

# OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

## CITY OF BALTIMORE



**Isabel Mercedes Cumming**  
**Inspector General**

## Investigative Report Synopsis

OIG Case #25-0047-I

Issued: February 12, 2026



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL  
Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General  
City Hall, Suite 635  
100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, MD 21202



February 12, 2026

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

The mission of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is to promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in City government, as well as to investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste, and abuse.

The OIG received a complaint regarding the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for Artscape 2025. Specifically, the complaint alleged that approximately \$600,000 in City of Baltimore (City) ARPA funds were spent on music talent. The investigation found that the City used \$516,150.00 of a \$1,600,000 ARPA grant to the Baltimore Civic Fund (BCF) for music artists, including \$240,050 for Artist 1 and \$125,000 for Artist 2. The investigation revealed concerns from the Mayor's Office of Recovery Programs with the amount spent on national talent, and the amount exceeded the \$300,000 budget allocation for performance talent and the \$40,000 budget for talent booking. The OIG also found that \$582,809.02 of Artscape ARPA funds were reallocated without Board of Estimates approval, and ARPA resources were used for a VIP Reception on May 23, 2025. The OIG suggests the City develop standard operating processes for events such as Artscape to help define roles and responsibilities amongst the entities involved and to ensure the City receives the best possible cost when selecting vendors.

The OIG received City Leadership's response to the report on February 11, 2026. While the OIG strives to publish responses in full, the response contained multiple exhibits that included unredacted invoices and internal email correspondence with an Artscape vendor. Due to recent Maryland Public Information Act concerns, the OIG did not include those exhibits when publishing City Leadership's response and made minor redactions. The OIG did include the economic impact report which the response labeled as Exhibit 1. If those other exhibits are sought by the public, the OIG recommends contacting City Leadership or the Law Department directly.

## **Background**

### *ARPA*

The 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) established the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program. SLFRF provided funds to state, local, and tribal governments to address the economic and public health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The City received \$641,170,126.00 through ARPA. Recipients have substantial discretion in using COVID-19 relief funds, but expenditures must fall into one of the ARPA Expenditure Categories. ARPA recipients may use a certain amount of COVID-19 relief funds to replace lost revenue for the provision of government services. According to the Department of the Treasury (Treasury), "government services" refers to "any service traditionally provided by a government unless Treasury has stated otherwise." Treasury examples of eligible Revenue Replacement projects are the maintenance, improvement, or new construction of public-school facilities; construction of new roads and other infrastructure; provision of public safety and other services; and health and educational services. The OIG learned the Treasury required the City to obligate all remaining COVID-19 relief funds by December 31, 2024.

### ***REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE***

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## *Baltimore Civic Fund*

The Baltimore Civic Fund (BCF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides the City with fiscal administration services for various initiatives exceeding \$25,000.00. BCF also facilitates the disbursement of federal, state, and philanthropic funds awarded to the City. BCF is governed by a Master Funding Agreement (Master Agreement) and a Master Agreement for Fiscal Sponsorship (Sponsorship Agreement), which the Board of Estimates (BOE) approved in April 2024.

## *BOPA*

The Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts (BOPA), d.b.a. Create Baltimore, is a quasi-governmental, 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency and the City's designated arts council. It operates with City funds, sponsorships, and State funds. BOPA organized Artscape events prior to the termination of its fiscal year (FY) 2025 agreement on November 6, 2024, due to "financial situation and operational challenges." Due to the termination, the Mayor's Office requested that BOPA assist to transfer management of Artscape and other programming to the City. In June 2025, BOE approved a new BOPA agreement for FY 2026.

## *MORP*

Mayor Brandon Scott established the Mayor's Office of Recovery Programs (MORP) in 2021 to administer the City's ARPA allocation, monitor recipients, and report to the Treasury. MORP allocates and monitors ARPA dollars sent to City agencies and other recipients. MORP Project Managers are assigned to Project Accounts to work with the City Agency implementing the ARPA project and ensure compliance with ARPA policy. The Former Chief Recovery Officer (Former CRO) transitioned to a different role and the Current Chief Recovery Officer (Current CRO) assumed CRO responsibilities during the Artscape preparation period.

## *Artscape*

Artscape is the City's annual free outdoor arts festival. It was canceled in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. The 2024 Artscape was held on August 1 and 2, 2024. On December 23, 2024, BOE approved the 2025 Artscape ARPA Grant Agreement between BCF and the Mayor and City Council, acting through MORP, and authorized a grant of \$1,600,000 to BCF to provide funding support for a three-day Artscape festival. ARPA funding for the 2025 Artscape was categorized as Revenue Replacement. Artscape was held on May 24 and 25, 2025.

## **OIG Investigation**

### *ARPA Justification*

Mayor's Office of Recovery Programs (MORP) officials said the decision to allocate American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for Artscape 2025 occurred sometime in 2024. The former Chief Recovery Officer (Former CRO) said decisions over ARPA allocations were made by City leadership, which included the mayor. The Former CRO said what they first heard about the Artscape project was that there was a community desire to return Artscape to its pre-pandemic status, and a funding source was needed. The Former CRO said there was an understanding that the grant should go to an entity that could move money more quickly than the City due to the anticipated number of contractors that would be involved.

The Former CRO acknowledged that they were "not a big fan of Artscape" and they did not "understand

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may of the associated costs.” They stated, that in their opinion, “it’s all like, too much money to me, it doesn’t matter what the funding source is.” When asked to elaborate, the Former CRO explained they were not being critical of Artscape and that they have never lived in a place where arts is so important that it gets the eye and attention of leadership. Regarding if they would have selected Artscape for ARPA funds on her own, the Former CRO stated “probably not”, but went on to add that arts is a very critical component to the City and a committee had voiced concerns that mayoral administrations have not supported and invested in arts and culture.

The current Chief Recovery Officer (Current CRO) explained that Artscape 2025 funds were categorized as Revenue Replacement for the provision of government services. The Current CRO said Artscape qualified for the Expenditure Category because it is an activity that is regularly funded by the City. According to the Current CRO, they viewed Artscape as part of the City’s overall arts investment and noted the City’s ARPA support for local artist relief and a community arts grant.

