



ASSEMBLY FOR THE ARTS IMPACT REPORT



assembly.
FOR THE ARTS

JULY 2024 > DECEMBER 2025



A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Dear Friends,

The 2024–2025 fiscal year delivered one of the most consequential wins for arts and culture in Cuyahoga County in decades. Assembly for the Arts built the case and the coalition behind Issue 55, helping to generate an expected \$130 million in projected public support over the next decade for hundreds of nonprofits.

Throughout the year, Assembly for the Arts deepened its commitment to artists, nonprofits, and creative businesses. We expanded the Creative Impact Fund to support 29 artists with unrestricted grants and launched the Boost Fund to provide 147 artists with flexible, accessible funding. These programs reflect our belief that artists are civic leaders, entrepreneurs, and catalysts for change.

We also celebrated the public officials who champion our sector and convened hundreds of community members through Assembly events and gatherings. We moved into our new home at the MidTown Collaboration Center, a space designed to foster collaboration and amplify our impact.

Behind these milestones is a team of dedicated staff, board members, partners, and supporters. I want to especially thank our outgoing trustees for their service and welcome the new leaders who have joined our board. Their vision and expertise will help guide Assembly into its next chapter.

As we look ahead, our work continues with urgency and optimism. We are building an arts ecosystem that reflects the diversity of our region and ensures every artist and organization has the resources to thrive.

Thank you for being part of this movement. Your partnership fuels our progress, and your belief in the power of the arts inspires everything we do.

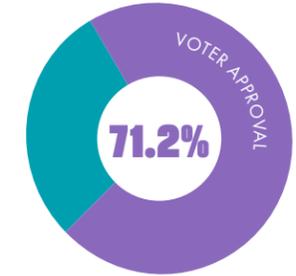
With gratitude,

Jeremy V. Johnson
PRESIDENT & CEO, ASSEMBLY FOR THE ARTS



ALL PHOTOS BY EMANUEL WALLACE EXCEPT WHERE NOTED
DESIGN: AGNES STUDIO

A VICTORY FOR THE ARTS



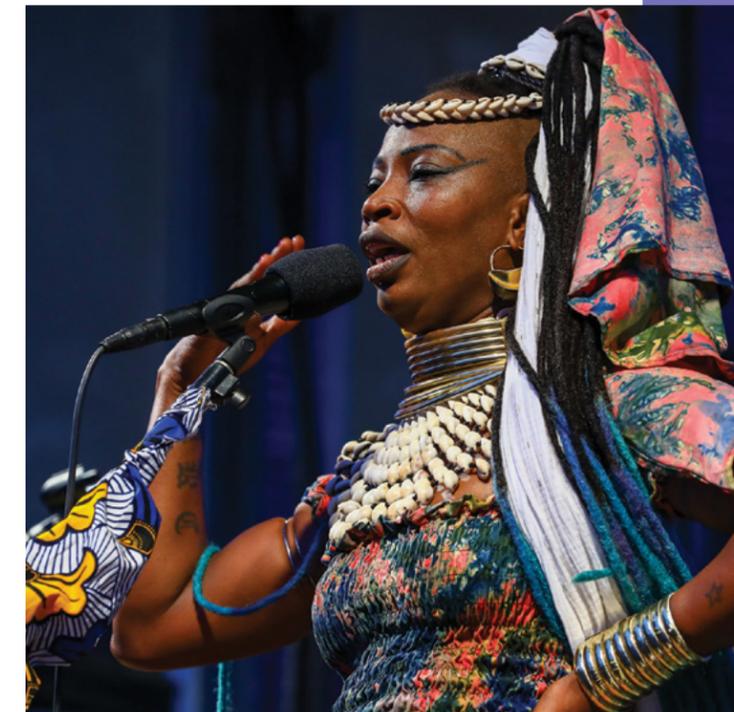
= \$130 MILLION
EXPECTED FOR HUNDREDS OF ARTS
AND CULTURE NONPROFITS
OVER 10 YEARS

AT LEFT: ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT & CEO JEREMY V. JOHNSON WITH ASSEMBLY BOARD MEMBER SHANELLE SMITH WHIGHAM OF KEYBANK.

