



**Creative Waco Annual Report
2023**

Dear Friends,

In 2015, Creative Waco launched with a bold mission: to grow and support a thriving cultural and creative community in Waco and McLennan County, Texas.

Why? Because the arts create ripples of positive impact throughout our entire community. Our theatres, museums, galleries, concerts, festivals, performances, and cultural programs infuse vitality into our surroundings. They not only attract tourists but also give community members a voice, breathe life into renovated buildings, anchor talented graduates to our city, and draw in new residents and businesses. A lively arts environment is the catalyst for shared experiences, the spark that ignites connections, and the foundation for forging meaningful relationships. In the realm of the arts, our community discovers its boundless capacity for imagination, compassion, laughter, wonder, curiosity, and a touch of magic that is uniquely its own.

Our VISION is that Waco and McLennan County is known and celebrated as a vibrant center of creativity and culture. The arts are an active innovator for our community's economic development, policy-making, and revitalization. We envision a community where artistic skills, creative entrepreneurship, and cultural leadership are cherished and supported, and where our cultural infrastructure can serve as the bedrock for sustainable growth and excellence across all artistic disciplines.

Our first decade brought the challenges of a global pandemic and its recalibration of cultural norms. Yet, within these challenges, we discovered opportunities that propelled us beyond our wildest imaginings. This report aims to offer a glimpse into our journey and an invitation for you to join us in shaping the future.

Warmly,

Fiona Bond
Chief Executive Officer, Creative Waco



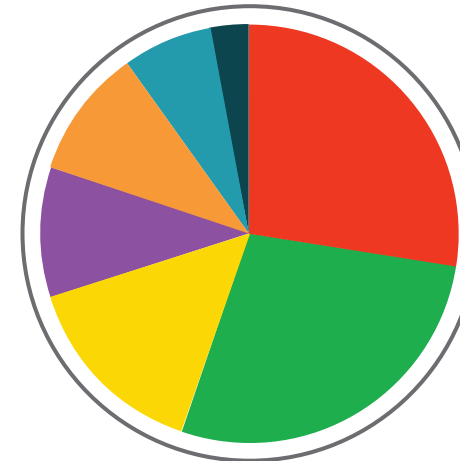
THE ESSENTIALS:

Creative Waco proudly serves as the Local Arts Agency (arts council or arts commission).

We are dedicated to fostering growth across all artistic disciplines within Waco and McLennan County.

Creative Waco operates as a non-profit corporation with a 501(c)(3) status.

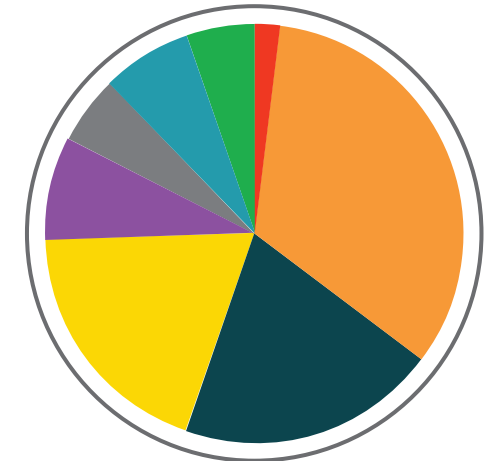
ANNUAL EXPENSE BY CATEGORY



Grantmaking	28%
Cultural District & Events	28%
Public Art	15%
Operations	10%
ARTPrenticeship	10%
Air Collaborative & Professional Development	7%
Data & Research	3%

\$1,005,651,90

ANNUAL REVENUE BY CATEGORY



Sponsorship & Project Revenue	33%
Regranting (City)	20%
Program Support (City)	19%
Regranting (ARPA)	8%
Trust & Foundation Support	8%
Public Art Income	7%
Program Support (County)	5%
In-kind Support	2%

\$1,005,651,90

We GROW and SUPPORT artists ... from education to industry

Creative Waco envisions Waco and McLennan County as a haven where creative professionals cannot only thrive but also make a sustainable living. We achieve this by:

- Supporting arts education initiatives through our programs and grantmaking
- Bringing diverse creatives together for networking and consultation
- Offering professional development opportunities where creatives gain career-building knowledge and business skills
- Providing online resources like our free local creative directory
- Connecting artists with businesses, services, customers, and audiences

Last year, our programs and grants directly impacted over 1,100 professional artists and performers, and over 2,800 students in Waco and McLennan County.