### *Talent Booking*

BOE approved the 2025 Artscape ARPA Grant Agreement between the Mayor and City Council and BCF on December 23, 2024 (Grant Agreement). Grant Agreement expenditures were categorized as Administrative (\$392,000), Equipment/Supplies (\$224,000), Marketing (\$112,000), or Operating (\$872,000). The budget allocated \$300,000 for Performance Talent and \$25,000 for the Booking Fee, which were Operating costs (Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Artscape Talent and Booking Budget Excerpt*

| Agency               | Spend Category                        | Description                            | FY25           | \$ | Total         |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|--|----------------|----|---------------|
|                      |                                       |  | \$1,600,000.00 | -  |               |
| M-R: Art and Culture | SC630351: Payments to Sub-Contractors | Administration - Festival Director     | \$50,000.00    |    | \$ 50,000.00  |
| M-R: Art and Culture | SC630351: Payments to Sub-Contractors | Administration - Operating Manager     | \$25,000.00    |    | \$ 25,000.00  |
| M-R: Art and Culture | SC630351: Payments to Sub-Contractors | Administration - Stage Manager         | \$15,000.00    |    | \$ 15,000.00  |
| M-R: Art and Culture | SC630351: Payments to Sub-Contractors | Administration - Technical Manager     | \$10,000.00    |    | \$ 10,000.00  |
| M-R: Art and Culture | SC630351: Payments to Sub-Contractors | Administration - Volunteer Coordinator | \$25,000.00    |    | \$ 25,000.00  |
| M-R: Art and Culture | SC630351: Payments to Sub-Contractors | Administration - Art Fair Curator      | \$30,000.00    |    | \$ 30,000.00  |
| M-R: Art and Culture | SC630351: Payments to Sub-Contractors | Operating - Performance Talent         | \$300,000.00   |    | \$ 300,000.00 |
| M-R: Art and Culture | SC630351: Payments to Sub-Contractors | Operating - Booking Fee                | \$25,000.00    |    | \$ 25,000.00  |

A Mayor’s Office Employee (MO Employee 1) was assigned to plan Artscape 2025 as the City’s agreement with the Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts (BOPA) was expected to be terminated. The MROP Project Manager was assigned to monitor Artscape and ensure expenditures remained within the Grant Agreement budget. BCF provided fiscal support and facilitated vendor contracts and payments. MROP witnesses explained that MO Employee 1 represented the Mayor’s Office as the “implementing agency” for the ARPA project, and BCF was an “implementation partner.” BOPA selected local vendors/performers through an online application system, oversaw local talent and assisted in planning the Mayor’s VIP Reception on May 23, 2025. A Mayor’s Office Director (MO Director) oversaw the mainstage production for Artscape 2025.

MROP witnesses said MO Employee 1 was in charge of Artscape spending decisions. MROP officials said once the Grant Agreement was executed, the MROP Project Manager was responsible for monitoring the budget and communicating any issues to the Chief Recovery Officer. The Current CRO said if MROP provided any kind of approval, it was probably based on the available budget. MO Employee 1 said because ARPA was involved, the MROP Project Manager “was the final approval on all the contracts,” and nothing was finalized without them signing off. BCF required the MROP Project Manager, MO

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Employee 1, or a Mayor's Office employee to approve of a vendor contract before the contract could be finalized, but their approvals were informal and did not require their signatures.

The OIG found BCF emailed draft contracts and amendments to the MROP Project Manager and MO Employee 1 for their approval. The MROP Project Manager and MO Employee 1 interchangeably or together responded to sign off on contracts and changes. MO Employee 1 and MROP Project Manager stated they did not have any role in obtaining talent contracts.

The investigation revealed hospitality riders for Artscape performers containing numerous bottles of alcohol. The OIG report noted MO Employee 1 instructed the talent booking vendor (Talent Vendor) that alcohol purchases were prohibited with the funds and supporting documentation for expenses like travel and lodging would need to be provided. The OIG learned the Talent Vendor would remove travel and lodging from the invoices. The investigation was unable to confirm whether ARPA funds were used to purchase alcohol for Artscape 2025 performers because purchase receipts were not required for payment. According to the City's response to the report, neither the City nor the Talent Vendor paid for the hospitality riders.

### *Talent Booking*

MO Employee 1 explained that they were not involved in selecting national music talent for Artscape. MO Employee 1 believed the Mayor and MO Director booked the headliners with the Talent Vendor. MO Employee 1 said they provided the MO Director with a talent budget of \$300,000. The MO Director said they were in charge of Artscape mainstage talent. The MO Director said music artists for City festivals are selected from a list of artists provided by the mayor and the mayor's administration. The MO Director stated, "You usually just ask the mayor, 'Hey, anyone on your wish list? Sometimes they say yes, sometimes they say no.'" The MO Director said that's how it's always been as far as they've known since at least 2009. When the MO Director was asked if they had ever planned a City festival using a funding source with spending restrictions, the MO Director said they had not and did not work with MROP for Artscape. The MO Director said they received the Artscape budget from MO Employee 1 and BOPA and then dealt with the Talent Vendor to see which music artists were available and "who fits in the budget."

The OIG found the Talent Vendor contract of \$400,000 exceeded the Artscape budget when it was first approved in January 2025 (Figure 2). In January 2025, BCF emailed MO Employee 1 and the MROP Project Manager that the contract would exceed the ARPA Performance Talent and Booking Fee budgets together by \$75,000, and other line items would need to be adjusted. BCF informed the MROP Project Manager, "please let us know if we're okay to move forward with this contract." The MROP Project Manager responded that it was "OK to move forward with this contract." The Talent Vendor contract was finalized on the same day.

