



# APPLICATION

## FY24 Community Reinvestment Funds

Administrative Services Department  
 101 E. Orange St., PO Box 429, Hillsborough, NC 27278  
 919-732-1270  
[www.hillsboroughnc.gov](http://www.hillsboroughnc.gov)

ORGANIZATION INFORMATION	
Organization Name:	Hillsborough Arts Council
Address:	102 N Churton St, Hillsborough, NC 27278-2534
Website:	<a href="http://www.hillsboroughartscouncil.org">www.hillsboroughartscouncil.org</a>
Point of Contact Name:	Mollie Thomas
Point of Contact Phone:	919-643-2500
Point of Contact Email:	<a href="mailto:director@hillsboroughartscouncil.org">director@hillsboroughartscouncil.org</a>
Board of Directors: <i>Please List</i>	Joshua Collins (Chair), Michael Winger (Vice-Chair), Sara Holihan Smith (Secretary), Don Norman (Treasurer), Suher Adi (Duke Student Board Member), John Claude Bemis, Jeff Berst, Kate Brilakis, Ali Givens, David Hays, Chelsea Maier, Jeanetta Powell, Cathleen Turner

FINANCIAL INFORMATION	
Current Fiscal Year Budget:	337,028
Next Fiscal Year Anticipated Budget:	345,000
Current Year Allocation from Town of Hillsborough:	16,000
Next Fiscal Year Requested Allocation from Town of Hillsborough:	20,000

FUNDING IMPACT SECTION 1			
How will the town's funding be used to assist the organization?	Category	\$	Notes
	Current Personnel	7,500	Allocated across all program
	Current Operations	7,500	Allocated across all program
	Current Programming	1,000	Allocated across all program
	Personnel Expansion		
	Operations Expansion		
	Programming Expansion	4,000	Poet Laureate Relaunch
	Other		
	<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>\$20,000</b>

FUNDING IMPACT SECTION 2			
Please list goals, programs and initiatives for which these funds will be used:		Item	\$
Items should be specific, measurable and verifiable by the Town of Hillsborough and may be subject to contractual agreement before disbursement of funds.	1.	Payroll, overhead, and administrative costs to run Last Fridays & the Art Walk. Offering 9 months of active programming (March-November) and year-round coordination/planning efforts.	\$3,600
	2.	Payroll, overhead, and administrative costs to run Solstice Lantern Walk & Solstice Market. Activities occur November-December, with planning efforts taking 6 months worth of time and resources.	\$3,200
	3.	Payroll, overhead, and administrative costs to run Handmade Parade & Handmade Market. Activities occur in the spring, with planning efforts taking 6 months worth of time and resources.	\$2,700
	4.	Payroll, overhead, and administrative costs to run HAC's downtown office & point-of-entry for visitors, artists, and residents to learn about Hillsborough's cultural community. The Gallery & Gift Shop provides services to the public 6 days per week and provides a year-round venue for arts engagement, public information, and sales of local artwork.	\$5,500
	5.	Evaluate the former structure of the Hillsborough Poet Laureate program, including conversations with community members, literary artists, key collaborators, and other stakeholders to ensure a thoughtful relaunch. Conduct search for the next laureate, provide stipend for a multi-year commitment, facilitate town-wide engagements & events, and further spoken word programs.	\$4,000
	6.	Payroll, overhead, and administrative costs to run all other programs & services outside of HAC's flagship events. Including public art projects, ArtCycle & arts education initiatives, workshops, and other collaborative community efforts	\$1,000
	7.		
	<b>Grand Total</b>		

**SIGNATURE**

*I hereby agree to conform to all applicable laws and regulations of the Town of Hillsborough, County of Orange, and State of North Carolina (as may be applicable to my request) and certify that the above information is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.*

Signature: Mollie Thomas

Date: 4/29/2023



# Fiscal Year 2023-2024

## Hillsborough Arts Council Funding Request for the Town of Hillsborough

### **Organizational Background**

The Hillsborough Arts Council (HAC) is a community-building nonprofit arts organization that has been serving neighbors, artists, and visitors of Hillsborough, North Carolina for over 30 years. HAC is committed to providing access to the arts for educational enrichment, community development, and economic prosperity. Located in historic downtown Hillsborough, HAC's headquarters known as the Gallery & Gift Shop provides a creative environment for local artists to market and share their work.