ISSUE 55 VICTORY

In 2024, Assembly for the Arts played a key role in educating the public and stakeholders about the importance of arts and culture to community well-being, economic development, and engagement. Through its affiliated 501(c)(4) organization, Assembly for Action, the coalition supporting the renewal of Cuyahoga County’s cigarette tax for the arts—known as Issue 55—reached out to voters with a message about the value of sustained cultural investment. The measure passed with 71.2% voter approval, securing an estimated \$130 million for hundreds of cultural nonprofits.

Following the successful passage of Issue 55, Assembly initiated a year-long research effort in partnership with SMU DataArts and Lord Cultural Resources to explore future models for public sector funding of arts and culture locally. Supported by the Cleveland Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, and Cuyahoga County, the study examines regional needs, funding gaps, and national models of arts and culture support. The findings will help inform next steps in cultural policy and planning, ensuring that the momentum from Issue 55 leads to sustainable, inclusive strategies for long-term public support.



DEEPENING OUR COMMITMENT TO ARTISTS



2025 CIF GRANTEE, JULIA FISHER. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

“The Creative Impact Fund provided the opportunity for me to undertake a deeply personal & impactful project: the creation of my first full-length play & musical.”

—JULIA FISHER (THEATRE/LITERATURE)

CREATIVE IMPACT FUND (CIF)

In 2024 and 2025, Assembly continued the Creative Impact Fund (CIF), with the support of Cuyahoga Arts & Culture. CIF supports artists whose work strengthens and advances Greater Cleveland’s cultural life.

The CIF is one of the largest unrestricted grants for Cuyahoga County artists. In 2024, CIF awarded 17 artists \$10,000 each. In 2025, CIF expanded to 29 artists: 15 Early-Career Artists received \$5,000 and 14 Mid-Late Career Artists received \$10,000. Grantees also benefited from promotional support, studio visits and supportive check-ins from Assembly staff, an Assembly membership, and access to business development and networking opportunities.

Each year, more than 350 artists applied. Awardees were selected by a national panel of creative experts and represented neighborhoods across Cuyahoga County and a range of disciplines – including dancers, musicians, painters, photographers, comedians, authors, sculptors, filmmakers, storytellers, playwrights, illustrators, poets, designers, crafters, and more. The last two cohorts have included Fulbright scholars, Guggenheim fellows, award winners and other lauded individuals.

2024

17 ARTISTS
\$10,000 EACH

= \$170,000

2025

15 EARLY-CAREER
ARTISTS \$5,000 EACH
14 MID-LATE CAREER
ARTISTS \$10,000 EACH

= \$215,000



2024

RAPID ACTION GRANT
UP TO \$2,000 EACH (17)

= \$14,000

2025

BOOST FUND
\$1,500 EACH (147)

= \$220,500



PHOTO BY BRIDGET CASWELL

RAPID ACTION GRANTS & BOOST FUND

In Spring 2024, Assembly awarded the last round of funding for its Rapid Action Grant program, granting 17 artists up to \$2,000 each for urgent needs. All 2024 funds (\$14,000) for the Rapid Action Grant were exhausted as of June 3, 2024, and provided funding to 17 artists. This indicated strong demand for these type of grants that informed the Boost Fund by highlighting the need for small, flexible grants for emerging artists.

Launched in 2025, the Boost Fund provided \$1,500 grants to 147 artists to support projects, events, and artist-specific needs. Grantees were selected using a random selection process to simplify the application and prioritize accessibility for first-time applicants. Artists used the funds for supplies and equipment, studio rent and utilities, domestic travel, public events, and performances.

Demand for the Boost Fund in 2025 led to a record 1,438 applications submitted across the spring, summer, and fall cycles—the largest in Assembly’s history. Applications remained consistently strong throughout the year, totaling 395 in spring, 597 in summer, and 446 in fall. Notably, 41% of applicants were seeking grant funding for the first time, and 65% had never been awarded a grant before. Through intentional outreach (including support from our Artist Advisory Committee), strategic marketing, and community partnerships, the applicant pool reflected a wide range of creative disciplines and geographies, including artists from historically redlined neighborhoods and significant participation from BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities. In total, we received 804 unique applications, demonstrating both repeat engagement and the continued expansion of access to new artists entering the funding pipeline.