*Figure 2: Approved Talent Vendor Contract Budget*

| EXHIBIT B   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| BUDGET  |                     |
| <b>Artist and all in booking fees:</b>  |                     |
| Artist #1   | \$125,000.00        |
| Artist #2   | \$180,000.00        |
| Artist #3   | \$55,000.00         |
| Talent acquisition, management, booking, and all other services to be performed by [REDACTED] pursuant to this Agreement. | \$40,000.00         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>\$400,000.00</b> |

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The OIG found the Talent Vendor contract was amended between February and May 2025, increasing costs for headlining music artists to a total amount of \$475,500. In February 2025, BCF informed the MROP Project Manager and MO Employee 1 that the contract needed to be increased by \$45,000 to book Artist 1. MO Employee 1 replied and informed BCF to issue Artist 1's payment as soon as possible, otherwise, we risk losing the artist. The MROP Project Manager replied it was okay to add funds, and we will modify the budget later to reflect. BCF then issued a payment of \$127,500.00 to the Talent Vendor for Artist 1's deposit. Approximately one week later, the contract was increased by \$75,000. In May 2025, it was amended again to add a DJ fee of \$500 for Artist 1's performance. The OIG found BCF processed payments totaling \$475,500.00 for the Talent Vendor and the five artists the Talent Vendor booked (Figure 3). Of that amount, \$240,500.00 was paid for a performance by Artist 1 and \$125,000.00 for a performance by Artist 2. Another \$40,650.00 of the ARPA grant was used to book nine other performers, for a total ARPA amount of \$516,150.00. The Talent Vendor submitted its invoices for payment, but requested five of the invoice payments go to different companies.

Figure 3: Talent Vendor Contract Payments (Source: BCF Payment Request Forms)

| Payee         | Service                               | Payment Process Date | Amount                     |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Talent Vendor | Talent Booking                        | January 16, 2025     | \$20,000.00                |
| Talent Vendor | Artist 2 Performance (Invoice 1 of 2) | January 16, 2025     | \$75,000.00                |
| Talent Vendor | Artist 3 Performance (Invoice 1 of 2) | January 19, 2025     | \$15,000.00                |
| Talent Vendor | Artist 4 Performance (Invoice 1 of 2) | February 5, 2025     | \$7,500.00                 |
| Talent Vendor | Artist 1 Performance (Invoice 1 of 2) | February 13, 2025    | \$127,500.00               |
| Talent Vendor | Artist 5 Performance (Invoice 1 of 2) | February 14, 2025    | \$20,000.00                |
| Talent Vendor | Talent Booking                        | May 22, 2025         | \$20,000.00                |
| Company 1     | Artist 1 Performance (Invoice 2 of 2) | May 22, 2025         | \$50,000.00                |
| Company 2     | Artist 4 Performance (Invoice 2 of 2) | May 22, 2025         | \$7,500.00                 |
| Company 3     | Artist 3 Performance (Invoice 2 of 2) | May 22, 2025         | \$10,000.00                |
| Company 4     | Artist 5 Performance (Invoice 2 of 2) | May 22, 2025         | \$10,000.00                |
| Company 5     | Artist 1 Performance (Invoice 2 of 2) | May 22, 2025         | \$113,000.00               |
|               |                                       |                      | <b>Total: \$475,500.00</b> |

The OIG found the City did not require the Talent Vendor to apply or submit a proposal to receive the Artscape 2025 contract. MO Employee 1 said they were told that the Talent Vendor would be used for booking talent. The Current CRO explained that because the Artscape grant was categorized as Revenue Replacement for the provision of government services, the Treasury did not require grantees to follow competitive procurement rules applicable to other ARPA Expenditure Categories.

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### *MORP Concern*

In March 2025, the MORP Project Manager wrote to the Former CRO and the Current CRO that the mayor added another artist, which put the Artscape talent line item over budget by about \$150,000. They wrote that budget modifications needed to be made. The Current CRO advised that they wanted to know what parameters could be put in place for costs related to talent and did not want to be in a situation where we are putting tens of thousands of federal dollars to pay a singer or performer. In April 2025, the Current CRO informed the Former CRO that individuals were talking about using ARPA money to pay Artist 1 \$240,000 and that they were really not okay with this. The Former CRO replied they did not want to use those funds for talent. The Current CRO wrote, “We didn’t tell them no on talent up front, so now I don’t know what grounds we have to say no now.” The Former CRO replied “phone,” which may indicate the conversation continued over a phone call.

According to the Former CRO, they were sure the question of paying Artscape performers with ARPA was raised to them as part of the overall budget but was not asked for input on specific artists. When the Current CRO was asked what they would think if a City Agency asked to use ARPA funds to pay Artist 1 or Artist 2, the Current CRO said their preference would be to use the funds for other things. The Current CRO explained the music artists are obviously highly paid, so using ARPA to compensate them requires an explanation that paying for a golf cart or tent, for example, does not.

The OIG learned typically when MORP works with a City Agency, MORP has access to invoices, payment and contractor information through Workday. MORP staff said they did not have access to the BCF billing system. The OIG learned BCF is required to contract with vendors selected by the City Agency for a given project. A BCF employee explained they would only question project spending if BCF knew the funding source would not allow the specific expense or if there was not enough money in the account.

### *Budget Reallocation*

The Artscape Grant Agreement required BOE to approve budget reallocations of more than 25% of the total ARPA budget (\$400,000). The Current CRO explained that if a budget modification is needed, BCF should submit a written request to the Chief Recovery Officer at least 60 days before the agreement expires, even if the modification would reallocate 25% or less of the budget. The Current CRO said the Chief Recovery Officer or their designee would then approve or deny the request in writing. The OIG found \$582,809.02 of the Artscape ARPA budget was reallocated (Figure 4). Electronic records indicated the MORP Project Manager and BCF prepared documents to submit to the BOE for a budget modification in August 2025, however, a request was not brought to the Current CRO for approval nor put before BOE. The Current CRO said since the Grant Agreement expired, and they are reviewing the request to identify any next steps.

