

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Colorado Organizations Unite to Infuse nearly half a million dollars into PreK-12 Arts Education, Removing Barriers for Underserved Students

DENVER, CO – September 26th, 2024

Building on a bold initiative launched in 2023, the Bonfils-Stanton Foundation, in partnership with Colorado Creative Industries, Denver Arts & Venues, and Think 360 Arts for Learning, is proud to announce the second year of the Equity in Arts Learning for Colorado Youth Grant. This collaborative effort is poised to drive transformative change in PreK-12 arts education across Colorado, injecting nearly half a million dollars into vital arts learning opportunities statewide through a competitive grant process.

A Catalyst for Transformative Change

"For years, we have been sharpening our focus on creating a more equitable arts and culture ecosystem," said Gina Ferrari, Director of Grant Programs at Bonfils-Stanton Foundation. "Last year, we took a significant step toward leveling the playing field in arts learning. It's not just an initiative; it's a call to action for other organizations to join us."

"Colorado Creative Industries (CCI) is thrilled to continue to be engaged in this important initiative alongside our valued partners. Our funding allows this grant to be available to schools and nonprofits beyond the metro area, particularly to those in underserved rural areas around the state," said Josh Blanchard, Director of CCI.

Breaking Systemic Barriers

This multi-organization alliance for arts learning—including Bonfils-Stanton Foundation, Colorado Creative Industries, and Denver Arts & Venues (DAV)—is the first of its kind in Colorado. The nearly half-million-dollar fund envisions dismantling the systemic barriers that have long prevented marginalized and underserved youth from experiencing the life-altering benefits of arts learning. Think 360 Arts for Learning, a 61-year old statewide serving nonprofit arts organization, serves as a critical thought partner and the administrator of the grant program.

Daisy Fodness-McGowan, Executive Director of Think 360 Arts, said, "This collaboration is where vision meets action, showing what can be achieved when organizations believe that change isn't just essential—it's within reach."

"The collective funding of the Equity in Arts Learning for Colorado Youth grant program exemplifies the power of unity in our pursuit to make arts education more equitable," said Tariana Navas-Nieves, Deputy Director for Denver Arts & Venues. "Together, we are ensuring that arts learning opportunities reach those who might not have had access before, allowing for a more diverse and inclusive artistic landscape in our communities."

Stark Reality in Colorado Schools

Stark statistics underscore the urgency for this initiative. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, students in high-poverty schools are more than twice as likely to have no access to the arts. The Department of Education reports that access to arts education for students of color is significantly lower than for their white peers, and for lower socioeconomic students, the problem is similarly pervasive. A 2021 report by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences found that the strain on school budgets, in the wake of economic challenges caused by the pandemic, negatively impacted arts education, including many cuts to arts programs. Unsurprisingly, this has disproportionately affected Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic students, exacerbating disparities in mental health support and overall well-being.

Here in Colorado, the post-pandemic landscape has been particularly harsh on rural school districts, which lost art educators at a statistically significant rate compared to urban areas. The positive impacts of arts education on youth are evident through improved student motivation, attitudes, and overall attendance. Engagement in the arts leads to higher school attendance rates, improved graduation rates, decreased behavioral incidents, and overall positive mental health outcomes. However, students who see the greatest improvements in these indicators of school success are statistically much less likely to attend schools with robust arts programs.

A Multi-Pronged Approach to Equity

The [grant portal](#) is open for applications starting today, September 26, 2024. Colorado arts and culture nonprofits, along with schools and school districts, in collaboration with artists or arts and culture organizations, can submit their Letters of Intent (LOI) through November 22, 2024. Proposals should emphasize and prioritize the distinct identities and requirements of youth, promote in-depth learning and the development of meaningful relationships, address clear gaps in school or community arts education, engage experienced artists and culture bearers, and ensure high accessibility for youth participants.

Visit <https://think360arts.org/grant-opportunities> to learn more about the Equity in Arts Learning for Colorado Youth full grant guidelines and timeline to apply, including an informational video about the opportunity, the application process, and additional ways to receive proposal support from Think 360 Arts.

In its first cycle, [21 grantees](#) across 10 Colorado counties were awarded \$10,000-25,000 for up to one year-long projects, taking place between July, 2024 - June, 2025 and engaging thousands of underserved youth statewide. In its second cycle, the Equity in Arts Learning for Colorado Youth opportunity has increased funds to regrant, and grantees will be announced

for the 2024-25 school year in spring, 2025, following a two-stage process of evaluation.

An Investment in the Future

Bonfils-Stanton Foundation has invested in this pilot program and is joined in year two once again by Colorado Creative Industries, Denver Arts & Venues, with additional funding partners pending.

"Our goal remains to raise a fund total that exceeds half-a-million dollars to support as many students as possible," Ferrari added.

"We have the research, and we understand the profound benefits. Now it's about turning our commitments into reality and giving every child in Colorado access to the life-changing power of the arts," Fodness-McGowan stated.

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