

Midpoint Assessment of the **William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's Performing Arts Program Strategy**

Above: Senegalese born Master Choreographer and dancer Oussenou Kouyate in action at the Oriki Arts performance at the 2022 Black Family Day celebration, Oriki Arts; Photographer: Danny McLane/Jamii Enterprises



Arabella
Advisors

A Note from the Program Director

Dear Colleagues:

It is an honor to support the transformational impact of our grantee partners on their communities. Whether it's through a singular performance or the way an individual or group of people comes to see themselves differently over the course of years, our partners exemplify the power of artistic and cultural expression. It has also been an honor to play a role in the evolution of the Performing Arts Program itself, so that we are equipped to keep pace with the arts sector and the artists who fuel it.


When we developed the 2020 strategic framework, it was important to the Performing Arts team that we be rigorous in implementing the plan and be open about our progress (or lack thereof). For this reason, we commissioned a midpoint "pulse" evaluation by Arabella Advisors to assess the implementation of our strategic framework thus far. We asked them to help us understand to what degree we were delivering on the goals it outlined, assess the extent to which the Performing Arts Program has been responsive to grantee needs, and consider whether refinements to our strategic priorities were merited. We are pleased to share this evaluation report, with a spirit of shared learning and accountability to the Bay Area's arts sector.

Our strategic framework centers the role of the arts and artists in cultivating thriving Bay Area communities and establishes a wide view of what it means for the Hewlett Foundation to support a healthy arts ecosystem. It envisions our role as a supporter of a wide variety of artistic forms and cultural practices, particularly so in communities where resources from Hewlett and other funders have been largely absent.

Arabella's evaluation emphasized several tensions apparent in our work. For example, our desire to keep pace with rapid evolutions in the sector can be at odds with our historic practice of being a stable and steady partner to existing grantees. Arabella has offered compelling recommendations for how we might navigate these tensions and surfaced important tradeoffs. For example, the evaluation highlights how it is paramount to support organizations that are addressing systemic issues that impact the sustainability of artists and arts organizations in the region. That type of support, however, could eat into our ability to maintain a reserve of resources and capacity to respond to evolutions in the field. The Program has not yet determined which recommendations we will implement or how, but we are committed to exploring our options over the coming months. As we do so, we pledge to communicate, particularly to those most affected by them, any adjustments to our approach moving forward. Sharing this evaluation is our first step.

We remain immensely grateful to our partners in this work and hope you find the report useful.

With gratitude,



Emiko Ono

Executive Summary

Background

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's Performing Arts Program rolled out a new strategic framework in November 2019 that outlined how the Program could center the role of the arts in building and sustaining thriving communities, with the intention to implement it over the next five years. The renewed strategy recognized and sought to address the challenges impacting the Bay Area arts and culture community, including displacement of artists, rising economic inequality, and shifts in how people want to experience the arts. The first three years of the strategy implementation period fell during a time of significant civic upheaval, which only exacerbated these existing challenges: the world shook from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the country experienced renewed civil unrest and calls for justice sparked by police brutality against Black Americans as well as a white nationalist resurgence led by the sitting president. These and other events significantly impacted artists and art institutions. To cite one example, shelter-in-place requirements prohibited organizations and artists from providing live performances and experiences, impacting their ability to bring in revenue and further deteriorating the already tumultuous financial environment for the arts. Further, broader economic turmoil continues to impact the livelihood and economic wellbeing of Bay Area residents. Rising housing costs, low wages, and other factors are pushing people out of their communities, intensifying the shifts in where and how people experience the arts.

Alongside this time of nationwide upheaval, institutionalized arts funding continued to decline as funder priorities shifted away from supporting the arts. Further, while policy victories—such as the passage of Proposition 28, the Arts and Music in Schools Funding Guarantee and Accountability Act, in late 2022—provided new funding opportunities for arts education in pre-K–12 public schools, other policies created more difficulty for artists. For example, Assembly Bill 5—which aimed to ensure workers are treated as employees under certain conditions instead of independent contractors—demanded creative economy workers be provided full employment, a cost some art and culture organizations with smaller budgets are unable to bear. This has worsened ongoing challenges in supporting artists, arts educators, and others in the arts and culture workforce. All these and other contextual factors continue to tremendously affect the

Bay Area, its art institutions, and its artists, making the Program's renewed focus on protecting and endorsing an expansive vision for the arts and promoting a sustainable future for artists in the region even more crucial.

After three years of implementing its new strategy and working to support its partners to navigate the consistently changing landscape, the Performing Arts Program contracted Arabella Advisors as a third-party learning and evaluation partner to conduct a midpoint "pulse" evaluation. The refreshed strategy was significantly different from the Program's previous strategy, and the Program rightly anticipated that it would take more time to see measurable impacts, especially given the social and political environment in which the Program began implementing the new strategy. Arabella therefore partnered with the Program team to design a light-touch assessment of the Program's progress toward implementing this strategy at the midpoint, consider whether any refinement to its strategic priorities would be in order, and co-design a forward-looking evaluation approach to assess the strategy's success going forward.

To support the Program in assessing its progress, Arabella conducted extensive document review and data coding as well as multiple interviews and focus groups. Throughout the evaluation, Arabella did not focus on measuring grantee performance or seek to attribute grantee outcomes to the Hewlett Foundation. Rather, the team focused on assessing how well grantee activities and priorities aligned with the Performing Arts Program's new strategy, the extent to which those activities and priorities changed since the Program began implementing the new framework, the extent to which the Program team responded to the evolving needs of grantees over the past three years, and the role the Program is best positioned to play to support the Bay Area arts and culture sector. This report shares the results of our midpoint evaluation of the Program team's strategy implementation, as well as recommendations for the team moving forward, including potential approaches to refining the team's strategy and designing an evaluation framework to help the team assess the implementation of its priorities through 2025.

Core Findings

Through its evaluation, Arabella identified and synthesized the following core findings:

The Performing Arts Program's strategy is expansive by design, and the portfolio supports a wide range of grantee priorities and activities. We most consistently observed the strategic framework's greatest potential for impact in the Program's newer grants, including Discovery grants, as these grants more explicitly reflect the Program's values and intentionally address systemic challenges facing the field.

The types of grants that compose the Performing Arts Program's portfolio remained consistent throughout the evaluation period. Given the Program's fixed budget allocation, the Program needs to create additional budget flexibility to invest more deeply in partnerships and initiatives with the greatest potential for impact.

The Program team's grantmaking approach is well aligned with the values of the strategic framework, and grantees noted that Hewlett has been one of the most responsive funders they have partnered with, especially over the past few years.

The Bay Area arts sector is facing large-scale structural and systemic inequities, and the Performing Arts Program team is operating under significant resource and capacity constraints in implementing the strategic framework to its fullest potential.

The Performing Arts Program has opportunities to strengthen its non-grantmaking support of the Bay Area arts sector by realizing its full potential as an influential funder and convener and more intentionally and strategically using its public voice.

There is a clear and ongoing need for grantees to receive large-scale, transformational investments to plan for long-term sustainability, and the Program's Adaptation grants are one excellent example of what this looks like in practice.

The Program's participatory grantmaking pilots are a good example of the Program's commitment to funding historically overlooked and underfunded community assets and amplifying community self-determination, making the pilots well-aligned with the Program's goals and values. However, informants expressed concern about the Program's current capacity to implement this work well without the support of trusted intermediaries.

Recommendations

Overall, the Performing Arts Program is working toward many of the goals it established in its strategic framework, which have become even more relevant over the past few years. Still, the revised strategy is broad and ambitious given the magnitude of the challenges facing the arts and culture sector and Bay Area communities. As the Performing Arts Program continues implementing its strategy over the next few years, Arabella recommends the Program sharpen its approach by leaning into the unique assets it offers the field and consider the following recommendations:

- 1 Expand the Program’s partnerships with values- and community-centered intermediaries** to implement more participatory processes and extend the Program’s reach to a more diverse array of performing art forms and practices that are relevant to and reflective of the people living throughout the Bay Area.
- 2 Continue to responsibly phase out grantee partners** as a valuable tool for making resources available to deepen the Program’s impact. Clarify the process the Program will use to determine if and when it is appropriate to wind down additional grant relationships.
- 3 Define and make deeper investments in core portfolio grantees.**
- 4 Bolster the Program’s non-grantmaking support by deploying the Program’s convening power** to create intentional spaces and resources for grantees to co-create solutions to systemic issues facing artists, culture workers, and their communities.
- 5 Leverage the Program’s strategic voice** to influence peer funders by encouraging intersectional funding strategies that center artists and culture work within broader community issues and by continuing to advocate for more flexible and responsive grantmaking practices throughout the sector.

About the Program's 2020 Strategic Framework

When the Hewlett Foundation's Performing Arts Program team rolled out its new strategic framework in late 2019, to take full effect in 2020, it established a more expansive view of what it means to support a thriving arts ecosystem. In the strategic framework, the Program notes that the overarching goal, included below, "elevates the symbiotic relationship between artistic vibrancy and the Bay Area's cultural diversity. It affirms the importance of individuals and communities to determine and engage in artistic and cultural practices that represent and reflect their own interests and aspirations, as well as appreciate others' artistic and cultural practices."

Performing Arts Program Goal:

Bay Area communities honor and support their own and each other's artistic and cultural vibrancy, and the power of the arts and artists to advance individual self-expression and collective self-determination.

To work toward this overarching goal, the framework identified and reorganized the Program's grantmaking into three strategic focus areas and associated goals:

Communities: Bay Area communities discover, develop, and experience artistic and cultural practices that provide meaning, inspiration, and joy.

Artists: Artists throughout the region have equitable access to services, networks, and supports that are relevant and responsive to their priorities.

