



# City of Fresno

2600 Fresno Street  
Fresno, CA 93721  
[www.fresno.gov](http://www.fresno.gov)

## Meeting Minutes Cultural Arts Grant Fund Subcommittee

*Vice Chair - Laura Ward*  
*Commissioner - Jon Dohlin*  
*Commissioner - Scott Miller*

---

Monday, October 6, 2025

4:00 PM

Council Chambers  
Parks, Recreation, and Arts  
Commission

---

### Special Meeting

The Cultural Arts Grant Fund Subcommittee of the Fresno Parks, Recreation, and Arts Commission met in special session in the Council Chamber, City Hall, on the date and time above written.

1. Call to Order

*Vice Chair Ward called the meeting to order at 4:12 P.M.*

2. 4:12 P.M. Roll Call

3. Approve Agenda

On motion of Commissioner Dohlin, seconded by Commissioner Miller, the AGENDA was APPROVED. The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** 3 - Vice Chair Ward, Commissioner Dohlin and Commissioner Miller

4. Approval of Minutes

4.-A. [ID 25-1360](#) Approval of the Subcommittee Meeting Minutes of September 16, 2025.

On motion of Commissioner Miller, seconded by Commissioner Dohlin, that the minutes of September 16, 2025, be APPROVED. The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** 3 - Vice Chair Ward, Commissioner Dohlin and Commissioner Miller

**5. Member Updates**

*Commissioners Miller and Dohlin had no updates for the Subcommittee.*

*Vice Chair Ward read a statement into the record responding to the public calls for transparency, accountability, equity and change. She announced the meeting was being held to publicly share the information the Subcommittee received from each applicant that identified the zip codes and narratives submitted about the areas served by the organizations and projects. The full text of the statement read by Vice Chair Ward are attached to these minutes as "Attachment 1" and incorporated herein.*

**6. Action Items**

**6.-A. [ID 25-1361](#)** Proposed Funding Allocations for EAAC Grant Awards.

*Discussion of the above item began at 4:28 P.M.*

*Upon call, the following people addressed the Subcommittee: Maggie Curtis; Carolyn Thomas; Julia Copeland; Lylian Banderas for Hugo Morales; Joe Catania; Joseph Rodriguez; Ashley Mireles Guerrero; Stephen Wilson; Johannus Reijnders; Alicia Rodriguez; Cami Cipolla; Christina Soto; Kiel Lopez-Schmidt; Dallas B.; Susan Filgate, and; Smiley. The public comment period closed at 5:00 P.M.*

**On motion of Commissioner Dohlin, seconded by Commissioner Miller, to RECOMMEND the proposed awards to the Parks, Recreation and Arts Commission for consideration and action. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 3 - Vice Chair Ward, Commissioner Dohlin and Commissioner Miller

**7. Discussion Items**

**7.-A. [ID 25-1362](#)** Discussion of Appeals of Proposed EAAC Grant Awards and Potential Appeals Criteria Modification in Future Guidelines Update.

*The above discussion began at 5:01 P.M.*

*Upon call, the following people addressed the Subcommittee: Christina*

*Soto; Johannus Reijnders; Kiel Lopez-Schmidt, and; Erin Byrd. The public comment period closed at 5:11 P.M.*

*During his comments, Johannus Reijnders requested transcripts and recordings from past meetings concerning EAAC Grants. City Attorney Janz stated he would connect with Mr. Reijnders and provide him with information concerning his request.*

*Subcommittee discussion on the above item included: the Parks, Recreation and Arts Commission displeasure of the current appeal criteria language which had been approved by the Fresno City Council; the Subcommittee requirement to adhere to the current appeal criteria language, and; alternative appeal criteria language that could be adopted when it was time to revise the guidelines.*

*The above item was for discussion only and no action was taken by the Commission.*

**8. Adjournment**

*Vice Chair Ward adjourned the meeting at 5:13 P.M. in memory of Dr. Francine Oputa.*

# Attachment 1

October 6, 2025  
Special Meeting of the PRAC Cultural Arts Subcommittee  
Member Report of Laura E. Ward

To the community, you are the reason this public subcommittee meeting is happening today. Almost a year ago, on October 14, 2024, this subcommittee and the full PRAC commission, along with the Fresno Arts Council, tried to make that happen and we were not successful – it took strong community advocacy to get that changed. You did this, and we thank you.

I have listened to the public comments that were made over the past few PRAC meetings several times, and the calls for transparency, accountability, equity, and change have been received. Through this meeting today the Cultural Arts Subcommittee is able to publicly share the information we reviewed from each applicant that identifies the zip codes and narratives submitted about the areas served by their organizations and projects.

