

FUTURE FILM COALITION

Exploring Public Tax Collection Mechanisms

Case studies and a readiness framework for arts, culture, and civic organizations.

TOOLKIT 01 · SEPTEMBER 2026 EDITION

Developed as part of the Regional Civic Media Cohorts initiative.

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01

How to use this toolkit

Two regions built a dedicated public revenue stream for arts, culture, and science through voter-approved and council-approved public tax collection mechanisms. This toolkit documents how those two public tax mechanisms were authorized, governed, funded, and explained to the public through case studies, offering lessons learned and a practical framework for those committed to charting a path in your community.

This toolkit is not intended to serve as a replicable template, as every place has its own legal framework, political environment, existing institutions, and community priorities to navigate. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, this toolkit offers transferable knowledge to help readers better understand the conditions that made these possible, the groundwork that had to be laid, the cross-sector coalitions that had to be built, and the public benefit case that had to be made.

How this toolkit is organized

Each case study includes a snapshot offering a high-level overview of key program features. Both case studies are organized into four sections and follow the same arc, so you can read one program straight through or compare the sections across both case studies. The four sections are as follows:

- **Authorization Pathway:** The legal and political route, including an analysis of successful and unsuccessful attempts.
- **Governance Structure:** Who administers the money, who decides, and what is fixed in statute.
- **Funding Formula & Distribution:** How the taxpayer revenue is distributed, the grantmaking process, and who is eligible.
- **Public Messaging:** How the public benefit case was developed and shared with voters and elected officials.

A note for readers

Both case studies are tax mechanisms designed to support arts and cultural programs. If that is your field, the assessment framework applies to your work directly. We encourage readers from other fields and sectors to use the case studies as a catalyst for exploring parallels and a shared underlying question: *How can a region build durable public support for the organizations that hold its cultural and information life together?*

Introduction: What these mechanisms are

A voter-approved or council-authorized funding mechanism asks residents to contribute a small, dedicated public revenue stream to shared assets. The forms vary: sales taxes, property tax levies, excise taxes, cultural access programs, special tax districts, state-wide constitutional amendments, and dedicated trust funds to pay for a specific public service. Whether approved by voters or authorized by elected representatives, at their core is a democratic premise: communities can dedicate public revenue to support shared assets that strengthen quality of life, civic participation, education, local identity, economic vitality, and public trust.

The tax mechanisms featured in the following case studies have helped local arts and culture ecosystems establish a more durable, long-term public investment strategy with a stable source of annual funding. These mechanisms have governance structures that distribute funds across large institutions and smaller community-based organizations, supporting museums, theaters, libraries, historical societies, science centers, festivals, community arts organizations, free and reduced-cost access, school partnerships, and cultural heritage.

The same logic can apply beyond traditional arts and culture.

Voter-approved public revenue can support regional civic media, independent and local journalism, documentary and public-interest storytelling, and other forms of community media and regional communications infrastructure. This framework builds on emerging research into [Civic Media 2.0](#), the idea that local news, independent journalism, documentary, community media, cultural storytelling, and public-interest information should be understood as essential regional infrastructure contributing towards healthy, informed communities and improved quality of life.

If communities can vote to fund transit, parks, libraries, conservation, stadiums, schools, and cultural access, they can also examine mechanisms to fund trusted local information ecosystems, public-interest media, and cultural storytelling.

03

Anatomy of a public funding mechanism

This toolkit provides an analysis across six components, which can be used to assist in the analysis of other existing tax mechanism programs.

1. Revenue source

The revenue source is where the tax is coming from, and who pays the tax. Both programs in this toolkit use a sales tax as the revenue source, which is paid for by anyone who shops in the jurisdiction.

2. Rate and scale

The tax rate and projected annual revenue from the tax. Both initiatives in this toolkit use a tax rate of one tenth of one percent, which is one cent on every ten dollars spent. These small tax rates can generate meaningful sums: Based on the most recent data available, Colorado's seven-county tax district generated \$85 million in 2024, and King County collected \$95.8 million in tax revenue in 2025.