THE CREATIVE IMPACT FUND AND THE BOOST FUND ARE SUPPORTED IN PART BY THE RESIDENTS OF CUYAHOGA COUNTY THROUGH A PUBLIC GRANT FROM CUYAHOGA ARTS & CULTURE.



CLEVELAND PUBLIC THEATRE’S STATION HOPE. PHOTO BY EMANUEL WALLACE.



ARTIST ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER CHRIS WEBB PERFORMING AT CLEVELAND PUBLIC THEATRE.

ARTIST ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Committee shared insights that directly informed the design of our 2024–2025 artist funding programs. Composed of practicing artists and Assembly artist board members, the Committee’s input helped shape artist grant priorities and programs, including expanding funding opportunities for Early-Career Artists, simplifying application processes, and elevating issues such as livable wages and healthcare access. Assembly’s Artist Advisory Committee ensures artist voices remain central to Assembly’s work.



HELPING AN ARTIST THRIVE AFTER A CHALLENGING TIME

When Cleveland fiber artist Cecilia Li lost all of her art supplies in a house fire, just as she was welcoming a new baby, she knew there was no way for her to rebuild her studio on her own. A Boost Fund grant allowed her to replace her sewing machine, tufting guns, yarn, and other tools so she could begin creating again. Now she is designing sensory beanbags for children with autism and opening her studio so others can make art together. A small investment helped a young mother restore her livelihood and created a new space for youth in our community.



ARTWORK BY CECILIA LI COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

SUPPORTING NON-PROFIT ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

“Cleveland VOTES was incredibly proud to partner with Assembly for the Arts for our inaugural Cultural Week of Action! Now more than ever, our community is in great need of having fellow advocates, such as Assembly, that are willing to stand firm in their convictions.”

— ERIKA ANTHONY, CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CLEVELAND VOTES.

ANNUAL PUBLIC OFFICIALS RECOGNITION BREAKFAST

Held in September, Assembly’s annual Public Officials Recognition Breakfast celebrates elected leaders for their support of arts and culture. Sponsored by Key Bank, the event convenes artists, arts workers, public officials (state, county, and local), civic leaders, and community advocates from various sectors.

In 2024, the event recognized City of Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb and City of Cleveland Senior Advisor, Arts & Culture Rhonda Brown. The event also kicked off Cleveland’s programming during the Cultural Week of Action on Race and Democracy, a national initiative led by Race Forward and Americans for the Arts that leveraged arts and culture to elevate dialogues and spark action to advance a multiracial democracy. Spearheaded by partner Cleveland VOTES, the week featured intergenerational discussions, artist talks, voter mobilization efforts, and community celebrations focused on equity, justice, and creative civic engagement. Assembly’s leadership in launching the week’s activities positioned Cleveland as a national model for arts-driven social impact.

In 2025, the Public Officials Recognition Breakfast honored Ohio Representative Jamie Callender and Ohio Senator Kent Smith for their longstanding leadership and advocacy. Guests included representatives from Northeast Ohio suburban municipalities, the City of Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio State Legislature, and U.S. Congress.



LEFT: 2025 PUBLIC OFFICIALS BREAKFAST HONOR ROLL





“The arts and culture sector is not a luxury. It is an essential part of the region’s economic and civic fabric.

The sector employs thousands of people, from actors and curators to electricians and carpenters. It educates young people through arts-integrated classrooms and after-school programs. It uplifts neighborhoods by drawing people to events and performances that strengthen local businesses. It promotes health and healing through creative therapies and community expression. And it helps attract and retain residents and workers, showing that Cuyahoga County is a place where people want to live, work, and invest.”

— CRAIN’S CLEVELAND BUSINESS OPINION EDITORIAL, AUTHORED BY DONNA DABBS, CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE GREATER CLEVELAND URBAN FILM FESTIVAL; EDWARD P. GALLAGHER, PRESIDENT & CEO OF BECK CENTER FOR THE ARTS; AND CRAIG HASSALL, PRESIDENT & CEO OF PLAYHOUSE SQUARE. NOVEMBER 2025



CITY OF CLEVELAND TRANSFORMATIVE ARTS FUND LEAD ARTISTS, OCTOBER 2025. PICTURED (LEFT TO RIGHT): ROBIN ROBINSON, MALENA GRIGOLI, JAMEELAH RAHMAN, JORDAN WONG, KUMAR ARORA, LATECIA DELORES WILSON STONE, AND ARIEL VERGEZ. PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB PERKOSKI.