In addition to operating the Gallery & Gift Shop year-round, HAC is well-known for presenting signature events such as Hillsborough's Last Fridays & the Art Walk, the Solstice Lantern Walk, the Handmade Parade, and various art markets, concerts, workshops, poetry showcases, and educational programs. HAC programs are designed to enhance the lives of residents in the Triangle by offering accessible, meaningful, and diverse connections with art for all demographics. With more than 40 volunteers donating thousands of hours annually, the Hillsborough Arts Council is truly a community of artists, staff, board members, and friends working to ensure the creative future of Hillsborough, North Carolina.

### **Funding Request**

The Hillsborough Arts Council respectfully requests a renewal of the funding partnership arranged with the Town of Hillsborough for the past several fiscal years. In FY 2022-2023, the Town of Hillsborough awarded HAC a community grant in the total amount of \$16,000. This funding enabled us to not only maintain our mission as our community recovered from COVID-19 challenges, but to expand our highly sought after cultural programs and arts events that have become inextricably tied with the charming identity of the town of Hillsborough.

For FY 2023-2024, we are proposing a funding partnership in the total amount of \$20,000. This amount takes into account the average 5.7% inflation rate that has impacted our local economy, the expanded services that HAC has offered our community through the hiring of multiple professional staff and the adoption of arts administration best practices, and costs related to the re-launch of Hillsborough's highly demanded Poet Laureate program. As an independent 501(c)3 organization, we rely significantly on funding support from local agencies to keep up with the rising costs of serving artists, residents, neighbors, and visitors of Hillsborough through our mission to build community through the arts. While we have invested greatly in new fundraising practices to diversify our revenue streams and become increasingly more sustainable in our operations, ongoing support from the Town is paramount to ensure that the Hillsborough Arts Council's services continue to be available for the rapidly growing numbers of residents and tourists.

HAC has demonstrated a consistent ability to provide a return on investment with local funding support, helping Hillsborough to be seen as a top cultural destination in central North Carolina. Funding the arts ensures that residents of Hillsborough have access to shared experiences and

arts engagement that enhance their quality of life. Your support of Hillsborough Arts is an investment in the programs and collaborations that are a proven and major driver of economic development, tourism, and culture in our community. This request is also in alignment with the Town of Hillsborough's comprehensive sustainability plan, which acknowledges the importance of programs hosted by the Hillsborough Arts Council.