3. Authorization pathway

The process that allowed for the proposed tax mechanism to be legally created, and who had to say yes. The two case studies followed different authorization pathways based on their local and state laws: SCFD is a voter-approved special district created under Colorado statute. Doors Open was established by King County Council vote under councilmanic authority, which was made possible after the state legislature amended the enabling statute (Cultural Access Washington: [RCW 36.160](#)), which now permits cities and counties to establish cultural access taxes through councilmanic authority without a public vote.

4. Governing body

Who administers the public funds. King County designated an existing cultural agency rather than building a new one. Colorado created a special district, alongside [County Cultural Councils](#) comprised of local volunteers appointed by the board of county commissioners or city council to review applications and recommend funding.

5. Distribution formula and eligibility

The distribution formula determines how the public funds are distributed to organizations. This includes tier structures, set-asides, geographic requirements, and eligibility floors. For eligibility criteria, exclusions are often

statutory (legislative) rather than discretionary (administrative). Local and state officials are knowledgeable about navigating these statutes, which can vary by location.

6. Accountability and renewal cycle

Oversight, reporting requirements, and authorization term. A reauthorization process helps a program remain responsive to community needs. SCFD is currently in the midst of a reauthorization cycle for 2028, and voters have approved the ballot measure four times consecutively in its 38-years of existence. Washington's Doors Open levy is on a seven-year term under the state cultural access statute.

04

CASE STUDY 01

Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD)

Location: Metro Denver, Colorado

About this case study

This case study is based on publicly available research and interviews (conducted in Summer 2026) with current SCFD Executive Director Andrea Albo; former SCFD directors Jane Hansberry and Deborah Jordy; Ciruli Associates President Floyd Ciruli; and Su Teatro Cultural and Performing Arts Center Executive Artistic Director Tony Garcia.

Snapshot: Scientific and Cultural Facilities District	
MECHANISM	Voter-approved special tax district
JURISDICTION	Seven-county Metro Denver region
REVENUE SOURCE	Local sales and use tax
RATE	0.1%, described in campaigns as one cent of every \$10 spent
YEAR ESTABLISHED	1988
AUTHORIZATION PATHWAY	Public vote, with reauthorization by public vote
ANNUAL REVENUE	Nearly \$85 million distributed in 2024
ORGANIZATIONS FUNDED	304 organizations funded in 2024
RENEWAL CYCLE	Reauthorized 1994, 2004 and 2016; process underway for 2028

Sources: [SCFD 2024 Annual Report](#); [SCFD statute](#) and [SB16-016](#).

Overview

The Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) is a voter-approved special tax district that funds arts, cultural, and scientific organizations across seven counties in Metro Denver. Created in 1988, amidst state and local cultural funding cuts during a severe economic downturn in Colorado, civic leaders, institutional trustees, and community advocates came together in search of ways to sustain cultural funding before these community assets were lost.

Inspired partly by emerging regional public funding paths in other communities, such as St. Louis's property tax-supported cultural district, SCFD leaders designed a funding mechanism that could support cultural institutions beyond individual jurisdictions. The reasoning behind this was out of a recognition that Denver's cultural institutions were regional assets shared by residents across the seven counties in Metro Denver, rather than these resources strictly offering public benefit to the county in which they were located.

The creation of this multi-district model required developing a shared purpose and alignment among institutions with different missions and priorities, which required time for coalition-building, organizing, and negotiation. Eventually, the coalition centered on the common thread of public access and youth education as a shared public benefit offered across the various scientific and cultural institutions, which has remained SCFD's clearest public messaging and its strongest source of community support ever since.

Funded by a 0.1% local sales and use tax, one cent of every \$10 spent, SCFD distributes funding to arts, cultural, and scientific organizations ranging from volunteer-led community groups to internationally recognized museums. In 2024 it distributed nearly \$85 million to 304 organizations.