TRANSFORMATIVE ARTS FUND

Assembly partnered with the City of Cleveland to administer the Transformative Arts Fund (TAF), a \$3 million investment of federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) dollars supporting seven bold public art projects that celebrated the city’s spirit. These ambitious, large-scale initiatives brought together teams of 400 paid artists, creative collaborators and 300 local businesses, fabricators, designers, and institutional partners, including the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority, Cleveland Clinic Langston Hughes Center, Redhouse Studio Architecture, Sculpture Center, Metro West Community Development Organization, Ingenuity Cleveland, and Campus District Development Organization. Artist-led projects, implemented in 2024–2025, included creation of an immersive theater, outdoor sculptures, festivals, placemaking, visual art, fashion shows, murals, and immersive interdisciplinary arts experiences. Assembly supported TAF with thought leadership, jury coordination, artist training, and financial management to ensure transparent and equitable distribution of funds and raising awareness of the opportunity.



MIDTOWN COLLABORATION CENTER MOVE

In January 2025, Assembly relocated to the MidTown Collaboration Center, co-locating with Cleveland Arts Prize, ChamberFest Cleveland and Cleveland Arts Education Consortium. This move fosters collaboration and positions Assembly as a hub for cultural innovation.

“The Transformative Arts Fund demonstrated the City of Cleveland’s commitment to the strategic use of public investment to advance artist-led, community-rooted impact. Through a collaborative model that centered individual artists as leaders, Assembly served as a key implementation partner, ensuring transparency, fiscal responsibility, and an equitable process that amplified the reach, accountability, and return of public dollars. We are grateful for their partnership and shared stewardship of this important work.”



— RHONDA K. BROWN, SENIOR ADVISOR, ARTS + CULTURE, CITY OF CLEVELAND



BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE ARTS ECOSYSTEM



QUARTERLY ASSEMBLIES

Assembly hosted over 300 community members at four Assemblies from July 2024 through December 2025. At these events, participants celebrated the work of non-profit and for-profit arts organizations, networked, helped plan for the future, and connected with artists, nonprofits, and creative businesses.



PHOTO BY BRIDGET CASWELL

FISCAL SPONSORSHIP

Assembly expanded its fiscal sponsorship program, serving as a trusted intermediary for grassroots arts initiatives, artist-led projects, and growing nonprofits. Assembly provided financial oversight, donor engagement, and compliance support for 14 projects, enabling sponsored groups to access more than \$240,000 in funding they otherwise could not. Projects ranged from youth arts camps and poetry programs to festivals, community-based visual arts and performance initiatives, reflecting the diversity and vitality of Cleveland's creative ecosystem.



“COSE sees Assembly for the Arts as an important partner in strengthening Greater Cleveland’s creative economy—connecting artists & creative entrepreneurs to networks, resources, & opportunities that support sustainable careers & small business growth.”

—MEGAN KIM, COUNCIL OF SMALLER ENTERPRISES (COSE)/GREATER CLEVELAND PARTNERSHIP

ART AT WORK PARTNERSHIP WITH COSE

Assembly partnered with the Council of Smaller Enterprises (COSE) to relaunch and expand Art at Work, an initiative connecting artists and creative entrepreneurs with small business resources. COSE and Assembly also partnered for the 2026 relaunch of the Artist as an Entrepreneur Institute (AEI), a 4-week, 8-session curriculum that helps artists build sustainable practices with actionable business skills. This work is supported by Huntington, an Assembly partner in helping artists build sustainable practices and bridge the gap between creativity and commerce since 2022..



