



HMONG CULTURAL CENTER

Koom Haum Hmoob Kab Lis Kev Cai

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We are writing from the Hmong Cultural Center in St. Paul. In 2022, our organization is celebrating its 30th year of teaching the community about Hmong folk arts traditions and providing programming to teach the broader community about Hmong culture, history and contributions to Minnesota. Our new storefront museum 3 blocks west of the capital on University Avenue was launched in December 2021 following an unfortunate delay resulting from racially-motivated vandalism (which received extensive media attention) just as we were set to have our grand opening in September 2021. Our museum teaches about Hmong culture, history, and contributions to Minnesota. It is the first stand-alone Hmong museum open to the public in the state. We would like to invite legislators and the general community to come visit our new museum.

In a seminal recent report, *Not Just Money: Equity Issues in Cultural Philanthropy* from the Helicon Collaborative and the Surdna Foundation, the following enduring national trends in philanthropic and nonprofit arts giving were noted including among Twin Cities arts and cultural institutions.

“Just 2 percent of all cultural institutions receive nearly 60 percent of all contributed revenue, up approximately 5 percentage points over a decade. Very few organizations of color or cultural groups based in low-income communities are included in this large-budget group.” (Italics added).

Unfortunately, these trends are also quite notable with the state appropriated arts and cultural heritage dollars allocated to the Legacy funds. By far, the two largest grant pools are associated with the Minnesota State Arts Board and the Minnesota Historical Society. Both organizations have a long and continuing history of granting the vast bulk of Legacy dollars to larger and more mainstream cultural heritage and arts organizations. Perusing the grants list of SAB and MHS in recent years, clearly show where the bulk of the grant dollars are going. At SAB, by far the largest amounts go to larger, mainstream arts organizations through the Operating Support program. At MHS, the Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grant program almost exclusively provides larger grants to internal MHS projects or county historical societies. Most cultural heritage and arts organizations based in communities of color only have a realistic chance to earn modestly sized project grants in the \$15,000-\$30,000 range from the Minnesota State Arts Board and a maximum of \$10,000 for a project grant from the Minnesota Historical Society.

For this reason, we believe the efforts of the Minnesota House in the past session to fund direct appropriations to many arts and cultural heritage organizations based in communities of color made so much sense, particularly at this time of magnified social justice concerns and increased attention to ethnic and racial disparities in our Minnesota institutions. Furthermore, the Minnesota House voted in their Legacy Bill to also create grant pools of competitive funds available to different communities of color including

Asian and Pacific Islanders, African Communities and Latino Communities under the Minnesota Cultural Identity Grant Appropriation to the Minnesota Humanities Center. The purpose of these pools of funding was to ensure that these communities would have access to a greater amount of arts and cultural heritage dollars than has historically occurred in the past (though these allocated amounts were still quite modest compared to those assigned to the SAB and MHS grant programs).

Unfortunately, the final version of the 2022-23 Legacy bill removed the direct appropriations to each and every one of the communities of color arts and cultural heritage organizations that were included in the House Legacy bill. Not only that, the competitive grant pools designated for specific communities of color (i.e. Asian and Pacific Islander, African, Latino, etc) included in the Minnesota Humanities Center's Minnesota Community Identity appropriation were also taken out of the language of the final 2022-23 Legacy bill.

Given the documented cultural/racial disparities in arts and cultural and Legacy funding in Minnesota and the largely unsuccessful efforts to ensure a more representative Legacy bill in this past cycle, we strongly hope the Minnesota Humanities Center will make every effort to ensure that grant funds from the Minnesota Cultural Identity program are broadly accessible to arts and cultural organizations and artists representative of communities of color in the 2022-23 grantmaking process. In particular, we feel that established cultural heritage organizations (with a long track record of successfully implementing programming on the ground) and based in communities of color that have traditionally not had access to substantial supporting funds from the Minnesota State Arts Board or the Minnesota Historical Society or direct appropriations from the Legacy funds should receive some priority in grantmaking. Speaking more generally, going forward, we hope our legislators in both the House and Senate will work to substantively decrease cultural/racial disparities in arts and cultural heritage funding in future Legacy bills.

Thank you for allowing us to share our thoughts.

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