

Arts Incubator Workgroup

Final Meeting

8.18.2025

Hosted by:

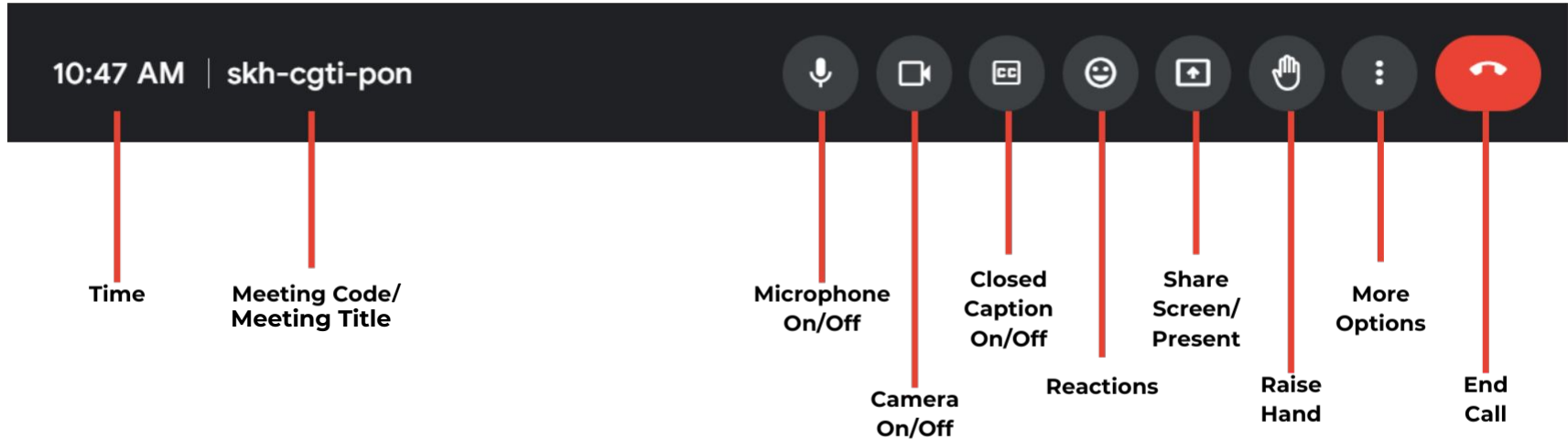
Nicholas Cohen, Committee Chair

Steven Skerritt-Davis, Executive Director, MSAC

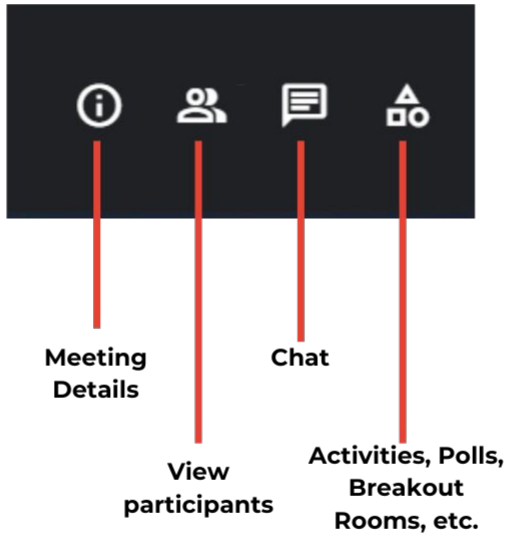
Jess Porter, Senior Program Director, MSAC

elli maria hernandez, Special Projects & Grants Assistant, MSAC

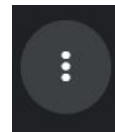
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Reference Shot of Features (2 of 2)



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Land Acknowledgement Statement

We acknowledge the lands and waters now known as Maryland are the home of its first peoples: the Accohannock Indian Tribe, Assateague People's Tribe, Cedarville Band of Piscataway Indians, Choptico Band of Indians, Lenape Tribe, Nanticoke Tribe, Nause-Waiwash Band of Indians, Piscataway Conoy Tribe, Piscataway Indian Nation, Pocomoke Indian Nation, Susquehannock Indians, Youghiogheny River Band of Shawnee, and tribes in the Chesapeake watershed who have seemingly vanished since the coming of colonialism. We acknowledge that this land is now home to other tribal peoples living here in diaspora. We acknowledge the forced removal of many from the lands and waterways that nurtured them as kin. We acknowledge the degradation that continues to be wrought on the land and waters in pursuit of resources. We acknowledge the right of the land and waterways to heal so that they can continue to provide food and medicine for all. We acknowledge that it is our collective obligation to pursue policies and practices that respect the land and waters so that our reciprocal relationship with them can be fully restored.

