

The State of Houston's Latinx Art 2018  
Prepared by the Mayor's Hispanic Advisory Board Arts Committee  
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www.HouLatinxArt.org

## Introduction

The National Association of Latino Arts and Culture's (NALAC) published a report September 14, 2018 titled: "[A Call to Collaborate: Continued Inequity in Funding Houston Latinx Art Organizations 2010 – 2015](#)". The NALAC report quantified the lack of art funding for Houston's Latinx community.

The report was careful to state that: "The causes of the inequity were not the focus of this study." The report goes on to say, "The findings are presented as a springboard for Houston stakeholders to look for the causes, to interpret them, and to implement possible solutions. This report is an optimistic call to collaborate in finding these solutions that will lead to funding equity."

The Mayor's Hispanic Advisory Board (MHAB) Arts Committee recognizes the NALAC Report as vital to defining a baseline for the manner in which Houston Latinx Arts have been funded. To that end, the Arts Committee compiled the State of Houston's Latinx Art 2018 Policy Paper, written by Tony Diaz, and released Wed. Oct 3, 2018. This will be an annual report that quantifies Houston's Latinx cultural capital. This will fuel the collaboration necessary to devise, address, and implement solutions to the inequity identified.

Community Latinx Art meetings have been held all year and will continue all year all over town. In order to accelerate the path to equity, 3 organizations have been identified to represent the Latinx Art community. These are:

1. The Mayor's Hispanic Advisory Board Arts Committee
2. Councilman Robert Gallego's Gathering of Latino Nonprofits
3. HALA-Houston Alliance of Latinx Arts

Three general goals have evolved from community meetings. They are:

1. Equity for Latinx Arts Groups
2. Accelerate the Latinx Community's Cultural Capital
3. Unite for a Successful Houston LAN 2019

The MHAB Arts Committee formulated specific goals which it will submit to the full Board for approval and submission to the Mayor's Office. Those are included at the end of the report. Their status will be conveyed through updates.

This State of Houston's Latinx Art 2018 Report will provide a picture of Houston's Latinx Community's cultural capital which is the foundation for addressing the inequity in arts funding for the Latinx Community. This report will also map out goals and plans to achieve equity. This 2018 report will be followed up by a 2019 report and subsequent annual reports to provide all of Houston and the nation a portrait of our progress.

The NALAC Report quantifies statistics that are the results of decades of inequity; however, Houston is at a unique point in its history where it has the resources to not only address this inequity, but Houston is also poised to become the nation's leader in quantifying, investing in, cultivating, and accelerating the Latinx Community's most powerful example of cultural capital-Latinx Art.

## **NALAC Report Findings Reveal The State of the Latinx Community's Cultural Capital**

According to the NALAC report, less than 1% of state arts funding and less than 7% of city arts funding goes to the Latinx community. These numbers are startling.

Of course, this is something that Latinx Art Organizations and Artists have always suspected, and this is something that Latinx Art Leaders have been saying for years. However, the numbers have never been laid out in black and white like this.

This lack of funding is surprising because of the number of Latinos in Houston and the amount of talent prevalent in the community. This deserves repeating. There is not a lack of talent in the Latinx Community. In fact, there is an abundance of it. However, the Latinx Community's cultural capital has not been quantified. This leads to a lack of investment in the community's most potent example of cultural capital-its art.

Other aspects of the Latinx experience are quantified.

According to the [Census Bureau, Latinos are 44.3%](#) of the Houston population. This will increase.

According to [Texas Department of State Health Services](#) by 2020, Hispanics will account for 48% of Harris County.

These numbers may not surprise most Houstonians who have not only heard about this demographic change but can also see it with their own eyes. However, even life-long Houstonians may be surprised to find out that, according to the [City of Houston](#), almost 1 in 3, or just over 32% of Houstonians are Mexican or Mexican American. That represents 73.6% of Houston's Hispanic population.

The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce has quantified Latino buying power: [“Hispanics in the Houston region have a spending power of \\$55 billion, which is projected to reach \\$78 billion by 2022.”](#)

However, the NALAC Report revealed that only 10 Latinx nonprofits were assisted by the Houston Art Alliance from 2010 to 2015.