### **Our Goals for FY 23-24**

- Relaunch HAC's Literary Arts & Poet Laureate program. Funding for literary arts programming would support the new Poet Laureate's stipend, planning costs associated with relaunching this effort, and workshops/events to promote, cultivate, and elevate diverse, local literary & spoken word artists. This program will be revised via a thorough evaluation of Hillsborough's former Poet Laureate program, benchmarking similar programs in nearby towns, and incorporating direct input from the Hillsborough community. One goal of the reimagined program will be to elevate artists early in their career so that HAC's Poet Laureate program is tailored to the size of our town and can promote a local, multi-year incumbent to more advanced career milestones.
- Continue to implement an updated list of strategic annual goals in support of a revised 3 year strategic plan.
- Adopt DEIA policies and procedures through an extensive DEIA research project led by our Board. These will include strategies to improve representation of and collaboration with the many different individuals, communities, neighborhoods, and artists who make up Hillsborough. Currently, the entire board is undertaking DEIA training which will help HAC properly administer these policies and procedures once developed. HAC also aims to continue diversifying membership among its Board of Directors.
- Strategically improve HAC's public events through the consolidation of efforts where sharing resources among programs is feasible and in the best interest of maximizing or capitalizing on event visitation, financial support, and staff/volunteer time and energy.
- Ongoing adoption and updating of best practices in arts administration, including volunteer recruitment, training, and engagement, as well as fundraising, marketing, and arts education.
- Explore opportunities for expanded physical footprint, which is already underway through HAC's lease of office space at C3 Hillsborough and through conversations with other key cultural partners, including Orange County Arts Commission and the Orange County Historical Museum.
- Work with local organizations, schools, leaders, and community groups to encourage expanded participation in the arts, including populations of Northern Orange County and others residing outside of the immediate downtown Hillsborough area.
- Maintain collaborations with other local non-profits, arts agencies, and cultural organizations, such as Orange County Historical Museum, Alliance for Historic Hillsborough, Burwell School, Eno Arts Mill/Orange County Arts Commission, the Chamber of Commerce, and more, to streamline efforts and reduce duplication of services where overlap may be most strategic.
- Finetune and implement strategic marketing plans to raise overall awareness of HAC's mission and promote Hillsborough as a top destination for arts, culture, and tourism. We've already had incredible success through our investment in a dedicated full-time Marketing Director, and are extremely optimistic about the visibility we can garner for Hillsborough's arts scene through an ongoing investment in paid marketing growth.
- Adjust and expand strategies for thoroughly tracking audience and demographic data, which can be used for internal analysis and for planning, reporting, and fund development.

- Explore additional partnerships and funding sources, including the ongoing efforts of our Sponsorship Program and individual giving Sustainer Program.

### **The Impact of Your Funding – FY 2022-2023 Progress Report**

The following is a summary of the impact your funding has made this current fiscal year and what the Hillsborough Arts Council was able to accomplish with support from the Town of Hillsborough. Without a doubt, the creation of multiple paid staff has greatly enhanced our capacity to deliver consistent, high-quality programming. It has also allowed our Board of Directors to shift their focus to governance, development, and strategic planning. The additional bandwidth has allowed HAC time to apply for more grants, revamp our fundraising committee, meet with others to creatively collaborate on programs, and successfully expand our outreach within our community.

Here are brief highlights, followed by a more complete description of our progress over the last year, thanks to you and the enthusiasm of our staff, Board of Directors, and volunteers:

- Retained a full time Executive Director
- Retained & promoted a full time Program & Marketing Director
- Re-hired a Gallery & Gift Shop Manager and promoted this role to full time with the addition of volunteer management responsibilities
- Retained a part time bookkeeper
- Recruited new board members with specialized expertise and varied perspectives to help round out HAC's board knowledge and experience base
- Adopted revised strategic goals to improve board responsibility and leadership; enrolled five board members in the Executive Service Corps of the Triangle's Board Leadership Boot Camp Series. This effort is ongoing through the end of this fiscal year and will include a holistic organizational assessment to inform HAC's strategic plan moving forward.
- Completed an internal review of the organization as a whole, taking into consideration the impacts of COVID on our social, economic, and cultural landscape and focusing on opportunities for improvements to financial procedures and fiscal policies
- Re-organized board committees, roles, and responsibilities to improve governance of the organization in relation to our expanded team of staff
- Revamped and expanded all marketing efforts, growing 50% in social media following compared to this time last year, and gaining over 26,000 website views this year
- Expanded and decentralized the Last Fridays program to drive increased tourism and economic support for local businesses, while enhancing the arts offerings around town to provide more diverse and varied options for visitors; expanded quantity & diversity of art walk venues by 40% in the last two fiscal years
- Successfully held the 7th annual Solstice Lantern Walk with record attendance on Hillsborough's River Walk, featuring the first-ever multi-faceted Solstice Market and continued partnerships with local businesses and the Home for the Holidays Gingerbread Exhibition
- Contracted and produced high-quality photography and videography that was used by countless local media outlets, as well as the Town of Hillsborough and Orange County, to promote the quality of life and cultural offerings in Hillsborough
- Maintained the Gallery and Gift Shop's expanded hours to operate 6 days per week in service of our community, with extended evening hours every Friday & Saturday, resulting in over \$60,000 put directly back into the pockets of 55+ local artists
- Enhanced arts education offerings in Hillsborough, including the continued operation of our

ArtCycle program in collaboration with local schools, as well as special workshops and art making activities, both in downtown Hillsborough and on the west end through partnership with groups at the Eno Arts Mill.