Equity and Justice Statement

The arts celebrate our state's diversity, connect our shared humanity, and transform individuals and communities. The Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) is committed to advancing and modeling equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion in all aspects of our organization and across communities of our state.

MSAC and its grantees are committed to embracing equity and non-discrimination regardless of race, religious creed, color, age, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, class, language, and/or ability.

Vision

MSAC plays an essential role ensuring every person has access to the transformative power of the arts.

Mission

MSAC advances the arts in our state by providing leadership that champions creative expression, diverse programming, equitable access, lifelong learning, and the arts as a celebrated contributor to the quality of life for all the people of Maryland.

MSAC Strategic Plan - Pillars and Goals

Access

Bolster access to arts experiences and resources

Awareness

Amplify the stories of Maryland's arts sector and the value of public support

Connection

Foster networks within and beyond the arts sector

Equity

Cultivate a thriving arts ecosystem centered in equity

Leadership

Commit to a culture of care and innovation

Creative Meeting Actions

Celebrate being in the space with other creative people.

Engage with everyone's presence as a gift.

Acknowledge that together we know a lot.

Enter the conversation with curiosity and inquiry.

Share your idea and trust that it will be heard.

Use "I" statements.

Focus your language on the task at hand.

Hold one another accountable with care.

Honor all perspectives and build on shared ideas

Balance speaking with listening.

Respect and appreciate our differences, they are our strength.

Have grace for yourself and everyone around you.

Dream big!

Today's Goals/Agenda

- **Report out final recommendations**
- **Share final report outline**
- **Quick Response - Round Robin**
- **Review timeline and next steps**

Legislative Recommendations

Statewide Artist Pay Standards

Identified issue/ opportunity

Independent Artists in MD face inconsistent pay standards. Factors include absence of standardized rates, lack of pay transparency, and limited awareness among both artists and the organizations that engage them. Mandating a standard of compensation for artists involved in publicly funded projects would help in to make Maryland a more stable and reliable place for artists to work and live. The workgroup recommends further study and the introduction of legislation to standardize pay standards and expectations.

Models/case studies

- NYC's 'Freelance Isn't Free Act' and Ireland's "Paying the Artist" initiative

Recommended next steps

- Research/data collection (recommend census of artist pay rates across disciplines throughout the state, public presentation, feedback) -> consideration of business environment for employers -> legislation development

Resources/inputs required:

- Commissioned survey/study
- Artist participation, artist employer participation
- Legislative staff time and capacity

Legislative Recommendations

Tax Incentives for Artists & Art-Supportive Businesses

Identified issue/ opportunity

The benefits of arts activity are often indirect and intangible, resulting in a gap in the economic model (i.e. the arts don't always pay for themselves). Coupled with rising costs and inflation, incentives are necessary to spur arts activity for economic and social benefits. The workgroup recommends the study and creation and/or expansion of deductions, exemptions, and incentives for artists and entities hiring them.

Models/case studies

- Maryland's A&E Districts designation program and related incentives
- Rhode Island's Artistic Work Sales Tax exemption (statewide)
- California and Colorado cultural districts programs

Recommended next steps

- Research (consider other states models and expanding existing A&E Districts incentives, including broadening to include W2 artists) -> consideration of fiscal impacts -> legislation development

Resources/inputs required:

- Commissioned study
- Legislative staff time and capacity

Legislative Recommendations

Artist Whistleblower Protection Act

Identified issue/ opportunity

Independent artists have reported experiencing unethical treatment in employment situations. The workgroup recommends ensuring legal recourse and resources are available to artists statewide and that entities that employ artists are aware of legal requirements.

Models/case studies

- [Collective Bargaining for Arts Workers in California](#)
- [Freelancers Union](#)
- Australia's [National Association for the Visual Arts \(NAVA\) Code of Practice](#) (Grievance subsection under section 1)

Recommended next steps

- Research/study to understand the pervasiveness of the issue and the need for additional protections -> legislation development to enhance oversight, reporting mechanisms, and enforcement or referral back to MSAC to provide resources to artists and arts organizations about the existing protections

Resources/inputs required:

- Commissioned research study
- Artist and arts organization participation
- Commerce/Labor staff time and capacity

Legislative Recommendations

Affordable Housing Tax Credits for Artists

Identified issue/ opportunity

Rising housing prices are a barrier for independent artists' ability to retain residency in Maryland. The workgroup recommends further research into leveraging existing programs to address the issue of affordable housing for artists and pursuing legislation if existing programs do not adequately address the issue.