These past few PRAC meetings have been difficult and necessary. Fresno has a history of bringing community members into advisory councils, committees, and commissions, often to create specific plans and reports that span hundreds of pages but are sitting on a shelf somewhere gathering dust. As a community member, it is frustrating to not see Measure P being implemented as hoped and expected. The city's ParkScore has dropped since the tax was enacted and on the park side of Measure P, its lion share, change is happening but slowly.

On the arts side, we have the opportunity to be more responsive, to make changes each year. You saw this last year; right after Year 1 funding went out, the guidelines were revised to address the issues raised by the Downtown Fresno Partnership, as applicant Elliott Balch noted in public comment last week, revised to address concerns about more limited funding availability in coming years, implement changes to ensure Fresno resident artists and culture bearers are prioritized by applicants with all parts of grant-funded activities taking place in the city, and revised to require that all applications include identification of who will be served and in what parts of the city each applicant will be providing services.

That change was made to address commissioner and community concern that zip codes and communities served by applicants must be considered before proposed funding allocations are recommended by the Cultural Arts Subcommittee and approved by PRAC, to confirm they meet the mandate of Measure P as follows:

- Funding for operating support [...] shall support organizational stability for arts and cultural organizations that reflect the cultural, geographic and demographic

diversity of the City of Fresno; and reflect the proportion of each grantee's overall operations that serves residents within, or visitors to, the City of Fresno sphere of influence.

- [These] Grants [...] shall prioritize organizations and programs that support and expand diverse public or youth engagement and equity.”

Further, in response to commissioner and community feedback, the Year 2 revisions added the policy that “Award allocations will be recommended by the PRAC with intent that these investments recognize, reflect, and support the cultural, demographic, and geographic diversity of all parts of the City of Fresno.”

Now the public has the data that the was made available to the subcommittee when we made the proposed recommendations for Year 2 EAAC grant funding. There are many different ways of looking at that data, and I hope we can receive concrete feedback on equity concerns, and ideas and recommendations about how they can be considered and addressed moving forward.

More than 30 years ago the cultural arts community in Fresno had very similar debates and conversations around the predecessor tax to Measure P, the Arts to Zoo sales tax that was created in 1993 and dismantled in 1995. As I noted at the July 17, 2023, commission meeting where the revised Cultural Arts Plan was introduced, the “Arts to Zoo” measure included a specific funding formula that favored four named organizations; 50% of the total dollars went automatically to the Fresno Chaffee Zoo, the Fresno Art Museum, the Fresno Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Fresno Metropolitan Museum. It did not provide cultural arts investment funds to be available on equitable terms, with a negative impact on cultural arts organizations from underrepresented and historically underinvested communities – those historical mistakes must not be repeated.

There are many differences in how the cultural arts component of Measure P was crafted, as compared to the Arts to Zoo predecessor tax. When current EAAC applicant Hugo Morales prepared his equity analysis of the Arts to Zoo funding distributions 31 years ago, published in the Fresno Bee on June 22, 1994, he identified the majority of award recipients as predominantly “white controlled” or “white serving” without the support of specific data, and a lot of subsequent new articles and opinion pieces from that time period include arguments about who in the community benefitted from those organizations and their activities.

That is different with Measure P. The Fresno Arts Council recently completed collecting the demographic information from all Year 1 EAAC grant recipients about who their Measure P grant supported work served, and they will be reporting that data to the City and to the

Commission. The PRAC will make this data available to the public, so that it can be reviewed and analyzed by everyone. That grant recipient reported data includes the following:

- Attendance data, separating out youth (up to age 17), adults (age 18-61), and seniors (age 62 or older);
  - Participant zip code data, to identify the number and percentage of Fresno residents served;
  - Race, ethnicity, household income, and gender identity; and
  - For murals, the total square feet installed, and their address or location.
- Further, the EAAC grant agreements with the Fresno Arts Council withhold the final 10%

of the grant award from recipients until their final report is timely submitted – those grantees who do not timely complete their final report forfeit the last 10% of funding, and the contracts bar those recipients (including both applicants and their fiscal sponsor, where applicable) from applying for new EAAC grants for a period of 2 years. The PRAC can receive the data from the Fresno Arts Council on the EAAC grant awardees in Year 1 who failed the final reporting requirement, including the forfeited dollar amount which was rolled back into available funding for future grant awards, and make that public as well.

The public has a right to this information about taxpayer dollars and has an important role in holding all aspects of the Measure P implementation accountable. For the cultural arts grant process, a part of that accountability includes identifying what needs to be addressed and changed to make the program better each year.

The Cultural Arts Subcommittee was not directly involved in the Year 1 or Year 2 grant review panel process, but that will change for Year 3 and future years. It is clear that it was an imperfect process, and as our eyes and ears, the community has brought several important and valid concerns to the forefront. Many aspects of that process need to change.

