

## Request for Small Grant Support for the West Allis Arts Collective

### Summary

We are requesting a one-time small grant of up to **\$2,000** to support the **West Allis Arts Collective**, a start-up organization dedicated to strengthening our community through the arts. This funding will support capacity building efforts including applying for 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, raising awareness of the Art Collective's work, and engaging the public through upcoming community arts events.

### Background

The West Allis Arts Collective is an emerging grassroots initiative dedicated to establishing West Allis as a thriving hub for creativity, culture, and artistic expression. Their mission is to cultivate a sustainable arts community by providing platforms for artists, makers, and performers to showcase their talents while fostering community connections through engaging artistic experiences and public engagement. Through initiatives such as makers markets, artist showcases, and public celebrations, they aim to inspire creativity and strengthen sense of belonging in our community.

Until November 2024, West Allis lacked an organized structure for local artists to network, collaborate, or contribute to city-wide artistic initiatives. The Arts Collective was born out of the City of West Allis' *Community Conversation* series, an inclusive civic participation dialogue among residents and business owners. The first "Creative Arts and Entertainment" discussion in November 2024 brought together 40 attendees to explore challenges and opportunities for the local arts scene, network, share resources and exchange ideas. Three additional public dialogue sessions followed, drawing even more participants. As a result, a dedicated group of artists, performers, and cultural advocates came together to form the West Allis Arts Collective and appoint its Board of Directors. To date, more than 50 creatives have actively engaged in shaping and enriching the city's cultural landscape. This grassroots effort is now evolving into a formal nonprofit organization committed to deepening community engagement through the arts.

Their initial work is already demonstrating alignment with city goals of community engagement, quality of life enhancement, and resident-led community vitality. Upcoming planned events include:

- **West Allis A La Carte** (arts presence to raise organizational awareness)
- **Make Music Day** (interactive musical experiences city-wide, supporting local performers)
- **West Allis Arts Showcase Weekend** (a celebration of local artists and hands-on arts programming featuring Art on the Plaza and a new Arts Showcase)
- **Wisconsin Arts Board grant application** (to support community arts programming)

## Use of Funds

The \$2,000 grant will be used for:

- **Filing for 501(c)(3)** status to build long-term sustainability and eligibility for additional funding sources
- **Outreach and awareness** materials to let residents know about the Arts Collective and how to get involved
- **Marketing** to build visibility and impact of upcoming programming
- **Event support and activities** to engage the public and encourage artistic experiences

These investments will directly support the organization's growth and independence, helping them transition from a grassroots initiative to a sustainable, community-driven nonprofit.

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## Funding Source and Fiscal Responsibility

We propose that this grant be drawn from remaining funds established in 2015 to support neighborhood group formation and engagement activities. These funds were designated specifically for community-building purposes and have not yet been fully expended.

- Using these older, underutilized funds ensures no impact on the 2025 small grant cycle for neighborhood associations.
  - When the 2025 budget was developed in 2024, the remarkable growth of Community Conversations and subsequent initiatives—like the Arts Collective—was not yet foreseen.
  - This grant reflects an opportunity to flexibly respond to that unexpected momentum and invest in its continuation.
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## A Model for Turning Dialogue Into Action

The Arts Collective is an example of how community dialogue can spark real-world action. Emerging from Community Conversations, it is already showing strong leadership, vision, and organizational capability. This group has:

- A clear plan
- The right leadership to execute it
- Strong momentum
- Community interest and enthusiasm

Supporting them now will help ensure that this momentum is not lost—and that we continue to see community-led innovation in the City of West Allis.

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## **Conclusion**

This small investment can yield outsized returns in resident engagement, community pride, and local vibrancy. It builds on West Allis' commitment to empowering the community, strengthens a promising new organization, and leverages existing funds without affecting future opportunities for others.

We respectfully urge the Common Council to approve this \$2,000 grant to the West Allis Arts Collective, and in doing so, affirm its continued support for creative, community-led solutions that make our city stronger.

## **West Allis Arts Collective Board of Directors**

**Erico Ortiz** is a Puerto Rico native who served in various capacities within the Milwaukee Public Schools, including classroom aide, teacher, supervisor, and principal, until 2011. He has participated on multiple community boards, focusing on the arts, education, and religious organizations. In 2014, leveraging his extensive background in community theatre, Hispanic folk dance, Spanish folk guitar, and visual arts, he acquired a former funeral home in West Allis and successfully transformed it into an intimate and dynamic art gallery and performance venue known as Inspiration Studios. This establishment has become a welcoming space for both established and emerging artists and performers, fostering creativity and community engagement.