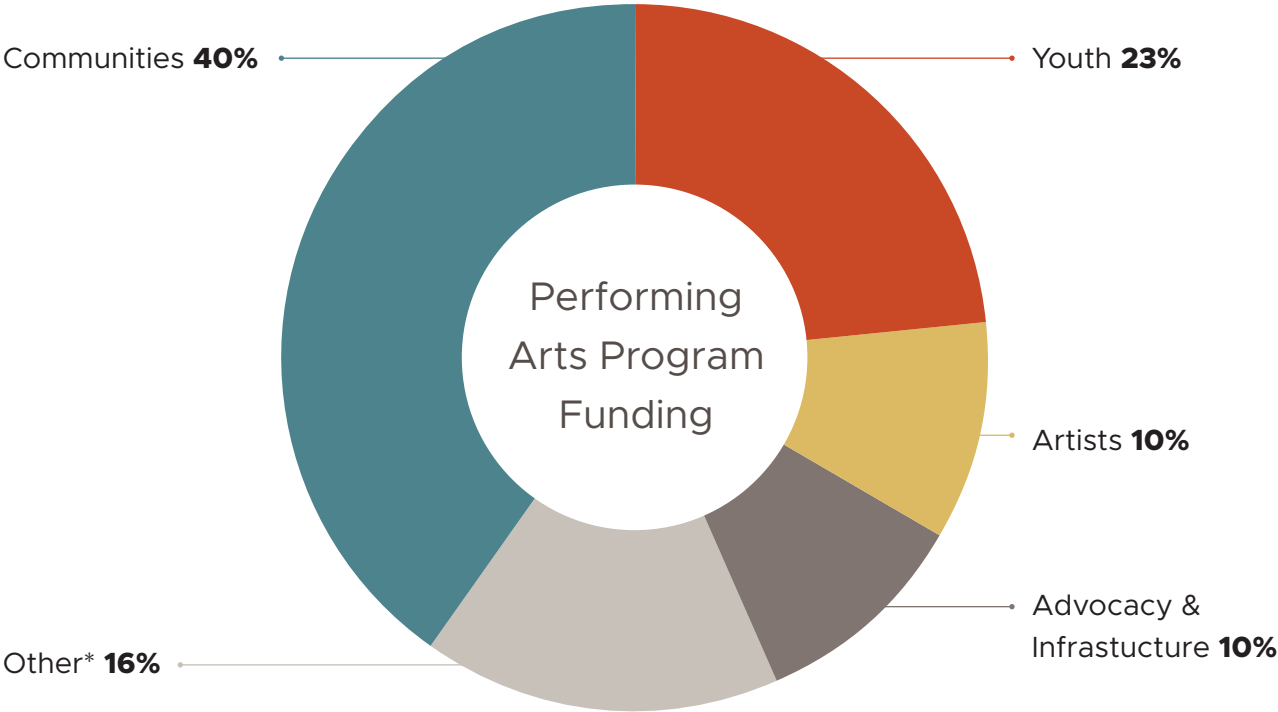
Youth: All Bay Area youth have equitable access to high-quality arts education opportunities.

To realize these strategies over time, the Program also articulated a focus on building the sector’s capacity in advocacy and infrastructure as a tool to strengthen the overall health of the Bay Area arts sector.

From 2020 through early 2023, the Program invested more than \$97 million in the Bay Area arts ecosystem across 655 grants. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of these investments across the strategic focus areas.¹



FIGURE 1. Distribution of Performing Arts Program Funding, by Strategic Focus Area (2020–2023)



*Other includes grants coded to the former strategy, including Continuity & Engagement; the Hewlett 50 Arts Commissioning Initiative; and Memberships & Sponsorships.

¹This analysis is based on how the Performing Arts Program coded its grants.

To guide how the Program implements its strategy, the Performing Arts Program developed *four core values*:

1 The Expansive Power of the Arts

The joy, exploration, and wonder of the arts contribute richly to the making of a whole person and a meaningful society. They expand our hearts and minds, helping bridge our differences and surface our commonalities. The arts are essential for both individuals and communities to thrive.

2 Community Self-Determination

Art is a powerful vehicle for community self-determination. We support the right of every community to safeguard, express, and develop its artistic and cultural heritage, as well as imagine and have agency over its future. We believe a constellation of thriving and interconnected communities contributes to a vibrant region.

3 Equity and Justice

We intentionally invest in the ability of people and communities to express themselves creatively and participate in the cultural life of their choice. At the same time, we understand that the history of the United States, and our own region, has created inequities in wealth and power that reflect or reinforce cultural hierarchies and exclusion. We make a dedicated effort to work against these inequities by being as generous and strategic with our resources and time as possible.

4 Leadership

We strive to exercise our leadership thoughtfully, for the benefit of the people and communities we serve. This means continuously learning by listening and sharing what we know. Thoughtful leadership means, at times, stepping up to take a stand for the things we believe in. It also means stepping back to make space for those who have historically been or are currently absent from leading and shaping the arts sector.

Source: William and Flora Hewlett Foundation Performing Arts Program Strategic Framework 2020.
Photo: James Knox, Freight and Salvage

About This Evaluation and Its Methodology

After three years of implementing the strategy, Hewlett sought to understand its progress toward delivering on the goals outlined in the new strategic framework, assess the extent to which the Performing Arts Program has been responsive to grantee needs, and consider whether the Program should make any refinements to its strategic priorities. To provide these insights, Arabella's evaluation set out to answer the following high-level research questions:

- In what ways has the new strategic framework changed how the Performing Arts Program has granted funds since its implementation?
- To what extent are grantees' programmatic approaches and goals aligned with the strategic priorities identified in the framework?
- How has the Program team succeeded or failed at being responsive to grantee needs during this time of extraordinary change for the sector?
- What more can the Performing Arts Program do to better position itself to maximize its support to the Bay Area arts ecosystem?

To answer these questions, Arabella used a mixed-methods evaluation to gather data on the Performing Arts Program's approach to supporting the arts in the Bay Area and the implementation of its new strategic framework. The evaluation team facilitated regular touchpoints with the Program team to build and refine a more detailed list of research questions; conducted extensive document review and

data coding; facilitated six focus groups with 24 grantee partners from the Artists, Communities, and Youth portfolios; and interviewed six Program team members as well as five external consultants who had worked with the Program over the past three years to develop and/or implement the new strategic framework. A full list of the evaluation research questions and methodologies can be found in Table 1.

To begin our work, in spring 2023, the evaluation team worked with the Program team to identify all existing grantee data in the relevant time period (2019–2023) and organize grant applications, reports, and application summaries developed by program officers. Throughout this period, Arabella worked with the Program team to develop an evaluation approach that pulled as much as possible from existing data sources and minimized the need for new data collection and subsequent burden on grantees. Once the Program team was aligned on the evaluation approach, the evaluation team began a process to review and code grant information according to the priorities of the strategic framework.

During document coding, Arabella conducted qualitative analysis to categorize each grant by the recipient's organization type, the grant activities' end beneficiaries, and the grant's activities and priorities. This would enable the team to assess any shifts in the portfolio following implementation of the new strategy. We began by reviewing summary statistics for grant type, grantmaking approach, and categorization within the Program's strategic focus areas for all grants awarded from 2019 through 2023. Given the volume of grant documentation, with 655 grants awarded since 2019, Arabella then coded a representative sample of 207 grants by grantee activities and priorities.

The sample was constructed in partnership with the Program team to ensure it would be representative of all grant types in the portfolio. The final sample included all Adaptation, Discovery, Opportunity, and Renewals With Changes grants and smaller samples of Renewal, Organizational Effectiveness, and Phase-Out grants (please see *Performing Arts Program Grant Categories* on page 11 for more detail on how the Program defines these grants). Once the sample was constructed, the evaluation team developed coding categories and tags based on priorities the team identified in the strategic framework and standardized a mechanism for a team of three coders to collect relevant information from grant applications, reports, and program officers' application summaries. The coding team tested the coding mechanism with 20 grants and then refined coding categories and tags to finalize the coding structure. Alongside this coding process, the evaluation team also analyzed demographic data that Hewlett collects from grantees and incorporated those data into our documentation. This coding and analysis process generated a final, central database of all relevant information for the 207 grants we reviewed. During this time, the evaluation team also interviewed Program team members about their perspectives on their work, the challenges and successes of the strategic framework implementation, and their own learning goals for this evaluation.

Performing Arts Program Grant Types

The Performing Arts Program team coded their grants to specific grant categories to distinguish between the many different types of grants made during the assessment period. Some organizations we assessed received multiple grants in different categories from the Program during the evaluation period. The Program team considered the following definitions when coding grants to the different categories:

Adaptation grants were one-time grants made in 2020 to ensure organizations that the Program team saw as critical to advancing its long-term goal had the resources and capacity to both navigate and adapt to the challenges introduced or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Please see the callout box on page 37 for more information on the Adaptation grants.

Discovery grants are made with the intention to learn something new, test an idea, or otherwise investigate a boundary of the Program's knowledge and funding practice. These were new grants made to implement the new strategic framework.

Opportunity grants are one-time grants that the Program determined were particularly aligned with the strategic framework and took advantage of a unique circumstance or opportunity.

Renewal grants are recurring grants that the Program has made to organizations, while Renewals with Changes are grants that the Program has made to recurring organizations but with a minor shift to the grant amount, grant term, and/or grant purpose.

Organizational Effectiveness (OE) or Organizational Effectiveness – Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity (OE-EID) grants are intended to support organizational planning and development. OE-EID grants are specifically designed to support organizations to better incorporate equity, inclusion, and diversity into their culture, systems, and operations.

Phase-out grants are final grants that the Program made to grantees that had previously received more than one grant. The Program team decided to responsibly phase out some of its grantee partners to ensure a more appropriate balance and distribution of funding relative to the Program's goals. In determining which grantees to wind down funding to, the Program took into account the composition of the entire portfolio and how each organization fit within the overall constellation of organizations the Program supports throughout the Bay Area. No funding relationship was ended for a single reason. Rather, the Program aimed to achieve a more equitable balance in the portfolio across factors such as artistic and cultural practices, mix of programs, communities served, and more.