Program Spotlight: ARTPrenticeship

ARTPrenticeship has provided opportunities for young artists and beauty for our city since 2018. This program offers paid mentored work experience for talented high school creatives to learn how to manage a creative project from concept to completion. Everyone involved is empowered to make their mark in the community through creation of impactful artistic projects such as murals and films. In its first five years, the program has supported:

80 Waco-area high school ARTPrentices

4 interns
22 artist mentors

10 mural designers

9 downtown businesses receiving exciting new murals

5 documentary films telling local stories



Artist Spotlight:
Tashita Bibles
Artist-N-U:

Local artist Tashita Bibles is not only a creative force but also a community builder. Her business, "Artist-N-U," offers inclusive and therapeutic community art experiences in a fun and affordable manner. Tashita's journey, supported by Creative Waco's Greenhouse Professional Development Program, has not only helped launch her business but has also facilitated commissions as a public artist. Additionally, Tashita has contributed as an artist mentor for ARTPrenticeship and received grants for community art initiatives.



Artist Spotlight:
Cade Keggereis
DVLVD:

Cade Keggereis, a participant since year one of ARTPrenticeship, exemplifies the transformative power of our programs. Starting as a Junior Mentor, Cade has evolved into a Lead Designer, empowering apprentices through his business, DVLVD. His murals, paintings, apparel designs, and videography now extend beyond our community and he employs and trains other artists, leaving his artistic imprint across the state and country.



We GROW and SUPPORT Arts Organizations

Strong, sustainable arts organizations are the backbone of a vibrant artistic and cultural community. Creative Waco aims to help arts leaders by:

- Grantmaking that builds capacity, attracts match funding, and supports innovation
- Bringing arts leaders together for networking and professional development
- Offering joint programming, event calendar, and marketing opportunities
- Providing online resources like our free Creative Directory
- Connecting arts organizations with people and opportunities that can help them flourish

Program Spotlight: Grantmaking

Since 2017, Creative Waco has proudly served as a regranting agency on behalf of the City of Waco, McLennan County, and beginning in 2022, the National Endowment for the Arts. Our 2023 grantmaking programs included:

- Operational Support for established arts non-profits
- Arts Match Program to help arts non-profits attract other funding for projects and programs that are innovative or impactful in response to priority areas of the Waco Cultural Plan
- American Rescue Plan (on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts and City of Waco) to support post-pandemic economic recovery for artists and non-profit arts organizations.
- In the past year, we invested \$270,000 in arts organizations and their programs, sowing the seeds for a flourishing cultural community.

Organization Spotlight:
Waco Independent Film Festival:



Louis Hunter and Samuel Thomas, the visionaries behind the Waco Independent Film Festival, stand as exemplars of Creative Waco's impact. As inaugural recipients of a Creative Waco Arts Match Program Grant in 2017, they envisioned bringing independent filmmakers worldwide to Waco, creating a filmmaking hub, and nurturing local talent.

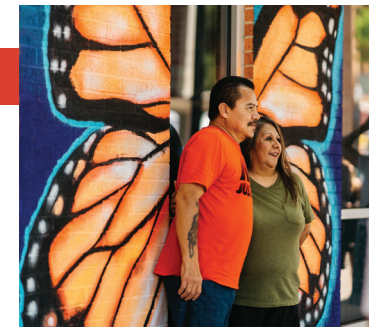
The grant enabled them to attract additional sponsorship and funds, propelling the festival's successful launch. Within three years, Waco's Independent Film Festival soared to the top 20 globally on FilmFreeway. The festival's success played a pivotal role in Waco's designation as a State of Texas Film Friendly Community. The festival's impact goes beyond showcasing films to include workshops, technical coaching, and an innovative script competition where draft film scripts are performed by local theatre groups. The prize includes support for the winner to make their movie in Waco.

