



City of Virginia Beach

Arts & Humanities Commission

2025-2026 Annual Report to City Council

Chair: Olga L. Torres Baker

Date: August 10, 2026

Executive Summary

During FY26, the Arts and Humanities Commission met nine times to fulfill its mission of supporting and advancing arts and culture throughout Virginia Beach. The Commission appreciates City Council's continued commitment to the arts through the arts & cultural dedicated revenue stream, which has strengthened grantmaking, expanded community outreach, and supported initiatives that enrich the lives of residents across Virginia Beach.

With City Council's support, the Commission administered three major grant programs that collectively supported 1192 arts activities and reached more than 600,000 people. Grantee organizations contributed over \$431,000 in direct return to the City and generated substantial additional economic impact. These investments expanded access to arts and cultural experiences for youth, seniors, military families, multicultural communities, and underserved audiences, reinforcing the essential role of the arts in fostering community connection and civic well-being.

Commission committees also advanced significant initiatives in cultural equity, public art, and community engagement. Working with members of the Indigenous community, the Cultural Equity Committee completed the development of the City's Land Acknowledgment, strengthened relationships with Indigenous leaders, and expanded multilingual outreach. The Public Art Committee continued to enhance public spaces through the approval of new artworks created by local artists, students, teachers, and internationally recognized creative teams. Marketing efforts expanded visibility for grantee organizations through inclusive advertising, targeted outreach, and community partnerships that broadened access to arts opportunities citywide.

Together, these accomplishments reflect a productive and meaningful year for the arts in Virginia Beach. City Council's continuing dedication to arts funding has made a lasting difference in the cultural vitality of the city. The Commission looks forward to building on this momentum in the coming year.

Mission Statement

To make Virginia Beach a great city, the Virginia Beach Arts and Humanities Commission is dedicated to integrating the arts and humanities, in their full ethnic and cultural diversity, into the fabric of everyday life. Toward this end, the Commission serves as an advisory and funding entity, stimulating and supporting excellence and accessibility in the arts and humanities for all citizens.

Accomplishment of Goals and Objectives

Over the past fiscal year, the Arts & Humanities Commission, through its appointed volunteers and its liaisons, worked on the following key matters in furtherance of its mission:

1. Grants to Nonprofit Arts and Cultural Organizations

a. Project Grants

- Awarded **26 Project Grants totaling \$682,275** from 28 applications received, supporting high-quality artistic and cultural experiences throughout Virginia Beach. Applications were evaluated through a rigorous review process using a standardized scoring rubric, panel presentations, and ongoing liaison support.

b. Community Cultural Arts Grants

- Awarded **two Community Cultural Arts Grants totaling \$7,500**, supporting projects that celebrate cultural diversity, strengthen community connections, and increase access to arts and cultural experiences.

c. Leadership & Organizational Development Grants

- Awarded **eight Leadership & Organizational Development Grants totaling \$9,514.89**, strengthening nonprofit organizational capacity through professional development and leadership training.

2. 2026 Champion for the Arts

a. Award Purpose

- The Champion for the Arts Award recognizes individuals whose exceptional volunteer service, philanthropy, and leadership have made a lasting impact on Virginia Beach's arts and cultural community.

b. 2025 Honorees

- Jane P. Batten and Joan P. Brock were selected **as the 2025 Virginia Beach Champions for the Arts in recognition of** their visionary leadership, transformative philanthropy, and enduring commitment to strengthening Virginia Beach's cultural landscape.
- Their shared support was instrumental in the fully funded \$30 million expansion and relocation of the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) to the Virginia Wesleyan University campus, creating expanded opportunities for contemporary art, arts education, and community engagement for generations to come.
- Jane P. Batten has enriched the Virginia Beach community through decades of volunteer service, philanthropic leadership, and transformational initiatives, including the establishment of the Batten Honors College, where the arts play an integral role in civic and global engagement.
- Joan P. Brock's contributions extend well beyond traditional arts organizations. Her leadership and philanthropy have strengthened institutions such as the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Brock Environmental Center, which combines environmental stewardship with cultural programming and partnerships benefiting the broader community.
- Together, Batten and Brock exemplify a lifelong commitment to philanthropy, community enrichment, arts accessibility, and the continued vitality of Virginia Beach's cultural ecosystem.

c. 2026 Honorees

- The Committee worked on a new process and rubric for the upcoming 2027 fiscal year and will add a new category of Arts Educator. The Committee has chosen Betsy Atkinson as the Champion for the Arts and John Brewington as the Champion for the Arts Educator.