In June 2023, the evaluation team synthesized and presented findings from this first phase of data collection in a sense-making meeting with the Program team. A majority (about 63 percent) of Performing Arts Program grants from 2019 to 2023 provide general operating support to organizations, rather than steer grantees toward specific programmatic outcomes. Accordingly, our analysis did not focus on measuring grantee performance or attributing Hewlett Foundation dollars to grantee outcomes. Rather, we assessed how well grantee activities and priorities aligned with the goals and values of the new Program strategies and the extent to which those activities and priorities have changed since the Program began implementing the strategic framework. Through this sense-making conversation, we refined our research questions and designed a grantee engagement approach that would enable us to add grantee voice to the initial data analysis via targeted focus group discussions with a small subset of current grantees.

In late summer 2023, the evaluation team reviewed the 2021 Grantee Perception Report that the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) developed on behalf of the Hewlett Foundation to ground our grantee engagement activities in the information that was already available about grantee attitudes and perceptions. The report shares findings from a survey that asked grantees a range of questions about the foundation's grantmaking

practices and approach. With that context, Arabella then developed a focus group protocol that would allow the team to build from the survey findings and worked with the Program team to identify grantee partners to invite for deeper focus group discussions, again with a focus on building a representative sample from across the Program's strategic focus areas. We designed the focus group questions to gather grantee reflections on the new strategic framework, experiences with the Performing Arts Program team, challenges and opportunities facing the Bay Area arts ecosystem as a whole, and opportunities for the Hewlett Foundation to better respond to the field's aspirations and needs. Given the purpose of the focus groups, as well as the Program and evaluation teams' desire to minimize burden on grantees, only partners with current and ongoing grants with the Program were invited to participate. Focus groups represented the three primary strategic focus areas: Communities, Artists, and Youth, with grantees sorted into groups based on whichever strategy their grant was most associated with, as coded by the Program team. Alongside grantee focus groups, the evaluation team also worked with the Program team to finalize a list of consulting partners from this time period who could offer an external perspective on the team's work and broader trends in the arts sector. Arabella conducted one-hour interviews with each consulting partner to invite them to reflect on how they perceived

the state of the Bay Area arts sector, their own perceptions of the Performing Arts Program's grantmaking initiatives and field-building efforts, and their perspective on how the Program might refine its strategic positioning going forward to better serve the field. Please see the Appendix for a list of the organizations whose representatives engaged in focus groups and interviews.

The data that Arabella collected for this evaluation have some limitations that are important to note. During document review, Arabella reviewed grantee proposals and reports to assess the level of alignment between grantee activities and priorities and the goals of the Program's strategic framework. Given that organizations develop these materials to secure additional funding and given the inherent power imbalances between grantees and foundation partners, organizations may include direct language from the Program's strategic framework in their proposals and reports to indicate a close alignment between the Program's goals and their own. In some instances, this practice may overstate the strategic alignment in a way that could skew the data in a more positive direction. Further,

given the desire to minimize burden on current grantees and partners as much as possible, and to place no burden at all on former grantees, focus groups represent only a small sample of organizational leaders from the Program's current grantee portfolio. Arabella also limited external interviews to a short list of Hewlett's current and former consulting partners and did not do outreach to identify other potential informants with no current or past affiliations to the foundation who might bring a more distant viewpoint on its work. Consequently, this evaluation does not include a strong contingent of neutral or dissenting voices on the Performing Arts Program's work, such as organizations that do not currently receive funding from the foundation and/or more neutral, outside experts with a perspective on the broader arts ecosystem. Arabella was also limited by a lack of reliable data to assess the extent to which the Program's current grantee beneficiaries reflect the demographics of the artists, youth, and communities who are most in need of philanthropic support in the Bay Area; this is a point of interest for both the Program and evaluation teams that we hope to continue exploring.



TABLE 1: Performing Arts Program Midpoint Evaluation: Final Research Questions

RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA SOURCE
<p>In what ways has the strategic framework changed how the portfolio has granted funds since it was inaugurated?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How has Hewlett changed the distribution of funding?• How has Hewlett changed the structure of grants and grant relationships?• Which grantmaking approaches (e.g., DEI, Org Effectiveness/Capacity Building, GOS, Project, Adaptability, processes/procedures shifts) did the Program team deploy more or less often since the strategic plan was initiated?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document review of all grantee data, 2019–2023
<p>How was the Program team interpreting the strategic framework? How has the rationale for grants evolved since the strategic framework was implemented? How does this rationale differ between program officers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document review and coding of sample data application summaries• Interviews with program officers and consulting partners
<p>To what extent has Hewlett’s grantmaking been responsive to the evolving needs of grantees during the time period in question? What constraints have inhibited Hewlett’s grantmaking from being responsive to evolving needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviews with program officers and consulting partners• Grantee focus groups

RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA SOURCE
<p>What role is Hewlett best positioned to play in the arts ecosystem? How can that help refine the team’s approach to narrowing the framework?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with program officers and consulting partners • Grantee focus groups
<p>Which grantmaking approaches were most successful in achieving the impacts Hewlett sought to achieve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review and coding of sample data, including grantee proposals, reports, and application summaries • Interviews with program officers and consulting partners • Grantee focus groups
<p>What impact are grantees seeking to achieve?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What activities have grantees engaged in and how have those activities changed since the strategic framework was implemented? • How have organizational/program development activities changed since the strategic framework was implemented? • What are grantees’ priorities and how have these priorities changed since the strategic framework was implemented? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review and coding of sample data, including grantee proposals, reports, and application summaries

RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA SOURCE
<p>To what extent are grantee impact goals aligned with the impact Hewlett seeks to achieve, as articulated by the strategic framework?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document review and coding of sample data, including grantee proposals, reports, and application summaries • Grantee focus groups
<p>To what extent are grantees familiar with the strategic framework? What meaning (if any) do grantees ascribe to Hewlett’s strategic framework?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEP Grantee Perception Report • Grantee focus groups
<p>How can Hewlett be more supportive of grantees’ own learning interests and needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEP Grantee Perception Report • Grantee focus groups

Findings

Through the evaluation, Arabella found that given the Performing Arts Program’s intentionally expansive framework, most grantees are engaging in activities and priorities that fit within the framework’s scope. Grantees and external consultants consistently highlighted the important role that Hewlett is already playing in supporting the Bay Area arts sector and suggested the Performing Arts Program is ahead of other funders in its grantmaking practices, noting the Program’s flexibility on reporting and application requirements, its multiyear grant commitments, and the strong thought partnership that Program staff offer grantees. It is also clear that artists, arts organizations, and the Bay Area communities they serve are facing extraordinary systemic challenges, leading grantees to look to Hewlett to invest even more deeply across its already expansive strategies. This is in tension with the realities of the Performing Arts Program’s capacity constraints—the Program operates with a

team of six to seven staff members, which is small relative to the Program’s volume of grants, and the team is constrained by its annual foundation budget allocation, which remains relatively fixed year over year. Given these constraints, the evaluation identified an opportunity for the Program to further focus its investments to have a deeper impact, including by prioritizing organizations and initiatives that align closely with the Program’s values, address and/or have an analysis of the systemic challenges facing Bay Area communities, and that advance the goals of two or more of the Program’s strategies (i.e., Communities, Artists, and Youth). Grantees and external consultants also suggested ways in which the Program could lean into its “beyond-the-dollar” assets to catalyze additional impact in the field, including by continuing to play the role of convenor and connector between grantees and by using the foundation’s platform and strategic voice to influence other funders’ grantmaking practices.

This section provides more detail on Arabella’s evaluation findings and the implications they may have for the Performing Arts Program and the field more broadly.

Photo: Brave New Voices Opening Ceremony, 2017 at SF State, Youth Speaks; Photographer: Daniel Schafer

Finding 1:

The Performing Arts Program’s strategy is expansive by design, and the portfolio supports a wide range of grantee priorities and activities. We most consistently observed the strategic framework’s greatest potential for impact among the Program’s newer grantees, including Discovery grants, as these grants more explicitly reflect the Program’s values and intentionally address systemic challenges facing the field.

Through the framework, the Program sought to widen its understanding of who creates art, how and where communities experience it, and how to center arts and culture within the broader landscape of community ecosystems. As a result, grantees’ wide array of priorities and activities all nested well within the expansive strategic framework. Figures 2, 3, and 4 show the top priorities for each of the Program’s three strategies and highlight the range of activities the portfolio of grantees support. For example, grantees across strategies frequently focused on establishing sustainable leadership and business models, including by making direct investments in staff development and wellbeing, planning for and implementing co-leadership models,

and developing revamped financial planning and business models. This reflects the Program’s commitment to providing resources to support the arts and culture sector in adapting to changing conditions, which has become even more important given the economic inequities exacerbated by the pandemic. Grantees within the Communities strategy frequently engaged in activities that increased overall participation in arts and culture work, such as shifting their outreach and engagement efforts to diversify who could experience and participate in the arts. Grantees within the Artists strategy frequently prioritized BIPOC and other historically disinvested communities in programming and strengthened the economic agency of artists, culture-bearers, and cultural communities.



