

Museum and Cultural Advisory Board – Meeting Minutes

The Museum and Cultural Advisory Board met in a regular hybrid meeting via Zoom and at the Old Council Upper Chambers on Thursday May 22, 2025.

Members Present:

Nick Willis
Katelyn Armbruster
Angela Buer
Annalisa Alvrus
Karen Rolston
Colleen Byron
Melvin Van Vorst
Brad Peterson
Todd Hanle
Greg DeSimone
Claudia Bloom

Members Absent:

Staff Present:

Illya Riske
Simon Tipene Adlam
Jarrad Bittner
Sarah Goedicke

Nick Willis called the meeting to order at 4:03pm.

Items from citizens present: There were no citizens present.

Presentation of Service Recognitions – Sarah Goedicke, Management Assistant:

Sarah Goedicke presented service recognition awards to Nick Willis for completing his second full term on the board, Angela Buer for completing her first full term on the board, and Claudia Bloom for completing a partial term on the board. Board members thanked Nick Willis for his leadership on the board over the years.

Approval of minutes from the regular March 27, 2025 Meeting:

Melvin Van Vorst moved to approve the minutes as written and Angela Buer seconded. Board members voted unanimously to approve the minutes as written and they will be posted on the city's website.

Hear a Presentation on East Valley Children's Theatre – Lisa Olson, East Valley Children's Theatre Board President:

Lisa Olson gave a brief summary of East Valley Children's Theatre's (EVCT) vision, mission, and history and discussed the financial and board membership challenges the organization is currently facing. She stated that they appreciate the support they have received from the city, including the Creative Economy Fund. She shared a testimonial video with the board that demonstrated the organization's impact on Valley youth (**Exhibit A**).

Nick Willis asked how many years East Valley Children's Theatre has been receiving the Creative Economy Fun Grant and both Sarah Goedicke and Lisa Olson stated they think since the grant began over a decade ago. Greg DeSimone asked how much their budget is down, and Lisa stated by about half due to reduced grant funds and transitioning to more paid staff. Greg also asked about sponsor and donor efforts and Lisa stated they do look to have a series sponsor, as each show costs about \$20-25k to produce. Kate Armbruster asked if they were leveraging social media and Lisa said that about four people are currently working on their social media.

Hear presentation on Arizona Museum of Natural History's Master Plan – Simon Tipene Adlam, Museum Administrator:

Simon Tipene Adlam gave a high level overview of the Master Planning process, but a deeper update will be rescheduled for a future meeting. He hopes the board will be able to see it before it goes to the City Council for approval. One thing learned during this planning process is that the museum can do better with community engagement.

Hear, Discuss, and Endorse Creative Economy Fund award recommendations – Sarah Goedicke, Management Assistant:

Sarah Goedicke stated this will be the final year for Mesa Arts Center's Creative Economy Fund in-kind grant program due to a few different factors. Based on her conversation with Executive Director Mandy Tripoli, this program no longer serves its original purpose and goals of bringing new partnerships to Mesa Arts Center (MAC). MAC is looking at other ways to continue supporting its resident companies and meeting community needs. This grant is awarded in the form of rental fee reductions of up to \$5k and MAC's total budget for this award is \$25k.

Awards are determined based on community panel scores. The community panel typically includes a Museum and Cultural Advisory Board Member, a Mesa Arts Center Foundation Member, and a community member that is embedded in the local arts and culture scene. This year, Nick Willis represented this board on the panel. Nick Willis said it was a great experience, and the applications were all very strong this year. Sarah Goedicke verified that the panel rated the applications very highly this year overall.

Staff use a multiplier based on panel scores to award a percentage of the organization's eligible requested award. This process was established to create equity and ensure that every applicant gets some kind of award. Sarah Goedicke compiles this information and then shares it with Event Services and Mandy Tripoli for review. This year, in order to meet MAC's firm budget of \$25k, staff reduced each panel's recommended award by \$215. **(Exhibit B)** has a summary of each applicant's proposed project, their requested award, the panel's recommended award, and the final staff recommendation for each award.

Karen Rolston moved to endorse the staff's recommended award amounts and Colleen Byron seconded. The board voted unanimously to approve the staff's recommended Creative Economy Fund Awards for FY 25-26. Sarah Goedicke will send out award letters before the end of May.

Discuss: Board Purpose – Nick Willis, Greg DeSimone

Nick Willis and Greg DeSimone had no updates for the board on this item, and it was tabled for future discussion in the interest of time.

Upcoming Events – Volunteer or Participation Opportunities

Illya Riske reminded the board that the Arizona Commission for the Arts was having a community meeting at the Main Library following this board meeting and encouraged board members to attend if they are able to.

Sarah Goedicke shared that Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum has its opening Friday May 23, 2025. She also shared that the Día de los Muertos Festival is approaching soon and volunteer info will be shared with the board as it becomes available.

