley Smith	The Branch of Nashville	
Disappearing Act	Hayley Maurer		Kindling Arts
Creative Pulse: Arts'N Antioch 2026	Saraya Charlton		The Forge Nashville
Urban Writers Rounds	Thalia Ewing		Excellence In Motion
"Write What You Know"	Christan Riley		The Scarritt Bennett Center
The Art of Care	Anne Veal		The Estuary, Inc.
Spin & Spark	Aimee Watson		Helping Music Foundation
Def as Resistance — The Rhythm of Women	Nesrin Simsek		Kurdish Culture And Music Association
"Flowers as Art" community workshop series with Building Life Opportunities and Options for Mothers (BLOOM)	Rolanda Lister	Building Life Opportunities and Options for Mothers	
Seen and Heard	Melissa Cherry	Choosing Justice Initiative	
Paint The Way: Nashville	Acacia Barron		Turnip Green Creative Reuse
Rocklife Youth Film Festival	Caleb Rogan	Rocklife Youth	
A Reason To Believe	Andee Rudloff		The Forge Nashville
Ephemera of Desire	Rachael Steward		Buchanan Arts
Senior [seated] Dance Class	Lyle Oberman		DancEast Collective
Amplifying Healing Through Written Word Performance	Greta McClain	Silent No Longer Tennessee	
The Nashville Cypher Story	Miriam Kraatz		DancEast Collective
"Plates & Palettes: Nashville's Global Feast"	Israel Garcia		La Misión ConArte
Amm Skellars' Full Length Musical	Hannah Dorfman		Kindling Arts
A Shared Table: An Art Exhibition	Lauren Zook	Friends Life Community	
Stay in Touch	Hannah McCarthy		New Dialect
Chinese Drumming Infusion - stimulates creativity, outreach	Jen-Jen Lin		Chinese Arts Alliance of Nashville

communities and connecting local arts and culture			
Nashville Youth Jazz Ensemble Community Concert Series	Richard Ripani	Nashville Youth Jazz Ensemble	
A love letter to my community	Safiyat Aminu		The Forge Nashville
Voices Unheard - Art for Change	Daniel Holmes		Drkmtr Community Fund, Inc
Intro to Interactive Media Art 101	John Holmes		Buchanan Arts
OutGaze Spoken Word Showcase & Anthology	Déjana Matthews		MashUp!
It Ain't Over - Comedy for Seniors	Leslie Townsend		The Forge Nashville
MADE Foundation: Render Exhibition	Taylor Fair		Nashville Design Week
Afterlife (working title) -- An Immersive Performance Art Experience	Sarah Saturday		Kindling Arts
Silver Songs	Timbre Cierpke		chatterbird
From Here: an AAPI Showcase	Chris Kang		API Middle Tennessee
The Quiet Voice's (TQV) Youth Summer Arts Workshop Series	Alex Wong	The Quiet Voice	
X-PACs: Portable Shelter Solutions For The Unhoused	Danielle Myers		The Forge Nashville
Bubblegum's House of Broken Hearts	Jack Stell		Kindling Arts
The Nashville Bi Diaries Project + Trans Day of Visibility Community Portrait Project	Emily Allen		Healing in the Margins
Nashville Music Boost: Industry Insights & Nashville Beat Battle Series	Jarrel Pierson		Helping Our Music Evolve
Nocturne Dance	Delaine Dobbs		DancEast Collective
"there goes the point" Dance Film	Delaney McKay House		DancEast Collective
Liminoid AI: An Experimental Exhibition introducing Multimedia Techno-Whimsy	Chris Bandy		Daybreak Arts
Play It Forward Recording Sessions and Mix It Up Showcase Concert Series	Jason Garriott	Music Neighbors	
The Sound Builders Lab	Justin Merritt		International Black Film Festival
The Nina Project	Cory Roroya		MashUp!
Watercolor Exploration, Enthusiasm and Exhibition	Marie Hindman		Nashville Bel Canto Foundation
Touched By Sun: Wellness Series	Crystal Moise		Healing in the Margins

Ashley stated that Operating grant approvals are next. She provided a staff report, stating that 106 applications were received, 13 denied in technical review and 93 were reviewed by the panels. 79 applicants who received a score of 70% or higher are eligible for funding. She showed the distribution of grant amounts among the recommended grantees as categorized by size, noting the range of grants for each size category as follows: grants to micro-organizations \$1,837 - \$9,892, grants to small organizations \$6,786 - \$21,341, grants to medium organizations \$10,886 - \$44,399, grants to midsize organizations \$31,869 - \$40,206, and grants to large organizations \$27,784 - \$46,306. She noted that there is greater parity in grant sizes between the largest grants and smaller ones.

Commission discussed the recommendations and several aspects of the process, including comparison of scores across years, the processes from previous through current years of using outside adjudicators and community panelists, implementation of the rubric for the last two or three evaluation cycles. Ashley provided an overview of the panelist process, including the open call for panelists, training and orientation with the rubric, and the process for the in-person panel days, the number of panelists, and the amount of time for panel reviews. Commissioners who observed the panels shared an observation that the panel process appeared to run smoothly with robust engagement and discussion by panelists. Concerns were raised about variation in the outcomes of scores this year, which across the board were lower scores than the previous time the rubric was used. Commissioners discussed options of approving the recommendations today, taking actions to change the recommendation, or sending the recommendations back to the grants committee

A motion by Commissioner Knight to send the Operating recommendations for funding back to the Grants Committee to compare the difference in last year's scores to this year's scores. Commissioner Jester seconded the motion.

Additional discussion included how long-term and historical partnerships are captured or considered. Additional questions regarding what anticipated actions may be taken in grants committee. Concerns were raised about considering changes to Operating recommendations but not those for Thrive, and what the impact on the timeline would be.