Authorization Pathway

Metro Denver voters approved the district in 1988 and have reauthorized it three times, in 1994, 2004, and 2016. A process is now underway toward an anticipated 2028 reauthorization.

Periodic renewal keeps the district adaptive to changing needs and gives residents a recurring say in how their tax dollars are used. It also imposes a real cost. Each reauthorization cycle entails a multi-year campaign and a substantial time commitment, which can be demanding for smaller stakeholder organizations. The 2016 campaign raised more than \$2.5 million, according to Colorado Public Radio, with the process running on volunteer labor at scale. However, the burden of conducting a multi-year campaign is outweighed by the potential for a high multi-year return-on-investment for the Metro Denver community.

The original SCFD campaign used polls organized by CATZ (Citizens for Arts to Zoo), a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization, to assess voter appetite and shape public messaging and campaign strategy. The research found strong regional pride and support for iconic institutions across the seven counties, while highlighting voters' desire outside Denver for broader access to the region's cultural resources. Subsequent reauthorization processes have continued to use polls to gauge public sentiment and inform messaging and strategy.

The process for the 2028 reauthorization cycle includes independent research and landscape analysis, a district-wide listening tour, an initial proposal development, stakeholder consensus building, and a final proposal for board action. After board action, the proposal goes to a bill drafter, then through the state legislature (Colorado House and Senate). If the governor signs, the SCFD board would then pass a resolution for the November election. An external campaign will commence (without SCFD's involvement), leading up to the November 2028 public vote on reauthorization. Subject to voter approval, the majority of statutory changes would take effect in July 2030.

SCFD leadership describes this work as iterative, using insights from early interviews, funding distribution data across ten years, and district-wide listening sessions to inform subsequent phases of the process toward reauthorization.

The external campaign is run by Citizens for Arts to Zoo (CATZ), a volunteer-led 501(c)(4) organization independent of the district.

Governance Structure

- **SCFD Board of Directors:** Eleven members: one representing each of the seven counties, and four appointed by the Colorado governor.
- **SCFD County Cultural Councils:** Makes recommendations for the distribution of Tier III funds within their county. Final recommendations are reviewed and approved by the county commissioners or city council and by the SCFD board of directors.
- **SCFD Partners:** The Collaborative of the SCFD, The Colorado Business Committee for the Arts (CBCA).
- **State statute:** The state statute sets a distribution formula across the three funding tiers, specifically names the organizational beneficiaries and fixes allocation percentages for Tier 1, and defines the Tier II distribution basis as annual operating income, annual paid attendance, and documented free attendance

Funding Allocation & Distribution

Three-tiered distribution model overview for 2024			
TIER	SHARE UP TO \$38M IN COLLECTED TAX REVENUE	SHARE ABOVE \$38M IN COLLECTED TAX REVENUE	ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED (2024)
TIER I	64%	57%	5
TIER II (REGIONAL)	22%	26%	34
TIER III (LOCAL)	14%	17%	265

Source: SCFD [2024 Annual Report](#) and [SB16-016](#). As outlined in the statute: Tier I comprises the Denver Art Museum, Denver Botanic Gardens, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Denver Museum of Nature & Science, and Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance.

The [state statute](#) sets a distribution formula across the three funding tiers, and modernizing the tier-based formula has sparked recurring debate in the reauthorization process. This led to greater redistribution of funding towards Tiers II and III in 2016, and equitable funding remains a key topic in the current process for 2028. Tier I institutions are specified in state statute, whereas Tier II and III organizations share their tiers' allocations with a rapidly growing number of peers. One concern raised was that the substantial growth of the Tier II pool means more organizations must share the tier's allocation. Some Tier III organizations that could qualify for Tier II status find themselves disincentivized from applying because they could receive less funding after entering the Tier II pool.

The current planning process reflects lessons from 2016, when some stakeholders raised concerns about transparency and whether the process adequately reflected the perspectives of smaller organizations and other community voices. Reflecting on that reauthorization, some smaller organizations felt that larger institutions had disproportionate influence and that their own perspectives were not sufficiently heard. SCFD's current process continues to engage with stakeholders through listening sessions, with the intention to create expanded opportunities for participation across funding tiers, counties, and cultural disciplines.