*Figure 4: Artscape ARPA Budget Variance*

| <b>Budget Category</b> | <b>ARPA Budget</b>    | <b>ARPA Actuals</b>   | <b>Variance</b>     |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Administrative         | \$392,000.00          | \$281,545.00          | \$110,455.00        |
| Supplies               | \$224,000.00          | \$140,012.99          | \$83,987.01         |
| Marketing              | \$112,000.00          | \$15,037.50           | \$96,962.50         |
| Operating              | \$872,000.00          | \$1,163,404.51        | \$291,404.51        |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>\$1,600,000.00</b> | <b>\$1,600,000.00</b> | <b>\$582,809.02</b> |

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### *VIP Reception*

The investigation found that ARPA resources were used for Mayor Brandon Scott's VIP Reception for Artscape (VIP Reception) at The Assembly Room on May 23, 2025. BCF records indicated six vendors received direct ARPA payments totaling \$10,860.25 for VIP services. The Artscape Festival Operations Director, which received \$26,546.73 in ARPA funds and \$6,856.82 in State funds, coordinated with the Mayor's Chief of Special Events to organize the VIP Reception and assist BOPA in planning a VIP cigar lounge at the War Memorial Building during Artscape weekend. The OIG did not observe a contract for the Festival Operations Director in BCF Payment Request Forms or electronic records. Hosting the VIP Reception was included in a contract with a company (Venue Company) to provide a public venue over Artscape weekend. Venue Company's contract totaled \$15,000 for cleaning and three days of rental fees. One music artist received \$400.00 in ARPA funds to DJ the VIP Reception. When asked for an opinion on using ARPA dollars for VIP events, the Current CRO said it requires more explanation, and that's not preferable. Additionally, BOPA informed the OIG that an actress (Actress) agreed to host an invitation-only after party at a hotel following the VIP Reception on May 23, 2025, which was attended by Artscape "celebrities." The Actress's company received \$10,000.00 in ARPA funds to participate in a live, in-person panel discussion during a separate Artscape 2025 event with an optional post-panel meet-and-greet.

### **Investigation Findings**

The OIG found the City used \$516,150.00 of a \$1,600,000 Artscape 2025 ARPA grant for music artists. Of that amount, \$240,500.00 was paid for a performance by Artist 1 and \$125,000 for a performance by Artist 2. The amount spent on music artists exceeded the \$300,000 ARPA budget allocation for performance talent and the \$40,000 budget for talent booking. The OIG found \$582,809.02 of Artscape ARPA funds were reallocated without approval from the Chief Recovery Officer or BOE. Additionally, the OIG learned that \$26,546.73 in ARPA funds were used for a VIP Reception on May 23, 2025. The OIG recommended the City develop standard operating processes for events such as Artscape to help define roles and responsibilities among the entities involved and ensure the City receives the best possible cost when selecting vendors.

Sincerely,



Isabel Mercedes Cumming  
Inspector General

CC: Hon. Brandon M. Scott, Mayor of Baltimore City  
Hon. Zeke Cohen, Baltimore City Council President  
Hon. Bill Henry, Baltimore City Comptroller  
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council  
Hon. Ebony Thompson, Baltimore City Solicitor

# **City Leadership Response\***

## **Case # 25-0047-I**

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CITY OF BALTIMORE  
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

February 11, 2026

Isabel Cumming  
100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, MD 21202

RE: OIG Case #25-0047-I

Dear Inspector General Cumming,

**Introduction**

This response addresses the February 3, 2026, report issued by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), Case No. 25-0047-I. The report only presents a single formal recommendation: *that the City develop standard operating procedures for events such as Artscape to better define roles and responsibilities among participating entities and to ensure cost-effectiveness in vendor selection.* The City acknowledges this recommendation and notes that substantial progress toward that objective has already occurred.

In 2025, after four consecutive years of disruption, the City successfully relaunched Artscape under a fundamentally restructured model that included a new date, location, and operational framework. The result was not merely a return of the festival, but a decisive economic recovery for the City. Artscape 2025 generated an estimated \$8.5 million in economic activity (See Exhibit 1). The 2025 festival attracted more than 100,000 attendees, one of the largest crowds in recent history, continuing a pattern of approximately 15 percent year-over-year growth since the festival's reinstatement. These outcomes reflect careful planning, strong execution, and responsible stewardship of public resources.

Like cities nationwide, Baltimore strategically deployed American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to stabilize industries disproportionately harmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The arts and tourism sectors experienced severe and well-documented economic losses. Artscape 2025 was a deliberate investment aligned with federal guidance and the City's broader economic revitalization strategy. Artscape is one of several ARPA-supported

initiatives designed to restore economic activity, and reestablish Baltimore as a cultural destination.

Throughout 2024 and 2025, the City undertook a comprehensive restructuring of Baltimore's arts and culture governance framework. This included establishing the Mayor's Office of Arts, Culture, and Entertainment (MOACE) and reevaluating the City's contractual relationship with the Baltimore Office of Promotion & the Arts (BOPA), now Create Baltimore. These reforms were happening concurrently with the Artscape 2025 planning cycle and have significantly redefined oversight, authority, and operational responsibilities. The transitions were substantial. Nevertheless, in the midst of the arts evolving landscape, the City and its partners delivered a safe, fiscally responsible, and economically impactful festival during a period of structural change.

Today, MOACE is a fully established and funded office within City government, and a new contractual agreement with Create Baltimore provides clearer lines of accountability and coordination. The governance framework that the report implies was lacking has since been formalized and strengthened.

Although the report's sole recommendation only concerns standard operating procedures to facilitate coordination between partners, it attempts to raise questions about various aspects of the Artscape budget and utilization of ARPA funds that seem to insinuate impropriety where none exists. For that reason, the City will address those insinuations directly.

The sections that follow reaffirm Artscape's clear eligibility under federal ARPA guidelines, respond to concerns regarding the use of ARPA funds, and explain the acknowledged administrative oversight related to the modification of the grant budget. Artscape 2025 was consistent with both federal guidance and the City's recovery objectives.

### **Eligibility Under ARPA**

The City of Baltimore was awarded \$641 million in ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) in March 2021. The funds were intended to address the negative health and economic impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes lost revenues as individuals remained indoors, businesses closed and public gatherings ceased. In July 2021, Mayor Brandon Scott established the Mayor's Office of Recovery Programs to centrally monitor and report on the use of these funds to the U.S. Department of Treasury—the federal agency responsible for overseeing these funds.

