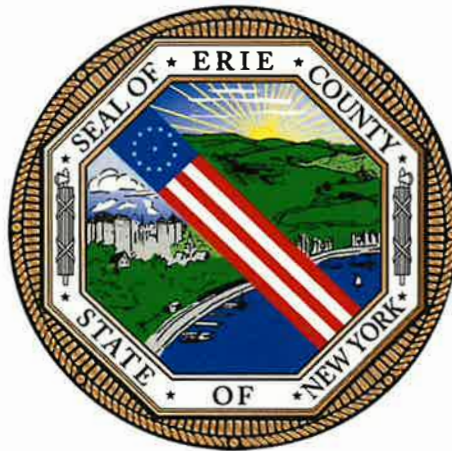


March 2025

**Erie County Cultural Funding Grant
Monitoring Program
Jewish Community Center
January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2022**



**HON. KEVIN R. HARDWICK
ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER**

**HON. KEVIN R. HARDWICK
ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE
DIVISION OF AUDIT & CONTROL
95 FRANKLIN STREET
BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14202**



March 25, 2025

Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin Street, Fourth Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

Dear Honorable Members:

In 2023, the Erie County Comptroller's Office, Division of Audit & Control initiated a regular Monitoring Program of Erie County Cultural Funding Grants. The Erie County Cultural Funding program provides annual grants to non-profit arts and cultural organizations operating within the County. County funds are intended to be limited in their use to current operating expenses including salaries, program costs, fringe benefits, rents, utilities, office supplies, and equipment. Grant funds may not be used for or applied towards capital projects or physical improvements of buildings or facilities, nor as a revenue offset against accounts receivable. No funds received shall be used for any services provided or activities performed outside Erie County. The County's Department of Environment and Planning executes contracts with organizations and is the primary agency charged with monitoring.

Objective

The objective of the Cultural Funding Monitoring Program is to verify that the recipients have utilized County funds according to the terms and conditions associated with the Erie County Cultural Funding grant process and the recipient's contract with the County. In order to verify the proper use of the grant award, a number of agencies were selected in order to review their expenses and financial records.

Scope and Methodology

Approximately 120 different organizations receive funding annually from Erie County. The Comptroller's Cultural Funding Grant Monitoring Program is intended to review organizations that received a minimum of \$5,000 in funding during any of the three prior years. Approximately 80 agencies were identified as receiving \$5,000 or more in grant funding. The list of recipient organizations was split into two groups of approximately 40 agencies. The first batch of letters announcing the commencement of a review was sent to the selected non-profit organizations during mid-February 2023, and a second batch was sent in early October 2023. The review of all agencies is expected to be completed by July 31, 2025.

2023 – 2024 Program

During the interview phase, the Auditor identifies use of funding to narrow down the expenses to be verified. A table of agencies which meet the criteria for review along with the amount of grant awards can be found on the following page.