Public Messaging

The original campaign used public polls across all seven counties to test voter appetite and inform public messaging. This process identified regional pride and support for the iconic institutions, alongside a clear desire outside Denver for broader access to the region's cultural resources. The polls also identified the strongest case for public cultural funding, which included messaging around expanded opportunities for youth and education. The founders of SCFD were also deliberate in choosing the word "facilities," to signal tangible community resources rather than grants to individual artists.

Later reauthorizations continue to use polling to test and inform public messaging, but also draws on its history of delivering on public access and community impact.

Public Impact at a Glance (SCFD Data from 2024 Calendar Year):

- \$85 million of funding distributed to 304 arts, cultural, and scientific organizations
- \$3.12 billion total economic activity in 2024 (+19.7% vs. 2022; +36% vs. 2019)
- 14,466 jobs supported
- \$692 million generated by cultural tourism
- 14.52 million in-person engagements
- 4.57 million educational experiences
- \$286 million received in charitable giving to the arts

Beyond the economic outcomes, SCFD has expanded public access most visibly through youth education, with funded organizations developing school partnerships, transportation assistance, and free or discounted programming. This outcome reduces barriers to participation and increases community access across multiple districts.

Following pandemic-era disruption, cultural participation among children and adults alike has continued to recover, with 14.52 million in-person engagements and 4.57 million educational experiences reported in 2024, surpassing even pre-pandemic levels. Earlier CBCA studies also suggest that dedicated public funding complements private philanthropy by diversifying revenue streams for the cultural sector and strengthening its long-term resilience.

Lessons learned

- **Engage diverse stakeholders early and meaningfully.** Build legitimacy, shared ownership, and community support by involving organizations of different sizes and levels of visibility, a range of disciplines and sectors, emerging voices, and communities of color from the outset. Ensure these stakeholders have a genuine role in shaping priorities, governance, and funding decisions.
- **Frame the vision around shared public benefit.** Work with stakeholders on messaging to position public funding as an opportunity for expanded access, stronger communities, and addressing a locally known shared challenge. Consider highlighting the public's personal connection to the topic and its benefits for younger generations and development.
- **Prioritize transparency and adaptability.** Long-term funding models need clear decision-making, ongoing stakeholder input, and room to respond to changing needs. Regularly evaluate how resources reach

emerging organizations and diverse stakeholders, to balance the stability of a dedicated public funding stream with equity and accountability.

- **Research what the public is willing to support.** Use polling, community engagement, stakeholder research, and scenario planning to assess awareness and sentiment; test reactions to proposed benefits, revenue levels, and distribution changes; and understand the influence of competing spending priorities. Revisit these findings as political and economic conditions change.
- **Build political strategy and stakeholder relationships early.** Map decision-makers, potential champions, institutional interests, and likely opposition before choosing a pathway. An experienced campaign manager can help navigate the legislative process, sustain coalition alignment, anticipate challenges, and translate the proposal into a compelling public case.

05

CASE STUDY 02

Doors Open

Location: King County, Washington

About this case study

Based on publicly available research and on interviews (conducted in Summer 2026) with King County Councilmember Claudia Balducci and Blake Trask, Deputy Chief of Staff; Inspire Washington Executive Director Manny Cawaling; former King County Creative Economy Director Kate Becker; and 4Culture Senior Governmental Relations Manager Claire Miccio.

