



**Draft Minutes
EDC Regular Meeting
December 11, 2025**

Present: Sarah Lansdale, Chair
Kevin Harvey, Vice Chair
Cris Damianos, Sceretary
Greg Casamento
Brian Beedenbender

Excused Absence: Josh Slaughter
Sondra Cochran

Also Present: K. Kelly Murphy, Executive Director/CEO
Willian Wexler, Esq. Agency Counsel

Ms. Sarah Lansdale, Chair presiding over the Meeting today indicated that the documents for this meeting can be accessed and are posted to the EDC's website at <https://www.suffolkeconomic.org/resources/> under the Board Meetings tab.

The Regular Meeting of the Suffolk County Economic Development Corporation held in Media Room #184 located on the lower level of the H. Lee Dennison Building, 100 Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge, NY11788was called to order at 12:30 p.m. by Ms. Sarah Lansdale, Chair of the EDC.

ROLL CALL

This is the December 11, 2025, Regular Board Meeting of the Suffolk County Economic Development Corporation and for the record, we do have a quorum present. Members of the public may attend the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Lansdale asked if there were any public comments and Ms. Murphy indicated no comments were received.

NEW BUSINESS – None

OTHER BUSINESS

Sarah Lansdale: Moving on to a Long Island Arts Alliance presentation by Lauren Wagner. So, in a nutshell, Lauren, as I understand it, Long Island, and in particular Suffolk County, is not receiving its fair share of funding from New York State arts, entities, like New York State Council on the Arts.

Lauren Wagner: That's correct.

SL: And your proposal is to, your request is for 50,000 in funding, as I understand it, to provide a grants academy for Suffolk County arts organizations to put them in a better position to receive New York State grant funding, is that correct?

LW: Yes, arts organizations and individual artists.

SL: Okay, great. The floor is yours.

Good morning. My name is Lauren Wagner. I am the Executive Director of Long Island Arts Alliance. I really appreciate the opportunity to come down this morning and talk about something that is already a major economic driver in Suffolk County, and how together we can dramatically increase its return to the region. I want to just start off really quickly with the simple truth. Suffolk County has one of the fastest growing creative economies in the state yet to receive some of the lowest levels of safe investment, which means Suffolk is losing out on millions of dollars each and every year that should be circulating right here in the economy. So, in 2023, Long Island Arts Alliance led our region's participation in a national economic impact study, so we could finally quantify what has long been known, anecdotally, that Long Island's arts and culture sector is valuable.

What the study measured was what arts and cultural organizations, spend a year, and then what audiences spend in the community when they attend events. So that's things like shopping and retail, dining and parking and transportation, things like that. When you add those together, the study found that the nonprofit arts and culture sector on Long Island generates over \$330 million each year. So, across Long Island, I've identified 494 nonprofit organizations that have some sort of cultural arts component in there, and 65% of those 494 are here inside. So, to put the numbers back to Suffolk-specific numbers, roughly 214 million of that \$333 million is generated here in Suffolk County. The same study estimates that the arts and culture activity supports 4,905 jobs.

And then the 65% of that would be 3,188 jobs here in Suffolk County. And I'm not talking about artists and performers that are on stage, I'm talking about the jobs that exist because arts activity brings people into local businesses. So these are restaurant staff, hotel workers, stagehands, the boat keepers, graphic designers, printers, drivers name it. These are all a very broad mix of jobs that touches many of the sectors that you all support. The study also estimates that arts and culture activity on Long Island generates over \$234 million in personal income to residents. So that's \$152 million in Suffolk County. That's wages that are paid each year to Suffolk residents because of the arts and cultures activity. So this is money that people used to cover their rent and mortgages, groceries, childcare, transportation. You name it. And then finally, the activity generates tax revenues. So, Suffolk County Arts and cultural organizations generate \$12.3 million in local tax revenue, \$8.1 million in state revenue, and over \$32 million in federal revenue, and that's all tied to nonprofit arts and culture work. There's one other key point here that I want to point out. Over the last decade, employment in Long Island's arts and culture sector has grown 21.6%, so that's more than 5 times the overall job growth rate of 4.1 in our region. Even as our under 65 population has slightly declined. The number of independent artists and creative workers has nearly doubled.

So there you go. When we talk about the arts in Suffolk County, we're not talking about a luxury or an extra. These numbers are reflecting something everyone really already knows, that the arts create the kinds of places where people want to live, they want to work, and they want to spend time.

