



NEWPORT BEACH

City Council Staff Report

February 24, 2026
Agenda Item No. 9

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Melissa Hartson, Library Services Director - 949-717-3801,
mhartson@newportbeachca.gov

PREPARED BY: Rebecca Lightfoot, Library Services Manager - 949-717-3819,
rlightfoot@newportbeachca.gov

TITLE: Cultural Arts Grants Fiscal Year 2025-26

ABSTRACT:

The sum of \$30,000 has been provided in Fiscal Year 2025-26 to fund specific cultural or artistic programs as approved by the City Council. The City Arts Commission has the responsibility to review all programs and requests for support from arts groups and make recommendations for funding to the City Council. The Arts Commission reviewed grant funding proposals from eight local arts organizations and recommends funding for all eight organizations, totaling \$30,000.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
- b) Approve recommended recipients for Fiscal Year 2025-26 Cultural Arts Grants as selected by the City Arts Commission in accordance with City Council Policy I-10, *Culture and Arts Grants*.

DISCUSSION:

City Council Policy I-10, *Culture and Arts Grants* (Attachment A) recognizes the importance of promoting culture and arts within Newport Beach. In Fiscal Year 2025-26, \$30,000 is budgeted for specific cultural or artistic programs as approved by the City Council.

The City Arts Commission (Commission) is responsible for reviewing all programs and requests for support from arts groups and then making recommendations for funding to the City Council for its review and approval. City Council Policy I-10 defines arts groups as those involved in visual, musical, theater, dance, crafts, performing and literary activities. The Commission considers the following in order of preference for granting support:

1. Local arts groups located within the City of Newport Beach and offering programs to city residents; and
2. Regional arts groups located in Orange County and offering programs to city residents; and
3. Arts groups located in California and performing or offering programs to city residents.

Groups not offering programs or services to local residents are not eligible for support from the City.

The Commission received written grant proposals from eight organizations, which combined totaled \$34,700 for free cultural arts programming for the Newport Beach community in Fiscal Year 2025-26. Grant applications included:

ORGANIZATION	REQUEST
Backhausdance	\$4,000
Baroque Music Festival, Corona del Mar	\$4,500
Choral Arts Initiative	\$3,500
Emerald Magic Events Inc.	\$5,000
Pacific Chorale	\$5,000
Pacific Symphony	\$5,000
South Coast Repertory	\$5,000
Wildlife Jewels	\$2,700
TOTAL FUNDING	\$34,700

The Commission considered the eight applications using the guidance as defined in City Council Policy I-10. Furthermore, each arts organization was evaluated considering the following additional criteria:

Baseline Criteria:

- application and report complete and on time
- arts organization (not individual artists)
- nonprofit organization
- Newport Beach geographic focus

Selective Criteria:

I. Service to the Public

- promotion and outreach
- audience development and participation
- safety and accessibility
- program diversity
- community service

II. Artistic/Programmatic Excellence

- ideas and creativity
- production

III. Managerial/Fiscal Competence

- mission and goals
- organizational management
- financial management

After careful deliberation, the Commission approved grant funding for eight arts organizations, totaling \$30,000, at its regular meeting on February 12, 2026.

The recommended grantees and funding include:

ORGANIZATION	RECOMMENDED AMOUNT
Backhausdance	\$4,000
Baroque Music Festival, Corona del Mar	\$4,500
Choral Arts Initiative	\$3,000
Emerald Magic Events Inc.	\$4,000
Pacific Chorale	\$5,000
Pacific Symphony	\$5,000
South Coast Repertory	\$3,000
Wildlife Jewels	\$1,500
TOTAL FUNDING	\$30,000

Backhausdance will present *Dance Expressions: Creativity and Choreography*, a school-community based contemporary dance residency in partnership with Newport-Mesa Unified School District (NMUSD) secondary schools (Corona del Mar Middle/High School, Back Bay High School and Newport Harbor High School) from September-December 2026, and culminating in a Fall 2026 Student Showcase. This program offers students an immersion into working with a professional dance company.

The Baroque Music Festival, Corona del Mar, will present music by Handel. Grant funds will support fees and travel for two soloists and eight Los Angeles-based singers. They will also subsidize student rush tickets, open dress rehearsals, and a Baroque 101 symposium for local music educators, students, festival subscribers and donors. Newport Beach NMUSD students will be able to attend the dress rehearsal and opening concert in June, and will learn about the detailed dress rehearsal process, ask questions and explore instruments.

Choral Arts Initiative proposes *Memory and Renewal*, a public contemporary choral performance in May 2026 featuring works exclusively by living composers and offers Newport Beach residents an engaging artistic experience centered on themes of memory, community and renewal.

Emerald Magic Events will present *Classical in the Park*, featuring two classical music concerts at the Bonita Creek Community Center and the Newport Beach Junior Lifeguard Building in August and September 2026, respectively. The concerts will showcase performers from the Orange County Youth Symphony, showcasing their talent alongside professional musicians.

Pacific Chorale's chamber choir will present a performance of Eric Whitacre's *The Sacred Veil* at Our Lady Queen of Angels Church in March 2026. This deeply moving work – created in collaboration with poet Charles Anthony Silvestri – traces a journey of love, loss and healing. The program will also feature Whitacre's transcendent *Three Songs of Faith*. The Chorale will also present December's Carols by Candlelight, a favorite of locals and visitors alike.

Pacific Symphony will use grant funds for the Class Act Music Education Program at Newport Coast Elementary School. This program places union musicians into local schools where students receive the value of music learning from teaching artists.

South Coast Repertory will utilize grant funding for the Theatre for Young Audiences free school-day matinee performances of *Cinderella: A Salsa Fairy Tale*, a bilingual family-friendly musical, including 14 free school-day matinees for local students from schools within Newport Beach.

Wildlife Jewels will use the grant to fund a new visual arts program consisting of three free public-collaborative painting events where Newport Beach residents will collectively create three-large-scale artworks on textile canvas, culminating in a public community showcase event. The project promotes community involvement and awareness of the visual arts while celebrating Newport Beach's coastal wildlife and sense of place.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The adopted budget includes sufficient funding for this purchase. It will be expensed to the City Grants account in the Cultural and Arts Division, 01060603-821006.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the City Council find this action is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the City Council considers the item).

ATTACHMENT:

Attachment A – City Council Policy I-10, *Culture and Arts Grants*