PLAY IT FORWARD!® CLEVELAND INSTRUMENT DRIVE

The Center for Arts-Inspired Learning partnered with Assembly and Cleveland City Councilman Kevin Conwell to expand access to music instruments for Play It Forward!® Cleveland Instrument Drive. Assembly supported outreach and visibility efforts, while the Center for Arts-Inspired Learning led program implementation and continued to accept instrument donations throughout the campaign. For his leadership in arts and culture, Conwell received the National League of Cities and Americans for the Arts’ national award in 2024. Nominated by Assembly, Conwell received the award alongside members of Cleveland City Council, Council President Blaine Griffin, and Cuyahoga County Councilmember Yvonne Conwell.



PHOTO BY JEREMY JOHNSON



ARTS & CULTURE NETWORK NIGHTS

Assembly was proud to partner with Neighborhood Connections on Arts & Culture Network Nights, quarterly convenings that bring together artists, arts educators, nonprofit arts workers, and cultural leaders across Cuyahoga County. These events were held at rotating venues, including the Pivot Center, Treelawn Social Club, and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

FUTURELAND & CREATIVE MEETUPS

Since 2023, Assembly has supported Creative Meetups, a monthly gathering for artists and creative entrepreneurs that supports their creative practice with networking and essential resources. Assembly presented grant application workshops, served on panels and connected organizers to funding opportunities, like Neighborhood Connections' Spark Grant.

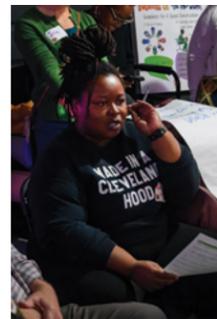
Assembly has partnered with the following organizations to support these monthly gatherings:

- Mas LaRae
- IGNITE With Light
- Breakthrough Sounds
- Poetry Unplugged
- Sparrows Fortune
- The Pull Up Experience
- Lokul App



REGRANTING PARTNER MANAGEMENT

In 2024, Assembly managed artist payments and oversight for Cuyahoga Arts & Culture-funded programs through Cleveland Public Theatre, Julia de Burgos Cultural Arts Center, Karamu House, and SPACES. Collectively, these programs awarded 73 grants to 68 artists, distributing \$375,000 in direct support. We thank these organizations for running exceptional artist support programs. Through careful planning and upon recommendation from the Artist Advisory Committee, the artist regranting programs transitioned under Assembly management to reduce administrative costs and increase direct artist funding.



CUYAHOGA LIVE!

Assembly strengthened its collaboration with Cuyahoga County by supporting Cuyahoga Live!, a newly launched task force focused on enhancing the region's live music scene. This initiative aims to improve the infrastructure for live music and position live music and nightlife as vital to Cuyahoga County's economic future.



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

FY25, ended June 30, 2025, Revenue and Expense numbers do not include pass-thru amounts, or capital revenue/expenses.

REVENUE

Contributed	\$1,398,458
Earned	\$67,366
Other	\$43,099
TOTAL	\$1,508,923



EXPENSES

Programs	\$1,278,046
Administrative	\$104,842
Fundraising	\$91,676
TOTAL	\$1,474,564



FY2024-2025 BOARD & STAFF

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- Chinenye Nkemere*, Chair
Enlightened Solutions
- Shanelle Smith Whigham*, Vice Chair
KeyBank
- Kelly Falcone-Hall*, Secretary
Western Reserve Historical Society
- Allison (Ali) Lukacsy-Love, Treasurer
Kent State University – CUDC
- Kathy Blackman, Grog Shop
- F. Allen Boseman Jr.**, Sherman Boseman Legal Group
- Lenora Inez Brown*, Cleveland Jazz Orchestra
- Talise Campbell*, Djapo Cultural Arts Institute
- Mordecai Cargill*, ThirdSpace Action Lab
- Leonard DiCosimo**, Ex Officio
Cuyahoga Arts & Culture
- Marie Eslick, Hit Your Mark Productions
- Chann Fowler-Spellman*, The Char and Chuck Fowler Family Foundation
- Beth Glas**, Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential (LEAP)
- Karolyn Isenhardt**, Ex Officio
Cuyahoga Arts & Culture