There are public allegations of facilitator bias as noted by applicant Johannes Reinders in his public comments on September 15<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, with statements made by the Fresno Arts Council staff on August 1<sup>st</sup> at the Emerging Project panel session that favored art over culture – former PRAC commissioner and panelist Christina Soto shared similar concerns with me late Friday August 1<sup>st</sup> and Sunday August 3<sup>rd</sup> and also identified that the panel review meeting schedule was not widely available – I spoke with Fresno Arts Council staff about those concerns the morning of Monday August 4<sup>th</sup> and that day the panel review schedule was posted to the their website; it also appears FAC staff comments made at the August 8<sup>th</sup> Established Project panel and the August 13<sup>th</sup> Emerging Project panel discussions were of a different nature. However, the Fresno Arts

Council does have a role as contracted service provider and facilitator staffing those panel review meetings, to answer clarifying questions raised to them by review panelists to comply with the panel review process as it exists under the current guidelines.

I also received applicant feedback privately that some panelists did not appear to have read all of the pages and attachments of their applications, and they alleged panelists showed bias toward or against certain applications, “voting their values” instead of scoring applications based on the merits of the application contents. This subcommittee has no access to the recordings FAC staff made of the review panels, has not listened to them, and cannot assist members of the public with their requests for access. However, I do want to note that this alleged panelist bias would not show up on a recording and is just as problematic.

Bias by anyone involved in the review panel process is unacceptable and compromises the integrity of the EAAC application scoring. We all deserve better and will make changes so that those issues are addressed. However, the final say on the allocations of EAAC grant award funding is held by the full PRAC commission, after this subcommittee receives the scores and makes a recommendation.

As Nefesha Yisrael noted during her public comment on September 29<sup>th</sup>, we need to work together to build a better process with stronger checks and balances; one that is responsive and proactive. Community, the Fresno Arts Council, and the PRAC need to commit to a collective problem solving that enables the EAAC grant program to continue to expand access to art and culture in meaningful and transformative ways.

The minutes of the subcommittee meeting on September 16, 2025, identify some of the proposed changes going forward, so that missteps around neutral facilitation, conflicts of interest, bias, and unclear communication to applicants about the application review process are corrected. Implicit bias and cultural competency training are necessary, anonymizing applicant identity (and fiscal sponsor identity) would be a positive change, and it is my opinion that we need to both strengthen the conflicts of interest process and find ways to include more panel review members with cultural arts grant review experience.

For several years I have asked if there is a way we can include panel review participants from outside of Fresno who have arts and culture grant review experience. I see this as something that will bolster the integrity of the scoring by reducing conflicts and bias, and adding much needed neutrality. I believe that bringing in geographically diverse panelists who have this cultural arts



grant review experience should be viewed not as a threat, but as a guardrail to help ensure that application scoring outcomes are stronger and can withstand scrutiny.

This is something we heard community feedback on in public comment at the September 15<sup>th</sup> PRAC meeting – with applicant Elizabeth Laval in favor, and applicant Ome Lopez strongly opposed. In my opinion, the work that Dulce Upfront is doing is an extraordinary act of community care – their efforts to expand access, educate potential EAAC applicants and encourage conversation about the EAAC grant program and process, should be respected and commended (as we have heard from several of their fiscally sponsored applicants in the public comments). Fiscally sponsoring 90 applicants, 70 of whom submitted LOIs, 30 that had eligible applications scored, and 17 applications selected for a proposed award, is incredible. It also highlights a need to make sure that we have more neutrality in the composition of panel reviewers. The conflicts of interest policies in the panel review process must be made stronger, because the current conflicts screening process is insufficient to ensure that scoring outcomes are free of bias.

At an upcoming PRAC meeting the Fresno Arts Council will make the full presentation on data they gathered about the demographics of the review panelists, and Lilia will be able to explain to the public, as she did to our subcommittee, that when the Arte Americas application is discussed by the review panel, she physically leaves the building to mitigate the conflict. At that meeting she will share that there will be focus groups conducted of established and emerging applicants to review the guidelines and policies together to recommend future changes, which will be supplemented by opportunities for any member of the community to offer perspective, thoughts and recommendations on other changes to the guidelines and policies.

If you feel more comfortable expressing your feedback directly to any commission member, or in a public forum, or to PARCs Director Aaron Aguirre as a neutral alternative, please do so. New EAAC guidelines and policy revisions cannot go to the City Council for consideration and adoption before December, so that is the timeframe for making the Year 3 process improvements. This is unfolding on a continuum, and we all must just keep showing up.

I am certain that Year 3 will bring to light new challenges, and that we will then work collectively to address them. However, at this time we are bound by the existing process, and the EAAC guidelines and policies as adopted by City Council on January 30, 2025, as we consider the Year 2 proposed grant funding allocations to recommend to PRAC, and the accompanying appeals. Thank you.