



# Strategic Framework For Grantmaking

2025





Photo by Robbie Sweeny for The Dance Brigade

# Table of Contents

Grounding Our Work	03
What We Heard From You	05
What We're Committing To	06
Our Realigned Funding Priorities	07
What's Next	09
Appendix	11



# Grounding Our Work

For over six decades, Grants for the Arts (GFTA), as part of the City and County of San Francisco, has quietly powered the city's creative and cultural backbone through strategic, sustained public investment – supporting over 250 arts and cultural nonprofit organizations every year that anchor civic life. GFTA grantee partners shape San Francisco's cultural identity through everything from neighborhood festivals to world-renowned institutions. In recent years, we've focused on creating broad, lasting cultural impact while contributing to the City's post-pandemic economic recovery – supporting work that reaches across communities, reflects the city's full creative landscape, and is delivered with transparency, care, and collaboration.

Now, together with our grantee partners, we are pleased to shape a refreshed articulation of GFTA's commitment and framework for grantmaking that is both responsive to our community's needs and in alignment with Mayoral and City priorities.

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Photo by David Hoshiyuki for Nihonmachi Street Fair



# Grounding Our Work



## Why Now?

GFTA's last strategic framework, completed in early 2020, predates major shifts such as the pandemic, City leadership transitions, and significant federal policy and funding changes. By early 2025, it was clear a reassessment was needed to align our values with action to better meet the moment.

San Francisco is entering a new era in how it supports the arts – one grounded in strategy, partnership, and long-term vision. This grantmaking framework represents a key step in building a NEW strategic arts agency in partnership with the San Francisco Arts Commission and Film SF. This change reflects a deep commitment to investing in what matters most: the people, organizations, and infrastructure that sustain our creative ecosystem. By centering general operating support, we're affirming our belief that artists and cultural organizations know best how to direct their work. As this vision continues to take shape, we look forward to growing alongside our partners – supporting work that is inclusive, innovative, and aligned with the City's evolving cultural goals.

**Above all, this framework is designed to provide greater clarity and alignment for both current and prospective grantee partners – so you can see how your work connects to our shared priorities.**



## How We Built This Together

Beginning with our community's voices, GFTA built this framework from the inside out. Staff served as stewards of the process, ensuring the framework remained grounded in community input at every step. For more details on the process, see page 12 in the appendix of this document.



## Framework Overview

Our Strategic Framework is a critical step in focusing our grantmaking on what we heard matters most to you: promoting San Francisco as a diverse cultural hub by supporting the arts through sustained general operating support. With this document, we're clearly sharing our commitment and priorities – so that arts leaders can see their mission-driven work reflected in how we show up as a funder. This framework is shaped by what we've heard from our community – grantees, City partners, and cultural leaders across San Francisco – and it will guide both our immediate strategies and long-term planning as we continue to grow and evolve.

# What We Heard From You

Three community-driven opportunities rose to the top as critical action areas that will better align City priorities with community need:



## **Opportunity 1: Funding Priorities and Measurement**

GFTA funding currently prioritizes tourism-driven metrics and economic impact, benefiting organizations that can demonstrate robust programming and high visitor draw while leaving smaller organizations underfunded. Incorporating more qualitative evaluation would better capture cultural and community impact, enabling more equitable resource distribution and supporting community-rooted organizations.

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## **Opportunity 2: Access, Transparency, and Bureaucratic & Administrative Barriers**

GFTA should increase access to funding by enhancing transparency in its processes, streamlining applications and reimbursements, and expanding technical assistance, outreach, and translation services.

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## **Opportunity 3: Equity in Funding Distribution**

GFTA should adopt a more balanced funding approach that supports 1) both large and small organizations and 2) both longstanding and new grantees, while addressing power imbalances such as the concentration of funding among a few well-established institutions, the historical underfunding of smaller and community-based organizations, and barriers that newer or less connected groups face in accessing resources.

# What We're Committing To

Strengthening San Francisco's standing as a vibrant, globally recognized center for arts and culture—for both residents and visitors—by uplifting the City's nonprofit arts and cultural organizations.

GFTA is committed to promoting San Francisco as a diverse cultural hub by supporting the arts through sustained general operating support.

Providing general operating grants with multi-year terms to ensure ongoing, stable funding that enables arts organizations to plan, grow, and adapt with confidence.

Fostering a dynamic and inclusive arts ecosystem by supporting organizations across artistic disciplines, neighborhoods, community affiliations, stages of development, and budget sizes throughout San Francisco.