Models/case studies

- [NYC Affordable Real Estate for Artists \(AREA\)](#)
- [Affordable Artist Housing in Lehigh Valley](#)
- [Second Story Collective's Homesharing Program](#)

Recommended next steps

- Research (survey existing programs and promotion of what is available and applicable) -> use constituent input develop ideas for new programs if needed-> consideration of fiscal impacts -> legislation development

Resources/inputs required:

- Research, coordination between Commerce and DHCD\
- Commerce/DHCD staff time and capacity
- Legislative staff time and capacity

Legislative Recommendations

Guaranteed Income for Artists

Identified issue/ opportunity

Even with robust support for the arts in Maryland, arts organizations largely operate from financially precarious positions and artists struggle to make ends meet. Guaranteed income is a model gaining popularity to address poverty, economic inequality, and financial insecurity. The workgroup recommends investigation into providing a guaranteed basic income for artists in Maryland to address issues around retaining and attracting creatives.

Models/case studies

- General UBI: Stockton, California; Durham, North Carolina; Tacoma, Washington; New York City; and Howard County and Prince George's County, Maryland
- Artist UBI: Ireland; Minnesota

Recommended next steps

- Research -> consideration of fiscal impacts -> legislation development

Resources/inputs required:

- Commissioned study
- Legislative staff time and capacity

MSAC Recommendations

Develop Artist Pay Guide and Companion Professional Development Resources

Current offering: Partners with MDVLA to provide resources on artist rights

Identified issue/ opportunity

Independent Artists in MD face inequitable and inconsistent pay standards when securing contracts. Factors include absence of standardized rates, lack of pay transparency, and limited awareness among both artists and the organizations that engage them. The creation and dissemination of Artist Pay resources tailored to the Maryland arts sector, would support equitable compensation practices across the state. By leveraging its existing networks and grantee base, MSAC can:

- Provide professional development and educational opportunities for artists on fair pay practices and contract negotiation.
- Offer resources to organizations—particularly current grantees—on how to fairly compensate artists.
- Increase transparency and raise sector-wide awareness of equitable pay standards.

Models/case studies

- [Indy Arts Council - Resource Guide](#) - fair pay resource page includes pay calculators, data, research, tools, industry-specific advocacy groups

Recommended next steps

Research -> Public Listening Sessions -> Resource Development -> Pilot & Feedback -> Launch and Publicize

Resources/inputs required:

- Staff Time and Capacity
- Potentially engaging partners or consultants in resource development or professional development training

MSAC Recommendations

Recommendation: Expand Unrestricted Artist Funding

Current offering: The MSAC Grants for Artists (GFA) program currently awards \$350,000–\$400,000 annually through \$2,500 unrestricted grants, distributed via eligibility-based random selection. In FY25, 154 awards were made from 1,159 applications (13%)

Identified issue/ opportunity

Demand for unrestricted artist funding in Maryland greatly exceeds available resources, leaving most applicants without support. This limits artists' ability to sustain their practice, take creative risks, and fully contribute to the state's cultural vitality. Expanding resources and accessibility could significantly strengthen the independent artist sector statewide.

Models/case studies

- [Creatives Rebuild New York](#) (one model researched in the development of GFA)
- [Springboard for the Arts](#) - Minnesota's Guaranteed Income for Artists pilot - longest running

Recommended next steps

- Increasing budget for GFA, potentially increasing both number of grants and grant amount
- Conduct a program evaluation to fully understand impact -> develop recommendations for program and policy changes to improve outcomes
- Expand accessibility and awareness about the program

Resources/inputs required:

- Staff capacity
- Increased State allocation through POCA fund

MSAC Recommendations

Increase Listening Sessions Opportunities for Independent Artists

Current offering: MSAC currently engages artists through virtual convenings (scheduled as needed), in-person office hours held at ten sites statewide each year, program editing processes, and other ad hoc or opportunistic connections.

Identified issue/ opportunity

Current offerings provide valuable dialogue, but there is an opportunity to more intentionally engage independent artists—particularly those in rural areas and BIPOC communities—in MSAC’s listening processes. Broadening and better promoting these opportunities would enrich the range of perspectives informing program design and policy development, ensuring MSAC programs remain responsive, equitable, and artist-centered.

Models/case studies

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Recommended next steps

- Research and pilot a program of “MSAC Community Ambassadors” to support grassroots, regenerative outreach and relationship-building with independent artists.
- Explore new opportunities for virtual and in-person sessions that increase access and participation for independent artists
- Integrate Artist Voices – Invite past grantees and independent artists to share their experiences in info sessions and presentations, creating peer-to-peer connections.
- Targeted Outreach – Build partnerships with grassroots groups, local artist networks, and community-based organizations to co-host sessions, with a focus on rural and BIPOC artists.
- Expand collaboration with county arts agencies to coordinate outreach and engage independent artists statewide.