Snapshot: King County's Doors Open Levy

MECHANISM	Council-authorized cultural access program
JURISDICTION	King County, Washington
REVENUE SOURCE	Sales tax
RATE	0.1%
ESTABLISHED	2023, by Ordinance 19710
AUTHORIZATION PATHWAY	Councilmanic authority, after a 2017 ballot measure failed
ANNUAL REVENUE	Approximately \$100 million a year, about \$700 million over seven years
ORGANIZATIONS FUNDED	700+ in the first round
RENEWAL CYCLE	Seven-year term under the state cultural access statute

Overview

Doors Open is one of five cultural access programs in Washington state. Funded by a dedicated 0.1% sales tax, it is expected to generate approximately \$700 million over seven years for cultural nonprofits across King County during its initial seven-year authorization. Its passage followed nearly two decades of sustained work by county councilmembers, state legislators, cultural advocates, and community partners, demonstrating the patient coalition-building often required to create durable public funding.

In December 2024, 4Culture, the public development authority responsible for implementing Doors Open, [announced](#) an initial funding round of more than \$165 million for over 700 King County cultural organizations. This funding consisted of \$150 million in Doors Open revenue and \$15 million of Lodging Tax funding. The Lodging Tax is a separate, pre-existing 4Culture funding stream that complements the sales tax-funded Doors Open program.

The Doors Open program builds on earlier efforts in Washington state. [Tacoma Creates](#), approved by voters in 2018, was Washington's first cultural access program. [Inspire Olympia](#) followed in 2022, with early support from the Olympia School Board and a strong emphasis on benefits for students. [Colorado's Scientific and Cultural Facilities District](#) served as a foundational model for Washington's broader cultural access movement.

Although Doors Open operates countywide, it draws on a transferable state legislative framework that gives cities and counties a common legal pathway rather than requiring each jurisdiction to start from scratch. Supporting the spread of this model is [Inspire Washington](#), formed when Cultural Access Washington and the Washington State Arts Alliance joined forces. Through statewide advocacy, coalition-building, and resource development, it helps communities explore cultural access pathways of their own. [San Juan County](#) demonstrates the value of that structure. In 2024, the rural county used the state framework to establish its own council-approved cultural access program.

Authorization Pathway

Although Doors Open was established in 2023, its roots reach back more than two decades through sustained research, advocacy, and policy development. According to interviews conducted for this toolkit, King County leaders and state legislators traveled to Denver in the early 2000s to study Colorado's SCFD model. They returned inspired by its scale and its potential to strengthen an entire regional arts and cultural ecosystem. The work continued through cultural advocates and organizations—including groups that would later come together as [Inspire Washington](#)—that sought a clearer legal pathway for Washington cities and counties to establish tax-funded cultural access programs.

That advocacy helped secure 2015 legislation establishing the state's cultural access framework, often referred to as [Cultural Access Washington](#). The original law authorized counties and cities to establish cultural access programs, but required voter approval to impose the sales tax. King County tested that pathway in 2017 with the

Access for All ballot measure, which voters narrowly rejected. Rather than ending the effort, the defeat prompted advocates and local leaders to return to the state legislature and pursue an alternative authorization route. In 2023, the legislature amended the law to allow counties to impose the tax by ordinance without requiring a public vote. King County used this new pathway to establish Doors Open, which the County Council approved unanimously in December 2023. 4Culture developed the program’s implementation plan during the first half of 2024 and submitted it to the Council in July. The Council approved the plan in November 2024, including an amendment sponsored by Councilmember Claudia Balducci that increased the 2024 grant allocation by \$17.5 million, accelerating support for cultural organizations still recovering from the pandemic.

Comparison chart of proposals for Doors Open: 2017 & 2023		
	2017 BALLOT MEASURE	2023 PROGRAM
PATHWAY	Public vote	Councilmanic authority
FORMULA	80% automatic grants by organization size, 20% competitive	100% competitive grants
GEOGRAPHIC REQUIREMENT	None specified	At least 25% of grant funding outside Seattle
OUTCOME	Failed	Passed unanimously

Governance Structure

The council designated 4Culture, the county's public development authority for arts, heritage, preservation, and public art, to administer the program. Since the agency was already distributing lodging tax revenue and 1% for Art funds, it already had an established track record of public grantmaking experience and existing relationships across the sector.

