

Spring 2017

# Arts Tax Advocacy Playbook

Updated 2.13.17

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## Situation

Portland's Arts Education and Access Fund (the "arts tax") was passed by 62% of voters in November 2012. The tax has been fraught with controversy since its inception, including questions about its fairness and constitutionality. It is important to note that RACC has no authority in administering or collecting the tax, but focuses its efforts on stewarding the funds well; educating the public how the arts tax works and what its impacts are; and lobbying city leaders to be more proactive in communicating the positive benefits of the tax and the many arts activities it funds.

The negative press has subsided somewhat over the last two years, although legal questions remain and the Oregon Supreme Court will make a final ruling on the constitutionality of the tax in the spring of 2017. Collections have failed to meet expectations with a 72% compliance rate, netting about \$9.2 million in annual revenue – significantly less than the \$12 million per year anticipated. The city recently began sending overdue accounts to a collections agency, which is expected to result in more than \$1 million in back-taxes paid, and a gradual improvement of the collection rate over time.

Despite these revenue shortfalls and lingering controversies, the tax does generate sufficient funding to pay for one arts specialist for every 500 K-5 students in Portland's six public school districts. But revenues have not been sufficient to meet the aspirational goal of providing RACC's General Operating Support organizations with 5% of their eligible revenue, and very few "arts access" grants have been awarded in direct service to communities of color, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, residents east of 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and other underrepresented neighborhoods in Portland.

In the fall of 2016, RACC hosted several discussions with arts leaders to discuss these funding shortfalls and develop some advocacy and communication strategies on behalf of the sector. Those meetings resulted in a call for RACC to invest more resources in strategic advocacy work, and participating arts leaders articulated several goals that RACC will embrace moving forward:

- **Our short term goal** is to educate the public about the arts tax, its impacts, and the fact that payment is due on April 18. Because the city itself refers to it as the "arts tax," and that's what taxpayers know it as, RACC and arts organizations agreed to start using the phrase "arts tax" when illustrating how these taxpayer funds are making a difference in our community.
- **Our medium-range goal** is to make the case for Portland City Council to add \$3M/year ongoing to RACC's budget for General Operating Support and Arts Equity Grants in the next 2-3 years.
- **Our long-term goal** is to consider a ballot measure for the 2020 General Election: shall Portlanders modify the arts tax to make it more equitable (progressive) and to raise more funds? The result of a "no" vote would be to keep the tax as is.

This playbook was developed in February, 2017 to help arts organizations achieve the short term goal of raising awareness and goodwill for the arts throughout the year, especially leading up to tax day on April 18.

## **Taking Action: Communications Strategy, Messages and Facts**

### **Strategy:**

- Arts organizations should collectively promote the impacts of the arts tax throughout the year, but especially during the months of February, March and April leading up to tax day (April 18, 2017).
- Communicate the benefits for K-5 schoolchildren first, followed by the benefits to the community at large through arts tax funding for your organization's mission and programs. (We recommend that you avoid talking about how the arts tax has stabilized or sustained your organization; keep your talking points community-centric. The arts tax is for everyone.)
- Arts organizations are encouraged to use a new Arts Tax emblem in advertising and collateral materials, connecting the dots for taxpayers with the phrase, "Your Arts Tax Dollars At Work."

### **Key Messages:**

- Thanks to the arts tax, every elementary school in the City of Portland now has an art, music or dance teacher.
- The arts tax also helps organizations like \_\_\_\_\_ fulfill our mission of \_\_\_\_\_.
- With funding from the arts tax, dozens of nonprofit arts organizations are expanding access to the arts by providing free and low-cost arts experiences for underserved communities throughout the City of Portland. (An example of your own access program, if you have one.)

### **Facts and Figures:**

- Before the arts tax, elementary schools in Portland had just 31 art and music teachers. Today, the total number of K-5 arts specialists is 91.
- Before the arts tax, City of Portland funding for nonprofit arts and culture activity was \$7.23 per capita. Today, with the arts tax in place, that figure is \$10.19 per capita.
- In 2017, RACC will invest \$1.9 million of arts tax funds to support more than 2.2 million arts experiences provided by 48 nonprofit arts and culture organizations. 38 of these groups participate in the Arts for All program and provide more than 10,000 tickets each year to low-income Oregonians for only \$5 each.
- Last year, RACC distributed an additional \$69,380 of arts tax funds to 21 organizations that provide arts-related services for communities of color, immigrants, refugees, people with disabilities, LGBTQ communities, East Portlanders and other underrepresented populations.