# Our Realigned Funding Priorities

*GFTA makes grants to San Francisco-based arts and cultural organizations that...*

- **Inspire Visits and Advance Economic Impact**
- **Enhance Our Cultural Identity**
- **Invest in Our Arts Ecosystem**

*.... in and for San Francisco.*

Photo by Dallis Willard for Museum of Craft and Design



# Our Realigned Funding Priorities

*We make grants to partners who...*



## Inspire Visits and Advance Economic Impact

**Arts and cultural organizations power San Francisco's economy through creativity.** By producing wide-reaching performances, parades, festivals, and activations, these organizations help drive attendance, attract visitors, create jobs, and strengthen local businesses. They fuel tourism, energize neighborhoods, and keep San Francisco's spirit vibrant, diverse, and alive.

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## Enhance Our Cultural Identity

**Arts and culture organizations strengthen the city's fabric by celebrating its diverse traditions, histories, artistic expressions, and innovations.** Through performances, heritage festivals, cultural education programs, and neighborhood activations, these groups honor and share the stories that make San Francisco unique and ever evolving. By preserving and promoting this rich tapestry, they ensure the city's vibrant cultural identity thrives, reinforcing San Francisco's status as a world-class cultural hub for residents and visitors alike.

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## Invest in Our Arts Ecosystem

**Arts and culture organizations that provide fiscal sponsorship, capacity building, marketing and promotion, and leadership development are crucial for sustaining San Francisco's arts ecosystem.** These groups bolster the entire creative community, keep the arts accessible and vibrant, and ensure the city's cultural vitality for generations to come. This investment not only enriches the local cultural scene and drives future tourism, but also supports artists and cultural producers who live and work here.



# What's Next

Based on what we heard from you and others in the arts community, we've identified **four key strategies** that will shape our next Request for Proposals (RFP) in 2026 and future grantmaking efforts - each one tied to the areas you said matter most. These strategies will be guided by our new funding approach, making the process more aligned with your work, your impact, and your needs.

## What we are working on:

### 1 **Redefine Impact**

We recognize that impact isn't just about dollars or visitors. It's about how the arts bring people together, spark belonging, and strengthen our communities.

## What this means for you:

Your work - and your voice in shaping this framework - are helping define what matters most in San Francisco's cultural life and laying the groundwork for a more connected, creative city. You'll see changes reflected in refreshed granting programs in our next RFP.

### 2 **Rebalance Metrics**

Expand from return on investment (ROI)-driven metrics to indicators of cultural, social, and civic value. Incorporate narrative, testimony, and audience stories as valid impact evidence.

You'll have more ways to show the value of your work - through stories, feedback, and lived experience - as our metrics shift to reflect new funding priorities and inform the RFP in 2026.

### 3 **Publish Clear Funding Matrix**

Make it easier for grantees to understand how award amounts are decided.

You'll have a clearer picture of how your funding amount was determined, as we continue to earn your trust through transparency.

### 4 **Align Funding with Demonstrated Impact**

Advance equity in grantmaking by aligning funding decisions with demonstrated impact and transparent performance metrics - ensuring that organizational scale or legacy informs, but does not overshadow, the value of outcomes or community benefit.

Your impact will speak louder than your size or history. Funding decisions will better reflect the significant value your work brings to the community.



As a living document, this framework will continue to evolve - reflecting changes both within the City and across the communities we serve. It also marks a pivotal step in the formation of a new, strategic arts agency for San Francisco. While this transition is underway, the City remains focused on centering sustainable investment in its cultural ecosystem:

*Grants for the Arts is committed to **promoting** San Francisco as a **diverse cultural hub** by supporting the arts through **sustained general operating support**.*



Idris Ackamoor and Cultural Odyssey at The Lab





# Appendix



Photo by Kristen Loken for Merola Opera Program

How We Built This Together	12
Stakeholder Engagement Summary	13
Participants	14
Connect With Us	16

# How We Built This Together

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Beginning with our community's voices, GFTA built this framework from the inside out. Staff served as stewards of the process, ensuring the framework remained grounded in community input at every step.