- **4Culture:** Implements the program across arts, heritage, and preservation, plus science and technology, which was added with Doors Open.
- **Community-peer grant panels:** Review and score all applications and make funding recommendations.
- **Discipline-specific advisory committees:** Review the panel process and recommendations and advise the board.
- **4Culture Board of Directors.** A 15-member board representing the cultural, ethnic, and geographic diversity of the county is appointed by county councilmembers and the county executive, and governs 4Culture’s final funding decisions.

- **King County Council.** Created the program and set the tax by ordinance, and established the implementation plan.
- **King County Executive.** Drafted legislation, championed the program, and appointed some of the board members.
- **Cultural Access Washington.** The enabling state statute was established in 2015 and amended in 2023.
- **Inspire Washington.** The statewide cultural access advocacy organization, which advocated for Doors Open and other Washington programs.
- **King County Office of Economic Opportunity and Creative Economy.** Provides additional program support.

Funding Allocation & Distribution

Doors Open combines broad unrestricted operating support with targeted investments in public access. 50% of its funding provides unrestricted support for organizations' day-to-day needs, while the remainder is dedicated to priorities including public school access (15%), free admission (15%), cultural facilities (10%), countywide initiatives (7%), and support for emerging organizations (3%). This structure allows organizations to remain stable while ensuring public benefit is built into the funding model.

Funding allocation structure for Doors Open	
PURPOSE	SHARE
UNRESTRICTED OPERATING SUPPORT	50%
PUBLIC SCHOOL ACCESS	15%
FREE ADMISSION	15%
CULTURAL FACILITIES	10%
COUNTYWIDE INITIATIVES	7%
EMERGING ORGANIZATIONS	3%

Source: A presentation about Washington's Cultural Access Program by Inspire Washington.

Under RCW 36.160.030, direct funding is limited to eligible King County-based nonprofit cultural organizations. The statute does not permit awards to individuals or to groups, including government entities, individual artists, radio or television broadcasting networks or stations, cable communications, or internet-based communications services.

The exclusion is narrower in practice than it first appears. Substantial sustained support to eligible organizations frees complementary funders, including 4Culture's lodging-tax programs, to continue supporting individuals and entities outside the eligibility rules. Funded organizations also use their increased capacity to employ and contract artists, educators, media makers, and cultural workers. Interviewees for this case study emphasised that the effect reaches well beyond direct grantees.

Access is broadly defined, so that it can mean free admission, but also removing the practical barriers that prevent people from participating. Transportation is one example: schools may be able to afford admission for a field trip but not the increasingly expensive cost of a school bus. Doors Open funding can help cover those costs, making cultural and scientific experiences possible for students who might otherwise miss out.

Doors Open's definition of public access extends beyond traditional arts programming to include science and educational experiences that engage the public. Funding supports organizations such as zoos, aquariums, and other science institutions for their public-facing programs, tours, experiences, and educational activities.

Public Messaging

In 2017, Doors Open went to the ballot and lost. Interviewees describe voters wanting a program that directed more funding to small and midsize organizations, and believing the proposed measure favoured large institutions, notably the symphony, opera, and ballet. These major institutions were also concentrated in parts of Seattle, which prevented support from at least one councilmember who represented a different district.

The 2017 defeat forced a rethink of both the program's structure (i.e. negotiating for more equitable distribution of funds) and how its value was communicated to communities and elected officials. Getting more specific about "why" cultural organizations needed more money proved pivotal: cultural access remained inequitable, and public investment could help close that gap.

While state legislators did not immediately grasp the case for unrestricted operating support for arts, science, and heritage organizations, they understood the value of exposing students to cultural programming. Youth education and public programming became points of shared investment that could reflect voters' interests and cut through the fatigue of asking communities to approve yet another sales tax. By emphasizing the tangible benefits like public programs that individuals and families could directly use, the case for the tax became less about funding institutions and more about expanding access to experiences that communities considered more immediately valuable.