So, right now, you're probably thinking, like, okay, if the art's so great, why is this woman here telling me all these things? It's a fair question, and the answer is that even with all of this economic strength, Suffolk is receiving some of the lowest levels of state investment in New York. And that gap is costing us real dollars, real jobs, and real opportunities. Long Island makes up roughly 15% of the state's population, and when you look at the state's primary arts funding agency, the New York State Council on the Arts. Long Island receives only about 2.5 to 3% of the statewide grant dollars, and this is year after year after year after year. Similarly, the Red Sea, programs, arts-related projects on Long Island received only about 3.1% of our region's entire allocation, and a significant portion of that went to a single large capital project.

So we have a sector that is growing faster than the regional economy, a sector that is supporting thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in tax revenue, but are receiving a very small, embarrassingly small share of state investment compared to our size and contribution.

The chronic underinvestment reduces the economic potential of one of Long Island's fastest-growing sectors and limits opportunities for residents, artists, schools, and community organizations. And here's the unfortunate reality. I had this conversation a million times with local organizations.

They genuinely believe state grants are not winnable for them. Not because their work isn't strong, not because, you know, they don't believe in themselves, but because the system itself creates real barriers. Many don't apply because eligibility rules are confusing, the application language is intimidating, and there's no one to help them interpret what the state is actually asking for. Smaller organizations, you know, serving underprivileged communities on Long Island, you know, they don't have the capacity, they don't have grant staff. Individual artists are automatically ineligible unless they can find a non-profit fiscal sponsor willing to take on the liability. So, that's where the funding gap starts. Fewer applications are going in from our region, so fewer are coming back, and the underfunding gets worse. I have had conversations with the executive director of the New York State Council of the Arts.

She has plainly told me, flat out, Long Island is leaving money on the table. So, that lit a fire underneath.

So this past year, in 2025, in preparation for 2026 grants, I said, what if I try to fix the system that's leading to this underfunding? So, with no dedicated program funding or staff, I tested a small pilot focused on one of the state programs that provides \$10,000 grants to artists.

We stepped in, I met with every single interested applicant individually, I understood their project ideas, goals, readiness. We reviewed their proposals together. I was very honest. If they weren't ready, I told them so, I directed them to other places. And ultimately, we've submitted 14 applications, and 9 of those applications were funded.

I just want to give you a quick, direct comparison. Last year, only 4 artists across the entire island received this \$10,000 grant. So that was less than 1% of the total. This year, 19 artists from Long Island were funded, and 9 of those were directly supported through this pilot.

Still only 3.1%, it's not enough, but it is a five-fold increase in outcomes for our region. All nine awarded artists are from Suffolk County, all 9 awarded artists were first-time applicants to state funding.

We definitely know that when applicants get the right support, they win.

So, that's what this Long Island Grants Academy is supposed to be. In short, the Academy trains, supports, sponsors, and ensures compliance for Suffolk applicants. Then it tracks exactly how much funding comes back into our communities. So, with the \$50,000 investment from Suffolk County, we will launch a year one pilot that creates permanent structure.

And I have all of the activities in the Grant Academy are in the proposal, but, we'll provide group workshops and virtual grant clinics, one-on-one technical assistance.

LIA's fiscal sponsorship capacities, we can apply up to 50, applications, deliver full project management, develop and maintain a grants toolkit with, you know, things that will live on, templates, budget guides, all

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that kind of stuff. And in year one, we expect to support 15 to 20 Summit-based organizations and independent artists applying on their own.

And then up to 50 Suffolk-based artists and projects applying through the fiscal sponsorship.

This level of activity could realistically, and this is very conservative, bring back on the order of \$200,000 to \$500,000.

And because the Academy is building reusable tools, templates, and systems, and helping applicants gain skills they will use year after year, this return grows over time. The cost per successful application goes down, and the total amount of funding coming back to Suffolk goes up. So this is not, a one-off grant.

You all, Suffolk County, consistently invest in strategies that strengthen small businesses, expand tourism, and retain talent, and the arts are truly one of the most powerful and undervalued engines that are already contributing to your goals.

The data shows it clearly. Suffolk's creative economy, it's large, it's fast-growing, and it's deeply tied to local economic vitality. So this is a moment where a relatively modest county investment can correct long-standing funding disparities and drive measurable economic return.

The infrastructure is ready, the demand is high, and we've already proven that the model works. What we need now is a partnership that allows us to scale it. So, Suffolk has the chance to be seen statewide as the region that decided to stop accepting underinvestment as a given. Thank you so much for your time and consideration, and I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have. Questions from the board. I guess I have one question. So, if we fund the project.