FIGURE 2. Top Priorities for Grantees by Strategic Focus Areas: Communities (N=79)

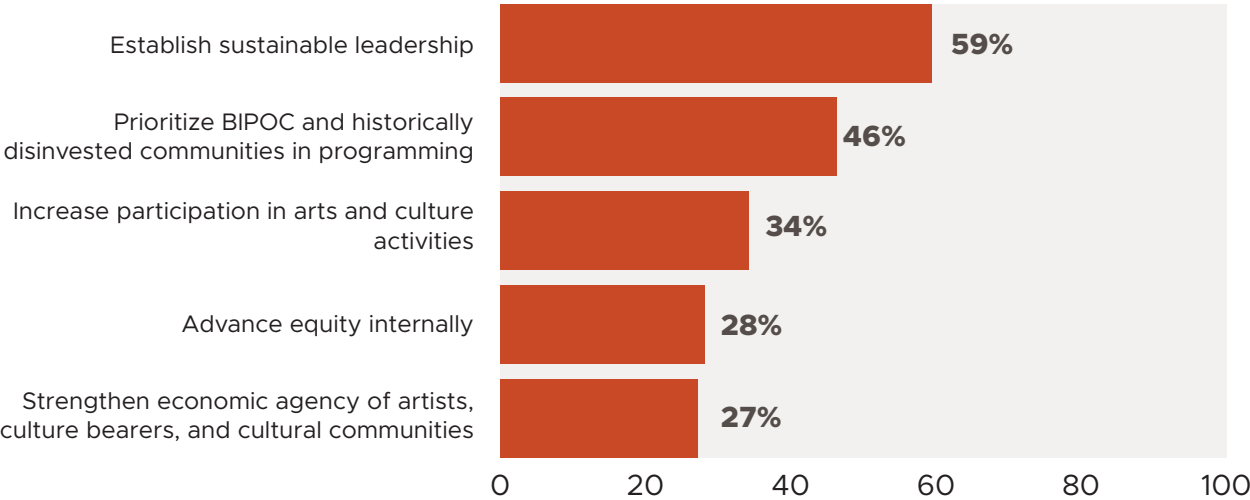
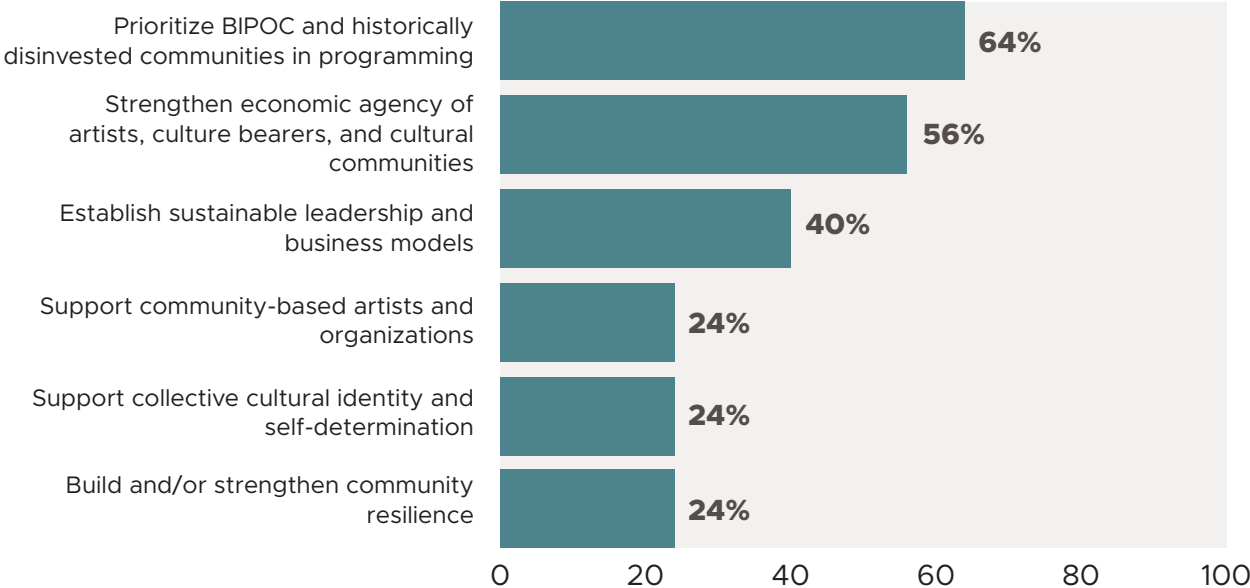


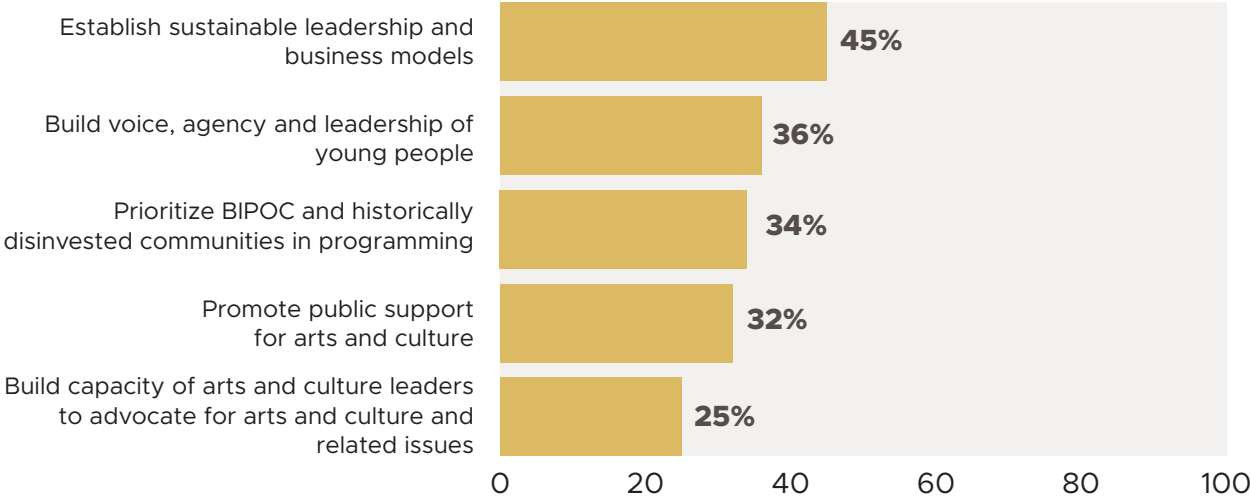
FIGURE 3. Top Priorities for Grantees by Strategic Focus Areas: Artists (N=25)



Lastly, grantees within the Youth strategy prioritized activities that built the voice, agency, and leadership of young people,

such as using the arts as a tool for young people to advocate for societal change.

FIGURE 4. Top Priorities for Grantees by Strategic Focus Areas: Youth (N=44)



Given the expansiveness of the strategic framework and therefore the breadth of activities that grantees are engaging in, the evaluation team explored where the framework’s greatest potential for impact lies to help focus the Program’s investments moving forward. We considered how grantee priorities and activities aligned with three important elements, based on what we heard in grantee focus groups and interviews with Program staff:

- **Program Values:** The Program articulated core values in its strategic framework that inform the Program’s grantmaking decisions and approach.
- **Systemic Challenges:** Bay Area artists, arts organizations, and communities are impacted by systemic and structural challenges, including longstanding racial inequities, the lack of living wages, limited affordable housing and performance space, and a limited leadership pipeline for the creative economy.

These challenges, among others, threaten the long-term vibrancy of the arts sector and are therefore a prominent concern and focus for the sector overall.

- **Program Strategy:** Given the intersection between the goals of the strategic framework, many grantees are engaging in activities and priorities that advance one or more strategy (i.e., Community, Youth, Artists).

Figure 5 depicts the evaluation’s assessment of the current state of the Program’s portfolio along the three elements described above. As this graphic shows, the current strategy encompasses both program values and systemic challenges, though they are not mutually inclusive. That is, some grantees align well with the goals articulated by the strategic framework, but they may not necessarily directly reflect the Program’s values or directly respond to systemic challenges impacting the arts sector.



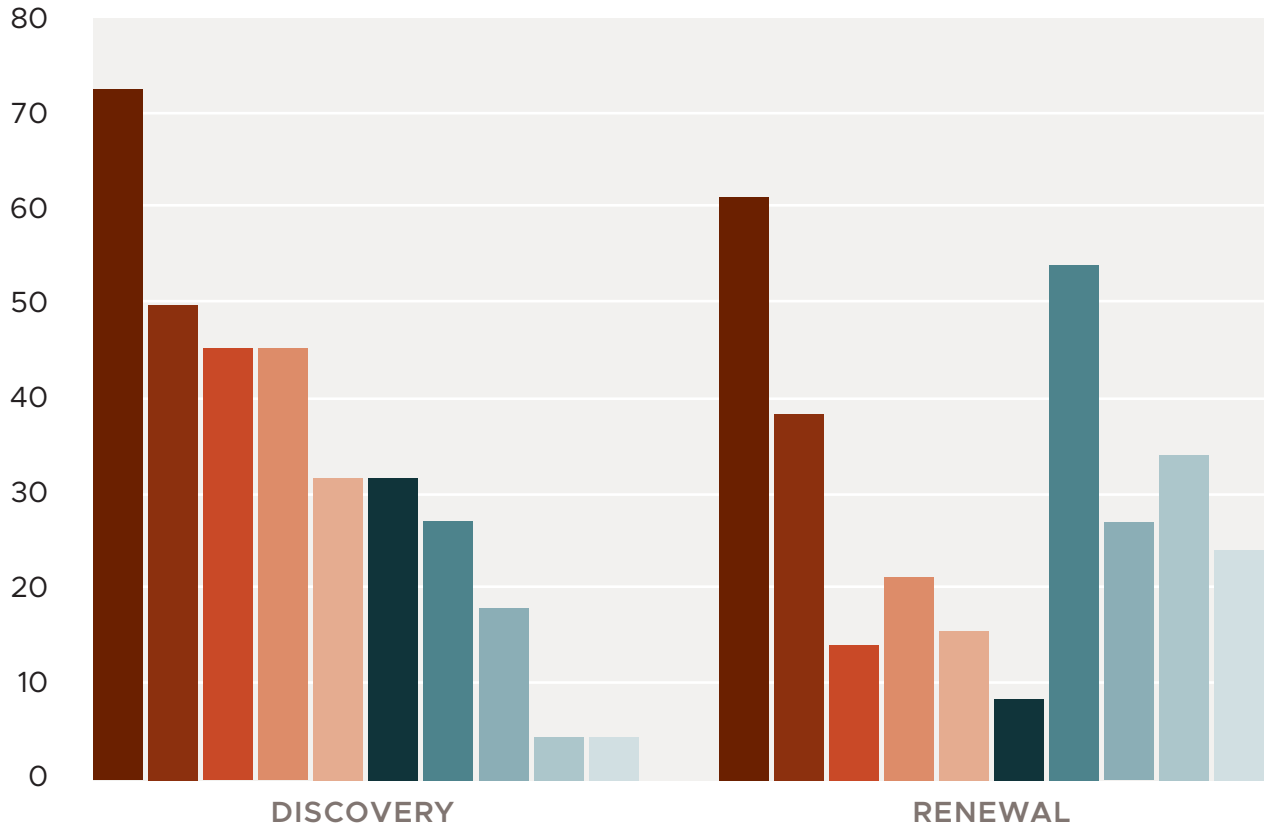
FIGURE 5. The Performing Arts Program’s greatest potential for impact lies at the intersection of the Program’s values and the systemic challenges that impact Bay Area artists, arts organizations, and communities.