**Suzann Campbell** studied Fashion Design and Theatre Arts at Mount Mary University, later earning a BA in Business Management and Communications from Concordia University. She's owned MAC Costumes since 1995 and moved the business to West Allis, WI, in 2024. Suzann has been active in the arts community all of her career, including serving on boards for Modjeska Theatre, Charles Allis Art Museum, and currently, Sunset Playhouse in Elm Grove.

**Patricia Eby** has had a distinguished career in music education and choral direction, spanning several decades and encompassing a variety of roles and achievements. Currently, she is the director of West Allis West Milwaukee Suburban Singers, a position she has held since 2017, when she planted roots in West Allis. Eby is Professor Emerita of Music from the UW System. She received a BS in Music and Education from Chicago State

University and Master of Music and Ph.D. (abd) from Kent State University. Eby has been known throughout her career to be an educator of excellence and innovation. Several times, she was the recipient of the Kaplan Award for excellent and innovative teaching and was awarded the University Teaching Award by her peers. At the University of Wisconsin, Fond du Lac, Eby served as Professor of Music and was appointed Associate Campus Dean. Eby also directed the campus chorus and FDL Chamber Orchestra, founded the Vocal Jazz Ensemble and FDL Chamber Singers.

As a church musician, Eby has held director positions in several states. She spent twenty years as Director of Choirs for Holy Family Catholic Community in Fond du Lac, WI where, in addition to the adult choirs, she directed the Hispanic Choir and founded the Hispanic Youth Choir, the Children's Choir and the Contemporary Choir. Most recently she was the Director of Choirs at Mount Zion ELCA in Wauwatosa.

**Michael James Grassman** is a Milwaukee based multi-instrumentalist, performer, creator, instructor, entertainment director, sound/lighting engineer and also an event DJ. Michael is the owner of Sound Check Entertainment, based in West Allis, WI. Dabbling in just about everything music related.

**Codi Peters** is a local artist and small business owner from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She is a 2014 UW Milwaukee alumni with a BFA in Digital Studio Practice. Codi has done freelance design and small local markets under her LLC FreshPrintsofMKE to sell her own paintings and artwork since graduating. In December of 2020 she and her husband Benjamin Buss opened Stalley Cats. Codi has become the resident designer and merchandise printer, marketing director, and bartender for Stalley Cats. She has developed their creative engagement in the community by hosting Gallery Nights monthly and also Art Classes. She takes pride in awareness and engagement in the artistic community and hopes to help showcase what makes West Allis a special place to be.

**Allison Schweitzer (Allison Emm)** is a musician, teacher and entrepreneur based in the Milwaukee area, WI. She began Wisconsin Music Ventures in the summer of 2019 as a way to offer musician friends fun, engaging performance experiences while serving as accessible listening opportunities for her private music students and others who might "find" the live music. Since COVID-19 WMV has shifted to become a diverse music community that helps musicians thrive in Wisconsin – through its continuation of hosting/co-hosting live music events, promotional support and networking efforts directed primarily toward member musicians. WMV launched its own podcast, [The Musician's Venture](#), in the fall of 2020.

Allison has worn a variety of hats within the arts and entertainment field: from music journalism to house management to box office to arts education to orchestral business management to marketing; having been everything from the Executive Director of a local

symphony orchestra to a Guitar Festival Consultant. As a musician she has worked as a performer, conductor, composer, arranger and accompanist. She's also been actively involved as a volunteer with local non-profits such as the Tosa Farmers Market (Fundraising Chair/Vice-President), 88 Nine Radio Milwaukee (Music Education Task Force) and the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra (Docent for Educational Programming).

**Colleen Volland** is the owner of Cream City Clay. What enables her to run this amazing business is the endless encouragement from her husband and two daughters.

Colleen has taught people of all ages since 1997. She holds a degree in K-12 grade Art Education and a Masters of Art. She loves to make large platters painted with a variety of materials such as slips, oxides, under glazes and wax resist. The finished pieces are often carved with figurative imagery. Working with others is her passion. Colleen loves to make collaborative public art works in the form of tile murals, sculptures and mosaic. In her free time you can often find her looking for new materials, tools and glaze recipes to share. Teaching is what she was put on the earth to do and she often says, "When my students excitedly tell me, they just created something that they didn't think they could, I feel successful."

**Dan Herro** is an artist from West Allis, Wisconsin focusing on painting and small scale sculptures. His artwork was recently included in group exhibitions at the Trout Museum of Art in Appleton and the Museum of Wisconsin Art in West Bend. Dan is currently the Head Designer and Preparator at the Haggerty Museum of Art at Marquette University and received his BFA from The University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**Chad Halvorsen** brings over 20 years of experience in commercial, web, and film production. He has produced multiple award-winning projects and three feature films, with a strong focus on crafting compelling narratives across both fiction and documentary formats. In addition to his creative work, Chad is currently serving his first term as Alder for West Allis District 2.