The U.S. Department of Treasury issued guidance with various categories for the use of ARPA funds. In recognition of the fiscal challenges faced by local jurisdictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Treasury identified "Provision of Government Services," as one of the eligible uses of ARPA SLFRF. According to guidance published by Treasury, "Government services generally include any service traditionally provided by a government. . . In order to use funds under government services, recipients should

first determine revenue loss. They may, then, spend up to that amount on general government services.”<sup>1</sup>

The City of Baltimore has a long history of providing financial support for Artscape, and funding has historically come from a combination of sources. Artscape has been a cornerstone of Baltimore’s cultural scene since 1982 and has become one of the largest free arts festivals in the country. In addition, the festival generates jobs, innovation, and public art which enhances the value of the festival’s footprint. Artscape was canceled in 2021 and 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to reinvigorate the festival in 2023 and 2024 proved challenging as the festival was a smaller scale in 2023 and the festival was impacted by weather in 2024—resulting in economic loss for the City. Due to the City’s long-standing practice of providing funding to Artscape, this project was categorized as eligible under “Provision of Government Services.”

While direct return on investment is not a necessary metric in determining eligibility or in justifying the City’s decision to invest ARPA funds in an eligible project, in this context it is worth restating that Artscape 2025 resulted in approximately \$8.5 million in economic activity. This success is a notable outcome when compared to the economic losses posed by the cancellation or disruption of the event over the previous four years.

### **Concerns about Funding Uses**

The report prepared by the OIG identified three areas of concern for the use of ARPA funds: the purchase of alcohol, the VIP reception, and securing musical talent.

First, like many other festivals, Artscape includes live music on multiple stages – from local musical artists to national talent. There is a long history of featuring nationally known musical artists at Artscape. Musical artists help generate greater interest in the event and attract more visitors to Artscape, which increases economic activity and the success of the festival overall. As previously noted, Artscape 2025 attracted more than 100,000 attendees, continuing a pattern of year-over-year growth since the festival’s return.

Secondly, per documentation maintained by the Baltimore Civic Fund (BCF)—the fiscal agent for this grant agreement—about \$26,000 in ARPA funds were used for limited purposes for the VIP reception, to include facility rental, room set-up, decor and signage. Create Baltimore (formerly known as BOPA) solicited sponsorships and used internal funds to cover costs associated with the bar at the VIP reception (See Exhibit 2). Finally, ARPA funds were not directly used to purchase alcohol. As noted in exhibit 14 included in report 25-0047-1, the contracted booking agent, [REDACTED], was instructed in writing (See Exhibit 3) that federal funds may not be used to purchase alcohol as determined by the Code of Federal Regulation. The items outlined in your report were listed in the musical artists’ contracts (known as “hospitality riders”), however, neither the City nor the booking agent paid for hospitality riders, and this information was communicated in writing to the artists’ management (See Exhibit 4).

The City is only responsible for technical riders, which includes band backline, lighting, staging, and audio requirements. It is common industry practice for artists to utilize a singular hospitality rider agreement for all of their commitments, rather than tailoring a new rider for each appearance that reflects differences in the type of event or restrictions facing the booking party. Therefore, it is similarly common practice for artists and their team to waive provisions in their normal rider agreement that cannot be accommodated when necessary. This often occurs during festivals that may have limited facilities, like Artscape, or when artists agree to appearances booked by parties that are not typical entertainment venues or companies. As such, a hospitality rider agreement, or specific provisions therein, being included in an artist booking agreement does not mean that those provisions were ultimately fulfilled. In the case of Artscape the hospitality riders were not fulfilled.

Relatedly, it is necessary to note that these booking agreements have specific confidentiality agreements. According to the agreement between [REDACTED] [REDACTED], “The Civic Fund and the Contractor acknowledge that certain information received under this Agreement, including, but not limited to, information provided by the City for this project and non-public information concerning the disclosing party’s business, methods, programs, activities, services, donors, or finances (“Confidential Information”), is confidential and proprietary” (See Exhibit 5).

Any information that is protected from disclosure under the Maryland Public Information Act should not be released to the public without appropriate redaction. This could include trade secrets or confidential, commercial or financial information, especially of individual artists. Therefore, the City requests that the Office of the Inspector General work with the Law Department before sharing such information publicly to protect the City from potential liability.

### **Budget Preparation and Modifications**

In the last quarter of calendar year 2024, the Recovery Office prepared a grant agreement for \$1,600,000 (0.25% of the total \$641 million ARPA award) for Artscape 2025, which was approved by the Board of Estimates (BOE) on December 18, 2024. Typically, when grantees prepare budgets for ARPA projects, they provide the best estimates and assumptions available at the time that the grant is executed. As programs or services begin, there is often a need to modify the budget to increase or decrease line items or to add new line items as warranted. In the template grant agreement that the Recovery Office developed with the City’s Law Department, there is a provision that allows grantees to request budget modifications in writing. If the dollar amount of the request is below 25% of the total grant, then the request may be approved in writing by the Chief Recovery Officer. If the request exceeds that amount, the grant agreement must go back to the Board of Estimates for approval.

This approach to budget modifications was developed and instituted by the Recovery Office in consultation with the Law Department. The BOE budget modification threshold is

not required by City policy or by the federal government. The objective of this provision in the grant agreement is to ensure that modifications above the Recovery Office's self-determined and voluntary threshold are reviewed and documented, with clear rationale for the modification.

For the \$1,600,000 grant for Artscape, changes at or below 25% (\$400,000) could have been approved in writing by the Chief Recovery Officer per provisions in the grant agreement. Because the proposed shifts between line items were above 25% (\$582,809.02 or 36%), the request should have been subject to Board of Estimates action per Recovery Office policy. Due to an administrative oversight, a budget modification for the Artscape 2025 grant was not submitted to the BOE. The Chief Recovery Officer was not aware until after the grant expired that a written budget modification request had been received but was not elevated. To reconcile the grant agreement, the Recovery Office will resubmit the grant agreement with a revised budget reflecting actual costs to the BOE for retroactive approval for transparency and accountability.