The fact that the Latinx Community is quantified as consumers but not as creators reflects the disconnect between the Latinx community and arts funding entities.

At a more profound level, the sheer number of Latinos, the community's buying power, and the talent in the community has helped to create an effectively “underground” Latinx Art community which survives without formal funding from mainstream arts funding sources. The Latinx Art Ecosystem has survived on the community's cultural capital. However, that has also created a plateau. If we can imagine a glass ceiling, we are addressing the ceramic ceiling.

Just as the problem of inequity in funding was finally quantified, we must now more accurately quantify the cultural capital of the Latinx Community. Houston must also cultivate and invest in that cultural capital immediately. And the city must devise and act on a plan to accelerate and sustain Latinx cultural capital long term. Traditional methods of funding must be examined, revised, and possibly replaced. Also, new collaborations, non-traditional alliances must be inspired and activated to fuel this change.

## **Who Represents the Latinx Art Community?**

To move forward, it is important to give the Latinx Art Community agency. Who can sit and negotiate and advocate for Latinx Art? Again, there are many artists and informal groups in the Latinx community. However, under current models and practices in place, that leads to only 10 Latinx Art nonprofits who are eligible to apply and compete for arts funding, as documented by the NALAC Report. Increasing the number of Latinx nonprofits is a long-term goal. However, for immediate action, 3 entities have been identified to quantify, cultivate, invest in, and accelerate the Latinx Community's cultural capital for sustained development of Latinx Art.

The following are the 3 entities:

### **The Mayor's Hispanic Advisory Board (MHAB) Arts Committee**

Mission:

[The Hispanic Advisory Board](#) exists to serve as a liaison between the Hispanic community and the Mayor. The Board will provide viable recommendations on policies that will advance the social, economic, and political issues of all Hispanics and citizens in the City of Houston. [Click here for a list of board members.](#)

The MHAB Arts Subcommittee

Mission:

Advise the mayor on arts issues facing the Latino community, and compile, analyze and report on survey data and attitudes of concern to the Latino arts community in general. Allocate resources to promote Latino arts for the benefit of Houston. Advocate for Latino Arts in Houston.

Tony Diaz and David Medina co-chairs Other members: Laura Murillo, Tony Diaz, Sofia Adrogué, Raul Reyes, Michele Leal, Rey Guerra, and Helen Cavazos

### **The Houston Alliance of Latinx Arts (HALA)**

The Houston Alliance of Latinx Arts (HALA) was formed as a response to several inequities in the funding of Latinx arts in Houston. After holding several gatherings, the group identified four major themes as part of the mission to foster strong connections and promote activism within the Houston Art communities:

- networking and professional development,
- artistic collaboration,
- political strategy, and
- funding advocacy.

The group's central thrust is advancing Latinx arts in the Houston metropolitan area.

HALA is interested in finding solutions by creating a strong and healthy coalition of Latinx artists and arts administrators to work toward changing the status quo. The group meets once a month and creates a safe space to cultivate relationships within their professional and personal spheres. The meetings are held at different venues throughout Houston. The group's members consist of about 40 professionals with backgrounds ranging from the visual arts, theater arts, culinary arts, music, digital media, designers, publishing, real estate, strategic planning, and non-profit arts organizations, to name a few.

### **Councilman Robert Gallego's Gathering of Latino Nonprofits**

City Council member Robert Gallegos is the only Latino on Houston City Council. As such, he has a unique relationship to the community's cultural capital. To maintain and cultivate that connection, quarterly he convenes Latino nonprofit organizations not directly related to the arts. This is important in efforts towards equity because nontraditional approaches must be examined and put into action to achieve equity for Latinx Arts funding. This group provides a bridge for collaboration between Latinx Art Organizations and non-arts based Latino nonprofits.

### **Latinx Art Response**

It is important to point out that that it is impossible to cover in a short time, a conversation that has been neglected for decades. At the same time, it is vital that we not only talk and plan, we must act. Furthermore, findings must be disseminated and archived for additional study. This is one example of cultural acceleration. Previous generations did not have every facet of this approach at their disposal. This too is another example of cultural capital.

