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AT A LOSS

Philadelphia Cultural Fund takes a big hit in funding; African American Museum has its subsidy restored.

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Visitors explore the African American Museum of Philadelphia, which saw its funding fully restored by City Council. The Cultural Fund, an independent nonprofit that supports arts programming throughout Philly, wasn't as lucky. Council's final vote on the budget is set for this week. File photo

City Council has put money for the arts back into the administration's revised COVID-19-ravaged 2021 budget, including full restoration of the subsidy for the African American Museum in Philadelphia.

But the Philadelphia Cultural Fund, the city's key funding apparatus for arts support, has been restored to only about one-third its pre-COVID-19 level of \$3 million.



Jane Golden of the Mural Arts Program in 2014.

Mural Arts Program

Barbara Silzle, executive director of the Cultural Fund, which is an independent nonprofit, called the cut “devastating.”

The full impact on the hundreds of organizations seeking Cultural Funds grants will only become clear in the months ahead, she said.

“It’s going to mean a whole lot fewer grants and lesser amounts,” she said. “Hopefully the city can find other ways to divert money to the Cultural Fund.”

The Cultural Fund subsidy had been eliminated when Mayor Jim Kenney submitted his revised budget at the beginning of May.

In explaining that budget, the mayor said the epidemic had forced him to propose a “drastically revised” spending

plan for the coming fiscal year that emphasizes “core municipal services.” He cut his initial \$5.2 billion budget by \$649 million. Then, less than two weeks ago, the administration said the COVID-19 budget hole had frayed even more, adding another \$100 million to the projected deficit.

“We all understand we have to take cuts, but why we were singled out to take this big cut, is baffling,” Silzle said. “The Cultural Fund has

not been restored.”

The Cultural Fund provided support this past year to 350 groups in every neighborhood of the city, as well as to big organizations like the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Silzle said she had hoped for restoration of at least 75% to 80% of the Cultural Fund's \$3 million appropriation — which would put it in line with most of the cuts made across a range of city departments and agencies.

The Mural Arts Program, for instance, has had funding cut from \$2.45 million to a little over \$2 million. The Philadelphia Museum of Art has been cut from \$2.55 million to just over \$2 million. But the revised Kenney budget eliminated the Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, which administered the Cultural Fund. The office has been disbanded.

The African American Museum, which initially faced elimination of its entire \$231,000 general operating subsidy, has been fully restored.

Derek Green, at-large council member who sits on the board of the Cultural Fund, said he is concerned by the substantial reduction in support for the fund.

"I'm going to continue to work for additional funding for the Cultural Fund as we continue to go forward," he said Monday. "The Cultural Fund is an organization that continues to provide resources to grassroots community organizations all around the city of Philadelphia."

Council gave its preliminary approval to the revised funding levels last week. A final vote is scheduled for this week in advance of the end of the fiscal year, June 30.

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