- Hosted HAC's first official fundraising event, Spring Equinox, which served as a kick-off event for the 2023 Last Fridays & the Art Walk season and garnered necessary, broadened support from the community to ensure HAC's sustainable growth
- Successfully incubated and released the River Park Concert program, now planned and coordinated independently by the Triangle Music Alliance with marketing support from HAC
- Launched a new satellite gallery in partnership with C3 Hillsborough, providing approximately 500 square feet of additional display space specifically dedicated to highlighting diverse and emerging local artists in a highly visible downtown venue

### **Without Your Support**

If HAC fails to renew funding partnership with the Town of Hillsborough, then we will struggle to keep up with our growth and investment in existing cultural programs, as well as the retention of our talented staff while we chart a sustainable future for our organization with improved operational stability. In addition to the impact on ongoing arts activities, failure to secure funding will limit new or planned efforts to:

- Relaunch the Poet Laureate program, which will provide Hillsborough's literary arts community with a meaningful outlet for celebrating & honoring local poets, authors, and writers
- Secure major individual fundraising and corporate sponsorship commitments
- Implement an updated strategic plan for organizational development
- Increase net operating income from revenue generating programs and retail sales
- Make necessary improvements to operating infrastructure, including technology
- Develop ongoing data collection systems and procedures to analyze & report on program impact
- Cultivate and foster key relationships with other community leaders and groups
- Improve community outreach and increase diversity of community partnerships
- Expand professional development opportunities for staff and board
- Implement strategic marketing plans to attract more volunteers, artists, guests, donors, and sponsors to HAC, as well as visitors, workers, residents, and families to Hillsborough
- Implement new income-earning programs, such as the integration of workshops and art-making activities as part of or in lead up to HAC's major public events

### **Program Activities**

The work of our staff and volunteers supported by this grant enables year-round arts programming, all of which benefits Hillsborough's economic and cultural climate:

1. **HAC Gallery and Gift Shop (G&GS)** operates year-round. Now open from 12-4pm (Tuesday-Sunday), with extended hours every Friday & Saturday 11am-7pm, and during Last Fridays events until 9pm. Showcasing work by over 55+ local artists, hosting pop-up events, and creating a shared space for art exhibitions that reflect the diversity and talent of our creative community. Serving over 12,000 visitors and generating over \$60,000 in income for local artists annually.