Simon Tipene Adlam shared information on Arizona Museum of Natural History's late evenings and its speaker series.

Jarrad Bittner shared that idea Museum will be open and free on Second Fridays on even months.

Discuss projects or presenters of interest and report on events attended

Nothing discussed.

The next scheduled meeting date is July 24, 2025, and will be a hybrid meeting on zoom and at the Old Council Upper Chambers.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:58pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Illya Riske
Acting Director of Arts and Culture

EXHIBIT A

EVCT Testimonial video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9vDFvR92EU>

EXHIBIT B

Creative Economy Fund Award Recommendations 2025-2026

Special Note about the 2024-2025 Awards: As in the past, a panel made up of one Museum & Cultural Advisory Board member, one Mesa Arts Center Foundation, and one community partner (representing The Neighborhood Comedy Theatre) reviewed applications and made award recommendations ("Panel Recommended Award"). These applications and recommendations were then reviewed by Mesa Arts Center staff in preparation of this summary for the Museum & Cultural Advisory Board. Once endorsed by the Board, applicants will be notified of their award amounts.

This is the final year for the Creative Economy Fund in-kind grant program. Mesa Arts Center staff reviewed the applications and panel's recommendations and decreased each award slightly (by \$215) to meet the budgeted amount of \$25,000.

*Organizations are listed alphabetically, not by award amount.

Ballet Etudes:

Ballet Etudes seeks support for its annual *Nutcracker* production during the second and third weekends in December 2025. This production has been well-received in the past and plays to near-capacity audiences in the Piper Theater. *The Nutcracker* is performed under professional choreography, direction, and costuming. Sets and scenery are professionally crafted, and guest artists are employed to perform the technically difficult portions of the program. Ballet Etudes keeps the production fresh by rechoreographing one or more major scenes and designing new costumes and sets.

Ballet Etudes strives to provide high caliber performing opportunities to dancers and promote ballet as an art form in our local communities. Ballet Etudes also engages audiences through backstage tour opportunities and their annual Sweet Tea events. They also offer free or heavily reduced tickets to veterans' organizations, local law enforcement and fire divisions, and children's organizations. They also seek to use their final dress rehearsal to provide a sensory-friendly opportunity and educational experience for community youth.

Eligible Rental Fee:	\$5,000
Panel Recommended Award:	\$4,000
Staff Recommended Award:	\$3,785

CYT Phoenix:

CYT Phoenix seeks support for their 2025-2026 season, which includes *Shrek the Musical*, *Tuck Everlasting*, and *Prince of Egypt*. Each production will run over the course of two weeks and include 8-10 public performances. CYT plans to offer complimentary tickets to foster families in the Valley and host Hope Kids, an organization that provides opportunities for families with terminally ill children. They will also continue to produce school matinee performances for schools and home school groups.

CYT Phoenix regularly sells out each show at the Nesbitt-Elliott Playhouse, as indicated by past projects. CYT will continue to offer shows that are family friendly and of interest to community members. CYT expanded into the Piper Theater last season and plan to do so again in FY26, in addition to increasing number of performances in the Nesbitt-Elliott Playhouse.

Eligible Rental Fee:	\$5,000
Panel Recommended Award:	\$4,000
Staff Recommended Award:	\$3,785

East Valley Children's Theatre:

East Valley Children's Theatre seeks support for its annual Aspiring Playwrights Contest. This global competition attracts entries from around the world. This year, EVCT received twenty-one submissions with the winner being "The Secret Medusa," written by J.S. Puller of Illinois. In addition to the experience of a live theatrical performance in the state-of-the-art facility, EVCT will have several workshops with the playwright for the cast and crew. The Aspiring Playwrights

Contest also encourages students to take part in Page to Stage, a student playwriting festival held later in the summer.

EVCT will hold two weekday matinee shows for school aged children with discounted rates. EVCT creates an educational packet to accompany the show for kids to work on prior to and after attending the performance and each child leaves with a gift that includes the theater's website and phone number. During the production's run, EVCT will hold talk back events after the shows with the playwright to talk about their inspiration and process.

Eligible Rental Fee:	\$3,000
Panel Recommended Award:	\$2,250
Staff Recommended Award:	\$2,035

Mesa Encore Theatre:

Mesa Encore Theatre seeks support for its 2025-2026 to be announced season. This season will include four diverse productions that have been selected by the Board but are still in the process of being secured. Once licenses are secured, the shows will be announced. One of the shows will be a newly released work. The shows are in line with the company's goals to provide a safe, diverse, equitable, and inclusive atmosphere for actors and the creative people necessary to perform each show.

Mesa Encore Theatre recognizes that not all communities are lucky enough to have an established community theatre program and is proud to have been serving Mesa and beyond for over 88 years. As part of their commitment to deepening audience engagement, MET will incorporate structured audience talkbacks following select performances. These talkbacks will facilitate meaningful interactions among the performers, creative team, and patrons, offering insights into artistic choices, thematic elements, and the historical context of the production.

