



Phyllis Wheatley  
Community Center

# SENATE ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE, & LEGACY COMMITTEE

## PHYLLIS WHEATLEY COMMUNITY CENTER: A VITAL INVESTMENT IN ARTS & CULTURE

**S.F. 2158 Champion** – Phyllis Wheatley Community Center appropriation

Request for Funding: Expanding Arts & Cultural Programming

Testifying: Amondo Dickerson, Manager of Operations and Programs

Zina Johnson, Director, Mary T. Wellcome Child Development Center

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**Phyllis Wheatley Community Center (PWCC) is seeking funding through the Minnesota Legislature's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund to enhance our programs for all ages — from pre-K to seniors — and incorporate transformative arts and cultural programming that enriches the lives of those in our North Minneapolis community. The arts are a powerful tool for healing, learning, and self-discovery, providing individuals with opportunities to express emotions, build confidence, and uncover hidden talents. With this funding, we will integrate music, dance, visual arts, and digital storytelling into early childhood education, restorative programs, and youth technology initiatives, ensuring that every participant can experience the personal and communal benefits of artistic engagement.**

### **Why This Funding Matters:**

PWCC serves a diverse and historically marginalized population, providing safe spaces for artistic expression, personal growth, and healing. This funding will allow us to:

- Expand music education with our partner organization, Walker West Music Academy, which provides interactive, developmentally enriching music sessions to Pre-K children in our Mary T. Wellcome Child Development Center. Additionally, Walker West collaborates with youth in our digital programs to integrate music composition and sound design into game development, fostering both technical skills and artistic expression.
- Increase access to dance through our partnership with Lundstrum Performing Arts, expanding a new ballet program that builds discipline, creativity, and confidence. Launched last fall, the ballet program, though small, has been a tremendous success, and with this funding we will be able to expand, creating capacity for many more youth to benefit.
- Integrate arts into trauma recovery programs, providing painting, sculpture, and storytelling workshops for individuals in domestic violence recovery and anger management programs. The creative process offers a vital outlet for expressing emotions that may be difficult to verbalize, fostering a sense of agency and self-worth. Studies show that engaging in art therapy can reduce anxiety, alleviate symptoms of PTSD, and promote emotional resilience. Through structured artistic activities, participants can rebuild confidence, develop coping mechanisms, and reframe their personal narratives in a supportive, healing environment.

- Enhance digital arts programming for youth in our tech program, offering hands-on experiences in content creation, podcast production, and storytelling in collaboration with radio hosts. This initiative will provide youth with mentorship opportunities, allowing them to develop media literacy, public speaking skills, and confidence in sharing their voices through professional-quality broadcasts.
- Establish an ongoing senior arts education program in partnership with the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA), ensuring older adults have continuous access to cultural and creative experiences. Building on last year's highly successful pilot program, this initiative will provide seniors with structured art classes, opportunities for self-expression, and a strong sense of community. The program fosters cognitive engagement, emotional well-being, and social connections, helping seniors explore new artistic talents while reducing isolation. With dedicated funding, we will make this a permanent offering, enriching the lives of older adults through creative learning and meaningful social interactions.

Participants in our senior programs have shared their experiences:

- "Excellent instructor, people, and fun, challenging class."
- "I never thought I would create a piece of jewelry for myself that is this beautiful."
- "I looked forward to class every week to get out of the house."

## **How We Will Use This Funding**

Early Childhood: The Mary T. Wellcome Child Development Center

- Music & Movement: Walker West Music Academy will provide Pre-K children with interactive music sessions that foster cognitive and social development.
- Visual Arts: Early learners will engage in hands-on arts projects that promote fine motor skills and self-expression.

Youth

- Ballet & Dance: Expanded classes with Lundstrum Performing Arts will encourage physical coordination, teamwork, and creative expression.
- Theatre programming in partnership with The Children's Theater at MIA

Trauma & Restorative Programming

- Art as Healing: Trauma survivors will access therapeutic painting, journaling, and sculpture workshops to process emotions in a supportive environment.
- Music & Storytelling: Individuals in our recovery programs will explore self-expression through songwriting and spoken word workshops.
- Movement-Based Therapy: Dance and movement workshops will provide stress relief and emotional regulation techniques for participants.

