

LA Mayor spares the city's cultural department despite financial pressure

The philanthropist Eli Broad will help the organisation focus on attracting tourists

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Against expectations and under serious financial pressure, the mayor of Los Angeles, Jim Hahn, has announced plans to preserve the Cultural Affairs Department of the city.

Mayor Hahn will also set up a Council for the Arts to help the department rethink its activities. The billionaire philanthropist Eli Broad will serve as honorary chairman of the council and John Emerson, ceo of the city's Music Center, will serve as chairman.

Last month the mayor's budget team had recommended that the Cultural Affairs Department, which has an annual budget of \$11.8 million, be dissolved for the coming fiscal year, which begins on 1 June. While the mayor had planned to allocate some of the agency's programmes to other municipal departments, if the move had gone ahead, it would have marked the end for the organisation's grants division which awarded \$3.5 million to 250 arts organisations and individual artists in the last fiscal year.

The elimination of the department was one of the measures planned to help the city reduce its budget shortfall, estimated at \$300 million for the coming fiscal year.

As the cuts loomed, Eli Broad told The Art Newspaper that the department had failed to promote Los Angeles as a tourist destination for art lovers. “We’ve got world-class institutions: LACMA, the Getty, LAMoCA, the Norton Simon, the Huntington, the Hammer, university museums, and no one is promoting them. It’s time we changed that.” He said he would advise the mayor to “upgrade the arts by creating a deputy mayor for cultural affairs whose purpose would be to promote all the cultural institutions in the region. The result would be to generate revenue for the city by stimulating cultural tourism as they do in other cities around the world.”

Evidently the mayor listened to some of Mr Broad’s ideas and to the protests of arts leaders. On 17 March, Mayor Hahn issued a statement announcing a reversal of policy. He pledged to work closely with the arts community “to make the most efficient use of our limited funds, while maintaining a streamlined and refocused Cultural Affairs Department”

Although a detailed budget proposal will be put to the City Council on 20 April, it is clear that the department’s reprieve is reliant on the generation of tourist dollars. The mayor said the department “will refocus its efforts on cultural tourism, which will help increase visitors to the city. More tourism will result in greater hotel tax revenue to Los Angeles, which will directly fund the Cultural Affairs Department and will help me in my goal to distribute more funds for neighbourhood arts programs and community arts organisations.”

The move has been cautiously welcomed by arts organisations in Los Angeles which are already struggling to cope with the near elimination of funding at the State level. California’s Arts Council recently reduced its funding for the arts from \$32 million to a token \$1 million this year.

o For the latest on Eli Broad’s support of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, see the “Eli Broad and Lacma set up foundation to run museum’s new wing” in current issue number.

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