Resources/inputs required:

- Staff Capacity and New Partnerships - Collaborations with local cultural leaders and grassroots organizations.
- Marketing & Communications – Increased resources for outreach, promotion, translation, and accessibility supports.
- Participant Honorariums – Funding to compensate artists for their time and expertise in listening sessions.

MSAC Recommendations

Develop Cross-Sector Pilot Programs Serving Independent Artists

Current offering: Actively engaging w/in Commerce, affiliates (SBDC) and with other departments (DHCD, Labor, DSCI, Dept. of Aging, Health, etc.) to develop info sessions and access to resources, including info sessions for fall 2025

Identified issue/ opportunity

Independent artists face needs across multiple sectors—housing, healthcare, transportation, and business development—that are not fully addressed through existing programs. MSAC has an opportunity to leverage cross-agency partnerships to develop coordinated, artist-informed resources, trainings, and pilot programs that are accessible, relevant, and responsive to these challenges.

Models/case studies

- Resources:
- Program: West Philadelphia [Second Story Collective](#) (2SC) arts-centered model for intergenerational co-housing as an anti-displacement and aging-in-place strategy

Recommended next steps

- Map Cross-Sector Needs & Opportunities – Conduct a scan of priority issue areas (housing, healthcare, digital access, business development) to identify where MSAC can have the most immediate impact.
- Pilot Programs – Launch 1–2 cross-sector initiatives in partnership with other state agencies.
- Develop Resources Collaboratively – Co-create guides, trainings, and programs tailored for independent artists.
- Embed Artist Leadership – Involve artists in designing, presenting, and promoting these initiatives to ensure relevance and accessibility.

Resources/inputs required:

- Staff Capacity – Dedicated time for coordination, planning, and facilitation.
- Inter-Agency Partnerships – Agreements with state agencies clarifying roles and responsibilities.
- Funding for Pilot Programs – Seed resources to design, implement, and evaluate initial initiatives.
- Artist Participation Support – Honorariums to compensate artists for their contributions in design, delivery, and outreach.

MSAC Recommendations

Establish Anti-Retaliation Protocols and Guidance for Independent Artists and Grantees

Current offering: Grantees currently agree to follow state and federal law. MSAC provides information sessions in partnership with Maryland Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (MDVLA) on artists' rights and protections including the Fair Employment Practices Act (FEPA) and Whistleblower Protection Act.

Identified issue/ opportunity

Independent artists, particularly early-career artists, need guidance on navigating existing legal protections and emerging challenges such as DEI restrictions, censorship, and retaliation. There is an opportunity for MSAC to:

- Provide clear guidance and training on protections for artists and grantees.
- Promote transparency about restrictions affecting MSAC and the safeguards MSAC can offer.
- Encourage grantee organizations that work with independent artists to adopt stronger assurances in contracts, hiring practices, and agreements.
- Develop accessible resources and protocols to support artists in understanding and exercising their rights while protecting both artists and MSAC.

Models/case studies

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Recommended next steps

- Develop Anti-Retaliation Protocols – Establish clear policies for grantees, outlining protections and procedures for addressing retaliation concerns.
- Create Guidance and Resource Guides – Produce easy-to-use guides for artists and grantees covering legal protections, best practices in contracts, and organizational responsibilities.
- Offer Trainings and Workshops – Partner with MDVLA and other legal experts to conduct in-person and virtual sessions for artists and grantees.
- Promote Transparency and Awareness – Ensure that protections, resources, and expectations are clearly communicated to all applicants and grantees.

Resources/inputs required:

- Staff time for policy development, resource creation, and training coordination.
- Legal expertise for content and workshop facilitation.
- Funding for materials, workshops, and expert honorariums.
- Communications support to ensure wide awareness and accessibility of resources.

MSAC Recommendations

Expand Housing Partnerships and Tax Benefits for Independent Artists

Current offering: A&E District Program currently offers property tax incentives

Identified issue/ opportunity

Current A&E District incentives and housing programs do not fully meet artists' residential needs. Additional data and research is needed to fully understand the limitations, but consider expanding geographic reach, targeting MSAC-connected artists, and exploring cross-sector partnerships could improve access to affordable housing and related benefits. MSAC could partner with other agencies and non-profit organizations to expand existing and create new affordable artist housing initiatives in Maryland. (*see related legislative recommendation*)

Models/case studies

- [NYC Affordable Real Estate for Artists \(AREA\)](#)
- Seattle Office of Arts & Culture – Artist Housing Pilot Programs – Combines tax incentives, grants, and partnerships to expand housing opportunities for artists across diverse neighborhoods.