We observed the strategic framework's greatest potential for impact at the intersection of these three components: when grantees' activities and priorities clearly reflected the Program's values and actively addressed the systemic inequities facing artists, arts organizations, and their communities. The evaluation found that the Program's Discovery grants, among the newest in the portfolio, frequently fell into this intersection, indicating potential for strong impact and providing an example of the types of initiatives the Program could focus its resources on. For example, as Figure 6 shows, from 2020 to 2023, both Discovery and Renewal grantees engaged in activities that prioritized BIPOC and other historically disinvested communities and focused on strengthening the economic agency of artists. These priorities showed up more frequently for the portfolio's Discovery grantees compared to its Renewal grantees. Many of the Program's Discovery grantees also engaged in cross-sector collaboration (i.e., engaged in work and/or collaborated with partners that worked to address a range

of intersectional issues) and supported communities in advancing collective cultural identity and self-determination. Again, these priorities showed up proportionately more frequently than they did for the Program's Renewal grantees. Discovery grantees' focus on cross-sector collaboration reflects the strategic framework's focus on supporting artists and other arts and culture leaders as advocates for and allies with broader community priorities. For example, grantees are focused on using the arts as a mechanism to organize communities to advocate for broader community development projects, including access to safe, affordable spaces to create art. Similarly, Discovery grantees' emphasis on supporting collective cultural identity and self-determination, including by amplifying specific cultural expressions, especially in underfunded communities, reflects the Program's value of community self-determination. This encompasses supporting communities to express, develop, and have agency over their artistic and cultural legacies—a goal of the new strategy.

FIGURE 6. Top 10 Priorities Tagged, as Percentage of Total Number of Discovery and Renewal Grants 2020–2023 (N=131)



- Prioritize BIPOC and historically disinvested communities in programming
- Strengthen economic agency of artists, culture bearers, and cultural communities
- Engage in cross-sector or intersectional issue collaboration
- Support collective cultural identity and self-determination
- Build and/or strengthen community resilience
- Build leadership capacity of art sector practitioners, administrators, and leaders
- Establish sustainable leadership and business models
- Expand awareness of multitude of cultural expression, practices, and art forms
- Increase participation in arts and culture activities
- Advance equity internally

Finding 2:

The types of grants that compose the Performing Arts Program’s portfolio remained consistent throughout the evaluation period. Given the Program’s fixed budget allocation, the Program needs to create additional budget flexibility to invest in new grantee partnerships and initiatives with the greatest potential for impact.

As shown in Figure 7, the overall composition of the Program’s grantees did not change significantly throughout the evaluation period, with renewal grants making up more than half of the Program’s portfolio from 2019 to 2023. The consistency in the portfolio surfaced a point of tension in interviews with the Performing Arts Program team: while the Program values its longstanding commitment to its grantee partners and takes seriously the vital role that the foundation plays as a steady partner to many Bay Area arts organizations, the team emphasized the importance of making more resources available to invest in organizations the Program has not previously funded to diversify the portfolio and accelerate progress with the strategic framework.

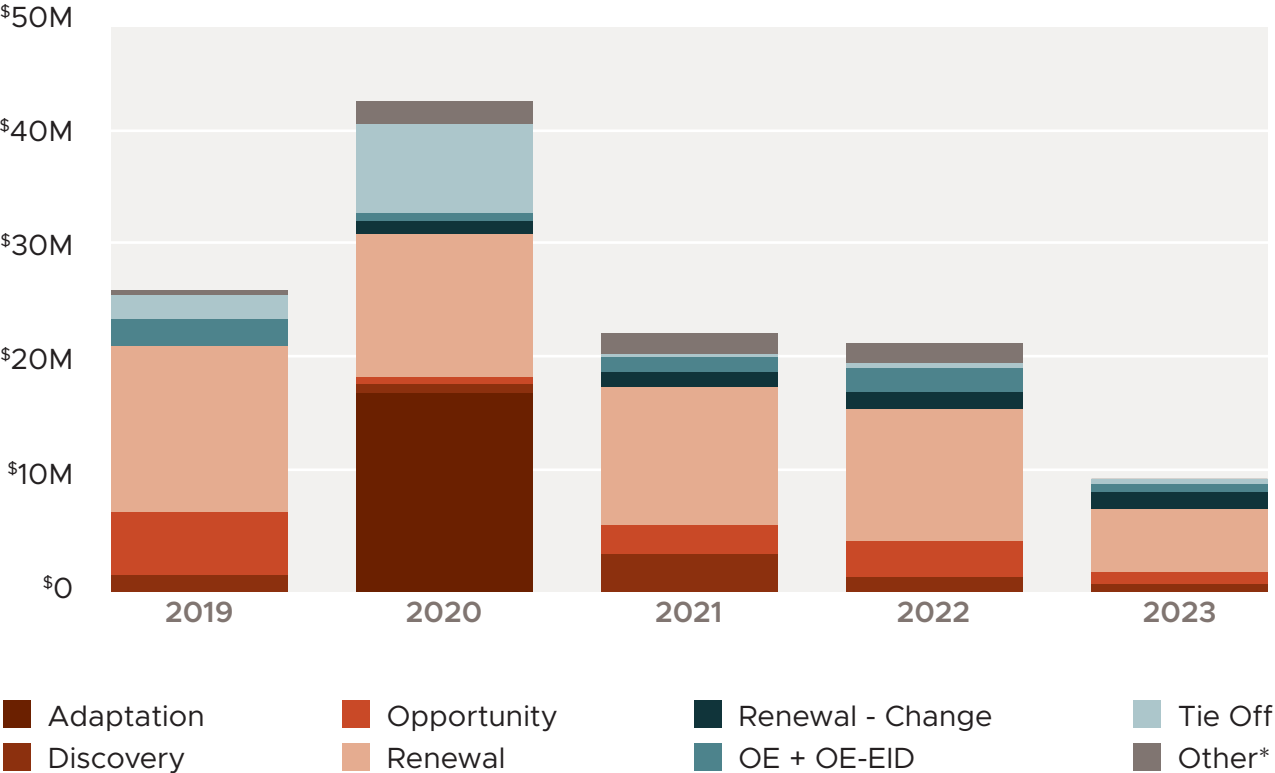
The Program did wind down some of its long-term grantee relationships as it began implementing its new strategy. Phase-out grants reflected about nine percent of all grants made in 2019 and about 18 percent of all grants made in 2020. These grants made up about one to four percent of all grants made in 2021 to 2023, indicating that after an initial push to exit some long-term partnerships, the team pulled back from winding down grantee relationships. As a result, the overall pace of change in the portfolio every year is relatively low. As the team began to phase out its grants, which the Program did by providing advance notice and offering final multiyear grants, the Program also began to invest in new initiatives, though in a fairly limited way. The Program made 22 Discovery grants between 2019 and

2023, representing about 3 percent of the total number of grants the Program made during this time period. As noted above, these Discovery grants represented some of the most promising investments that the Program has made since implementing the new strategic framework. Given the Hewlett Foundation’s practice of holding budget allocations constant across program areas over time, these Discovery grants were only made possible by the resources the Program made available through phasing out existing grantee relationships. Even with the upheaval of COVID-induced shutdowns in the past, the

Bay Area performing arts field will continue to experience rapid and prolonged change due to the high cost of living, an uncertain economic landscape, public policy shifts, leadership transitions, and sustained changes in cultural participation patterns spurred by the pandemic and technological innovation. In this changing landscape, the Program will need to remain flexible with a portion of its resources to maintain fidelity to the strategy and relevance to the field over time. Discovery grants (or a similar flexible funding mechanism designed to explore new relationships) will continue to be a crucial tool to enable the Program to best serve the community.



FIGURE 7. Distribution of Performing Arts Program Funding by Grant Type (N=655)



*Other includes the Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions Initiative and other miscellaneous grants.

Finding 3:

The Program team's grantmaking approach is well aligned with the values of the strategic framework, and grantees noted that Hewlett has been one of the most responsive funders they have partnered with, especially over the past few years.

Interviews with the Performing Arts Program team and focus groups with grantees revealed that the Program's grantmaking approach is perceived both internally and externally as closely aligned with the values of the strategic framework. Grantees also observed that the Program has been ahead of the curve in terms of its attentiveness to grantee needs and its flexible, trusting approach, which was especially important to grantees given the challenges of the past few years. Specific examples that demonstrate the Program's approach include:

- **Building a trusting and collaborative relationship with grantees:** Grantees value the thoughtful partnership they receive from the Performing Arts Program team and appreciate that it is a relationship built on trust, mutual respect, and thought partnership. The Program offers to connect with grantees via phone calls or site visits in lieu of written

reporting, and grantees reflected that their check-ins with their program officers feel more like a moment for connection, rather than a moment for evaluation. Program staff reflected that this approach helps them to foster existing and new relationships, as well as to better understand and, when possible, respond to grantees' emerging needs, successes, and challenges. Grantees also highlighted the Program team's experience in the arts and as former leaders of arts organizations. The Program team has a deep understanding of the unique challenges, nuances, and complexities of the arts sector, and grantees appreciate that program officers bring that expertise to their grantee relationships. Participants reflected that especially for newer organizations in more nascent stages of building their operations and fundraising structures, this approach empowers their leaders with a partner to name and solve problems with and to have a safe space to learn from successes and mistakes.