- Kurt Karakul**, Ex Officio, Cleveland Arts Prize
- Brian Lewis**, Bank of America Private Bank
- Chris Loeser**, DLR Group
- Sandra Madison*
Robert P. Madison International Inc
- Clyde Miles*, The Adcom Group
- Christine Nelson*, Team NEO
- Tony Panzica*, Panzica Construction Company
- Sharlene Ramos Chesnes**, True North Global
- Vince Robinson*, Larchmere Cultural Arts
- Afi-Odelia Scruggs, The Music Settlement
- Tony Sias*, Karamu House
- Leonard Young*, retired, Morgan Conservatory

ADDITIONAL FOUNDING BOARD MEMBERS

- Fred Bidwell
- April Miller Boise
- Carrie Carpenter
- Paul Clark
- Phyllis Harris
- David Heller
- Nancy Mendez
- Nahomy Ortiz-Garcia
- Barbara Robinson (deceased)

- Charna Sherman
- Marika Shioiri-Clark
- Paul Westlake
- Zulma Zabala

STAFF

- Jeremy Johnson, President & CEO
- Abigail Del Río, Chief Financial Officer
- Melissa Leuvenberger,
Finance & Operations Associate
- Maja Maricic, Creative Arts Intern
- Meg Matko, Director of Artist Funding Programs
- Deidre McPherson, Chief Community Officer
- Kristin Puch, Senior Researcher
& Development Officer
- Dhiraviya Rajubettan, Finance Intern
- LeAundra Richardson, Executive Assistant
to the President & CEO, Board Liaison
- DavidPatrick Ryan, Cleveland Foundation
Public Service Fellow
- Valerie Schumacher, Director
of Strategic Initiatives

* DENOTES FOUNDING BOARD MEMBER. ** DENOTES NEW BOARD MEMBER.

THANK YOU

July 1, 2024 – December 31, 2025

MAJOR FUNDERS

Assembly thanks the following organizations and agencies for their extraordinary investment in advancing the arts and culture sector across Greater Cleveland.

\$100,000 & above

- Cleveland Foundation
- Cuyahoga Arts & Culture
- The George Gund Foundation

\$50,000–\$99,999

- The Paul M. Angell Family Foundation
- The City of Cleveland
- Cuyahoga County
- The Char and Chuck Fowler Family Foundation
- Ohio Arts Council

Up to \$49,999

- Victor M. Cannon Jr. Charitable Trust
- KeyBank
- Huntington
- The George W. Codrington Charitable Foundation
- Kulas Foundation

LEADERSHIP PARTNERS

We are grateful for our Leadership Partners, whose generosity and vision help strengthen Assembly’s capacity to serve artists, organizations, and communities.

Legacy, \$10,000–\$19,999

- Fred and Laura Ruth Bidwell
- Chann Fowler-Spellman
- Paul Westlake/DLR Group

Champion, \$5,000–\$9,999

- Kumar Arora
- Jeremy Johnson
- Scott Mueller
- Tony Panzica

Leadership, \$1,000–\$4,999

- Christopher Loeser/DLR Group
- Shawn Riley

SUPPORTING DONORS

We gratefully recognize the following donors for contributions (\$500–\$999), which demonstrate a strong commitment to our mission and programs:

- Agnes Studio
- Kathy Blackman
- Lenora Inez Brown
- Mordecai Cargill
- Marie Eslick
- Allison Lukacsy-Love
- Shawn Powell
- Geri Presti & John Sedor
- Shanelle Smith Whigham
- Anonymous (1)



ASSEMBLY EXTENDS ITS SINCERE THANKS TO ALL INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, PARTNERS AND MEMBERS WHO SUPPORTED ASSEMBLY FOR THE ARTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS MAKE A LASTING IMPACT ON OUR COMMUNITY.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR FOUNDING CIRCLE OF DONORS WHO HELPED TO CREATE AND ESTABLISH ASSEMBLY FOR THE ARTS: Cleveland Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Char and Chuck Fowler Family Foundation, Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, Ohio Arts Council, Fred & Laura Ruth Bidwell, The Estate of Barbara S. Robinson.



Donate to Assembly for the Arts with confidence. We have earned Candid’s Platinum Seal of Transparency. Get updates on our impact through our Nonprofit Profile at [guidestar.org](https://www.guidestar.org) and search for Assembly for the Arts.



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