Monitoring Program – Phase I

ACT #	APPROPRIATION	SYNDICATE NUMBER	TAX YEAR 2019	TAX YEAR 2020	TAX YEAR 2021	TAX YEAR 2022
Enlightenment Library Arts Center &						
517125	Dog Ears Bookstore	352183	\$ 28,000.00	\$ 36,000.00	\$ 55,000.00	
518004	African American Cultural Center	112604	\$ 275,400.00	\$ 311,950.00	\$ 300,000.00	
518012	Alleyway Theatre	109340	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 11,000.00	
518016	American Legion Band of	100079	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 45,000.00	
518017	Amherst Symphony Orchestra	100475	\$ 32,500.00	\$ 26,750.00	\$ 28,740.00	
518019	Arts Services Initiative of WNY Inc.	147159	\$ 26,090.00	\$ 26,090.00	\$ 30,000.00	
518028	Ballet Artists Of WNY (Neglia)	100794	\$ 24,000.00	\$ 24,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	
Buffalo Arts Studio (Arts Studio of						
518040	Western New York, Inc]	101144	\$ 18,000.00	\$ 45,500.00	\$ 55,000.00	
518044	Buffalo Inner City Ballet Co. Inc.	108597	\$ 27,000.00	\$ 27,000.00	\$ 27,000.00	
518050	Buffalo Music Hall of Fame	111342	\$ 4,500.00	\$ -	\$ 5,500.00	
518051	Buffalo Heritage Carousel	187829	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 35,000.00	
518078	Colored Music Clubs	190377	\$ 5,000.00	\$ -	\$ 12,500.00	
518084	Cl Museo Gallery	108635	\$ 12,585.00	\$ 8,585.00	\$ 11,000.00	
518104	Grayhill Conservancy	103107	\$ 50,300.00	\$ 50,300.00	\$ 60,000.00	
518113	Hull House Foundation	145478	\$ 15,875.00	\$ 5,375.00	\$ 7,500.00	
Jewish Community Center Cultural						
518119	(Jewish Ctr of Greater Buff)	111216	\$ 13,500.00	\$ 8,750.00	\$ 13,500.00	
518120	Just Buffalo Literary Center	106577	\$ 78,100.00	\$ 78,100.00	\$ 83,500.00	
518132	Locust St Neighborhood Art Classes	109960	\$ 29,250.00	\$ 25,250.00	\$ 28,500.00	
518136	Martin House Restoration	104863	\$ 175,500.00	\$ 175,500.00	\$ 190,000.00	
518139	Music In Art	190615	\$ 48,000.00	\$ 48,000.00	\$ 59,000.00	
518140	Polish Arts Club Of Buffalo Inc	105117	\$ 7,000.00	\$ 7,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	
518147	Preservation Buffalo Niagara	147009	\$ 4,615.00	\$ 4,615.00	\$ 6,000.00	
518160	Springville Center For The Arts	111308	\$ 10,500.00	\$ 20,500.00	\$ 35,000.00	
518164	Squeaky Wheel	181328	\$ 20,900.00	\$ 30,920.00	\$ 27,000.00	
518172	Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural Site	105552	\$ 22,320.00	\$ 21,320.00	\$ 37,000.00	
518176	Ujima Community	101047	\$ 83,000.00	\$ 85,600.00	\$ 97,714.00	
518180	Western New York Artists Group	108295	\$ 8,215.00	\$ 6,275.00	\$ 5,500.00	
518181	WNY Rock Arts Collaborative, Inc	135559	\$ 4,540.00	\$ 4,540.00	\$ 6,000.00	
518184	Young Audiences Of WNY	105818	\$ 10,500.00	\$ 10,500.00	\$ 14,000.00	
518196	Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village	191966	\$ 18,500.00	\$ 18,500.00	\$ 24,500.00	
518200	Michigan St African Amer Heritage	152578	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 32,500.00	
518201	General Pulaski Association	103060	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 11,000.00	\$ 12,500.00	
518204	Brighton Place, Inc	156104	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 16,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	
518211	Hispanic Heritage Council of WNY	159305	\$ 12,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 24,500.00	
Black Rock Historical Society (Black						
518216	Rock-Riverside Alliance)	170980	\$ 22,500.00	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 10,000.00	
518233	Centro Culturale Italiano di Buffalo	167500	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 15,000.00	
518549	South Buffalo Irish Feis/Can You Dig	111041	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 15,000.00	
518596	Nat Preserv DNA The Foundry	168005	\$ 5,000.00	\$ -	\$ 5,000.00	