“Hewlett program officers build long-term relationships and see your story through. They go beyond what we are saying, and they are seeing us.”

— PROGRAM GRANTEE

- **Providing multiyear, general operating support:** Grantee partners emphasized the value of the Performing Arts Program’s multiyear, general operating support, especially over the past three years. The Program, and the Hewlett Foundation as a whole, have been following this practice even before the implementation of its new strategic framework, and while many foundations shifted to these more flexible practices during the early days of the pandemic, some are starting to shift back to project-specific, one-year grants, making Hewlett’s approach even more critical. As the Performing Arts Program knows well, multiyear general operating support has allowed grantees to be flexible in how they use their resources. It has also strengthened their capacity to respond to emerging opportunities and needs, including prioritizing the needs of artists and the broader community. In this way, the Program’s approach reflects its value of community self-determination by

giving its partners ownership over how they spend foundation resources. As one grantee put it, “Because of the general operating support, Hewlett allows us to determine on our own where we want to put our resources. That is huge in this moment.” Several grantees agreed that the Performing Arts Program could extend this multiyear funding even further, by offering five- to seven-year grants to some of its grantee partners, which would provide grantees with even longer-term committed resources.

“In addition to the physical money, the Hewlett team works with you if things are changing. They completely get how things are moving beneath us.”

— PROGRAM GRANTEE

- **Providing “beyond-the-dollar” resources and amplifying grantee voice:** Grantees value the insights and resources they have received from Hewlett, beyond the funding. For example, grantees appreciate when Program team members share trends and opportunities they see in the field, such as the Program’s pandemic-era weekly email newsletter

or the presentations the Program has facilitated regarding emerging leadership. Other grantees reflected on the “stamp of approval” that Hewlett funding provides, citing examples of how having support from Hewlett led to new funding from additional donors.

In addition to these practices that grantees emphasized, Program staff highlighted the team’s ability to provide

resources, space, and time for grantees to plan and adjust their organizational models through project-specific grants. Adaptation, Organizational Effectiveness, and Organizational Effectiveness – Equity, Inclusion, Diversity grants were used as a vital approach to meeting organizations’ ongoing needs to plan for long-term sustainability and adapt to the quickly shifting landscape in which they operate.

“One of the most important things our [program officer] did for us was co-present at a national funders’ briefing to demonstrate the importance of a new initiative. Once I explained the initiative to the program officer, she believed in it, saw the connection, and leveraged Hewlett’s institutional power and position to support it.”

— PROGRAM GRANTEE

Finding 4:

The Bay Area arts sector is facing large-scale structural and systemic inequities, and the Performing Arts Program team is operating under significant constraints in implementing the strategic framework to its fullest potential.

All grantee focus groups and most consultant interviews elevated the structural and systemic inequities that communities are experiencing, including rising housing costs; low wages for workers and other factors contributing to community displacement; and the particular challenges that artists and arts organizations face as a result—sentiments that were echoed in interviews with the Program team. These inequities are not

new, and positioning the arts within the broader context of communities and systems is core to the Performing Arts Program’s strategic framework. Grantees and their communities have experienced an exacerbation of these structural inequities over the past three years, imploring Hewlett and other funders to invest in interventions that will transform systems for artists, arts organizations, and their communities.

“There is not a better time for staff to think boldly about what is possible. If we don’t do something different, we are going to go backward in terms of how much impact we can have.”

— PROGRAM GRANTEE

Grantees surfaced a few consistent examples of how these challenges manifest in their work. For example, some grantees emphasized the importance of supporting artists' basic needs, as so many artists are getting priced out of the Bay Area or are forced to choose a different path to financial sustainability beyond the arts. Grantees emphasized the need for pay equity and finding a pathway for increasing salaries for artists and teaching artists. As one grantee succinctly put it, "If a funder wants stability for the arts ecosystem, then they have to get involved in supporting the social conditions of artists and workers." Grantees are particularly focused on activities like securing resources to support living wages for artists, advocating for affordable housing so artists can live near where they work, and ensuring there are opportunities for artists to do their work.

"Keeping those cultural communities vibrant means we need a space for people to live near where they're working."

— PROGRAM GRANTEE

"When these inequities rose to the surface, a lot of arts organizations were on the frontline, holding community and young people. We're now recognizing the need and deeper power to support student mental health and to support families economically, in addition to arts education."

— PROGRAM GRANTEE

Grantees also spoke about the need to find more connective tissue between arts and culture work and other intersecting issue areas, such as economic development. Specifically, they emphasized the real need for basic community infrastructure, especially access to affordable, community-owned space for artists and communities, a theme that was elevated by grantees across focus areas. As one grantee reflected, "Think of the many BIPOC communities and organizations that don't have the generational wealth to have facilities that they own. ...Without access to capital, organizations struggle to figure out how to build that physical, cultural asset within their communities." The importance of getting arts and artists a seat at broader collaboration tables to support cross-sector change resonated with all grantees interviewed.

The Program team demonstrated a keen understanding of these challenges in their interviews; at the same time, they recognize the Program cannot alone address the scope of the challenges that face the arts. They acknowledged that they operate with lean capacity given the Program's volume of grants and the budget available. The capacity and budget constraints of the Program make it difficult to implement the full scale of its expansive strategic framework and limit the team's ability to provide targeted and intentional support to all grantees.

Further, the budget constraints also mean the Program does not have the funds available to invest in new partners or initiatives that address systemic

challenges without winding down funding to existing partners. As described above, though the Program has phased out some grantee relationships over the past three years, Program team members expressed that they take seriously the foundation's legacy as a funder of the Bay Area Performing Arts and recognize the importance of their stability as a funder to the region. Especially given the shifts that other funders have made away from the arts over the past three years, the Program team has found it difficult to maintain the balance of providing stability to existing grantees while also making resources available to support historically underfunded geographies, artistic expressions, and initiatives that could help shift the broader systemic inequities that artists and communities experience.

Finding 5:

The Performing Arts Program has opportunities to strengthen its non-grantmaking support of the Bay Area arts sector by realizing its full potential as an influential funder and convener and more intentionally and strategically using its public voice.

Grantees across strategies highlighted that there is power in convening and connecting grantees with one another when done thoughtfully and intentionally, especially when bringing grantees together to discuss and solve a specific shared problem. Given the scale of the Performing Arts Program’s portfolio, it can connect grantees with shared goals and challenges with one another through convenings and one-to-one connections. Grantees are craving additional spaces to connect and problem-solve with one another on specific issues, including working collaboratively

to address some of the systemic issues outlined in the previous finding. Grantees clearly expressed that convenings focused solely on networking or that bring in untailed speakers to talk about an assortment of issues are unhelpful. Instead, organizations are looking for opportunities to brainstorm solutions to things like organizational capacity-building or points of intersection between issues. Grantees reflected that these types of settings can reduce the feeling of isolation that sometimes come with leading an organization and can increase collaboration across organizations.

“Organizations going through change can feel isolated. Bringing them together in conversation to learn and grow around specific topics is helpful.”

— PROGRAM GRANTEE

Grantees who recently received an Adaptation grant shared that the convenings they participated in as part of that cohort were particularly fruitful for several reasons. First, the convenings centered on clearly defined topics, which were often elevated by one or more grantees. This gave structure to the conversations and also ensured it was

a topic that grantees wanted to focus on. Second, convenings were optional, so organizations could opt in or out depending on what topics were most beneficial to them. And third, organizations had the option to present their work on the Adaptation grants and use that in lieu of their written annual report, which gave more purpose to the presentations.

“The Adaptation meetings and convenings really had significance for our direction. There is a difference between large-cohort convenings and smaller groups focused on specific ideas for exploration, which are very helpful.”

— PROGRAM GRANTEE

Grantees and consultants also highlighted that the Performing Arts Program is missing an important opportunity to maximize its impact by influencing other funders, government actors (within the foundation’s legal capacity to do so), and others to view and fund the arts as integral to thriving communities and to implement more flexible, community-oriented, and trusting grantmaking models. This came up in a few ways during grantee focus groups and consultant interviews. For example,

one consultant suggested that the Program could be bolder and more vocal about its perspective of the role of the arts in the bigger crises facing communities, including by naming specific policies and structures that need to shift in order to sustain local communities. Clearly sharing this perspective could be an impactful intervention that the Program has not explored as deeply as it perhaps could. This could be achieved via conferences, public-facing blog posts, newsletters, and other mechanisms.²

² It is relevant to note that while this recommendation was surfaced in external conversations, the Program team named that they have limited capacity to take this on presently.



“[Hewlett’s] strategy aspires to reconfigure relationships between grantmaking and community. They are doing work to advance new ways of doing things. How is Hewlett encouraging the field to also be open to other ways of doing things?”

— PROGRAM CONSULTANT

Several grantees and one consultant proposed that the Program share more publicly the lessons it has collected through the different grantmaking approaches it has piloted, including its participatory grantmaking work and its Adaptation grants. Given the alignment between these grant programs and the arts sector’s needs, the broader field of

philanthropy and, more importantly, the organizations funded through philanthropy would benefit from learning from the Program’s experimentation.

Finally, grantees recommended that the Program continue to make connections between grantees and other funders and to advocate on behalf of organizations to other funders within the Program’s network.