Recommended next steps

- Collect data on who benefits from current A&E District programs.
- Explore expanding tax incentives to additional areas and artist networks
- Pilot Housing Programs – Develop pilot initiatives targeting artists connected to MSAC programs or networks.
- Cross-Sector Collaboration – Partner with housing, urban development, and health agencies to integrate arts and affordable housing initiatives. (*See Cross-Sector Agency Collaboration Recommendations*)

Resources/inputs required:

- Staff capacity for data collection, program design, and coordination with other agencies
- Partnerships with local and state housing authorities, and community organizations.
- Funding for pilot programs, feasibility studies, and potential expansion of tax incentives.
- Communications and outreach resources to ensure artists are aware of available programs and benefits.

MSAC Recommendations

Conduct research to understand the need for multilingual grant materials and outreach.

Current offering: MSAC currently provides automated translation services for all materials, including website content, guidelines, and applications. Various alternate application formats are also available, and programs are regularly revised with access and equity considerations in mind.

Identified issue/ opportunity

MSAC does not have enough information on how language barriers affect non-native English speakers' access to programs and funding. Simplified, multilingual grant materials, outreach, and technical assistance could improve equitable access and increase participation among these artists and artists-serving organizations.

Models/case studies

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Recommended next steps

- Gather information and feedback from non-native English speaking artists to determine which languages, translation methods, and types of support services are most needed.
- Include non-native English speakers are involved in existing program editing processes
- Develop new resources based on this feedback, monitor results and collect additional input.

Resources/inputs required:

- Staff time for research, application redesign, and technical assistance.
- Funding for translation services, multilingual materials and outreach efforts.
- Partnerships with community organizations for targeted support and outreach.

MSAC Recommendations

Expand demographic analysis and reporting on MSAC grantees and recipients.

Current offering: MSAC has revised reporting requirements with an access and equity lens. As a state agency, MSAC is limited in the demographic information it can request or require from applicants.

Identified issue/ opportunity

To increase transparency around equity and funding reach, MSAC could expand demographic data analysis and public reporting on grantees, including non-demographic metadata such as artistic discipline. Because demographic information cannot legally be collected at application, MSAC could explore alternative methods, such as using zip codes to extrapolate demographic and community-level indicators.

Models/case studies

- Maryland DHCD “Just Communities” – which selects areas based on factors like Priority Funding Area, homeownership rates, property value trends, redlining history, and health indicators, could inform this approach to better understand communities with the greatest need and opportunity.

Recommended next steps

- Explore methods for estimating demographic reach using zip codes and community-level data.
- Identify metadata and indicators that provide meaningful insight into access and equity.
- Develop public reporting mechanisms to share findings with stakeholders.

Resources/inputs required:

- Staff time for data analysis and mapping and partnerships with demographic research experts.
- Perhaps new tools or designs for data visualization and reporting.
- Funding to support research and reporting.

MSAC Recommendations

Enhance Tracking and Reporting of Independent Artists Investments Across MSAC Programs

Current offering: MSAC currently produces annual reports by program and geographic area, providing general information on funding distribution.

Identified issue/ opportunity

Current reporting does not fully capture the diversity of independent artists, their practices, or how they define themselves. Expanding data collection to include artist self-identification, emerging disciplines, and nuanced categories of practice would provide a clearer picture of funding distribution. Analyzing investments across all programs would offer additional insight into MSAC's impact, highlight underserved artistic communities and geographic areas, and inform future program development and equity-focused strategies.

Models/case studies

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Recommended next steps

- Inventory existing data to identify opportunities for cross-program analysis.
- Convene stakeholders to determine priority data points and reporting goals.
- Develop mechanisms to capture independent artist identification and nuanced discipline categories across programs.
- Produce reports that highlight geographic, disciplinary, and demographic trends to inform policy and program development.

Resources/inputs required:

- Staff capacity for data collection, analysis, and reporting.
- Data management tools to track artist-level investments across programs.
- Consultation with independent artist networks to refine discipline and practice categories.

Timeline/Next Steps

- Hire writer (in process)
- Flesh out outline (the bulk of the outline is the recommendations reviewed today)
- Draft report
- Asynchronous review by workgroup members - comments sent to MSAC
- Complete Draft Incorporating workgroup member feedback
- Commerce Department Review
- Submission of Final Report

Discussion

Questions

Wrap Up

Reflections

THANK YOU!