3. Marketing Support to Grantees & Arts Promotion

The Arts and Humanities Commission continued to strengthen visibility for local arts organization through a coordinated marketing strategy designed to increase awareness of arts programming, grant opportunities, and cultural events throughout Virginia Beach.

a. Marketing Support to Local Arts Organizations

- Provided year-round marketing support to local arts organizations and grant recipients through Cultural Affairs communication channels.
- Promoted arts events through quarterly **VEER** magazine event calendar advertisements, monthly email newsletters, digital advertising, radio advertising, and organic social media.
- Directed audiences to the Cultural Affairs “Upcoming Events” calendar on VirginiaBeach.gov/culture as the central resource for arts and cultural programming.

b. Inclusive Marketing and Community Outreach

- Expanded multilingual outreach through Spanish-language print and radio advertising.
- Increased engagement with diverse audiences through targeted advertising in community publications, including the *New Journal & Guide*.
- Promoted grant opportunities at targeted community and industry events, including the Back-to-School Care Fair, Council of Civic Organizations meetings, and the ViBe Creative District Economic Development Block Party.

c. Grantee Promotion

- Expanded distribution of the **Celebrate the Arts in Virginia Beach** campaign rack cards highlighting current and former grant recipients.
- Partnered with Virginia MOCA during the Boardwalk Art Show to showcase local arts organizations and community events in celebration of National Arts & Humanities Month.

d. Digital Engagement

- Continued growing public awareness of Commission initiatives and grantee organizations through the Virginia Beach Arts social media platforms managed by the Cultural Affairs Department, reaching approximately:
 - 10,400 Facebook followers
 - 6,200 Instagram followers
 - 2,000 X (formerly Twitter) followers

4. Cultural Equity:

The Cultural Equity Committee (CEC) continued implementing City Council's 2023 Resolution supporting partnerships with the Nansemond Indian Nation and Native American communities. During FY26, the Committee completed development and implementation of the City's Land Acknowledgment while advancing broader initiatives focused on outreach, inclusion, and community engagement.

a. Land Acknowledgment

- Convened 10 dedicated committee meetings.
- Engaged seven Indigenous leaders throughout the planning process.
- Developed and presented recommendations for Council consideration.
- Planned and coordinated the City Hall Dedication Ceremony, welcoming more than 80 community members, including regional Indigenous leaders.

b. Outreach and Inclusion

- Produced more than 12 multilingual outreach materials in partnership with the Cultural Affairs Communications Coordinator.
- Supported five multicultural programs, including Cultural Affairs' partnership with VBGIGS for the Día de Muertos program at Zeiders American Dream Theater.

c. Community Engagement

- Promoted Community Cultural Arts Grant opportunities through public events and online outreach.
- Expanded public education by hosting informational tables at two VBGIGS events.
- Presented alongside Cultural Affairs staff to the Minority Business Council regarding multicultural grant opportunities and the ongoing work of the Cultural Equity Committee.

d. Committee Growth and Planning

- Added two advisory members to strengthen committee expertise.
- Reviewed committee priorities and reaffirmed its ongoing commitments.
- Updated the annual action plan to reflect priorities for FY27.
- Developed and refined a public input survey for consideration by the Arts and Humanities Commission.

The Cultural Equity Committee strengthened community partnerships, advanced equity and inclusion initiatives, and successfully completed development and implementation of the City's Land Acknowledgment, establishing a strong foundation for future cultural initiatives.

5. **Public Art:**

- The Public Art Committee (PAC) is responsible for reviewing and approving public art projects located on City property. During FY26, the Committee approved several significant additions to Virginia Beach's public art portfolio, supporting both permanent installations and temporary exhibitions.
- The Committee endorsed *Harbor of Stories*, a permanent public artwork installed in Historic Kempsville. Created by Washington Glass Studio, the installation features community-designed glass panels developed through a series of public workshops.
- The PAC also approved numerous murals, crosswalk artworks, district identifiers, and sculptures created by local artists, as well as works by students and teachers from Virginia Beach City Public Schools.
- In addition, the Committee approved two large-scale interactive public art installations by internationally recognized creative teams—Skunk Control (Fall 2026) and Amigo & Amigo (Fall 2027)—bringing new immersive art experiences to Virginia Beach.
- The Committee also reviewed artist submissions for the Sandler Center Gallery exhibition program.
- The Public Art Committee met six times during FY26 to review and advance public art initiatives throughout the city.

Membership, Attendance and Volunteer Hours

Members, terms of service and volunteer hours for Commission meetings and committee meetings are noted below. It is noted that these hours only represent meetings and not other hours attending performances and speaking in the community. We are working to better capture these hours for FY27.

