SHIELD SEATTLE

SHIELD OUR CULTURE

SCIENCE | HERITAGE | ARTS

Advocate at Seattle City Council

InspirationLeague.org/advocate/shield-seattle

Cultural Sector Key Messages

In 2025, the Seattle City Council created the Shield Seattle tax to protect groups they considered most at risk from Trump's many funding cuts – unhoused, low-income, and immigrant communities, small businesses, vulnerable workers, and the cultural sector.

- Voters overwhelmingly agreed with the need to protect Seattle and backfill essential lost funds for those already impacted. 71% of people approved the measure in November 2025.
- The proposition raised the business and occupation tax on the top 10% of high-grossing companies, while lowering the tax burden for small and medium-sized businesses for 7 years. This will raise nearly $85 million annually.
- Rightfully, most of those funds should support the immediate, visceral needs for emergency shelters, homelessness prevention, and food access programs.
- But the Council, and the voters, were wise to make room for the cultural sector under their umbrella to shelter our unique city from Trump's anti-progressive storm. Our sector, and consequently the workers we employ, is being targeted as never before.
- Sheltering arts, culture, heritage, and science organizations from further federal harm will also help preserve the myriad public benefits and social services our organizations provide. With a network of programs that that reach underserved and at-risk community members including youth, seniors, unhoused, addiction-recovering, and immigrant populations – our work aligns closely with the intentions of Shield Seattle.
- Cultural funding directly supports community health and recovery. In just one example, Seattle's *Path with Art* serves thousands of no- to low-income adults and families in recovery from various systemic traumas. They partner with more than 60 social service and public health organizations each year to deliver life-saving services.

The cultural sector in Seattle has been significantly and adversely impacted by the Trump budget cuts and the imposition of policies opposed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Shield Seattle was established to help mitigate or offset these kinds of drastic Trump impacts.

- The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum & Library Services (IMLS) have now been radically altered by the president's executive orders and face possible elimination this appropriations cycle. Since May of 2025, NEA, NEH and IMLS have been actively cancelling promised grants or rescinding active grants to Seattle organizations.
- Dozens of us have received letters, like the one from the NEA, stating they will now, "*focus funding on projects that reflect the nation's rich artistic heritage and creativity as prioritized by the president. Consequently, we are terminating awards that fall outside these new priorities.*"

- And the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was eliminated entirely – deeply impacting KUOW, KING, KEXP and many others.
- Estimates calculate the hit to our local arts sector at $7.5M so far. And this doesn't include science, technology, or heritage grants lost to other local organizations such as Woodland Park Zoo or the Pacific Science Center.

The loss of federal cultural sector grants means the loss of local cultural sector jobs. More than 250 cultural workers have been laid off in the past eight months, with more on the horizon. Trump's attacks come at a time when our organizations are already deeply vulnerable – squeezed between today's careening costs and ongoing recovery efforts after the pandemic.

- Expenses are rising far faster than revenues, so even though ticket sales for many arts groups have returned to or surpassed pre-pandemic levels, the cost of wages and show production has kept many budgets in the red.
- Our sector has long relied on subscriptions, grants, and donations to put on labor-intensive shows and productions. New funding approaches and partnership models are being tested but they are nascent and need protection while they gain a solid footing.

Shield Seattle funds could backfill the $7.5M in losses so far and provide critical support to the cultural sector to help them rehire and protect cultural workers.

- Beyond the many grants that are being cancelled, an entire wave of our organizations will no longer be eligible to apply for grants they have relied on for years.
- And a new round of threats is on its way. In May of 2026, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), along with nearly every other federal grantmaking agency, proposed new rules that will further alter the framework for federal grantmaking. The new rules will:
    - Codify their new grant direction as legally binding and no longer "guiding," increasing the legal risks for groups that do accept federal awards
    - Require senior political appointees to approve all discretionary awards
    - Add a "termination for convenience" provision that makes it easier to terminate awards that don't advance the president's agenda
    - Fully prohibit grants from being used to "fund or promote" initiatives related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, or "gender ideology"
- Here are a just a few of the local impacts we've seen so far:
    - Wing Luke, Path with Art, Woodland Park Zoo, Humanities Washington, Seattle Children's Theatre, Orquesta Northwest, and Artist Trust.

The cultural sector is an essential part of Seattle's financial health and recovery. Our performances, exhibits, shows, classes, and installations attract the people that fuel Seattle's small businesses and restaurants, drive tourism, and foster the economic recovery still underway after the pandemic.

- Seattle's creative workforce drives 18% of the city's GDP – this is four times the national average according to an OED study.
- Shielding Seattle's cultural sector from the Trump administration's attacks will not only protect vulnerable cultural workers and preserve the cultural treasures that make Seattle vibrant and unique, it will further support the small businesses targeted for tax relief and support in the original proposition.