### **Applicable Procurement Rules**

Under the "Provision of Government Services" eligible use of ARPA, Treasury has established "streamlined reporting and compliance requirements."<sup>2</sup> There are several provisions in the Code of Federal Regulations (2 CFR 200) that Treasury deemed are not applicable to ARPA funds expended under this category. According to Treasury's SLFRF Final Rule Frequently Asked Questions, FAQ 13.15, "given the purpose and very broad scope of eligible uses of the revenue replacement funds, only a subset of the requirements in Subparts D and E of the Uniform Guidance [2 CFR 200] apply to recipients' use of such funds."<sup>3</sup> "General Procurement Standards" (2 CFR 200.318) and "Competition" (2 CFR 200.319) are not applicable under this use category. Therefore, competitive procurement was not a requirement for Artscape 2025.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Artscape 2025 was an economically impactful investment that advanced the City's recovery goals, and delivered measurable results for residents, businesses, and Baltimore's arts community. ARPA funds were deployed in accordance with federal guidance, the festival was executed responsibly during a period of significant structural transition, and governance reforms are already underway to improve our processes moving forward. While the City acknowledges the value of continued process refinement, the report does not undermine the impact, or public benefit of Artscape 2025.

The City remains committed to transparency, fiscal responsibility, and building on the demonstrated success of this revitalized festival.

### **Exhibits**

Exhibit 1: Artscape 2025 Economic Impact Analysis Report

Exhibit 2: Invoice for alcohol at VIP Reception Paid for by Create Baltimore

Exhibit 3: Email to [REDACTED] Regarding Purchase of Alcohol

Exhibit 4: Email from [REDACTED] to Artist Management Regarding Purchase of alcohol.

Exhibit 5: Confidentiality Provision from the Contract between the Baltimore Civic Fund and [REDACTED]

# Exhibit 1

*City Hall – Room 250, 100 Holliday Street, Baltimore, MD 21202*

# ARTSCAPE



Source: Mollye Miller, Artscape 2025: Unapologetically Baltimore in Photos, BmoreArt, [https://bmoreart.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/DSC\\_6200.jpg](https://bmoreart.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/DSC_6200.jpg)

## Artscape 2025 Economic Impact Analysis Report

### September 2025



GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

## Background

For over 40 years, **Artscape** has been Baltimore's largest free outdoor arts festival, celebrating the city's vibrant culture and generating a significant economic impact. In 2025, the festival underwent its most notable changes yet, moving from its traditional July dates to **Memorial Day weekend** and shifting its location to the area under the Jones Falls Expressway, and activating City Hall and the War Memorial Plaza. Despite these changes, the event's economic significance remained strong and creating lasting memories.

To measure this impact, the **Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC)** was commissioned by the Baltimore City Office of Promotion & The Arts (BOPA) to conduct an **economic impact analysis** of the 2024 Artscape festival. This study aimed to provide a quantitative assessment of the festival's contribution to the local economy, including its effects on businesses, job creation, and city revenues.

The analysis followed a comprehensive methodology:

- **Review of Survey Data:** GBC analyzed visitor survey responses to understand spending habits on food, lodging, entertainment, and other local purchases.
- **Analysis of Visitation Data:** The study included an assessment of attendance figures, using estimates from BOPA and visitor data from Visit Baltimore to gauge the festival's reach and market segmentation.
- **Estimation of Total Festival Spending:** Using the data from the surveys and attendance figures, GBC estimated the total spending generated by attendees.
- **Economic Impact Analysis Using the Lightcast Impact Scenario Model:** GBC used the Lightcast Input/Output model to conduct a detailed analysis of visitor spending and overall economic impact. This model traced the economic flow across various industries to measure the **direct, indirect, and induced effects** of the Artscape festival on Baltimore region.

Economic impact analyses are crucial for events like Artscape. They provide a clear, data-driven assessment of an event's economic impact on the community, highlighting its broader effects beyond just attendance and revenue. By quantifying the festival's return on investment through job creation and increased business activity, these reports help articulate the need for continued support, ensuring Artscape remains a vital driver of cultural and economic growth for Baltimore for decades to come.

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## A. Survey & Visitor Data

Attendance at Artscape saw an increase from last year, the second consecutive year of growth since the festival was canceled in 2022; this was according to visitor data provided by Visit Baltimore through the analytics software Placer.ai, which analyzes cellular data that is used to estimate the attendance year over year. Placer.ai attendance data is used for sampling and to measure growth. The analytics are supplemented with city findings which provide definitive attendance rates for the weekend. Announcements from the mayor's office are consistent with this growth noted in data, in which recorded crowds of over 100,000 attendees – the highest total since after the COVID-19 pandemic.

| Visitor Trends       | 2023   | 2024   | 2025   |
|----------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Estimated Attendance | 44,100 | 50,900 | 59,800 |
| YoY Growth           | n/a    | +15.7% | +14.9% |

*Source: Placer.ai*

Based on surveying conducted by BOPA filled by both attendees, vendors, performers, and volunteers, **Artscape attendees had an overwhelmingly positive experience**. Out of 212 respondents which identified as attendees during the event, **92%** rated their time as excellent, good, or fair, marking a **7.5% increase** in satisfaction from attendees last year.

The survey highlights several key findings:

- **Safety:** 93% of attendees felt completely or somewhat safe at the festival's new location.
- **Repeat Visitors:** 71% of attendees were repeat visitors, showing strong loyalty.
- **First-Timers:** The new location also left a great impression on first-time attendees, with **over half** of them describing their experience as excellent.

