

Local arts programs could suffer if Legislature approves cuts



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GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. — Local arts groups may have to cut programs or find funding elsewhere if the Colorado Legislature approves a proposed 50 percent cut in funding to the Colorado Council on the Arts. The proposal is part of the state's plan for balancing the budget.

Several Grand Junction organizations such as The Art Center, KAFM Community Radio, the Grand Junction Symphony and the city's Arts and Culture Commission depend on grants from the Arts Council to fund various programs.

KAFM received grants from the Arts Council of \$8,500 for both 2007 and 2008 to launch the Radio Room Gallery, ongoing art exhibits of area artists and Reel Time, a new monthly alternative film series.

The radio station intends to seek a 2009 grant for the continued operation of Reel Time.

"We're still lacking some equipment, and it would give us some general operating funds," said KAFM Executive Director Ryan Stringfellow.

A potential loss of funding from the state is no surprise.

"We're experiencing this with grantors and foundations across the board," Stringfellow said. "Arts and culture and nonprofits are feeling the economy like everyone else."

The Art Center received about \$9,000 from the Arts Council last year toward its \$377,000 operating budget. Director Cheryl McNab said state funding for the arts is critical for rural areas like Grand Junction, due to a smaller donor base compared to larger cities.

The Art Center will already lose after February its local sponsor for its First Friday art openings.

If it loses funding from the Arts Council this year, "ideally we'll try and make that up," McNab said. "If we can't, we'll have to look at our services. I'd hate to see anything go away."

The Grand Junction Symphony Orchestra received a grant from the Arts Council of \$6,500 for the 2008-2009 season, which was applied toward this winter's "Nutcracker" performances.

Symphony Director Michael Schwerin said the organization will apply for Arts Council funding again in 2009.

The Arts Council has scheduled a "listening tour" from Jan. 30 to Feb. 9 to gather information from the public about where arts and culture funding is most needed.

"The listening tour is to hear what the agency's priorities should be if we end up with the cut," said Colorado Council on the Arts Director Elaine Mariner. "We'll need to prioritize where the funding will go to."

The open sessions replace meetings that were to be held to gather information from grant applicants.

Due to the budget uncertainty, the Arts Council postponed its March 12 grant deadline for the 2009-2010 grants to artists and organizations, and Success through Art grants.

In western Colorado, the listening tour sessions will take place Feb. 7 in Craig and Steamboat Springs, Feb. 8 in Glenwood Springs and Feb. 9 in Montrose at the Montrose School District Board Room, 126 S. Fifth St. Several representatives from local arts groups have said they plan to attend the Montrose session.

The Grand Junction Commission on Arts and Culture recently received from the Arts Council a \$10,500 grant approved last year.

The Arts Commission uses the money it receives each year from the state to give out to local arts organizations.

The city funds smaller or new arts groups unable to apply to the Council for funding, said Arts Commission Director Allison Sarmo.

"We like to help small arts groups get off the ground," Sarmo said.

The state Arts Council plans to release a study by the end of the week that will show the significance of creative enterprises on the state's economy. Mariner said a significant number of jobs would be affected by a 50 percent cut to the Arts Council.

"Fifty percent is pretty drastic," Sarmo said. "Perhaps it won't be quite that big of a reduction."

"There are so many important issues. Every division in the state has to take its cut."

Schwerin said it surprise him that the state would choose to cut funding of an agency that provides a direct economic impact to the state.

"We tend to be seen as frosting on the cake versus a necessity," Schwerin said. "I think a strong vibrant arts organization is a necessity."

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