Finding 6:

There is a clear and ongoing need for the sector to receive large-scale, transformational investments to plan for its long-term sustainability, and the Program’s Adaptation grants are one excellent example of what this looks like in practice.

Grantees across focus areas highlighted the Adaptation grants as one of the most responsive and useful supports they received during the pandemic. In addition to multiyear, general operating support that Hewlett provided to its grantees, Adaptation grants and Organizational Effectiveness grants provided grantees with additional, transformational “dream capital,” enabling grantees the time and resources to think creatively about their long-term approach to their work, while also managing their day-to-day operations. These grants provided a significant influx of flexible capital and enabled organizations to dream big and determine how they wanted to allocate resources to position their organizations

to sustain and thrive in changing contexts. Though grantees perceived the Adaptation grants as an emergency response effort, the Program team saw these grants as an opportunity to address long-existing inequities that were more prominently revealed and worsened during the pandemic. The Adaptation grants, along with the Program’s longstanding Organizational Effectiveness grants, uniquely recognized the importance of supporting an organization to strengthen its overall infrastructure. The grants also provided support for organizations to plan for and implement programmatic and operational adaptations that would enable them to better meet community needs over the long term.

“In the past, there have not been a lot of opportunities that have allowed organizations with our budget size and serving the communities we do the ability to take small risks that actually invest in [our work] in the long run. The Adaptation grant was a good example of this, and it has enabled self-determination around how we want to grow. There is a lot of self-determination when an organization has resources for adapting.”

— PROGRAM GRANTEE

The Adaptation grants were well-received by grantees who were awarded them, and grantees in nearly every focus group encouraged the Program to consider embedding Adaptation grants as a long-term Program strategy, rather than a one-time emergency response effort, to provide additional organizations with the resources to plan for and implement programmatic and operational adjustments. Artists and arts organizations continue to be impacted by a changing

landscape, including limited funding opportunities, closed venues, and limited work opportunities, and organizations continue to require resources that will enable them to adapt to these shifting conditions to ensure their longevity. While the Program’s capacity and current budget availability is limited and therefore may not be able to replicate the Adaptation grant initiative in the near-term, there may be opportunities for the Program to share lessons with other funders and influence others to provide similar support.

“Adaptation grants are critical and even more necessary going forward, in addition to general operating support. Organizations are trying to hold their backbone together while trying to figure out how to adapt.”

— PROGRAM GRANTEE

Adaptation Grants

Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Performing Arts Program secured an additional, one-time foundation budget allocation of \$17 million with the goal of supporting arts organizations to plan for their sustainability and relevance in the face of challenges made apparent and/or exacerbated by the pandemic. The Adaptation grants were designed to help ensure that arts organizations would endure and remain viable throughout and following the pandemic, including by providing monetary and non-monetary support to support organizations in developing sustainable financial, leadership, and other operational models.

In total, the Program awarded 34 grants ranging in size from \$300,000 to \$975,000. Of the grantees, 30 were existing and four were new partners. The Program awarded Adaptation grants to organizations that the team identified as crucial to the Bay Area arts ecosystem and to advancing the Program's refreshed strategic goals. According to Performing Arts Program team members, Adaptation grants went to organizations that have "an array of assets, networks, and relationships that is of unique value [that] would be unrecoverable, untransferable, or extremely difficult to reconstruct should the organization close or be severely impaired." The Program also selected organizations that were open to adapting and were in a position to receive an influx of flexible dollars from the foundation. Lastly, the Program considered a financial health analysis provided by Financial Management Associates to inform funding amounts.

Adaptation grantees engaged first in a six-month planning process, during which they developed a written adaptation plan that included a clear purpose and goal, anticipated outcomes and milestones, a detailed budget, an evaluation plan, and assumptions about the current context. Grantees had the opportunity to receive technical assistance during this planning period and worked with Program staff to solicit and incorporate feedback on their plans to help course correct, if needed, or consider additional challenges. After planning, grantees implemented their adaptation plans over three years. During this period, grantees engaged in a series of two to three optional convenings, which focused on topics surfaced by participating grantees to ensure the convenings responded to the needs and interests of the groups.

At the time of this writing, grantees are still implementing their Adaptation plans, and this evaluation did not set out to assess the effectiveness of these grants or grantees' outcomes. Still, over the course of Arabella's evaluation, we gathered insights about the model from grantees, Program staff, and consultants that may be instructive to

other funders looking to support organizations to adapt to changing economic and social conditions. For example, grantees who received Adaptation funding highlighted the resources as transformational and crucial to sustaining their relevance within the changing performing arts landscape. To support the longevity and resiliency of artists, culture work, and arts organizations, other funders should follow the Adaptation grants model and provide grantees with a significant influx of dollars focused on organizational planning in addition to general operating support for programmatic work. Funders should also offer grantees the flexibility to determine how to use their adaptation funding: while Adaptation grantees were expected to use grant funds for organizational adaptation purposes, such as developing sustainable leadership or business models, the Program team allowed grantees to take the lead in determining how their organizations could best use the grant funds. This flexibility allowed organizations to make adjustments as needed and navigate uncertainty. Further, funders should consider providing technical assistance and/or capacity-building support to grantees during both the planning and implementation phases. One consultant involved in the design and implementation of the Adaptation grants suggested that this is one area where the Hewlett Adaptation grants may have fallen short; while grantees had access to technical assistance during the planning period, they would likely have benefitted from even more support throughout the implementation period.

Finding 7:

The Program's participatory grantmaking pilots are a good example of the Program's commitment to funding historically overlooked and underfunded community assets and amplifying community self-determination, making them well-aligned with the Program's goals and values. However, consultants expressed concern about the Program's current capacity to implement this work well without the support of trusted intermediaries.

The Performing Arts Program team implemented two participatory grantmaking pilots over the past three years to shift resources and decision-making power to historically underfunded communities. Consultants and intermediaries who supported these programs found that these processes can be effective means to get funding directly to artists and organizations and create space for greater community self-determination. However, these pilots have also uncovered a few important lessons for the Program to consider as it continues to pursue more equitable and participatory grantmaking approaches. First, consultants shared that these pilots would benefit from the same multiyear support that the Program provides to its renewal and

core grantee portfolio. Participatory grantmaking is time- and resource-intensive, and the one-year pilots left the consultants implementing the pilots, as well as community participants involved in them, wondering about the sustainability of their efforts. One consultant with particularly close experience to one of the participatory grantmaking processes also named that the one-year nature of the grants caused some tension within communities, with some organizations and artists in the community receiving funding and others not. Multiyear funding can help ease some of these tensions, as applicants may have another chance to apply for funding in future years. Further, multiyear grants would allow partners to deepen their relationships with one another and refine their processes over time.

In addition, consultants were mindful of the Program’s existing capacity constraints as well as the team’s current skillsets and encouraged the Program to continue partnering with trusted intermediaries to implement participatory grantmaking processes, rather than taking on these relationships themselves. Consultants involved in the participatory processes emphasized the importance of working with intermediary partners who are rooted in the communities that Hewlett wants to

support and who can navigate the histories of inequity and existing power and political dynamics within those communities. Further, implementation of successful and authentic participatory grantmaking practices requires specific skillsets that may be beyond the expectations of a traditional program officer role, including facilitation and community organizing. Community-centered intermediaries are better positioned to take on this role than the Performing Arts Program team given the Program’s current structure.

“In its new refresh, Hewlett has been trying to move into communities that have never been funded. That is most important—to reach out to organizations who wouldn’t otherwise think to apply.”

— PROGRAM GRANTEE

“Without multiyear funding, there is a sense of instability, a tentativeness about the work that isn’t the best. We need more commitment of more funds over a long period of time.”

— PROGRAM CONSULTANT

Participatory Grantmaking Pilots

As the Performing Arts Program began to implement its refreshed strategic framework, it launched two participatory grantmaking pilots designed to strengthen the Program’s relationships with artists and culture-bearers in historically underfunded geographies and to advance the Program’s Communities goal, which aims to support arts and culture practices that are relevant to and reflective of different communities. The Program launched its first pilot, the Vallejo Arts Fund, in 2021, following community listening sessions and convenings with Vallejo residents facilitated by the Three Palms Group, a capacity-building consulting firm rooted in community-centric work. Informed by the Three Palms Group’s recommendations, the Performing Arts Program launched the Fund in Vallejo, given the Program’s historic lack of support for the area, the high level of demographic diversity in the city, and the Program’s understanding of Vallejo as an area of relatively limited opportunity for economic advancement. These reasons all aligned well with the Program’s strategic focus. The Three Palms Group continued to coordinate the pilot, facilitating community outreach and engaging with community artists who invited other artists to apply. The organization also supported the Program in developing and reviewing grant proposals, and facilitated community decision-making processes to determine which artists and culture workers in the area would receive grant funds. Ultimately, the Vallejo Arts Fund distributed an initial \$500,000 to a range of artists selected by their peers and their community.

The Program launched a second participatory grantmaking pilot, the North Bay Arts Fund, in 2022. Similar to the Vallejo Arts Fund, the North Bay Arts Fund sought to spur more equitable investments in the arts in Solano, Sonoma, Marin, and Napa counties and to give communities more power to decide how best to distribute funds related to arts and culture. The North Bay Arts Fund, fiscally sponsored by the New Venture Fund, differed

“The participatory grantmaking program built relationships among artists. They were excited to get to know each other, excited about each other’s events, and the program offered relational capacity-building along with technical skills development.”