Eligible Rental Fee:	\$5,000
Panel Recommended Award:	\$4,000
Staff Recommended Award:	\$3,785

Metropolitan Youth Symphony:

Metropolitan Youth Symphony seeks support for their 2025-2026 Concert Series – its 43rd and landmark year of growth and transition. The project includes three formal concert events at the Mesa Arts Center's Ikeda Theater, each showcasing all six Metropolitan Youth Symphony ensembles. In addition, the Jazz Lab extension program performs in the lobby as a pre-concert feature, creating a welcoming and engaging atmosphere for the audience.

This project addresses a well-recognized need within the community: access to high-quality, age-appropriate music opportunities for young instrumentalists. MYS serves a broad range of skill levels, allowing young musicians to grow through multiple ensembles as their experience and confidence develop. MYS programs are intentionally designed as a training platform to prepare members for lifelong engagement with music – whether professionally or personally.

Eligible Rental Fee:	\$5,000
Panel Recommended Award:	\$4,000
Staff Recommended Award:	\$3,785

Salt River Brass:

Salt River Brass seeks support for their 2025-2026 season, including four performances at MAC. In Fall 2022, SRB proudly introduced their new Music Director, Julie Desbordes. She has been leading multiple efforts to expand outreach, re-engage fans, and introduce the band to new audiences by programming exciting guest soloists and adding small performance opportunities for various ensemble sizes (from chamber music to the full group). During the 2025-26 season, the December concert will feature another collaboration with the Phoenix Children's Chorus and SRB plans to expand the Salt River Youth Brass Band to include additional rehearsals and master classes with SRB musicians, in addition to performing at the April concert.

Typically, SRB offers more than 5,000 annual patrons entertaining concerts featuring world-class musical performances covering a range of styles including patriotic marches, jazz, big band, classical, popular contemporary favorites, as well as music from around the world. They cultivate a deeper connection with their audience through pre-performance conversations and on-stage storytelling that highlights the historical significance and personal connections to musical selections. Audience members are also invited onto the stage to view performances from the musicians' perspectives. Additionally, SRB has multiple outreach, community engagement, and audience development initiatives including outreach concerts, collaborations with other area musicians, offering free and discounted tickets, and teaching workshops at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at ASU.

Eligible Rental Fee:	\$5,000
Panel Recommended Award:	\$3,500
Staff Recommended Award:	\$3,285

Silambam Phoenix:

Silambam seeks support with their *Yuva Utsav* series. This is a unique arts learning and performance project that offers senior Bharatanatyam students the opportunity to craft and present original solo works. These students, who have completed their formal solo debuts (arangetrams), will engage in a nine-month creative process blending traditional technique with personal storytelling. The public will experience a culminating showcase in April 2026 at the Mesa Arts Center, where each dancer will perform a fully developed solo that reflects their individual relationship to the art form. The program will also include artist statements, providing audiences insight into each dancer's creative journey.

For audiences, *Yuva Utsav* offers a rare and intimate experience: witnessing emerging artists explore classical Indian dance through contemporary lenses. By featuring original works grounded in tradition yet shaped by personal narrative, the program makes Bharatanatyam accessible, resonant, and dynamic for diverse audiences. Silambam will also host an open rehearsal and artist talk in march 2026.

Eligible Rental Fee:	\$1,386
Panel Recommended Award:	\$ 970
Staff Recommended Award:	\$ 755

Southwest Shakespeare Company:

This application seeks support for the 2025-26 season of five plays to be presented at MAC, which includes *1984*, adapted from the novel by George Orwell; *Elizabeth I: In Her Own Words*, a one-woman show written by Carole Levin; *Henry V* by William Shakespeare; *Merry Wives of Windsor* by William Shakespeare, and *Moby Dick*, adapted from the novel by Herman Melville. The season includes highly relevant themes of Power, Deception, Fear, and Obsession, exploring who controls these things or how they control and manipulate us.

School performances are augmented by a variety of workshops and master classes, including offerings related in theme or skills to the plays being presented. There are opportunities for audiences to dive more deeply into our mainstage productions, offered through the Flachmann Seminars, which feature a full Saturday morning talk by an expert (most frequently Dr. Susan Willis, resident dramaturg of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and Professor Emerita at Auburn University) and a panel engaging attendees in the themes, conflicts, historical context and relevant topics about each show. Southwest Shakespeare will also continue their Juvenile Justice program in partnership with Rite of Passage in Queen Creek.

Eligible Rental Fee:	\$5,000
Panel Recommended Award:	\$4,000
Staff Recommended Award:	\$3,785

Total Awards Requested	\$34,386
Total Funds Recommended by Panel	\$26,720
Total Funds Recommended by Staff	\$25,000