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ArtsWave Kicks Off 2026 Community Campaign Focused on “Discover More”

James Zimmerman to Chair Annual Campaign; Civic and Education Leaders Join Kickoff

CINCINNATI (February 4, 2026) – As ArtsWave marks its 99th year, the 2026 ArtsWave Community Campaign, the region’s primary source of funding for the arts and the largest community arts campaign in the nation, officially launched today to support over 150 arts organizations, artists and projects across the Cincinnati region.

The launch event brought together arts, business, civic and education leaders to rally support for the ArtsWave campaign across the Cincinnati region.

This year’s campaign is chaired by James Zimmerman, partner-in-charge at Taft, Stettinius & Hollister, who will lead the effort to sustain and strengthen the region’s arts sector through collective community investment. Joining him at the kickoff were Cincinnati Public Schools Superintendent Shauna Murphy and numerous other business, civic and arts leaders, underscoring the campaign’s broad impact.

Cincinnati’s Arts Sector Fuels a Stronger Region

The 2026 ArtsWave Community Campaign launches as the Cincinnati region continues to earn national recognition for the strength and consistency of its arts sector.

Most recently, the region was again ranked among the nation’s most arts-vibrant communities by SMU DataArts, placing in the top 5% of more than 900 communities studied nationwide. The Cincinnati region ranked highest across Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky and was one of just 22 communities recognized nationally for sustained arts vibrancy in the years following the pandemic.

That strength shows up not only in national rankings, but in shared experiences that bring people together across the region. BLINK will return this year, with ArtsWave

-serving as the event's illuminating sponsor, reinforcing the role of the arts in creating moments of connection that cross neighborhoods and state lines.

The impact is also felt in classrooms across the region. ArtsWave's More Arts, More Kids initiative provides arts field trips to nearly 20,000 students each year from school districts across the Cincinnati region, including Ludlow Independent Schools, Hamilton City Schools, Catholic Inner City Schools, Northern Kentucky Cooperative for Education Services, and every first through sixth-grade student in Cincinnati Public Schools. These shared experiences connect classroom learning to creativity, curiosity and community.

At the kickoff event, Superintendent Murphy highlighted the role these experiences play in education and community life. "When students experience the arts together, whether it's their first theater performance or museum visit, it changes how they experience learning and how they see each other," Murphy said. "These field trips aren't extras. They're meaningful experiences that support academic growth, creativity and connection across our district."

Reflecting on this momentum, Zimmerman said, "What we're seeing across the Cincinnati region is the result of decades of intentional, collective investment. The arts don't just happen on their own. They thrive when a community chooses to support them together, year after year."

Discover More: Why Our Arts Matter Now

The 2026 campaign theme, Discover More, builds on ArtsWave's long-standing role as a connector, linking people to experiences, organizations and one another.

"Discover More is an invitation," said ArtsWave President & CEO Alecia Kintner. "It's about discovering more connection between neighbors, more opportunity for students, more vibrancy in our neighborhoods and more reasons to feel proud of the Cincinnati region. The arts make all of that possible, but only when all of us pitch in to support them."

Since 1927, the community-funded ArtsWave campaign has provided stable, reliable support for the arts across the Cincinnati region. Today, that collective investment supports more than 150 arts organizations, projects and artists, helping keep the arts within reach for everyone while strengthening them as a shared asset for the region's success.

Early Momentum and Growing Impact

Early momentum is already strong with thousands of donors pledging over \$2.3 million to the 2026 Campaign.

Zimmerman announced that Western & Southern Financial Group's \$99,000 Challenge for the Future of the Arts, launched in honor of ArtsWave's 99th year, has already surpassed its original goal. Business and civic leaders have contributed more than \$135,000 through new \$5,000 gifts and increased renewals as part of ArtsWave's Executive Leaders for the Arts initiative.

“This response sends a clear signal,” Zimmerman said. “Leaders across Cincinnati understand how the arts make our community stronger and serve as a key asset. They’re a major part of how we define ourselves here in the Cincinnati region.”

Zimmerman also announced a new lead gift of \$25,000 from a long-time supporter for ArtsWave’s More Arts, More Kids initiative. This is the first step toward a \$250,000 goal — the annual cost of providing an arts field trip for every first- through sixth-grade student in Cincinnati Public Schools.

Shafer’s lead gift will send 1,300 CPS second graders to Cincinnati Ballet’s production of *Pinocchio* this April and is designed to encourage additional contributions of \$20 or more, roughly the cost of one student’s arts field trip.

How to Support the Campaign

ArtsWave funding supports more than 150 local arts organizations, projects and artists through one collective community campaign. Donations come from individuals through workplace giving campaigns at hundreds of regional companies, special events, direct giving and a variety of other community-driven funding mechanisms.

As a thank-you, ArtsWave offers donor benefits that connect supporters more deeply to the arts, including the ArtsWave Pass with half-off arts tickets and local deals, access to exclusive experiences and invitations to donor-only events like ArtsWave’s exclusive BLINK donor lounge that donors can access during this year’s festival.

The 2026 ArtsWave Community Campaign runs through May 19. To donate or learn more, visit artswave.org. To explore the thousands of arts events and opportunities in Cincy, download the ArtsWave App at artswave.org/app or through your app store.

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About ArtsWave

ArtsWave fuels the Cincinnati region’s arts, supporting 150+ organizations, projects, and artists each year. Since 1927, it has been the primary way the region funds the arts, raising millions annually from tens of thousands of individuals, businesses, and foundations to drive a more vibrant economy and connected community. Through the Blueprint for Collective Action, now in its second 10-year cycle, ArtsWave strategically makes investments that maximize the arts’ impact across the region. To learn more and give, visit artswave.org.

2026 ArtsWave Campaign Cabinet

The 2026 ArtsWave Community Campaign is led by Chair James Zimmerman and the following corporate and community leaders.

James Zimmerman, Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP, Chair

Matt Barney, Messer Construction Co.
Catherine Botos, GE Aerospace
Eric Combs, Dinsmore & Shohl LLP
Kathy Cook, Fitton Center for Creative Arts Board
Anna Coutts, Cintas Cares Foundation
Brendon Cull, Cincinnati Regional Chamber
Jennifer Damiano, KeyBank
Patrick Dingeldein, PNC Bank
Douglas Fox, Plante & Moran, PLLC
John Gray, Fifth Third Bank
Trey Grayson, Frost Brown Todd LLP
Devon Greco, BeNKY
Gregory Harris, First Financial Bank
Barbara Hauser, P&G
Heather Hawkins, Taft, Stettinius & Hollister LLP
Renee Hevia, CPS, retired
Andrew Hof, Novus Foods
Paul Jenny, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center
Marcene Kinney, GBBN Architects
Holly Mazzocca, Bartlett Wealth Management
Rob McDonald, Taft, Stettinius & Hollister LLP
Peter Metz, Cincinnati Regional Chamber
Samuel Moore, P&G, Retired
Theodore Nelson, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra
Gregory Olson, Urban Sites
James Smith, Cincinnati Business Courier
Chet Swisher, Cincinnati Insurance Companies
Susan Zaunbrecher, Fifth Third Bank
Sam Zeller, Taft, Stettinius & Hollister LLP