On that note, the response to the NALAC Report and a continued discussion about equity for Latinx Arts will be documented throughout the year. Updates will be shared at townhalls. Those findings will be shared, discussed, and/or reported via mainstream media, Indy media, and social media.

These will be shared to the website and corresponding social media platforms for [www.HouLatinxArt.org](http://www.HouLatinxArt.org) and/or at the blog "The Cultural Accelerator" at [www.TonyDiaz.net](http://www.TonyDiaz.net), the author of this report. These may be made available to other entities as well; however, the platforms directly mentioned will defiantly carry updates.

At this point, it is important to note that this plan fully embraces nontraditional approaches. That is vital for stakeholders to actually shatter the ceramic ceiling that has limited the Latinx Community's Cultural Capital for decades.

Updates will be broadcast on the radio program Nuestra Palabra: Latino Writers Having Their Say (NP) which airs Tuesdays, 6p-7p cst on 90.1 FM KPFT Houston, Texas. The livestream is available on [www.kpft.org](http://www.kpft.org). Selected podcasts will be available at [www.NuestraPalabra.org](http://www.NuestraPalabra.org), as well as the social media platforms for NP. For long term study, all NP radio broadcasts are archived by the University of Houston Digital Archives. Additionally, hard copies of findings such as the NALAC Report and the State of Houston Latinx Art 2018 report will be housed at the Houston Public Library Hispanic Collections, along with NP's additional hard copy materials.

Nuestra Palabra: Latino Writers Having Their Say, founded in 1998, was interviewed and completed a survey for the NALAC report. Nuestra Palabra was one of only 10 Latinx nonprofits recognized by the Houston Arts Alliance from 2010 to 2015. Nuestra Palabra provided the first direct response the NALAC report from the Latinx Art community. Additional responses will be shared via updates and included in the State of Houston Latinx Art 2019 Report.

The NP response also serves as an answer to the immediate reply that mainstream institutions provide when addressing the lack of number of Latinx Art groups funded.

Mainstream arts funding agencies believe the problem is that Latino organizations and Latinx artists simply don't apply for funds. NP refutes that claim.

[Nuestra Palabra released a statement in response to the NALAC report that said:](#)

“After 2010, NP made a conscience decision to stop applying for funding from HAA because the system was unfair to Latinos. Worse, it was evident that the organization was not cultivating and did not respect the cultural capital of the Chicana, Chicano, Hispanic, Latina, Latino, Mexican American or Latinx community.”

This must be addressed as we assess the 2018 State of Latinx Art in Houston. The manner that a “nonprofit” status is treated is unfair to cultural capital. Also, the manner that this status is currently treated is arbitrary and must be altered to arrive at equity in the funding of cultural capital. This component will be addressed at greater length in updates. Changes to this practice will be reported in the 2019 State of Latinx Art in Houston report.

Additionally, in the course of the survey for the NALAC report, the researcher pointed out that it was difficult to quantify the amount of arts funds granted to Latinx Arts Organizations.

That must not be the case. An annual amount should be reported, so that we can track growth or the lack of growth.

Additionally, the Latinx Art community has not been formally represented during the planning of the administration of arts funds, or during negotiations for the funds, or during the finalized agreements for those funds.

[Take the case of the contract to distribute funds from the Hotel Occupancy Tax Revenue.](#) That agreement was signed in 2013. That original agreement was scheduled to end December of this year 2018. It was extended an extra year to Dec. 2019.

That agreement was signed by the following entities: The City of Houston, Houston Arts Alliance, Miller Theatre Advisory Board, the Houston Museum District Association, and Theatre District Improvement, Inc.

Not one of those entities is Latinx. Their boards are not majority Latinx. Their CEO's are not Latinx. Additionally, the contract included components that directly allotted funds to each entity that signed.

As a result, the NALAC report cites the following:

“This study finds 58% of HOT funding is geographically predetermined and available only to organizations with the Theater District and the Museum District and the Miller Theatre Advisory Board.”