The survey found that **65% of respondents were Baltimore City residents** with the remaining coming from the larger region or out of state. What's also clear is that **first-time attendees not only spent more money, but they were also more likely to be out-of-state visitors**, which is a significant benefit to the local economy.

| Attendee Characteristics | Average Spend | % Primary Purpose Artscape | % Out of State | % Total Responses |
|--------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| First time               | \$105.89      | 72%                        | 21%            | 28.8%             |
| 1 – 2 times              | \$77.64       | 93%                        | 7%             | 13.2%             |
| 3 – 4 times              | \$98.68       | 84%                        | 12%            | 15.5%             |
| 5 – 5+ times             | \$105.63      | 90%                        | 5%             | 42.5%             |
| All attendees            | \$100.64      | 83%                        | 11%            | 100%              |

These first-time visitors also showed greater racial diversity. White and Caucasian alone attendees made up **20%** of this group, which is **12 percentage points lower** than repeat visitors. This difference was driven primarily by an increase in Black/African/Afro-Caribbean attendees, who were **11 percentage points more represented** among first timers. Additionally, a quarter of first-time visitors came to Baltimore for other attractions besides Artscape. This new visitor traffic has likely benefited the broader regional economy in addition to their economic contributions to Artscape.

| Attendee Data Continued   | In-State | Out-of-State |
|---------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Percent of Total          | 88.7%    | 11.3%        |
| Average Spending          | \$95.44  | \$139.92     |
| Visited for Another Event | 75%      | 25%          |

The survey data also highlights the value of coordinating Artscape with other major city events. Comparable to first-time attendees, those in attendance traveling from out of state, or the non-Maryland residents surveyed, visited for something other than Artscape and were likely to spend more than In-State visitors. Looking at out-of-state attendees:

- **75%** came to Baltimore specifically for Artscape.
- **25%** were in town for another event, such as a live show or sporting event, and attended Artscape as a secondary activity.

These findings suggest that creating a "cross-pollinating" event landscape could be a powerful strategy. By aligning Artscape with other city attractions, Baltimore can attract out-of-state visitors who might not have attended the festival otherwise, ultimately driving more traffic and capturing more revenue to the city as a whole.

Additional research from Placer.ai, a location analytics platform that uses aggregated cellular data to analyze visitor trends, further expands upon the survey's demographic and spending findings. This research, enriched by **Experian's Mosaic consumer segmentation system**, provides a deeper look into the Artscape audience segmentation.

The data shows that over half of attendees fell into three primary Experian Mosaic profiles:

- **Thrifty Habits:** Largely a group of low-income, older individuals.
- **Suburban Style:** A diverse group of suburbanites with modest to high middle incomes.

- **Singles and Starters:** Young, single people and young families who enjoy a city lifestyle and have modest incomes.

This research highlights the diverse visitor base of Artscape and provides valuable insights into the spending patterns and lifestyles of its attendees. This information can be used to inform future marketing and programming efforts, helping to tailor outreach to attract and develop curated experiences to engage these specific audience segments.

| Top 5 Groups – Experian Mosaic Profiles | Population – 70% of Artscape Visits |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| S – Thrift Habits                       | 16.3%                               |
| D – Suburban Style                      | 21.5%                               |
| G – Young City Solos                    | 8.5%                                |
| O – Single Starters                     | 11.9%                               |
| R – Aspirational Fusion                 | 6%                                  |

This event segmentation is further supported by demographic data outlined in the survey. Of respondents who completed the survey, almost 70% had a college degree or higher, suggesting a highly educated group of attendees with income segmentation consistent with research provided by the Experian Mosaic Profiles analysis. Of those respondents listing their annual income, 61% earn above the Baltimore metropolitan's per capita personal income (ACS 5 Year Estimates, 2023) with 39% earning below this threshold.

Furthermore, survey data indicates an overrepresentation of female attendees with 65% of respondents listing their sex/gender as Female/Woman and 33% listing their sex/gender as Male/Man, the remaining 1% listed their sex/gender as non-binary. Of note, this Female/Woman representation is 13 percentage points higher than the Baltimore metropolitan's area current representation and indicates a high attendance rate compared to regional statistical data.

Other qualitative data in the survey found that the new location of Artscape was not without its challenges. Several attendees expressed concern that holding festival events at the **Baltimore War Memorial** on Memorial Day weekend was insensitive to veterans. They felt that the festivities failed to appropriately honor those who have served and fallen in battle, finding the activation of the space to be disrespectful. Additionally, concerns around accessibility were captured across multiple responses. Several attendees found that the food vendor layout and main stage were not accessible by wheelchairs due to crowds and other immovable obstacles, obstructing one's ability to move throughout.

## B. Economic Impact

Analyzing the spending habits of Artscape attendees reveals a significant economic impact on the city. The total estimated spending from the event was an impressive **\$8,530,470.00**, representing a substantial **30% increase** over the previous year.

On an individual level, the average spending per respondent was **\$142.65**. Key spending categories included:

- **Retail:** Attendees spent an average of **\$53** on retail items from vendors at Artscape, a **4% increase** from last year.
- **Food:** Spending on food saw some of the most significant growth, nearly **doubling** from the previous year. This substantial increase, combined with survey feedback on wait times, options, and availability, suggests that further investment in food offerings could be a major driver of future spending. Macroeconomic factors like inflation and increase in food/service costs may also explain this category's growth.
- **Live Shows and Sporting Events:** Despite no baseball being played over the weekend and an insignificant volume of live performances and shows, this category saw a notable increase from the year prior. Additional research will be needed to determine which events drove this spending but, importantly, this spending showcases a willingness to support live events outside of those at Artscape.
- **Retail Businesses:** Though spending rates for those who solicited retail businesses outside of the festival were at comparable rates, meaning that visitors likely spent the same amount per retail transaction inside vs outside the festival, survey data indicated that less visitors spent at retail businesses outside of Artscape, ultimately resulting in an overall decrease per visitor. This may be partially explained due to the new location with fewer establishments nestled around the adjacent area as compared to the Mount Vernon and Station North area, where the festival is usually held, may help explain the marked decrease.