Youth & Technology: Digital Arts Expansion

- Digital Storytelling for Youth: We will partner with local media organizations and radio stations such as KMOJ, The Current, and community-driven platforms to provide youth with opportunities to create podcasts, interviews, and digital media content. Through mentorship with professional radio hosts and content creators, young participants will develop storytelling skills, media literacy, and technical expertise in audio and video production. This program will empower youth to share their voices, explore cultural narratives, and produce meaningful content for their communities.
- Game Design and Music: Youth will explore the intersection of music and technology by composing original soundtracks for video games and interactive media. Through partnerships with local gaming studios and music producers, participants will gain hands-on experience in digital audio production, music scoring, and interactive sound design. This program will empower young creatives to merge their artistic and technical skills, fostering pathways into the gaming and music industries.

Expanding Partnerships & Impact

To further expand access to the arts, we are exploring additional partnerships with:

- Youth Farm Marcus Kar: Engages youth in urban agriculture, nutrition education, and leadership development through hands-on gardening and food justice initiatives. A partnership would provide opportunities for youth to explore creative storytelling through visual art and multimedia projects focused on food and culture.
- Appetite for Change: A community-driven organization that uses food as a tool for health, economic empowerment, and social change. Collaborations could include culinary arts programming that integrates storytelling, photography, and videography to document cultural food traditions.
- Juxtaposition Arts: Offering mentorship in painting, graphic design, and mural creation for teens, providing them with real-world experience in public art projects and design.
- Kenneth Caldwell Jr. (artist): A celebrated local artist whose expertise in mural art and community storytelling can provide youth mentorship and hands-on artistic experiences.
- Walker Art Center: A premier contemporary art institution that can offer workshops, artist talks, and youth engagement programs, connecting participants with modern and experimental art practices.
- The Children's Theatre: A nationally recognized theater company that specializes in youth-centered performances, storytelling, and acting workshops, creating opportunities for young people to engage in the performing arts.
- Boys and Girls Club: A trusted youth organization providing after-school arts programming, mentorship, and leadership development through visual and performing arts experiences.
- Northside Boxing Club: A nonprofit boxing gym dedicated to character development, mentorship, and youth empowerment. A partnership could integrate movement-based art therapy, spoken word, and storytelling initiatives that align with the discipline and expression found in boxing.
- McKnight Foundation: A philanthropic organization that supports arts and culture initiatives. Securing funding or partnership opportunities with McKnight could help sustain long-term arts education and programming at PWCC.
- Page Scholars: A scholarship and mentorship program that supports students of color in higher education. A partnership could integrate mentorship opportunities, connecting young artists with college-bound scholars to foster leadership through the arts.
- Intergenerational programming (Wheatley Trailblazers): A PWCC initiative that brings together seniors and youth through collaborative art projects, storytelling, and shared cultural experiences. Programs could include oral history projects, visual arts mentorship, and community mural creation.
- Hennepin County Library: A cornerstone of community learning and access to information, Hennepin County Library offers extensive resources for arts and cultural programming. Through this partnership, we can provide creative writing workshops, storytelling events, and digital media literacy programs. Youth and adults will have opportunities to engage in spoken word performances, film screenings, and hands-on workshops in graphic design and animation. Additionally, the library's maker spaces and digital labs will support our technology and digital arts initiatives, helping participants develop new skills in media production and creative expression.

## A Strong Return on Investment

Your investment in PWCC will:

- Expand arts education access for over 500 participants annually
- Support culturally responsive, trauma-informed programming
- Foster creative skill-building for youth in technology and digital arts
- Strengthen community connections through cultural storytelling and artistic expression

**With your support, we will create a more vibrant and inclusive arts community, ensuring that individuals of all ages have access to transformative artistic experiences.**

For more information, contact us at [Katyn@phylliswheatley.org](mailto:Katyn@phylliswheatley.org) or visit [www.phylliswheatley.org](http://www.phylliswheatley.org).

**The power of art** extends beyond creative expression—it serves as a **bridge to opportunity, healing, and community connection**. By investing in arts programming at Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, we are not only enriching lives but also providing pathways for personal and professional growth. Whether through **music, dance, visual arts, or digital storytelling**, these programs **inspire confidence, foster new skills, and open doors to careers** in the creative industries. Art has the power to **unite, to heal, and to transform**, ensuring that every individual, regardless of background, has the chance to explore their full potential.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to the arts!