The report goes on to state:

“11% of the funds from the Miller Theatre Advisory Board are redistributed to Latinx arts organizations.”

Of course, this figure is lower than the percentage of Houston’s Hispanic population. This also addresses once again the number of “official” Latinx organizations alluded to earlier in this report. We will address this issue in addendums and updates.

“As a result of the contract for HOT Funds, for which Latinx Art groups have no representation, 42% of HOT funds are allocated to organizations with the Museum and Theatre Districts.”

Perhaps one of the most important fact articulated in the NALAC Report is the following:

“No Latinx organizations are located in the Museum and Theatre Districts making 42% of HOT funds unavailable to Latinx arts organizations.”

Nuestra Palabra: Latino Writers Having Their Say provides a Latinx Art Organization’s response in their statement:

“Significant portions of funding are set-aside for the larger nonprofits that have the most infrastructure and the most funding to begin with. The remaining funds also effectively pit all remaining nonprofits against each other.”

Other aspects of the contract will be examined in the addendums and updates. Clearly this contract is clearly not fair.

## **This is not a new problem, But Now We Are Organized and Have Solutions.**

This lack of funding for Latinx Art is something that the community has always suspected, and this is something that our art leaders have addressed for years. Alice Valdez, founder and director of Multicultural Education and Counseling Through the Arts (MECA), Richard Reyes, director of the Pancho Clause Foundation, Nicolás Kanellos, Ph.D. founder and director of Arte Público Press, and Javier Perez, director of Talento Bilingue de Houston (TBH), among others, have been saying for years even as they invest and cultivate cultural capital.

Additionally, in [2012 The Center for Houston’s Future, said the following:](#)

“Though representing 13 percent of the region’s arts nonprofits, cultural and ethnic awareness organizations account for less 1.7 percent of the total revenue secured by the sector as a whole.”

Of course, the figures would be lower for Latinx artists. It is important to note the arts funding system does not adequately fund Latinx nor African American Arts Groups.

[The 2012 report reflected some optimism:](#)

“Nevertheless, the data do give reason for some optimism: the number of Houston’s cultural and ethnic awareness nonprofits increased by 82% from 2000 to 2011. Such organizations now comprise 13 percent of the total number of arts and cultural nonprofits in the

Houston metro area. The strong growth in this measure suggests that the nonprofit arts sector is conscious of the cultural needs among our region's diverse population and is taking significant steps toward engaging the region's inhabitants."

The NALAC report also refers to 2015 report which Houston artists and art groups contributed to. "In October 2015, the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs for the city of Houston released the "Arts and Cultural Plan." The executive summary stated that, "The vision for the City of Houston Arts and Cultural Plan is to foster an environment in which art and culture flourish for the sharing and benefit of all residents and visitors." Town Hall meetings were held with more than 250 residents actively participating in the conversation surrounding the Arts and Cultural Plan.' The report goes on to state:

"Equity was raised in every meeting about the Plan, from a need for more fairness in how the City allocates its cultural investments, to residents' ability to access Houston's cultural sector."

These are more formal reports of a sentiment that has been prevalent, especially in the Latinx community. However, in 2016, these talks took a different turn, that has led to this latest stage of community involvement.

The introduction to the ["A Call to Collaborate: Continued Inequity in Funding Houston Latinx Art Organizations 2010 - 2015"](#) alludes to the genesis of the NALAC report:

"In 2016, upon the request of several Houston arts and community leaders, the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures (NALAC) launched a research initiative that would diagnose the current state of support to Latino arts and cultural communities in Houston, in order to identify, prioritize, and coordinate capacity building efforts for, by and with Latinx stakeholders. Initial feedback from constituents drew attention towards the need for professional artistic development, collaborative arts advocacy, and equitable policies for public arts funding. To this end, the study can inform plans to advance and strengthen the capacity, economic growth and impact of the Latino arts field in Houston."

However, the 2018 NALAC report quantifies that only 10 Latinx nonprofits were applying for funds through HAA from 2010 to 2015. This shows that the optimism of 2012 did not result in major changes. This also may reflect the plateaus that Latinx Art groups encounter when funded by only, or mostly, cultural capital. More funding, equitable funding is necessary to sustain long term growth.