The messaging was deliberately built through broad community and stakeholder engagement. Inspire Washington gathered input from rural communities and legislators while working to make the councilmanic pathway possible, which mattered because most of Washington's school districts sit outside the urban core. Legislators who needed convincing understood cultural access immediately when it was framed through their own communities, acknowledging their students did not have the same opportunities as those in Seattle. From this, geographic equity

was then written into the program design: at least 25% of 4Culture's funds, including Doors Open revenue, must be administered outside Seattle city limits.

Leading with concrete, widely understood community benefits, particularly youth education and public programming, created an entry point for larger conversations about the importance of public investment in cultural equity and organizational sustainability.

Public Impact at a Glance:

Source: 4Culture, “Communicating about Doors Open.” The annual figure is an average over seven years, with an additional \$25 million from King County Lodging Tax.

- 700+ organizations supported through Doors Open funding
- \$100 million distributed annually, on average over 7 years (with an additional \$25 million from Lodging Tax in King County)
- 11 million people reached through cultural activities
- 1,445,000 free tickets provided to arts, heritage, historic preservation, and science public programming activities in 2024.
- 80+ cultural facilities were built, purchased and renovated (25% outside of Seattle)

Lessons learned

- **Identify political leadership and champions early.** For example, legislators with a history of supporting arts and culture, or a background in film/media, are a natural starting point.
- **Research what authority each level of local government holds.** Counties and cities differ, and the available pathways will inform your strategy.
- **Embed equity considerations in the design to broaden political support.** Geographic equity was what made the program legible to legislators outside the urban core.
- **Regional scale can protect local autonomy.** Washington relies on multiple regional mechanisms rather than one statewide system, keeping funding close to the communities it serves and making it harder for outside actors, including federal agencies, to exert control over locally generated funds.
- **Ensure new funding does not replace existing investment.** The legislation explicitly prohibited supplantation, so King County could not substitute Cultural Access funds for its existing Lodging Tax commitment. New revenue had to be additive.
- **Advocates build the vision, but leave room for policymakers to own it.** Coalitions supply the argument and the case for public benefit, but legislation is ultimately compromise and negotiation.

06

Side by side comparison

COMPONENT	SCFD	DOORS OPEN
REVENUE SOURCE	Local sales and use tax	Sales tax
RATE AND SCALE	0.1%, nearly \$85 million in 2024	0.1%, about \$700 million over seven years
AUTHORIZATION PATHWAY	Public vote, 1988; reauthorized by vote three times	Councilmanic authority, 2023, after a 2017 ballot defeat
GOVERNING BODY	SCFD board of 11, plus county cultural councils for Tier III	4Culture, a public development authority, with a 15-member citizen board
DISTRIBUTION FORMULA AND ELIGIBILITY	Three statutory tiers by organization scale Arts, cultural and scientific organizations across seven counties	100% competitive, with purpose-based set-asides and a 25% non-Seattle funding floor King County nonprofit cultural organizations; broadcast, cable and internet communications excluded by statute
ACCOUNTABILITY AND RENEWAL	Periodic voter reauthorization; next process targets 2028	Seven-year term under the state statute

07

Readiness framework: Could a public funding mechanism work in your community?

The following framework is intended to provide a helpful starting point, not a prescriptive roadmap. It can help communities build connections, identify shared priorities and areas of alignment, and consider whether a public funding mechanism merits further exploration. For communities interested in pursuing a community-governed public funding mechanism, it can also surface the relationships, questions, and potential next steps that may support future organizing.

Step 1

Scan the local landscape

Identify the organizations, institutions, networks, and community groups already operating in the region and the needs they are working to address.

Questions

- ☐ What relevant organizations, institutions, and networks already exist?
- ☐ What are their most significant funding or infrastructure needs?
- ☐ Are similar initiatives already underway?
- ☐ Would it make more sense to build on an existing effort than to create something new?

Step 2

Define the mechanism's purpose

Clarify what the mechanism is intended to accomplish before deciding how it should be funded.

Questions

- ☐ Who should benefit?
- ☐ What public need is being addressed?