- 1 Our process began with **research and internal analysis**, including an assessment of GFTA's own 65-year history, our legal foundation, and our current state.
- 2 We sat down—literally at kitchen tables—with our grantees to listen, reflect, and imagine together. These 6 **kitchen table talks** with more than 30 current grantees became the foundation of this framework.
- 3 **Grantee input sessions** brought our current grantees together to prioritize opportunities that came out of the kitchen table talks. We held 7 sessions hearing from more than 100 arts leaders. These opportunities represent the areas our grantees felt GFTA had the most power to shift—and where change could have the most meaningful impact.
- 4 Recognizing that there's overlap with other City Stakeholders and Departments, as we serve many of the same communities, GFTA conducted **City stakeholder discussions** to leverage City leaders' expertise and knowledge, inform GFTA's priorities, and develop opportunities for working together more closely. Across 16 sessions with 15 City departments and divisions, 33 City stakeholders identified areas of alignment and opportunity within the community feedback.
- 5 A **public survey** collected input from the broader community to prioritize opportunities and further understand community need from more than 70 respondents.
- 6 Staff **collaboratively drafted** a strategic framework to share with our stakeholders for feedback before finalization and implementation in our next Request for Proposals (RFP).



# Stakeholder Engagement Summary

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## Kitchen Table Talks

**6** in-person Kitchen Table Talks assembled and led by current grantee organizations

**30** grantee organizations\* contributed to the Kitchen Table Talks



## Grantee Input Sessions

**7** grantee input sessions assembled and led by GFTA staff in a virtual format

**100+** participants\* attended



## City Stakeholder Meetings

**16** sessions with **15** departments across the City and County of San Francisco:

- California Academy of Sciences
- City Administrator's Office
- Film SF
- Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
- Human Rights Commission
- Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD)
- Moscone Center
- Office of Economic & Workforce Development (OEWD)
- Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA)
- San Francisco Arts Commission
- San Francisco Department of Children, Youth & Their Families (DCYF)
- San Francisco Law Library
- San Francisco Planning Department
- San Francisco Public Library
- War Memorial Veterans Building



## Public Survey

**70** responses received from the public

**68%** of the respondents were current GFTA grantees

**63%** of the respondents identified with multiple roles in supporting the San Francisco arts and culture community

\*All were current grantees representing a broad range of disciplines, neighborhoods, communities, and operating budgets.

# Participants

GFTA engaged with over 150 grantee organizations and city stakeholders to guide and shape priorities and community engagement efforts during the Strategic Framework process. We are grateful for their continued partnership as we shape the future of GFTA together.

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## GFTA Staff

The Strategic Framework process was led collaboratively by the GFTA team:

Kristen Jacobson, Director

Lorraine Cawili-Thy, Operations and Program Officer  
Amy Chou, Senior Program Officer  
Raysean Jones, Jr. SF Willie Brown Fellow  
Sarah Simon, Program Officer

## Kitchen Table Talk Hosts\* and Participants

ABADÁ-CAPOEIRA San Francisco  
Acción Latina  
African- American Shakespeare Company\*  
AfroSolo Theatre Company  
Asian Improv Arts  
Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center  
Campo Santo  
Chavalos de Aquí y Allá  
Chinatown Media & Arts Collaborative  
Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco\*  
CubaCaribe  
Cultura Y Arte Nativa de las Americas\*  
Diamond Wave  
Intersection for the Arts\*  
Kearny Street Workshop  
Kulintang Arts Inc.\*  
Loco Bloco  
Manilatown Heritage Foundation  
ODC  
PUSH Dance Company  
Queer Rebel Productions  
Queer Women of Color Media Arts Project  
Red Poppy Art House  
San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Company  
San Francisco Film Society  
San Francisco Symphony\*  
San Francisco Youth Theatre  
The San Francisco Neo-Futurists  
SEW Productions Inc./ Lorraine Hansberry Theatre  
World Arts West

## City Stakeholders

Carmen Chu, City Administrator, City and County of San Francisco  
Ned Segal, Chief of Housing and Economic Development, City and County of San Francisco