Of course, the figures from the Center for Houston's future cover more than just the Latinx community. It is important to ascertain the situation for other groups as well.

However, in terms of the Latinx Arts community, the research shows that the signification steps taken towards engagement with the Latinx Arts Community have not enough.

Additional examples and results of inequity will be provided in addendums and updates; however, one more example deserves attention because it current.

In a June 2018 Houston Chronicle article titled ["Houston theater diversity, not always so diverse"](#) Wei-Huan Chen writes:

The “core” Houston theater scene might have one of the largest gaps between minority authorship in theater (6 percent) and city minority population (51 percent) in the U.S. — a whopping 45-point gap between art and reality.

Wei-Huan Chen was interviewed on the Nuestra Palabra radio show about the topic. [You can click here to listen to the podcast.](#) The program originally aired August 7, 2018 on 90.1 FM KPFT, Houston, Texas.

The numbers are even lower if examined for Latinx artists.

Also, of course, several main stream arts organizations have mounted campaigns and programs to reach the Latinx community, but without direct interaction with the entire Latinx community, and without an overhaul of the manners in which Latinx cultural capital is treated and funded, equity will be illusive.

Another response may be that the mainstream arts community has not heard complaints for the Latinx community. [Nuestra Palabra: Latino Writers Having Their Say addresses this in their statement:](#)

“It was also difficult to complain. Other organizations fear losing funding or possible rejection when applying for grants for organizations or as individual artists. There is no transparency. It is difficult to get an exact number on the amounts Latinx groups receive, until now. Now it is clear the entire system and process must be overhauled.”

## **Houston Timeline: Houston is Working Towards Equity**

February 2018, the Mayor’s Hispanic Advisory Board created its Arts Committee, in response to a need in the community.

May 21, 2018 the organization that would become the Houston Alliance of Latinx Artists began convening. It was organized by Houston Arts Alliance and NALAC board member Adan Medrano in response to community needs.

These groups would formalize and unite to work with Houston City Council member Robert Gallego’s Quarterly meeting of Latino nonprofits. This union of organizations came together formally Wednesday, August 29, 2018, City Hall Legacy Room, 901 Bagby Street. Houston, TX. 77002. The roles of each group were defined to result in the following:

### **There Are Now Three Super Groups Advocating for Houston’s Latinx Art:**

1. Mayor Sylvester Turner’s Hispanic Advisory Board Arts Committee:  
This group will address public policy regarding Latinx Art.
2. Councilman Robert Gallego’s Gathering of Latino Nonprofits:  
This group consists of Latinx nonprofit organizations not directly related to the arts.
3. HALA-Houston Alliance of Latinx Arts:



This group consists of Latinx artists and Latinx Arts organizations.

Additional dates and timelines:

**Friday, September 14, 2018. 2pm – 3pm. City Hall, Legacy Room. 901 Bagby, 77002**

Press Conference to proclaim Latino Arts Day, release the NALAC Report, and launch HALA-Houston Latinx Art Alliance.

**Wed, Oct. 3. 10 am. Talento Bilingue de Houston 333 S. Jensen**

Tony Diaz, co-chair of the Mayor’s Hispanic Advisory Board’s Arts Committee, will release the “State of Latinx Art in Houston 2018” report. This will be an annual policy paper examining the funding of Latinx Art and the cultural capital of Houston’s Latinx community. Latinx Art townhalls will be planned throughout the year and through the city in English, Spanish, and Spanglish.

**Hispanic Heritage Month September 15 – October 15: Houston Latinx Art Townhalls**

Put #HouLatinxArt on the map. Pledge to support #HouLatinxArt in your community. Promote LAN 2019.

**April 2019 Latinx Arts Month**

**April 2019 Latinx Arts Now: This National Event Will Take Place in Houston.**

This national conference will take place in Houston. This will feature international, national artists as well as artists from Texas and Houston. There will also be legacy events that will shape the Latinx Artist community long after the conference. Some of these components include:

Creation of Digital Map of Houston Latinx Art

Directory of Houston Latinx Visual Artists to be archived by the MFAH, UH, Smithsonian

Directory of Houston Community Artists Directory to be archived by the Houston Latino Arts Alliance and the MHAB Art Committee.