Then, for next year, then at the end of the year, we'll get some sort of report? Yes, that's correct. So, the, the Grants Academy is, sort of structured around the grants calendar, so it's got a sort of a quick jumping-off point. There's a bit of urgency on it, because the NISPA grants, that was mostly what I'm talking about in this proposal, the guidelines come out in typically late April or early May to the deadline of late June, early July, so that's really when a lot of that work is happening. The decisions are, announced the middle of November. So, at the end of the year, you would receive, you know, all of the stats, all of the, you know, participants and everything. It'll be not just who applied, but actually the money that's received. Yeah, we just got the notifications, I think 3 weeks ago, and this year's numbers were also bad. Okay.

Cris: How long has this, alliance been in existence, or is this being created now?

LW: No, we were founded, in 2003 by Regent Roger Tillis.

CD: Okay.

CD: Nassau County, do they participate for their side, if you want to call out the, of the property line?

LW: So we served, we're a regional organization, so we serve both Suffolk and Nassau counties in all of our programming, but this direct, you know, this proposal is for Suffolk County organizations and Suffolk County artists. The opportunity is being presented to Nassau to fund, you know, their own version of this, but in no way will any dollar that's given to the Alliance for this program, you know, be directed towards Nassau County, artists and organizations.

CD: And besides the money that, comes from us and maybe Nassau and New York State, are there any other funding sources coming into the Alliance?

LW: Yeah, so we're funded, we're an arts service organization, we don't have, like, flashy programs that people don't come sit in our seats and watch great shows. We support the organizations that have that. So we have an interesting sort of structure where we don't have very many, like, forward-facing donors,

we do have a membership program, which is comprised of about 127 arts and cultural organizations from across the island, as well as hundreds of artists. But we do apply for grants, we get state funding. Unfortunately, we don't, get county funding yet, but I'm confident that we will soon. And then private donors, and then, you know, private foundations and things like that. So, all that funding goes into our operations, and our operations are based in these types of technical assistance programs.

Greg Casamento: I guess the only other question I have for Kelly is, we have the funds in the budget for this, right? We are evaluating that, we believe so. At this point, we do. Okay.

Kelly Murphy: It would be funded in 2026.

Brian Beedenbender: Just one quick question. So, the 15% to 3% cap, can you put dollars to that?

LW: We're 15% of the population, but we're getting 3% of the funding for this sort of stuff.

BB: What does that mean in dollars?

LW: So, 2.8%, which was the allocation for 2025, was \$2.5 million. And then so it's 400 and something million dollars.

BB: Okay Thank you.

SL: Any other questions?

LW: And unfortunately, sorry not to jump in, but, while we grew the artists category, as I said, the other category or support for organizations actually went down, so it's less money this year.

Kevin Harvey: Just one question. If we approve this, would we be your largest funding stream for Suffolk County?

LW: Yes, for Suffolk County? That's correct.

SL: What is your overall, operational budget? \$123,000 a year.

LW: It's just me. I'm the only employee at the moment, but we contract out, so the program is, is, you know, designed to bring in people who are professional grant writers and, you know, consultants and things like that.

SL: Do you have a plan for looking for other funding sources, so that, you know, this is not a continuous request?

LW: Yes, yes, definitely. I think because of the urgency, because if we don't do something now, the next cycle is going to come up on us very quickly. This is a smaller version of, I think, what this could be, and I think, you know, doing this test pilot, being able to get those numbers and say, here's the percentages, here's the growth. There are definitely other opportunities for funding outside of, of, you know, county funding.

Most certainly, even if we go after other grants. But it'll be good to have a solid year under our belt of doing this program, because my pilot was really just sort of off the cuff.

SL: So, Kelly, for today, this was just a presentation.

KM: That's correct.

SL: You're still evaluating the budget for EDC to see if this could fit for 2026, correct?

KM: Yes, we believe it fits the budget, however we are working on a program for providing grants administration and reporting. There are a few questions regarding the budget with the Wyandanch Tech Center so we would have to evaluate both of those, components. I suggest that we revisit it at the next meeting.

MINUTES

The minutes of the October 23rd 2025 Board of Directors Meeting was presented.

After further discussion and:

Upon a motion by Brian Beedenbender, seconded by Greg Casamento, it was:

RESOLVED, to approve the Minutes of the October 23,2025 meeting of the Board of Directors,

Unanimously carried 5/0.

The Meeting adjourned at 12:36 pm.