- ☐ Is the priority sustaining essential services, expanding public access, supporting local jobs, strengthening community institutions, addressing geographic inequities, or another objective?
- ☐ Should the mechanism grow from existing community organizations, government, or a combination of the two?

Step 3

Determine what state and local law allows

Research the legal authority available to the relevant jurisdictions. This step should happen early because the available legal authority may determine what type of mechanism is possible.

Examine

- ☐ Local taxing authority
- ☐ Property-tax limitations
- ☐ Sales-tax options
- ☐ Voter-approval requirements
- ☐ State legislative requirements
- ☐ Other mechanisms for establishing dedicated public revenue

Step 4

Test financial feasibility

Determine whether the proposed funding source can realistically support the intended program.

Consider

- ☐ Potential annual revenue
- ☐ Administrative costs
- ☐ Long-term growth or volatility of the revenue source
- ☐ Implementation costs
- ☐ How financial performance and public outcomes would be measured

Step 5

Map stakeholders, partners, audiences, and opposition

Identify the people and organizations that could influence the design, implementation, adoption, and long-term sustainability of the mechanism. If the mechanism will distribute funds, establish clear and transparent eligibility and allocation criteria.

Potential stakeholders and partners

- ☐ Community-based and nonprofit organizations
- ☐ Educational and cultural institutions
- ☐ Local media and information providers
- ☐ Libraries and community centers
- ☐ Universities and research institutions
- ☐ Civic and advocacy organizations
- ☐ Local and regional government
- ☐ Businesses and economic-development organizations
- ☐ Philanthropy
- ☐ Residents, taxpayers, and prospective beneficiaries

Step 6

Identify anchor institutions

Identify three to five trusted, broadly accessible institutions that could help demonstrate the public value of the mechanism. The purpose is not to guarantee these organizations funding. It is to identify institutions that can help residents understand the public benefits the mechanism could provide.

Examples

- ☐ Libraries and community centers
- ☐ Schools, colleges, or universities
- ☐ Cultural or educational institutions
- ☐ Local media and information organizations
- ☐ Community health or service organizations
- ☐ Other widely used and trusted local institutions

Step 7

Define the public case

Develop clear, nonpartisan language explaining how the mechanism would benefit residents. Frame the proposal around community benefit rather than the interests of a particular industry, sector, or institution.

Potential benefits

- ☐ Educational opportunities for young people
- ☐ Stronger and more sustainable local institutions
- ☐ Preservation of local history and culture
- ☐ Support for local employment and economic activity
- ☐ Reliable access to valued programs, services, or information
- ☐ Greater geographic and economic access to public benefits

Step 8

Assess readiness

Evaluate whether the necessary conditions are in place.

Questions

- ☐ Is there a strong enough network of relevant organizations and institutions?
- ☐ Is there a broad and representative coalition?
- ☐ Is there a feasible funding source?
- ☐ Is there sufficient administrative capacity?
- ☐ Is there political support?
- ☐ Is there evidence of public support?
- ☐ If legislative or voter approval is required, is the coalition prepared for an advocacy or public-education campaign?

Sources, interviews, and thanks

Interviews

- **Andrea Albo**, Executive Director, Scientific and Cultural Facilities District
- **Jane Hansberry**, former Director, Scientific and Cultural Facilities District
- **Deborah Jordy**, former Director, Scientific and Cultural Facilities District
- **Floyd Ciruli**, President, Ciruli Associates
- **Tony Garcia**, Executive Artistic Director, Su Teatro Cultural and Performing Arts Center
- **Claudia Balducci**, Councilmember, King County
- **Blake Trask**, Deputy Chief of Staff to Councilmember Balducci
- **Manny Cawaling**, Executive Director, Inspire Washington
- **Kate Becker**, former Creative Economy Director, King County
- **Claire Miccio**, Senior Governmental Relations Manager, 4Culture

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- **4Culture program data**. Source for Doors Open organization counts, distribution, reach, free tickets, and facilities figures.

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