## Timeline: Communications Schedule

- **February 13-14:** (Valentine's Day is February 14.) Launch **#pdxlovesart** campaign on social media: tell your followers how much you appreciate their support of your organization and the arts tax. Consider sending a valentine to Portland's elected officials, thanking them for their support of RACC and the arts tax.
- **February 15-28:** Add your organization's [1-2 sentence summary](#) of how the arts tax has benefited the community by emailing your story to [jhawthorne@racc.org](mailto:jhawthorne@racc.org). RACC will feature these stories in its March 1 newsletter.
- **March 1-31:** Develop a press release and stories for your newsletters, playbills, social media and other communication channels. Communicate the key messages on page 2 of this playbook, and highlight the impact the arts tax has had on the community through your programs.
- **April 1-18:** Use social media to remind Portland residents to pay the arts tax by April 18. (And don't forget, #pdxlovesart!)
- **April 3-7:** Reach out to your closest media contacts and let them know you are happy to talk about the impact the arts tax is having on the community through your programs. Suggest upcoming performances, exhibits, and community events that could serve as a good backdrop or B-reel for any arts tax story they might be working on.
- **April 12:** (Wednesday) RACC will distribute press release to the media emphasizing the positive benefits of the arts tax, including [impact stories provided by arts organizations](#).
- **April 13:** (Thursday) Join RACC for the annual State of the Arts presentation at Portland City Hall, 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. This is an annual opportunity to thank City Council for their support, and to urge for increased funding for arts and culture in the year ahead.
- **April 18:** (Tuesday) Arts tax payments due.
- **April 19-21:** Send thank you notes to elected officials and any media contacts who helped spread the word about the positive impacts of the arts tax.

**Arts Tax Emblem and Collateral Materials**

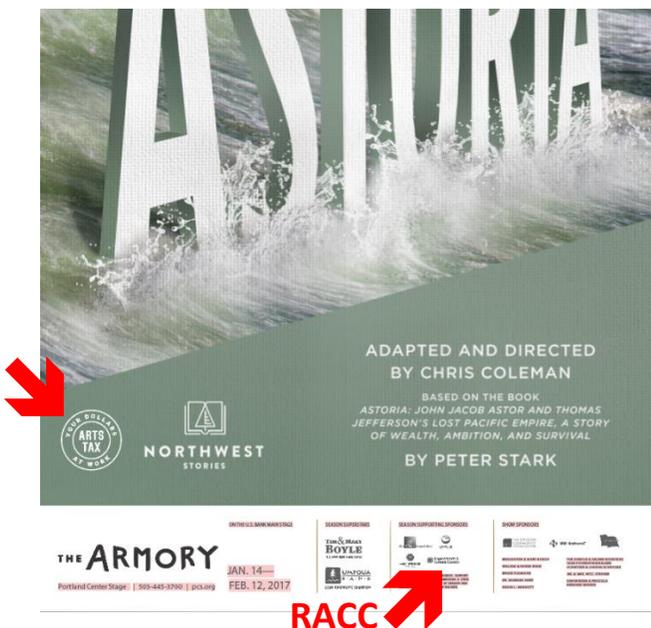
To help communicate where arts tax dollars are ultimately invested, RACC has developed a new Arts Tax emblem. We encourage arts organizations that receive arts tax funding through RACC to include this emblem in programs, posters, websites, print ads and other collateral materials:



These images are available for download in .jpg and .png formats at [www.racc.org/logos](http://www.racc.org/logos). Rules of use:

- The RACC logo must also appear on any collateral piece that also bears the Arts Tax emblem.
- Although the emblem can be used like a funder logo, we encourage organizations to place it more prominently whenever possible – a few examples are shown below. When you supersize the Arts Tax emblem in this way, the RACC logo can appear its usual size elsewhere.
- If you place the Arts Tax emblem among your funder logos, please place it next to the RACC logo.
- It is OK to rotate the mark and have it appear like a stamp if you wish.

*Application examples:*



### **A note to Artslandia customers:**

Artslandia can help you place the Arts Tax emblem in your March and April playbills, including placement on your event title page if you so choose.

### **Press Releases and Media Outreach**

Each arts organization is encouraged to reach out to its own media contacts during the month of March with information about the positive impacts of the arts tax, and unique stories about how the arts tax makes Portland a better place. Headline suggestions include:

- “Portland’s arts tax funds art and music teachers for every student, improves arts access for every resident”
- “[Name of Organization] serves [how many and what type of audience] every year, thanks to the arts tax.”
- “[Name of Organization] receives [amount] from RACC and the arts tax annually to serve Portland residents through [type of programming].”

Other facts and quotes you can include in your release, if you choose:

- In November 2012, 62% of Portland voters overwhelmingly passed Ballot Measure 26-146 to create the Arts Education & Access Fund, now known as the “arts tax.” This innovative fund directly supports art and music teachers for all K-5 students in Portland, and provides grants to nonprofit organizations that are engaging city residents in cultural experiences and creative expression opportunities.
- Before the arts tax was approved, the city’s six school districts had a total of 31 art and music teachers. Today, thanks to the arts tax, there is one arts specialist for every 380 students – a total of 91 art, music and dance teachers in all.
- “The arts tax has accomplished its goal of funding an arts specialist for every K-5 student in Portland – and that’s something we can all be proud of,” said Eloise Damrosch, executive director of the Regional Arts & Culture Council (RACC). “Now, we are working to improve arts tax collection rates so that RACC can invest more in local nonprofit organizations that are bringing creative and cultural experiences to every Portland resident.”
- The arts tax is due Tuesday, April 18, 2017. Pay online at [www.artstax.net](http://www.artstax.net).
- A summary of arts tax grants to nonprofit organizations can be found online at [www.racc.org/aeafgrants](http://www.racc.org/aeafgrants). For stories about the arts tax and its impacts, visit [www.racc.org/advocacy/arts-tax-impact-stories/](http://www.racc.org/advocacy/arts-tax-impact-stories/) or search social media for #pdxlovesart.