Monitoring Program – Phase II

ACT #	APPROPRIATION	SYNDICATE NUMBER	TAX YEAR 2019	TAX YEAR 2020	TAX YEAR 2021	TAX YEAR 2022
517533	Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy	140237	\$ 25,910.00	\$ 25,910.00	\$ 35,000.00	
518008	Albright-Knox Art Gallery	108207	\$ 575,000.00	\$ 575,000.00	\$ 675,000.00	
518009	Albright-Knox Public Art Curator	147226	\$ 44,750.00	\$ 48,750.00	\$ -	
518025	Assembly House 150, Inc.	167247	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 3,500.00	
518034	Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Garden	108743	\$ 102,000.00	\$ 125,000.00	\$ 150,000.00	
518036	Buffalo & Erie Co Historical Society	106772	\$ 417,000.00	\$ 467,000.00	\$ 437,000.00	
Buffalo & Erie County Naval & Servicemans						
518052	Park	109339	\$ 35,000.00	\$ 35,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	
518060	Buffalo Philharmonic Orch Society	101032	\$ 926,000.00	\$ 926,000.00	\$ 940,000.00	
518061	Buffalo Philharmonic Chorus	109796	\$ 34,500.00	\$ 34,500.00	\$ 35,000.00	
518064	Buffalo Society Natural Sciences	109767	\$ 955,000.00	\$ 955,000.00	\$ 955,000.00	
518069	Buffalo String Works, Inc.	167853	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 3,351.00	
518088	Burchfield Penney Art Center	101004	\$ 155,000.00	\$ 155,000.00	\$ 160,000.00	
518072	Center for Exploratory and Perceptu	109934	\$ 55,000.00	\$ 55,000.00	\$ 63,000.00	
518082	Clunecobility	156639	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 3,000.00	
518090	Explore & More Children's Museum	102758	\$ 42,000.00	\$ 42,000.00	\$ 73,000.00	
518108	Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center	108098	\$ 57,000.00	\$ 57,000.00	\$ 60,000.00	
518112	Hamburg Nat Hist Society/Penn-Dive	101281	\$ 84,314.00	\$ 96,314.00	\$ 96,314.00	
518116	Irish Classical Theatre Company	108777	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 9,500.00	
518121	O'Connell College Keweenaw Theater	109341	\$ 11,750.00	\$ -	\$ 8,500.00	
518128	Lancaster Opera House	113681	\$ 45,300.00	\$ 30,300.00	\$ 35,000.00	
518140	Musicalfire Theatre	105308	\$ 61,525.00	\$ 61,525.00	\$ 66,000.00	
518141	New Phoenix Theatre	109342	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 7,500.00	\$ -	
518148	Road Less Traveled Productions	121043	\$ 61,500.00	\$ 63,500.00	\$ 67,000.00	
518152	Roycroft Campus Cooperation	118213	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	
518156	Shakespeare In The Park	109578	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 31,000.00	
518168	Theatre Of Youth	109486	\$ 69,400.00	\$ 69,400.00	\$ 74,000.00	
518171	Town Space Theatre	143873	\$ 20,440.00	\$ 15,440.00	\$ 25,500.00	
518188	Zoological Society Of Buffalo	108825	\$ 1,500,000.00	\$ 1,500,000.00	\$ 1,700,000.00	
518191	Orchard Park Symphony Orchestra	147741	\$ 4,615.00	\$ 4,615.00	\$ 6,000.00	
518202	Buffalo Opera Unlimited Incorporated	135975	\$ 2,300.00	\$ 2,300.00	\$ 10,000.00	
518207	Buffalo-Toronto Public Media WHEO/WBFO	172909	\$ 1,750.00	\$ -	\$ 3,000.00	
518209	Cheektowaga Comm Symphony Orchestra	109177	\$ -	\$ 7,500.00	\$ -	
518209	Newstead Historical Society	155518	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 3,000.00	
518213	O'Connell & Company Productions	159362	\$ 23,100.00	\$ 23,100.00	\$ 31,500.00	
Amherst Male Glee Club dba Ren Blazer						
518219	Men's Chorus	162043	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 6,000.00	
518221	Buffalo Center for Arts and Technology	152307	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 7,500.00	
518226	Cheektowaga Historical Association	163121	\$ 1,250.00	\$ 8,250.00	\$ 8,100.00	
518229	Second Generation Theatre Company	164957	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	
518230	Steel Plant Museum of Western New York	147740	\$ 2,020.00	\$ 2,020.00	\$ 5,000.00	
518501	Alleen Christian Theatrical Society	114558	\$ 10,000.00	\$ -	\$ 3,000.00	
518514	Clarence Concert Association	107711	\$ 3,500.00	\$ -	\$ 3,000.00	
Clarence Museum (Historical Soc. of the						
518515	Town of Clarence)	111067	\$ 5,500.00	\$ -	\$ 6,000.00	

BEST PRACTICES

Over the course of the Monitoring Program, the Division of Audit found a number of problematic practices and questionable expense categories on a recurring basis. In order to address issues pertaining to a large number of organizations, certain generally applicable best practices and recommendations are included here.

Alcohol

Several organizations used or appeared to use CGF funds to obtain alcohol. While the Division of Audit does not recommend that CGF awards be made contingent on the absence of alcohol from events hosted by the organization, alcohol should not be purchased with CGF funds. The Division of Audit found dozens of alcohol purchases that appeared to be personal in nature and several more which likely violated NYS Alcoholic Beverage Control Laws. Furthermore, the NYS Comptroller has long held that alcohol is not a "lawful county charge", meaning that government officials and employees may not use taxpayer funds to purchase alcohol. The Division of Audit sees no reason that organizations receiving taxpayer funds should be treated differently.

Debit Cards

Credit cards, particularly with smaller organizations, can provide a critical layer of expense control. The Division of Audit found a large quantity of small-dollar expenses appearing personal in nature. If a debit card is used, the money is gone by the time statements are typically reviewed, while a credit card bill often needs to be paid and approved by the organization's board of directors.

Alternate Funding Sources and Segregation of Accounts

Organizations may have several sources of governmental or philanthropic funding. One way to ensure that CGF funds go farthest is to tailor awards to the needs of the organization. Such an assessment would require

applicants to provide certain financial documents covering prior years and a disclosure of current year funding applications. Furthermore, accounts received from Erie County should not be comingled with the other funds of the organization. Having source information upfront and requiring the segregation of accounts substantially decreases the likelihood of wasted CGF funds.

JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER OF GREATER BUFFALO, INC.