| Spending Category             | Average per Respondent | Total (Estimated)     |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Food and Drinks               | \$51.90                | \$3,103,330.65        |
| Retail Shopping from Vendors  | \$53.02                | \$3,170,706.92        |
| Retail Shopping – Businesses  | \$8.92                 | \$533,136.29          |
| Parking                       | \$5.99                 | \$358,076.61          |
| Live Shows or Sporting Events | \$9.52                 | \$569,001.82          |
| Lodging                       | \$11.20                | \$669,878.15          |
| Rideshare Services or Taxis   | \$2.11                 | \$126,339.56          |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>\$142.65</b>        | <b>\$8,530,470.00</b> |

| Year Over Year Changes      | 2025 Estimates        | 2024 Estimates           | Change     |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Food and Drinks             | \$51.90               | \$31.00                  | 67%        |
| Retail ... from Vendors     | \$53.02               | \$51.00                  | 4%         |
| Retail ... Businesses       | \$8.92                | \$21.00                  | -58%       |
| Parking                     | \$5.99                | \$4.00                   | 50%        |
| Live Shows or Sporting...   | \$9.52                | \$4.00                   | 138%       |
| Lodging                     | \$11.20               | \$9.00                   | 24%        |
| Rideshare Services or Taxis | \$2.11                | \$ 4.00                  | -47%       |
| <b>Total Average</b>        | <b>\$142.65</b>       | <b>\$129<sup>1</sup></b> | <b>11%</b> |
| <b>Total Spending</b>       | <b>\$8,530,470.00</b> | <b>\$6,560,543.00</b>    | <b>30%</b> |

A detailed economic analysis of Artscape estimates shows that the festival's total economic impact stood at approximately **\$8.8 million for 2025**. This figure represents a significant impact on the broader Baltimore economy.

While the total economic impact and the subsequent breakdowns in sales, earnings, and employment are captured below in distinct analyses, the output figure represented, total value of goods and services generated by businesses, showcases resounding economic generation. Additionally, the event is estimated to have generated around **\$1,047,190.00** in local, state, and federal taxes, further underscoring its financial benefit to the region.

| Impact by Year            | 2023             | 2024            | 2025            |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Estimated Economic Impact | <b>\$12.1 MM</b> | <b>\$6.7 MM</b> | <b>\$8.8 MM</b> |

A direct year-over-year comparison is not encouraged across previous years, as each economic analysis is derived from different software, a direct comparison of the raw data between them is not possible. However, the final, estimated output figures can be reliably compared year over year to track the festival's economic growth and impact.

Below is the estimated analysis showing the effect on sales, earnings, jobs, and tax revenues. These impacts are capturing the direct, indirect, and induced effects of event of vendor and attendee spending as it circulates through the regional economy:

- **Total Sales (Output):** The total economic output generated was **\$8,880,219.27**.
- **Total Earnings (Labor Income):** The event supported **\$2,859,509.31** in labor income.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that this year did not include an option to catalogue public transit in this year's spending survey.

- **Total Jobs (Employment):** The event created or supported the equivalent of **33** full-time jobs.
- **Total Tax Revenues:** The event generated an estimated **\$1,047,190.00** in total tax revenues.

|          | Output         | Earnings       | Jobs |         | Effect on Taxes |
|----------|----------------|----------------|------|---------|-----------------|
| Direct   | \$6,051,122.87 | \$1,901,967.20 | 13   | Local   | \$498,325.00    |
| Indirect | \$2,148,017.64 | \$721,435.83   | 4    | State   | \$412,212.00    |
| Induced  | \$681,078.76   | \$236,106.27   | 16   | Federal | \$136,653.00    |
| Total    | \$8,880,219.27 | \$2,859,509.31 | 33   | Total   | \$1,047,190.00  |

## Conclusion and Results

The 2025 Artscape festival had a significant and lasting impact on Baltimore's economy. As the nation's largest free arts festival, Artscape brought in thousands of visitors, which translated into a major boost for the city's hospitality, retail, and food industries. Artscape is on a positive trajectory, attracting a growing and diverse audience. The festival's ability to draw significant attendance, especially from new visitors, is a major win for the future.

**First-time attendees** not only **spent at the highest rate** but were also more likely to be **out-of-state visitors**, bringing new dollars into Maryland's economy. This group also showed greater racial diversity, with a higher proportion of people of color compared to repeat visitors.

To maximize economic impact, Artscape should **continue to target first-time and out-of-state attendees**. Additionally, efforts to re-engage returning attendees are crucial, as the data suggests they are more likely to be local. By focusing on both attracting new visitors and maintaining the loyalty of its base, Artscape can build on its recent successes and become an even more powerful economic driver for the city.

Looking at the impact analysis, money spent on accommodations, dining, and transportation created a ripple effect, increasing revenue for local businesses and generating sales tax for the city. This surge in economic activity not only supported existing jobs but also created new employment opportunities in the arts, entertainment, and related industries.

Beyond the immediate financial benefits, the festival helped solidify Baltimore's reputation as a cultural destination, attracting future events and investments. By highlighting local artists and creative talent, Artscape contributed to the city's long-term revitalization and economic growth.

## Appendix – Methodology

### Lightcast Input-Output Model

The Lightcast Input-Output (I-O) model is a comprehensive economic analysis tool used to quantify the economic impact of a particular event, industry, or organization. It works by tracing the flow of money through an economy to estimate both the direct and indirect effects of an economic activity.

The model is based on the idea that every economic transaction has a ripple effect, creating a chain of related transactions. Input-Output model used for the Artscape 2025 economic impact analysis measures the festival's influence on Baltimore City through four key metrics:

**Output.** Represents the total value of goods and services generated by businesses in Baltimore as a result of Artscape, including spending on accommodations, dining, retail, and transportation.

**Employment.** Measures the number of full-time and part-time jobs created or supported across different sectors, such as hospitality, entertainment, and local arts, due to the festival's activities.

**Labor Income.** Accounts for wages, salaries, benefits, and other earnings received by workers employed in jobs generated by the festival, contributing to local household income.

**City Government Revenues.** Includes revenues collected by the Baltimore City government, such as sales and lodging taxes, resulting from increased economic activity associated with Artscape.

The model evaluates Artscape's economic effects through the following categories:

**Direct Effects.** Reflect the initial impact of visitor spending at the festival, including purchases made on-site, hotel stays, and dining expenditures.

**Indirect Effects.** Capture the changes in inter-industry transactions, such as local businesses increasing their purchases of supplies and services to meet the heightened demand from festival-related activities.

**Induced Effects.** Represent changes in household spending as employees earn additional income from jobs directly or indirectly associated with Artscape, leading to increased spending on local goods and services.

**Total Effects.** Sum the direct, indirect, and induced effects to provide a full picture of the economic impact that Artscape 2025 had on Baltimore City.