— PROGRAM CONSULTANT

from the Vallejo Arts Fund in that it was intended to build the capacity of four community organizations to become trusted intermediary partners that could facilitate participatory, community-driven grantmaking processes and therefore enhance support for and participation in arts and culture throughout the North Bay. Arabella Advisors³ facilitated the North Bay Arts Fund's advisory board through a decision-making process to select the four partners, and then designed a learning curriculum to support the selected partners in designing and implementing participatory decision-making in their communities. The cohort included two organizations familiar with traditional grantmaking practices that center decision-making power with an organization's board and two organizations that had strong community relationships and experience driving community-centered participatory processes but were new to grantmaking. The organizations engaged in four peer learning sessions, bringing their different areas of expertise to share with one another, and the Arabella team offered a learning curriculum that accounted for these differences and learning edges. In total, the four organizations collectively regranted \$535,000 to artists and culture-bearers based on the decisions of their community decision-makers.

Participants in both funds celebrated the pilots as an opportunity to showcase and honor art that is representative of their communities and to elevate artists and culture workers as community leaders. The funds also provided an opportunity for artists to get to know one another, support each other's work, and celebrate the cultural vibrancy of their communities. In this way, the pilots connect well with the Performing Arts Program's strategic goals, particularly the focus on community self-determination and distributing resources to historically underfunded geographies and artistic communities. At the same time, the Program gathered important lessons from both funds that can inform future investments in participatory grantmaking by Hewlett and other funders. For example, as described in Finding 7, participants in both funds articulated the importance of providing multiyear commitments to participatory grantmaking work, both to ensure the sustainability of the initiatives and to demonstrate commitment to and build trust with communities that have been overlooked or harmed by philanthropy in the past. Further, multiyear commitments to these initiatives reflect the time-intensive nature of this work, which depends on facilitators and community members navigating existing community power dynamics and establishing strong, trusted relationships with one another in order to engage in shared decision-making. Participants in both funds also reflected on the aspects of traditional philanthropy that remained embedded in these processes, including developing and reviewing written grant applications or operating from a scarcity mindset given limited resources.

³ Some, but not all, Arabella team members worked on both the North Bay Arts Fund work and this evaluation, enabling us to assess the participatory grantmaking pilots while minimizing bias.

Recommendations

Arabella recommends the Program consider making a handful of structural and strategic shifts that will position the Program to achieve greater impact. Ultimately, these recommendations are choice points for the Program and will have to be considered in the context of its capacity and budget constraints. These include:

1 Expand the Program's partnerships with values- and community-centered intermediaries to implement more participatory processes and extend the Program's reach to a more diverse array of performing art forms and practices that are relevant to and reflective of the people living throughout the Bay Area.

In doing so, the Program team could reduce the overall volume of grantee relationships that it is directly managing while also ensuring its grant funds continue to support organizations serving defined geographic and/or cultural communities that have historically been overlooked and underfunded. In selecting trusted intermediaries, we recommend the Program consider the relationships those intermediaries hold, existing networks within the communities the Program seeks to support, and the intermediaries' ability to manage participatory and other community-driven grantmaking processes. The Program should also consider offering resources to skill up and coach nascent intermediaries who are values- and community-aligned but who may need additional resources to support artists and culture work most effectively. One drawback of shifting a portion of the portfolio away from direct grantmaking and toward the use of intermediaries is that it could reduce access to Hewlett's "beyond the dollar" benefits and the validation that Hewlett funding provides to grantees' work, elevating their profile and credibility among other donors. To mitigate this concern, Arabella recommends that those organizations receiving funds from the Program's trusted intermediaries still be invited to participate in all Hewlett-sponsored activities, including convenings.

2

Continue to responsibly phase out grantee partners as a valuable tool for making resources available to deepen the Program’s impact. **Clarify the process the Program will use** to determine if and when it is appropriate to wind down additional grant relationships.

Though transitioning groups out of the portfolio is a challenging process, it has created space for the Program to make investments in more aligned grantees that are responding directly to systemic challenges and whose priorities and activities more strongly align with the Program’s values of self-determination, and equity and justice, in particular. To continue making dollars available for the most impacted and under-resourced organizations and communities in alignment with the Performing Arts Program’s strategic framework, the Program will need to continue examining its grantee portfolio and consider winding down grant relationships. Given the state of the field, it is a particularly sensitive time to be exiting grant relationships. Thus, the Program should continue to determine which relationships to wind down with time and care. To ensure consistency in determining which grantees remain in the portfolio, the Program might consider the following questions:

- **Does the grantee support a “defined community,” and does it have a good sense of who its community is and how its art is advancing the self-determination of that community?** This may include groups that are identify, affinity, artistically, and/or geographically based. In determining what defined communities the Program will support, Arabella recommends doing an analysis of where broader philanthropic funding currently goes in the region and prioritizing funding for communities that have fewer funding sources available to them.
- **Do the grantee’s programming and services concretely align with the Program’s values of equity, justice, and community self-determination?** The Program should clearly define these terms, in partnership with grantees, and then regularly assess the extent to which its grantees are in alignment with these values.
- **How does the grantee’s budget fit within the Program’s overall portfolio?** The Program could consider determining an organizational budget range that the Program is well positioned to support. The Program team could lean more heavily on its intermediary partners with mid-sized budgets to regrant to organizations with operational budgets that fall below the Program’s budget

range but that otherwise align well with the Program's values and goals. The team might also consider winding down relationships with organizations that have larger operating budgets that might be able to secure resources from other funding sources.

Arabella does not recommend that the Program end funding to an organization based on any one of these factors alone, but that the team should consider them collectively and within the context of the Program's broader portfolio.

3 Define and make deeper investments in core portfolio grantees, and establish a grantee partner advisory council to inform future portfolio investments.

While grantees named general operating support as most critical, additional supports such as capacity-building and future-oriented grantmaking opportunities like Adaptation grants can have an outsized impact on grantees as well as their communities. However, as we've identified throughout the report, the Program has limited resources available for additional investments. To address this tension, we suggest the Program identify and make deeper investments in core portfolio grantees. This could include developing an internal assessment tool that helps the Program team make grantmaking decisions more consistently and transparently and consider which grantees substantially contribute to the goals identified for each strategy (Communities, Artists, and Youth), intentionally address systemic field needs, and are aligned with the Program's values. We encourage the team to make this tool—and the thinking behind it—transparent for the field as a method of ensuring accountability. Once the Program determines the criteria it will use to define these core partners, it can also determine opportunities for deeper investments, including extending multiyear grant terms to four years, offering transformational investments similar to the Adaptation grants, and/or providing resources for uniquely tailored capacity-building opportunities and grants. It may also consider creating a grantee partner council, an advisory body with a rotating membership of core grantees that can provide guidance and input to the Program's ongoing strategic planning to ensure the Program and its stakeholders are on the same page about the commitments it is making to the field.

4 Bolster the Program's non-grantmaking support by elevating its convening power.

Given the deeply rooted systemic inequities that artists and communities experience, the Program is not positioned to meet all the challenges facing the arts sector and communities alone; there is an opportunity to consider how it can help bring in additional funders and create spaces for shared problem-solving on particular issues. For example, the Program can build on the types of convenings facilitated through the Adaptation grants, with the intention of supporting spaces for grantees to co-create solutions and pathways forward to address systemic issues.

5 Leverage the Program's strategic voice.

While Hewlett's grantee partners have consistently expressed the desire for the foundation to use its voice to influence peers in the philanthropic sector, we recognize that the team's capacity to do so is limited, and that previous efforts to increase arts funding have met with mixed success. Nevertheless, we believe the program can effectively leverage its voice in two areas:

- **Influencing peer practices:** As noted in the findings section, Hewlett's Adaptation grants and participatory grantmaking pilots were successful and relatively unique efforts to respond to field needs. The foundation may consider telling the story of these two programs more proactively and publicly. In addition, as other funders increasingly return to more restrictive funding practices after a brief respite during COVID, the foundation can remain public in its advocacy for multiyear operating support and flexible reporting requirements.
- **Expanding support for the arts by encouraging intersectional funding strategies:** Grantees appreciate that the foundation sees the arts as integral to community health, and thus essential to the success of other philanthropic strategies related to public health, economic development, environmental action, racial justice, and more. While funding for the arts is diminishing in some quarters, there is an opportunity for the foundation to use its voice to center artists and the cultural sector in these broader conversations, thus expanding the potential for new resources at the intersection of arts and these critical issues.

In both of these endeavors, it may be worth exploring a partnership with the foundation's Effective Philanthropy Group to amplify the Performing Arts Program's voice beyond the arts community.

Conclusion

Hewlett's Performing Arts Program is working toward the values and goals it set for itself in the 2020 strategic framework. At the same time, the arts and culture sector and Bay Area communities continue to experience a vast array of intersecting systemic challenges that require funders, including the Performing Arts Program, to act with urgency and intention. To help address the needs and aspirations of these communities, the Performing Arts Program should lean into the unique set of assets it brings to this work, including its historical role as a critical funder in supporting the Bay Area arts community; the team's flexible and relational approach to grantmaking; and the foundation's overall platform to convene and influence grantees and other funders. By focusing the Program's time and financial resources in a way that reflects these strengths, the Performing Arts Program can more sustainably and effectively promote arts and culture as a critical component of healthy and thriving communities.



Photo: Destiny Arts Center Teaching Artist Julia Chigamba leads students in Zimbabwean Dance; Photographer: Pablo Pitcher DeProto

Appendix: Evaluation Informants

Arabella Advisors spoke with representatives from the following organizations to help inform our evaluations:

Alameda County Arts Commission
Ali Akbar College of Music
Arts Council Napa Valley
AXIS Dance Company
BDO-FMA
Center for Cultural Innovation
Create CA
Crowded Fire Theater Company
Dancers' Group
Destiny Arts Center
East Bay Center for the Performing Arts
Headlands Center for the Arts
Helicon Collaborative
Informing Change
La Peña Cultural Center
Larkin Street Youth Services
Luna Dance Institute
Luther Burbank Center for the Arts
Magic Theater
Open Mind Consulting
Playwrights Foundation
San Jose Taiko
School of Arts and Culture at MHP
Three Palms Group
Gerbode Foundation
Women's Audio Mission
Youth in Arts
Youth Speaks
Z Space