## **Other Communications Suggestions**

**LOVE LETTERS.** Send thank you notes or Valentines to Portland elected officials.

**Mayor Ted Wheeler**  
mayorwheeler@PortlandOregon.gov

**Commissioner Nick Fish**  
nick@portlandoregon.gov

**Commissioner Chloe Eudaly**  
Chloe@ portlandoregon.gov

**Commissioner Dan Saltzman**  
dan@portlandoregon.gov

**Commissioner Amanda Fritz**  
amanda@portlandoregon.gov

**Mailing address for all:**  
Portland City Hall  
1221 SW 4th Avenue  
Portland, OR 97204

**NEWSLETTER ARTICLES.** Convert your press release into stories that can appear in your newsletters, playbills and email blasts.

**SOCIAL MEDIA.** Post your articles to facebook, twitter and other social media channels using the hashtag #PDXlovesart.

**CURTAIN SPEECHES.** Before the performance, thank Portlanders for the arts tax.

**CLIENT TESTIMONIALS.** Invite one of your constituents to write a story or speak at your event about the impact your organization has had on them personally, and how the arts tax helped make that experience possible. RACC would like to share these types of stories too – please email [jhawthorne@racc.org](mailto:jhawthorne@racc.org).

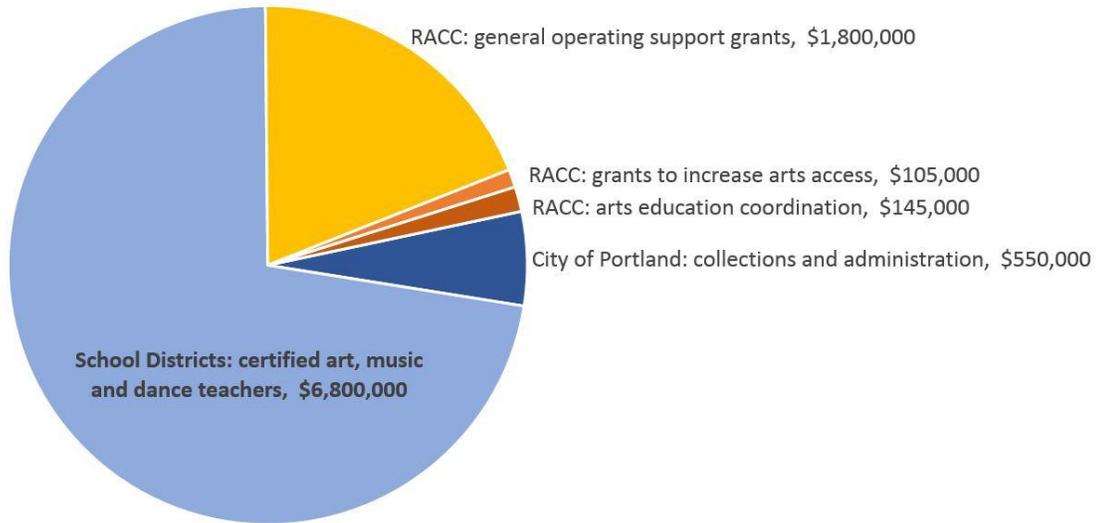
**VIDEO.** If your organization produces videos, consider one that tells your client testimonial and arts tax impact story.

**VOLUNTEERS.** Train volunteers to educate audiences and answer questions about the arts tax in your lobby.

## FAQs

### **Q: How much does the arts tax raise, and how is it distributed?**

The city disburses funds to school districts and to RACC. Based on an annual revenue projection of \$9.4 million, the Fund is intended to be distributed approximately as follows:



### **Q: How does RACC decide who receives arts tax funds?**

RACC currently distributes arts tax funding through two grant programs: General Operating Support (GOS) and Arts Equity Grants. RACC is also creating new grant programs to distribute arts tax dollars as capacity-building grants for culturally specific organizations, and to fund equity projects and initiatives within GOS organizations. Community volunteers evaluate all applications and recommend funding amounts to the RACC Board. For more information, including funding criteria, grant guidelines and deadlines, visit [racc.org/grants](http://racc.org/grants).

## **More questions?**

- Visit [www.artstax.net](http://www.artstax.net) and [www.racc.org/aeaf](http://www.racc.org/aeaf).
- Contact:  
Jeff Hawthorne  
Director of Community Engagement  
Regional Arts & Culture Council  
[jhawthorne@racc.org](mailto:jhawthorne@racc.org)  
503-823-5258