We GROW and SUPPORT Public Art

Since 2017, Creative Waco has collaborated with philanthropists, community members, property owners, and our city partners to transform visionary ideas into artworks that resonate throughout our entire community.

We have commissioned and installed over \$2 million in public art showcasing the diverse talents of artists from Waco, across the United States and even as far away as Australia and Slovenia.

In 2022, we joined forces with the City of Waco and consultants Forecast Public Art to create a Public Art Strategic Plan delivered in 2023. Supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, "Bridges to Public Art" lays the groundwork for a strategic and sustainable approach to building and maintaining a public art collection—aptly named "Creative Placemaking." Over 1,100 community members, stakeholders and leaders actively contributed to the plan, opening new avenues for artists and anyone eager to invest in public art for our community.



Why Creative Placemaking?

Creative Placemaking is more than just art; it's an amalgamation of arts, culture, and design activities strategically woven into community initiatives. In Waco, the tangible impact of creative placemaking can be experienced at the vibrant Bridge Street Amphitheatre and the Waco Sculpture Zoo.

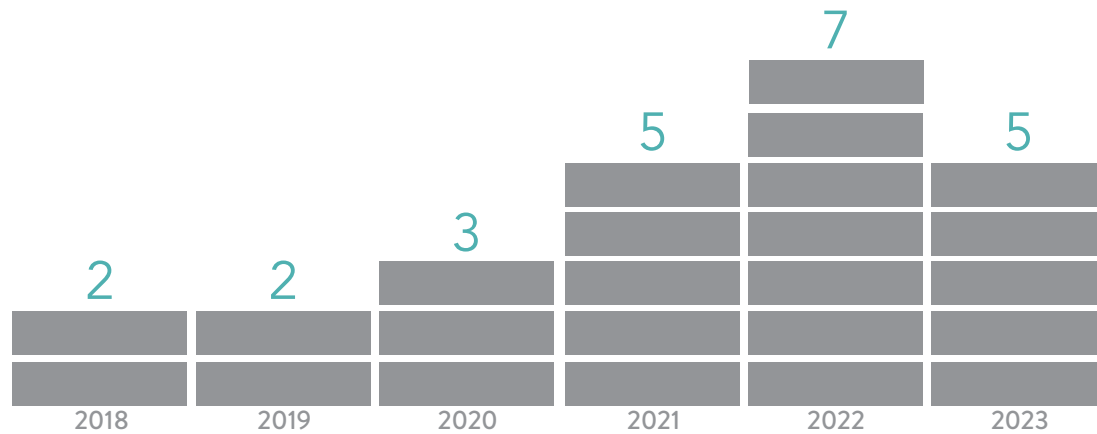
Public Art Milestones (Since 2017)

