



2503 W. Shaw Ave #103
Fresno, CA 93711
(812) 219-5590
www.youthorchestrasfresno.org

Public Comment for PRAC Meeting – May 18, 2026

Agenda Item 12.C ID 26-647

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment regarding allocations related to Measure P funding, updates to the Parks Master Plan and Cultural Arts Plan, and the annual PARCS Department Budget and Capital Improvements Plan.

I write today on behalf of Youth Orchestras of Fresno, an organization that has served Fresno for 76 years through music education, youth development, and free community performances that reflect the cultural diversity and artistic aspirations of our city.

As you continue discussions surrounding the Emerging and Established Arts and Cultural (EAAC) funding structure, I respectfully urge the Commission to remain focused on several critical principles:

- Organizational sustainability and operational realities
- Demonstrated community impact and accountability
- Continued access to consistent, high-quality arts programming for Fresno residents
- Capacity-building and future growth for Fresno's cultural sector
- Collaboration across organizations to strengthen Fresno's arts community as a whole

There has been increasing discussion suggesting that established organizations should receive substantially reduced support in the name of equity. I respectfully ask the Commission to reconsider that approach.

Our "large" arts organizations in Fresno are not the enemy. In reality, most arts nonprofits in Fresno function with extremely limited infrastructure. These organizations are not wealthy institutions; they are fragile organizations carrying decades of community service on the shoulders of very small staff.

At YOOF, we serve roughly 500 students annually through our yearlong orchestral programs and summer festival. We provide tuition assistance, instruments, instruction, mentorship, and free performances for the community. Yet despite this reach, our organization operates with only three salaried employees, only one of whom is full-time. We do not employ professional grant writers. I personally write all grant applications while also overseeing operations, fundraising, partnerships, and programming.

Measure P operating support has become increasingly essential as traditional sponsorships and long-standing donor support continue to diminish. During Cycle 1 funding, we were finally able to “think big.” We expanded programming, welcomed more students regardless of financial means, increased collaborations, and offered concerts free of charge to Fresno families.

Reducing the operating support cap to a fraction of previous levels will have devastating consequences, not only for our organization, but for the students and audiences we serve. The loss of stable funding does not simply reduce administrative capacity; it reduces access, opportunity, education, and cultural enrichment for Fresno residents.

Our own annual budget fluctuates according to available funding. Today, we might be considered a “large” nonprofit but by losing one major grant we will become a small nonprofit overnight. Stability matters. Dependable funding allows organizations to grow responsibly, retain staff, plan programming, and continue serving the public consistently.

Equity should not mean forcing established organizations to become smaller or less effective. True equity means supporting organizations of all sizes while ensuring that funded organizations provide meaningful services that benefit the entire community and reflect Fresno’s cultural, demographic, and geographic diversity, as Measure P itself explicitly requires.

I am reminded of Haydn's Farewell Symphony. In the performance, musicians gradually leave the stage one by one until only a single performer remains and the lights finally go out. While Haydn used this gesture to make a different point, the metaphor feels painfully relevant today.

One by one, arts organizations are being asked to do more with less:

- fewer staff,
- fewer programs,
- fewer opportunities for students,
- fewer performances for the public,
- fewer resources for communities already underserved.

Eventually, the lights go out.

I respectfully ask the Commission to reconsider the proposed cap structure and ensure that Measure P funding truly fulfills its intended purpose: strengthening Fresno’s arts and cultural sector so that organizations can grow, collaborate, and continue serving the people of Fresno for generations to come.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Marchese
Executive Director
Youth Orchestras of Fresno