Melanie Bishop, Senior Planner, San Francisco Planning Department  
Ken Bukowski, Convention Facilities Director, Moscone Center  
Thomas P. Campbell, Director and CEO, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco  
Melissa L. Chan, Operations and Grants Administrator, OCEIA  
Brett Conner, Grants Manager, DCYF  
Rachel Cukierman, Deputy City Administrator, City and County of San Francisco  
Monica Eo'Mailani Flores, Program Specialist, DCYF  
Mani Fata, Executive Director, Film SF  
Ebon Glenn, Deputy Director, San Francisco Arts Commission  
Isabella Gordillo, Program Specialist, DCYF  
Elina Juvonen, Public Service Trainee, San Francisco Planning Department  
Michael Lambert, City Librarian, San Francisco Public Library  
Becky Lo Dolce, Principal Administrative Analyst, Human Rights Commission  
Frances McMillen, Senior Planner, San Francisco Planning Department  
Imani Pardue-Bishop, Community Development Specialist, MOHCD  
Denise Pate, Director of Community Investments, San Francisco Arts Commission  
Kate Patterson, Director of External Affairs, OEWD  
Imani Pardue-Bishop, Community Development Specialist, MOHCD  
Katie Petrucione, Deputy Director of Finance and Administration, City and County of San Francisco  
Vivian Po, Director of Central Office and Engagement, City Administrator's Office  
Ralph Remington, Director of Cultural Affairs, San Francisco Arts Commission  
Diane Rodriguez, Director, San Francisco Law Library  
Scott Sampson, Executive Director, California Academy of Sciences  
Maggie Smith, Senior Planner, San Francisco Planning Department  
Kate Sofis, Managing Director, War Memorial Performing Arts Center  
Robynn Takayama, Grants Manager, Community Challenge Grants, City Administrator's Office  
Stephanie Tang, Deputy City Administrator, City and County of San Francisco  
Melissa Tang, Program Specialist, DCYF  
Ben Van Houten, Director of Nightlife Initiatives, OEWD  
Kelly Varian, Business Development Manager, OEWD  
Alyssa Ventre, Chief of Staff, San Francisco Arts Commission  
Angela Yip, Senior Communications and Legislative Analyst, City Administrator's Office

# Participants

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## Grantee Input Session Participant Organizations

3Girls Theatre Company	Manilatown Heritage Foundation
3rd i South Asian Independent Film	Margaret Jenkins Dance Company
42nd Street Moon	Marigold Project / Day of the Dead SF
ABADA-Capoeira San Francisco	Melody of China
ABD Productions / Skywatchers	Mixed Bag Productions / Sara Shelton Mann
Acción Latina	Museum of Performance + Design
American Bookbinders Museum	Museum of the African Diaspora
American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.)	Na Lei Hulu I Ka Wekiu
Arab Film and Media Institute	National Japanese American Historical Society, Inc.
Art of the Matter Performance Foundation / Deborah Slater	New Conservatory Theatre Center
Dance Theater	Nihonmachi Street Fair, Inc.
ArtSpan	Opera Parallèle
Audium	Performing Arts Workshop
BATS Improv	Phoenix Arts Association
Bay Area Omni Foundation for the Performing Arts Inc	Presidio Performing Arts Foundation
Center for Cultural Innovation	Queer Women of Color Media Arts Project (QWOCCMAP)
Chinatown Media and Arts Collaborative / Edge on the Square	Russian Center of San Francisco
Chinatown Merchants Association	SEW Productions Inc. / Lorraine Hansberry Theatre
Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco	SF Camerawork
Circus Bella	SF Children's Art Center
Clarion Alley Mural Project	SF Recovery Theatre
Community Arts Stabilization Trust	SF Travel
Community Music Center	SF/Arts
CounterPulse	SFFILM
Creativity Explored	San Francisco Arts Education Project
CubaCaribe	San Francisco Conservatory of Music
Dancers' Group	San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus
Diamond Wave	San Francisco Historical Society
Ensemble for These Times	San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
FLACC	San Francisco Opera
Flyaway Productions	San Francisco Pride Band
Folsom Street	San Francisco Shakespeare Festival
Gardens of Golden Gate Park	San Francisco Symphony
Golden Gate Park Band	Stern Grove Festival
Golden Thread Productions	The Contemporary Jewish Museum
Gray Area	The Lost Church
Independent Arts and Media	The Marsh
International Indian Treaty Council	The Roxie Theater
Intersection for the Arts	Theatre Bay Area
Italian Heritage Celebration Inc.	Theatre Rhinoceros
Jewish Community Center of San Francisco	Theatre of Yugen
Joe Goode Performance Group	Urban Jazz Dance Company
Killing My Lobster	Women's Audio Mission
Korean Center, Inc.	World Arts West
Kronos Performing Arts Association	Z Space Studio
Litquake Foundation	
Loco Bloco	

# Connect with us



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Photo by Najib Joe Kakim for 3<sup>rd</sup> i SF International South Asian Film Festival







Photo by Mark Shigenaga for First Voice