2. **Last Fridays & the Artwalk (LFAW)** occurring March-November with full programming, and the art walk continuing in January and February. Bringing both locals and visitors to downtown, River Park, and West End Hillsborough to enjoy artist receptions, workshops/demonstrations, dancewaves, makers markets, community showcases, live music, poetry/spoken word, and opportunities to actively participate in Hillsborough's shared culture and diverse traditions. Between 1,000 and 3,000 people attend each event and 75% are estimated to be tourists coming from surrounding counties/towns and other states. Local restaurants and bars report an average 30% increase in sales during LFAW compared to other Fridays of the month, some reaching sales increases as high as 80%.
3. **Solstice Lantern Walk:** Each December, we host a non-denominational, multicultural community event celebrating the hope and promise of light in darkness. On solstice night, thousands gather at the Farmer's Market Pavilion carrying handmade lanterns, often crafted from one of the popular lantern kits assembled by HAC volunteers & staff (sold out of over 500 kits prepared for 2022). Participants join in a lantern procession along the Riverwalk, admiring their creations and gently ushering in the winter season. In 2022, we expanded this event to include the first-ever Solstice Market which served as pre-walk and post-walk celebrations with live music, food/beverage vendors, and local artisans. Plus, collaborations with the Homes for the Holidays Gingerbread Exhibition and local businesses across town. Over 3,000 people were recorded in attendance. We aim to steadily expand this program over the next several years to grow towards a winter market model and will continue adding pre-event lantern making workshops to promote visitation and arts education in Hillsborough throughout the winter season.
4. **Weekend of Art in Hillsborough:** featuring the iconic grass-roots style Handmade Parade as a celebration of our community's diversity, resilience, and creative folklife. It began as a passion project of one artist volunteer, and has evolved into a beloved part of our culture here in Hillsborough. In 2022, we expanded the Parade to include the new Handmade Market with 45+ local artists, buskers, concessions, and pre-/post- parade festivities. Packaging these events with the April occurrence of Last Fridays created an enticing and highly marketable "Weekend of Art in Hillsborough" experience. We also engaged community members by inviting them to several unique workshop opportunities to build their handmade creations for the parade, and provided inspirational content and "how to" videos on social media and our website. Currently the bi-annual parade occurs only on even-numbered years. Over 3,000 people attended the Handmade Parade and Market on April 30, 2022. The next occurrence of this program is expected in spring 2024.
5. **ArtCycle** is a year-round program most active when Orange County Schools are in session that encourages the public to contribute new and used supplies to students in local art classes as well as for HAC's art-making programs. We are actively expanding this program to improve leadership, sustainability, and ownership among partnering schools so that the legacy and efforts can be carried on for years to come.
6. **Hillsborough Poet Laureate/Literary Arts Programs:** While the Poet Laureate program has not been operating for the past few years, with dedicated funding from the Town of Hillsborough this program can be relaunched to provide a special outlet for spoken word in the Triangle and another draw for visitors to Hillsborough which will bring positive economic impact to local businesses. Re-activating this program will involve an intentional investment of time into hearing from Hillsborough's literary arts community so we can be certain the

program is structured in a manner that is tailored to the size, needs, and desires of our town. Once HAC receives this feedback, the search for the next laureate can be conducted, followed by an onboarding process to facilitate & contract town-wide engagements of spoken word & other artistic events. Special workshops or performance opportunities would offer accessible literary art activities to the local community. Ultimately, we aim for Hillsborough's Laureate award and HAC's literary arts programs to serve as stepping stones for rising artists to launch further into their professional career or personal creative passions.

7. **Community/Public Art projects:** evaluated throughout the year on a case by case basis in collaboration with key cultural partners, including the Town of Hillsborough, Orange County Arts Commission, and other agencies/local businesses. HAC serves primarily in a supportive capacity, rather than a leadership role for these projects. This fiscal year, HAC is an active member of the Uproar planning committee, helping to identify sites, placement, and events related to this new county-wide public art festival.

### **Data Collection**

HAC is committed to closely tracking the impact of programming through our Gallery & Gift Shop (G&GS) in downtown Hillsborough, as well as soliciting feedback and data from partnering venues and businesses, and requesting demographic and geographic information through event registration processes. On average, HAC is consistently seeing a geographic distribution of serving 75% tourists/visitors from outside Hillsborough and 25% residents and locals through its flagship programs.

The following information speaks to the importance of HAC's economic impact on the community and the success of our public events:

- On average, retail sales at the G&GS during LFAW experiences a 277% increase compared to average daily sales not occurring during LFAW.
- On average, visitation to the G&GS during LFAW experiences a 469% increase compared to average daily visitation not occurring during LFAW.
- Local restaurants & bars reported at least 20% average increase in sales during LFAW compared to normal Fridays, often peaking at higher increases. Some restaurants have had to expand outdoor dining and reservation times to accommodate the spike in demand they experience during LFAW.
- Local galleries and art walk venues reported up to 80% average increase in visitation during LFAW compared to normal Fridays. Some venues had even higher increase rates (over 100%) due to their limited normal operating hours and the impact of LFAW on their visibility.

These statistics are shared across HAC flagship programs, with reports of similar success occurring during Solstice Lantern Walk, the Handmade Parade, and more. Additional demographic and geographic data can be provided upon request, as we continue to improve our collection and analysis of data.