**Friday, September 13, 2019**

Latinx Arts Day 2019

State of Houston’s Latinx Art 2019 Policy Paper

**September 15, 2019 – October 15, 2019: Major Latinx Arts Events.**

**Direct Solutions**

The MHAB Arts Committee formulated specific goals which it will submit to the full Board for approval and submission to the Mayor’s Office. Their status will be conveyed through updates.

They are:

1. The Mayor of Houston may appoint up to 6 board members to the Houston Arts Alliance Board. We recommend that he appoint Latinx members.
2. San Antonio City Council recently voted to automatically award annual grants to Latinx nonprofits to help with sustainability. Houston City Council should do the same.
3. The contract for the allocation of the Hotel Occupancy Tax was due to end December 2018 began in 2013. It was amended to last an extra year to Dec. 2019. That contract prohibits the Latinx community from accessing different funds due to geographical restrictions. The entire contract should be put on the table for renegotiation.
4. A representative group of the Latinx Art Community should sign the contract as well, representing the interests and needs of the Latinx community's cultural capital.

### **Quantifying Cultural Capital**

A Latinx nonprofit organization should be endowed to count Latinx nonprofits. That part is easy since there are so few. They should also quantify Latinx art groups, which is harder. Then they should quantify Latinx artists. This part would be the most difficult. And finally, they should also quantify Latinx art supporters.

This information should be funded through his nonprofit. And the information will become that group's cultural capital.

This information should be managed by the group which should remain Latinx owned and run.

It will administer the information and collaborate with other entities who want to outreach into the Latinx Community.

This group can also provide art services to the Latinx Art Community and artists. However, one thing must be clear. To truly cultivate the Latinx Community's Cultural Capital, any Arts Services to the Latinx Community must be planned, coordinated, conducted, archived, maintained and sustained by organizations that are Latinx "owned" and run. In the case of nonprofits that should mean Latinx majority boards with Latinx Presidents/CEO's and Latinx upper administration and staff. They should also possess profound evidence of cultivating Latinx Cultural Capital.

We will launch Latinx Art Town Halls across Houston to inform the community about the state of Latinx Art to get their input, to put them on the radar, to find out their needs, to get them involved, to help them quantify, accelerate, and sustain their Art. This will include townhalls in underserved areas such as Houston's Southwest, outreach to Central American artists, the LGBTQ community, the Afro-Latino community, Asian-Latino, townhalls all in Spanish, and more.

We also want the nation to understand that Houston is the right city to take on this task.

We will address issues that have been ignored for decades, but there will be significant changes and work done for change. This not short term.

We are committed to making Houston a national example of the power of Latinx Art.

## About The Author

In 1998, writer, activist and professor, Tony Diaz founded Nuestra Palabra: Latino Writers Having Their Say (NP). NP has received Houston Arts Alliance (HAA) project grants, as well as grants for operating funds. NP was in the HAA incubator program for 2 years. He served on the HAA board. NP has also received funding from the Texas Commission on the Arts, Houston Endowment, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Diaz has received HAA Individual and Project Grants. He has also served on arts review panels in San Antonio, Texas.

Diaz is a member of the Mayor's Hispanic Advisory Board and chair of its Arts Committee. He was the first Chicano to earn a Master of Fine Arts Degree from the University of Houston Creative Writing Program. He is author of the award-winning novel "The Aztec Love God" and co-founder and leader of the Librotraficante Movement.

Diaz is also a political analyst on "What's Your Point" which airs on Fox 26 Houston. He also hosts the weekly bilingual radio program Nuestra Palabra: Latino Writers Having Their Say which covers Latino Literature, Art, and Politics on KPFT 90.1 FM Houston. His essays have appeared in the Houston Chronicle, The Texas Observer, CNN.com, the Los Angeles Times, and The Huffington Post Latino Voices, among other publications.