46+ Pieces of permanent public art commissioned

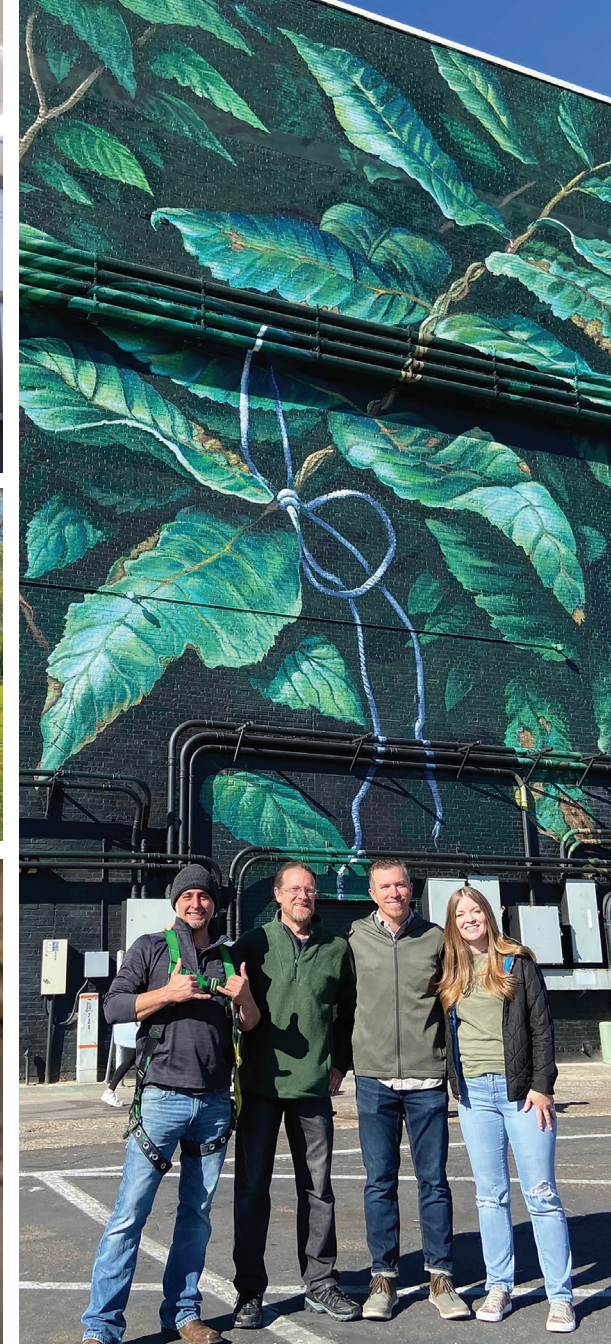
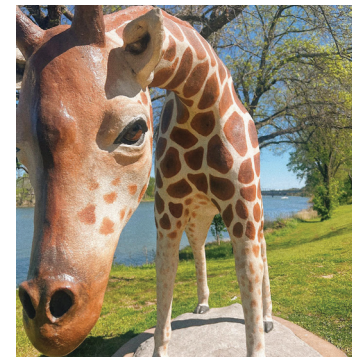
112+ Pieces of chalk (temporary) public art created

120+ Artists involved

\$2 Million+ invested



PUBLIC ART PROJECTS COMPLETED IN EACH YEAR





We GROW and SUPPORT Creative Innovation

In 2022, Creative Waco launched Air Collaborative, a nationally recognized design-thinking curriculum that unites artists, business leaders, and community stakeholders to craft innovative solutions addressing shared community challenges, in Waco. We became the first community in the nation to develop and execute this program in Spanish.

With support from the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation, Creative Waco

delivered the inaugural Air Collaborative Shift Workshop in Spanish in October 2022. Participants expressed immense joy and benefit from accessing this impactful learning tool in service of the community. In a context where 35% of our community identifies as Spanish speakers, providing equitable language access ensures that the talents and ideas of Spanish speakers are integral to creative problem-solving, particularly for issues in which they are stakeholders.

The success of this pilot paved the way for a Spanish language Shift workshop engaging Waco ISD high school students. The program's accessibility has generated exciting new cultural opportunities and programming and emerged as a source of pride, engagement, and cultural identity for individuals who often lack opportunities for their voices and ideas to be heard. Testimonials from students underscore the transformative impact:



"I will not be ashamed of my language and my roots anymore."

Our next steps include piloting a bilingual version of the program and expanding its reach into corporate and other contexts. For example, FEMA has recognized the potential of Air Collaborative for generating creative solutions in disaster relief efforts.



We Activate the Cultural District

We work with arts organizations and other partners across the City and County to support and create live arts programming in our downtown core.

In 2016, we brought our community together to apply for recognition as a State of Texas Cultural District. That success has given Waco access to cultural district funding. Over the last year, it helped us bring initiatives such as:

Chalk Waco

A celebration of art, food, fashion, and fun for all in Downtown Waco!