### **Marketing Efforts**

We employ the following marketing and publicity efforts to engage intended audiences:

- HAC website - 26,000+ views/year
- HAC social media (unpaid/organic) - 45,000+ average reach/year



- HAC monthly newsletter - 6,100+ distribution list with 45% open rate
- HAC quarterly donor newsletter - 100+ highly engaged distribution list
- On-site marketing at events and at the G&GS - 30,000-40,000+ visitors/year
- Printed signage and flyers
- Press packages with high-quality photography and announcements to extensive list of media outlets, sent at least quarterly
- Postings to 20+ community calendars to ensure inclusion & awareness of events
- Collaborative cross-promotions with local businesses and community groups
- Radio and/or TV advertising as budget allows
- Print advertising or features in print publications as budget allows
- Paid social media advertising as budget allows
- Ongoing conversations and meetings with key collaborators

### **Collaborations and Partnerships**

The Hillsborough Arts Council serves as the primary liaison, network, and advocate of our town's creative community. All of our events are coordinated closely with external organizations, artists, and individuals. The following are groups & related programs where HAC's collaborative efforts are currently focused:

- Alliance for Historic Hillsborough
  - Visitor's Center
  - Burwell School
  - Orange County Historical Museum
- Hillsborough/Orange County Chamber of Commerce & Downtown Merchants Groups
- Orange County Schools
  - ArtCycle Program
  - International Baccalaureate Student Artist Exhibitions
  - Cedar Ridge High School WoodShop
  - Student Volunteers
  - Local Bands/Theater Departments
- Town of Hillsborough
  - Tourism Board & Tourism Development Authority
  - Public Art projects
  - Hometown Holidays & other town-wide seasonal celebrations
- Art Therapy Institute of North Carolina
- Orange County Arts Commission / Eno Arts Mill
- Music Makers Relief Foundation
- C3 Hillsborough
- Last Fridays & the Art Walk Venues
  - C3 Hillsborough
  - Carlisle & Linny Vintage Jewelry
  - Coldwell Banker Howard, Perry & Walston
  - Dwell Hillsborough
  - Hillsborough Artists Cooperative & The Skylight Gallery
  - Hillsborough Arts Council Gallery & Gift Shop
  - Hillsborough Gallery of Arts
  - Hillsborough Visitors Center
  - Hillsborough Wine Company
  - Margaret Lane Gallery

- My Delight Studio
- Orange County Historical Museum
- Paynter Law Firm
- Preservation Fund of Hillsborough
- Saltire Gallerie
- RocSite Homes
- The Ballard Agency
- The Colonial Inn
- Thomas Stevens Gallery
- Yep Roc Records
- Yonder: Southern Cocktails & Brew

- The Living Arts Collective
- Paperhand Puppet Intervention
- 123 Puppetry
- Batala Durham
- Bulltown Strutters
- Monarch Movement Company
- Jennifer Daniels Poet & Owner of Just Write Consultant, LLC
- Writer's Block Publishing: Spoken Word poetry and workshops
- Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation
- Triangle Music Alliance
- Dorothy Johnson Community Center in Fairview
- St. Matthews Episcopal Church
- Orange County Public Library
- Local photographers, videographers, & digital artists including Digital Butler & Green Rabbit Photography, Drone Data & Film, and Donn Young
- Many other local artists, businesses, venues, bars, and restaurants

Renewing the Town of Hillsborough's partnership with the Hillsborough Arts Council is not only an opportunity to keep arts at the forefront of the daily lives of residents, but ensures we continue serving as a major driver of economic development and tourism, and a facilitator of the substantial culture that Hillsborough has to offer. With your support, we can maintain the operations, staff, and community programming that makes this possible. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to hearing from you about the opportunities for partnership in FY 2023-2024 to continue building our community through the arts.

Respectfully submitted April 28, 2023 by:

*Mollie Thomas*

**Mollie Thomas**

Executive Director

[director@hillsboroughartscouncil.org](mailto:director@hillsboroughartscouncil.org)

**Hillsborough Arts Council**

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