Commissioner Knight restated the motion: ***A motion to send the for Operating grants back to committee to consider the significant difference in scores from last year to this year using the same rubric.***

Roll call vote:

- Commissioner West: yes
- Commissioner Hardin: no
- Commissioner Lefkowitz: no
- Commissioner Brown: no
- Commissioner Cole: no
- Commissioner Jester: no
- Commissioner Khalil: no
- Commissioner Knight: yes
- Commissioner Wade: no

The motion failed.

Chair West called for a brief recess.

Chair West called the meeting to order and confirmed quorum. Commissioner Brown & Commissioner Wade left the meeting during the recess.

Ashley stated that there are 79 organizations recommended for funding that will be taken up by size category, starting with large organizations. Organizations will be taken up for individual votes where abstentions are needed for conflicts of interest, followed by a group approval for the remaining.

Ashley read through the recommendations for large organizations that required abstentions.

A motion was made to approve funding for National Museum of African American Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Cole abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve funding for Belcourt Theatre, Inc. by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Kalil and Commissioner Lefkowitz abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve funding for Frist Art Museum by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Kalil and Commissioner Lefkowitz abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve funding for Tennessee Performing Arts Center by Commissioner Lefkowitz and seconded by Commissioner Hardin. Commissioner Knight abstained. The motion passed.

A motion was made to approve funding for the Country Music Foundation, Inc., Nashville Symphony Association, Nashville Opera, and Nashville Ballet by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Kalil. The motion passed.

Ashley read through the recommendations for midsize organizations that required abstentions.

A motion was made to approve Arts & Business Council of Greater Nashville by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Hardin and Cole abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve The Porch Writers' Collective by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Kalil abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Nashville Repertory Theatre, Inc. by Commissioner Lefkowitz and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Knight abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve The Contributor, Inc. by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Khalil. Commissioner Lefkowitz abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Nashville Children's Theatre by Commissioner Lefkowitz and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Knight abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve the remaining midsize organizations including Southern Word; CreatiVets; Musicians On Call; W.O. Smith/Nashville Community Music School; Music City Youth in the Arts, Inc.; Tennessee Association of Craft Artists (DBA Tennessee Craft); Turnip Green Creative Reuse; Native American Indian Association of Tennessee; Nashville Jazz Workshop; Nashville Film Festival; Jazz Empowers; The Forge Nashville; Tennessee Arts Academy Foundation; Music for Seniors; Humanities Tennessee; and The Theater Bug as listed by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Motion passed.

Ashley read through the recommendations for medium organizations that required abstentions.

A motion was made to approve Actors Bridge Ensemble by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Lefkowitz abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Creative Girls Rock by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Hardin abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made to approve Arcade Arts Nashville by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner West abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester to approve all remaining Medium Organizations (Youth Empowerment through Arts and Humanities (YEAH!); Kindling Arts; Girls Write Nashville; Love Learning Music; DancEast Collective; North Nashville Arts Coalition; Nashville Philharmonic Orchestra; The Beat of Life; Buchanan Arts; Rejoice School of Ballet; Intersection; Daybreak Arts; Healing Arts Project Inc. HAPI; MOVE Inclusive Dance; Operation Song; Global Education Center; Street Theatre Company; Nashville in Harmony; New Dialect; Dancing Through the Curriculum; Art and Soul Nashville, Inc.; The Arts at Center Street; Senior Center for the Arts as listed. Motion passed.

Ashley read the recommendations for small organizations that required abstentions.

A motion was made to approve Unscripted by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester. Commissioner Lefkowitz abstained. Motion passed.

A motion was made by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester to approve all remaining small organizations, including Excellence in Motion; Nashville African American Wind Symphony, Inc.; International Black Film Festival; FALL; Carnegie Writers; Chinese Arts Alliance of Nashville; Vox Grata, Inc.; Portara Ensemble; Friends of the Edmondson Homesite Park & Gardens; La Misión ConArte; COOP; Nashville Filmmakers Guild; Defy Film Festival; Nashville Bel Canto Foundation; Numinous Flux Dance Company as listed. Motion passed.

Ashley stated that there are no micro-organizations that require separate approvals.

A motion was made by Commissioner Knight and seconded by Commissioner Jester to approve all micro-organizations including Music City Review; April Gloaming Publishing; Drkmtr Community Fund Inc.; The Enlightenment Film Academy; SONUS Choir; Nashville Dance Collective; Kurdish Culture and Music Association; Community Arts of Bellevue dba Arts Bellevue as listed. Motion passed.

Having approved all recommended grants, Ashley summarized the overall distribution of \$3,263,200 breaks down as follows: 40% to Thrive, 1.5% to micro, 5.7% to small, 18.6% to medium, 24.9% to midsize, and 9.3% to large.

F. Chair's Report

Chair Campbell West shared that the Executive Committee will meet in the coming weeks and will share updates after that meeting. She thanks all applicants who applied for grants, and the Metro Arts staff and Grants Committee for running the FY26 grant cycle on in a demanding and navigating multiple cycles concurrently.

G. Executive Director's Report

Ashley Bachelder shared that Camille Greer has been confirmed and is officially the 11th member of the Arts Commission. She will start at the October meeting. Staff updates include the departure of long-serving Finance and Operations Coordinator Skyler Peterson, which Ashley stated was a planned departure and she thanked Ms. Peterson for all her years of service to Metro. Interviews will begin soon for a new Finance Officer position, and the Strategic Grants and Initiatives Manager and Public Art Manager recruitments will close in the coming days and weeks. Ashley shared that she is close to finalizing the process for bringing on a facilitator to work with the staff and Commission on a 60–90-day organizational alignment and planning process to complete in preparation for a director search.

H. New/Old Business

None

I. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:59pm.