- Christopher Buhner – 9/3/2024-07/31/2029 (resigned 12/02/2025) (17 hours)
- Michael Cloud-Butler – 7/7/2020-6/30/2028 (22 hours)
- Tim Crowley – 11/18/2025-6/30/2027 (17 hours)
- Cortney Doucette – 12/10/2024-6/30/2030 (25 hours)
- Susan C. Grube – 8/7/2018-6/30/2026 (24 hours)
- Mark A. Johnson– 7/1/2023-6/30/2027 (resigned 11/6/2025) (0 hours)
- Ashley K. McLeod – 7/11/2023-6/30/2029 (14 hours)
- John Katsias – 1/20/2026-7/31/2029 (18 hours)
- Alicia “Sunny” Peoples – 2/1/2022-6/30/2030 (19 hours)
- Patricia A. Phillips – 4/16/2024-6/30/2028 (26 hours)
- Cynthia C. Romero, MD – 1/8/2019-6/30/2027 (7 hours)
- Hunter J. Thomas – 7/1/2024-6/30/2028 (22 hours)
- Olga L. Torres Baker – 7/7/2020-6/30/2028 (27 hours)
- Michael Berlucchi (City Council liaison)
- Amelia Ross-Hammond (City Council liaison effective January 2025)
- Mari Coronado (staff liaison)
- Beth Hundley -resigned 11/12/2025 (staff liaison)
- Emily Labows (staff liaison)
- Lisa D. Wigginton (staff liaison)

Financial Report

1. Arts & Humanities Commission Project Grants:

Organization Name	Amount Awarded
Access Virginia	\$4,000.00
Ballet Virginia	\$75,000.00
Hampton Roads Jazz, Inc.	\$5,000.00
Hurrah Players, Inc.	\$45,000.00
I. Sherman Greene Chorale, Inc.	\$1,000.00
Little Theatre of Virginia Beach	\$30,000.00
Military Aviation Museum	\$25,000.00
Mosaic Steel Orchestra, Inc.	\$7,500.00
Rouge VA	\$35,000.00
Symphonicity	\$95,000.00
Tidewater African Cultural Alliance	\$17,918.00
Tidewater Arts Outreach	\$20,000.00
Tidewater Classical Guitar	\$3,000.00
Tidewater Winds	\$2,000.00
TWP - The Youth Movement	\$26,600.00
United Jewish Federation of Tidewater	\$15,000.00
ViBe Creative District	\$100,000.00
Virginia Arts Festival	\$25,000.00
Virginia Beach Art Center, Inc	\$31,000.00
Virginia Beach Chorale	\$1,000.00
Virginia Stage Company	\$5,000.00
Virginia Symphony Orchestra	\$81,838.00
WHRO	\$5,000.00
World Affairs Council of Hampton Roads	\$16,419.00
Young Audiences of Virginia, Inc.	\$10,000.00
TOTAL	\$682,275.00

Impact:

Grantees held 1192 programs attended by 610,935 people. Ticket sales totaled \$1,330,120 and \$431,693 was returned directly to the City. These organizations employ 553 people and attract 3,731 volunteers annually, contributing nearly 160,000 hours annually.

2. Arts & Humanities Commission Community Cultural Arts Grants:

Organization Name	Amount Awarded
Changing Narratives Now	\$5,000.00
Hands of Grace	\$2,500.00
TOTAL	\$7,500.00

3. Arts & Humanities Commission Leadership & Organization Development Grants:

Organization Name	Amount Awarded
Benjamin Goldberg Foundation	\$1,250.00
Changing Narratives Now	\$1,250.00
Galatea Chamber Music	\$1,029.00
Tidewater Arts Outreach	\$1,250.00
Virginia MOCA	\$985.89
Virginia Beach Art Center	\$1,250.00
Virginia Beach Chorale	\$1,250.00
Virginia Beach Surf & Rescue Museum	\$1,250.00
TOTAL	\$9,514.89

Goals and Objectives for the Coming Year

1. Continue administering and strengthening the Commission's three grant programs.
2. Select and recognize the 2027 Champion for the Arts and Arts Educator.
3. Increase public awareness of grantee accomplishments through coordinated marketing and outreach.
4. Support the ongoing work of the Advocacy, Champion for the Arts, Cultural Equity, Marketing, and Public Art Committees.
5. Promote awareness of the City's Land Acknowledgment through outreach and community partnerships.

Recommendations to City Council and Closing

The Commission expresses its sincere appreciation to City Council for its continued and enhanced investment in the arts. We respectfully submit only one recommendation: that Council continue to enjoy, value, and support the vibrant arts community that flourishes because of this sustained commitment.

This report was approved unanimously at the Arts and Humanities Commission meeting on July 9, 2026.

For questions, contact Olga Torres Baker (olgalt311@gmail.com) or Emily Labows (elabows@vbgov.com).