BACKGROUND

The Jewish Community Center of Greater Buffalo, Inc. (JCC) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization initially established in 1938. The stated mission of the JCC is to build and strengthen the Jewish and WNY communities by providing recreational, educational, cultural, health and wellness, as well as social programs and services that are consistent with Jewish values.

Between 2020 and 2022, JCC received funding through the Cultural Grant Funding (CGF) program as follows:

- 2020: \$13,500 (\$9,750 above executive recommendation)
- 2021: \$8,750 (\$5,000 above executive recommendation)
- 2022: \$13,500 (\$7,500 above executive recommendation)

Additionally in 2024, JCC secured additional capital and legislative grant funding including:

- \$68,000 in Cultural Capital Grant funding for new theater equipment
- \$400,000 in legislative grant funding for security enhancements and upgrades

Both grants were partially disbursed in 2024, with the remaining balance scheduled for 2025. Notably, capital and legislative funding falls outside the scope of this review.

AUDITOR'S OBSERVATIONS

The JCC came about as an outgrowth of a movement started in 1891 by the Sisterhood of Zion. The organization started with the creation of the Jewish Community Building in order to serve the emerging Jewish community as well as to address the needs of several Jewish organizations. The organization was subsequently restructured through consolidation, strategic planning and right-sizing. The JCC shifted its focus to become an inclusive organization, with centers and programming opened to the entire community.

The Jewish Repertory Theatre (JRT) and the Cultural Arts Department (CAD) are key divisions of the JCC that provide cultural programming for both the Jewish and broader local communities. Notably, all Cultural Grant Funding received during the years under review was allocated exclusively to these divisions.

- Jewish Repertory Theatre (JRT): Founded in 2002, JRT is a professional theatre dedicated to presenting high-quality plays rooted in Jewish life, themes, and values. While emphasizing Jewish heritage, the JRT offers theatre for everyone, fostering cultural appreciation and dialogue.
- Cultural Arts Department (CAD): CAD provides inclusive and culturally accessible programming designed to engage diverse audiences while sharing perspectives on Jewish values, traditions, and stories.

For the years under review, programming service revenue was the primary source of revenue for the JCC, accounting for much of the organization's annual revenue. Grants, donations and contributions accounted for the second largest sources of revenue for the organization. The JCC also generated income from mission-related functions such as fundraisers and miscellaneous events.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the JCC operations, as the organization was required to temporarily shut down. During the shutdown period, shows produced by the JTR were streamed virtually. Other

activities were also transitioned to virtual platforms. Additionally, a portion of the staff was furloughed, while executive staff worked remotely with reduced salaries. The salary reductions helped to fund an employee assistance program. During this period, the JCC faced declines in admissions, memberships, and event cancellations. However, the organization mitigated financial losses through pandemic-related economic assistance, including:

- New York State grants and foundation funding
- Federal Payroll Protection Program (PPP) assistance
- Shuttered Venue Operators Grant
- Employee Retention Credit (ERC)

Despite the challenges, the JCC successfully navigated the pandemic by adapting operations and securing necessary funding to sustain its mission and programming.

AUDITOR'S CONCLUSION

During the grant monitoring review process, the JCC was able to provide the Auditor with adequate substantiation for its use of the CGF award for all the years under review. CGF awarded to the JCC was allocated exclusively to the Jewish Repertory Theatre (JRT) and the Cultural Arts Department (CAD), which operate as separate departments within the organization. While funding is awarded to the JCC, it is then distributed internally to the appropriate divisions. The Auditor was informed that the primary operating expenses for JTR and CAD include salaries & wages and advertising expenses. To substantiate these expenditures, the JCC provided comprehensive financial documentation including tax return documents, general ledgers, payroll records and other electronic financial records. The Auditor confirmed that wage expenses incurred by the JCC exceeded the total grant funding awarded by the County for each year under review.

The JCC is governed by a 16-member Board of Directors. First-time board members serve a one-year appointment and are then eligible for up to two consecutive three-year terms. Board officers are elected to two-year terms and are not permitted to serve consecutive terms.

The organization affirmed that the Board of Directors plays a critical role in the JCC's internal controls. The Board is responsible for reviewing expenses incurred, overseeing large purchases, and ensuring the accuracy of IRS Form 990 filings before submission. Additionally, the Board hires and supervises the CEO, providing oversight of executive leadership. To maintain financial accountability, the JCC implemented a procurement policy with segregated approval levels and requires dual signatures on checks. As an added layer of financial control, bank account access is granted to the Board President, Board Secretary, and executive staff. These governance and internal control measures help ensure transparency and operational integrity within the organization.

At the conclusion of the grant review, the Auditor determined that JCC was fully compliant with all filing requirements, including IRS Form 990, New York State Form CHAR500, and all necessary information return documents.