24,000 attendees
60 artists
60 sponsors
50 musicians
 over **100** vendors



Dia de los Muertos Parade and Festival

Waco's largest Dia de los Muertos Celebration!

OCTOBER 2022	OCTOBER 2023
6,000 attendees	6,500 attendees
44 parade entries	55 parade entries
5 acts	7 acts
50 vendors	53 vendors



Levitt AMP Waco Music Series

Annual free, family-friendly concert series!

APRIL - JULY 2023

- Wacoans secured our community a top 10 spot in a national voting competition to win the grant
- 10 free live music concerts including family-friendly activities and local vendors
- Showcases local visual artists and local and national musicians with a focus on original music that features Waco's outstanding musical past, present and future
- Three-year concert series from 2023-2025 at the Bridge Street Plaza Amphitheatre



We also support other programs that help activate the Cultural District, such as

- Public Art Creation
- Juneteenth Festivities
- arts organizations
- Waco Family & Faith International Film Festival
- Waco Cultural Arts Fest
- 7th Street Pedestrian Plaza
- And dozens of programs across our community in art, design, sculpture, theatre, dance, music, writing, film, and fashion

Waco warmly welcomes an average of 35,000 visitors each week and we invite them to enjoy "one more" hour, meal, event, activity, or overnight stay exploring our community and experiencing a cultural journey within our vibrant city.

Join in the fun and discover your Waco with the array of experiences that await you. Sign up at WacoInsider.com to receive a weekly newsletter featuring a list of live events and activities.

We Do Research and Collect Data

Our pursuit of understanding the arts' impact on our community drives us to conduct thorough research and gather data, exploring dimensions like education and economic influence. Collaborating closely with partners, we transform these insights into actionable strategies, involving diverse stakeholders to ensure our initiatives resonate deeply. Our commitment to community voices echoes through living documents—the Waco Cultural Plan and Waco Public Art Strategic Plan—shaping our every endeavor.

In 2022 and 2023 Creative Waco participated with communities across the USA in Americans For the Arts' 6th Arts and Economic Prosperity Study (AEP6). Locally, we partnered with 57 non-profit cultural organizations, collecting over 1,200 surveys. Results were released in October 2023. We learned that:

- Waco's non-profit arts and cultural organizations grew from an annual economic impact of \$65 million in 2015 to over \$74 million in 2022-23, far outstripping the national trend where arts economic impact remains below pre-pandemic levels.
- When arts activities happen in our downtown cultural district, audience members are more likely to enhance their experience with meals, drinks, and other social activities. On average, that triples their economic impact...and helps our downtown businesses thrive.
- Texas students that are highly engaged in the arts have better school attendance, are up to 112% more likely to have exceptional standardized test scores, and are 40% more likely to graduate and further their education. (Texas Cultural Trust 2023 State of the Arts Report)

What's Next?

Implementing the Public Art Strategic Plan

We want to work with stakeholders to develop new opportunities to bring great art and captivating design to public and private spaces that represent and enrich our diverse community.



A Riverside Performing Arts Facility

Bursting with talent, ideas, and eager audiences, Waco's performing arts sector is poised for a transformative leap forward, but constrained by lack of suitable spaces. A downtown performing arts facility will be a game-changing addition, allowing existing talent to flourish, and introducing performing arts experiences that 95% of Wacoans currently access outside our community.

In 2022, Keen Independent Research unveiled a compelling feasibility study highlighting the need for performing arts infrastructure in Waco, and fueling our commitment to this visionary project. Developed collaboratively with the City of Waco, award-winning OMA architects, and local arts stakeholders, the innovative conceptual design features a 2,000-seat auditorium, a dynamic black box theatre, a broadcast and recording studio, and a multitude of flexible, programmable indoor and outdoor spaces. "We are working alongside our city and stakeholder partners to determine how to move forward with this world-class facility."

Be the Spark!

Become a year-round catalyst for arts and cultural growth in Waco. As a Creative Spark, you will be the first to hear about new initiatives and receive VIP access to Waco's premier cultural events!

creativewaco.org/donate



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