



Proposal to Starr Foundation General Operating Support

Mission & Purpose

Since 2018, Riverside Harmony Collective (RHC) has been working to transform underused public spaces in Riverside, Oregon into vibrant community gathering places through the power of free, live music. Our mission is to strengthen the social fabric of our community by creating inclusive, accessible cultural experiences that celebrate diversity, foster connection, and activate public spaces that have long been overlooked. Led by a diverse team of local musicians, community organizers, and cultural advocates, RHC's programs are developed by and oriented towards the unique needs of our multicultural community. Our staff reflects the diversity of Riverside itself—including working-class families, recent college graduates, and longtime residents who serve as trusted voices and community bridges. Many of our team members have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of music in building community connections during challenging economic and social times. **Our core programs are:**

- **The Riverside Community Concert Series** features 8 free outdoor concerts annually in Riverside's underutilized Waterfront Park, presenting a diverse lineup of local, regional, and touring artists across genres including folk, world music, jazz, hip-hop, country, and traditional cultural performances. Each concert creates a welcoming, family-friendly environment where neighbors who might never otherwise meet can share in the universal language of music.
- **Generational Harmonies** is our monthly intergenerational concert series held at Riverside Community Center, specifically designed to bridge the gap between longtime residents and newcomers, older and younger community members. These intimate performances feature storytelling through song, oral history projects, and collaborative performances that celebrate our community's evolving identity while honoring its agricultural roots and working-class heritage.
- **Youth Rising** provides performance opportunities and mentorship for local emerging artists aged 16-25, offering them professional experience opening for established acts while giving them a platform to share their voices and stories with the broader community.

Context & Critical Need for Community-Driven Arts Access

The current political climate has made privately-funded cultural programming more essential than ever. The current administration's proposed NEA funding cuts have left small communities like ours particularly vulnerable. Hundreds of arts organizations nationwide have already received emails terminating their federal grants, and proposed budget cuts of 35% to remaining NEA funding mean that community-based arts programming must increasingly rely on private foundation support to survive.

Riverside, Oregon (population 28,000) sits at the intersection of urban and rural, serving as a regional hub for surrounding agricultural communities while struggling with the challenges of a post-industrial economy. Over the past decade, rising housing costs have displaced many longtime residents while creating tension between established communities and newcomers. Nearly 40% of residents are people

of color, representing diverse backgrounds including Native American, African American, Pacific Islander, and immigrant communities. Despite this rich diversity, community members report feeling increasingly isolated from one another, with few shared gathering spaces and limited affordable cultural programming.

The federal funding crisis has compounded existing barriers to arts access. The closest professional music venue is 45 miles away, and ticket prices for most concerts range from \$25-75—costs that are prohibitive for families where the median household income is \$42,000. Organizations like ours represent one of the few remaining pathways for ensuring cultural equity and access. Riverside's downtown core, once bustling with small businesses, now has several vacant storefronts and a general lack of foot traffic, particularly in the evening hours. Waterfront Park, our community's most beautiful public space, remains largely unused except for occasional weekend sporting events.

Research consistently demonstrates that free cultural programming builds social cohesion, increases property values, supports local businesses, and creates a sense of pride and belonging essential for community health. In Riverside, where demographic shifts, economic challenges, and now the federal disinvestment in the arts have created distance between neighbors, our free concerts serve as neutral ground where people of all backgrounds can come together, discover common interests, and build lasting connections.

Track Record of Success

Our community concerts have brought thousands of residents together over the past six years, creating measurable impact in both community connection and economic development. Through partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, and the City of Riverside, RHC has successfully presented 42 free concerts reaching over 35,000 audience members. Post-event surveys consistently show that 78% of attendees report meeting new neighbors at our concerts, and 65% say the events make them feel more connected to their community. **Our achievements include:**

- Increased Waterfront Park usage by 300% during concert season
- Generated over \$180,000 in local business revenue through concert-related spending
- Featured 95 different artists, with 60% being local or regional performers
- Created performance opportunities for 24 youth artists through our Youth Rising program
- Established ongoing partnerships with 12 community organizations and 8 local businesses

The Generational Harmonies series has become a cornerstone of community connection, with attendance growing from 75 people at our first event to an average of 400 participants. These concerts have sparked additional community initiatives, including an intergenerational oral history project and a community-led time bank system where neighbors trade skills and services.

Our work has not gone unnoticed—RHC received the Oregon Arts Commission's Community Arts Award in 2022, and our Community Sound Collective program was featured as a best practice model in the National Main Street Center's "Activating Public Spaces" toolkit.

Request

In this era of unprecedented federal disinvestment in community arts, the Starr Foundation's support is more crucial than ever. RHC respectfully requests \$40,000 in annual general operating support from the Starr Foundation for three years (2026-2028) to expand and deepen our community impact through the **Starr AMP Riverside Music Series**. **This partnership will help fill the critical gap left by eliminated federal funding while demonstrating how private philanthropy can ensure that communities like ours don't lose access to the arts.** Specifically, a Starr Foundation partnership will help us achieve the following goals:

1. **Present a dynamic 10-concert series annually** that transforms Waterfront Park into Riverside's premier community destination through professionally produced, genre-diverse programming featuring both established and emerging artists. Our concerts will celebrate the full spectrum of our community's musical traditions while introducing audiences to new sounds and cultures. **Specific outcomes we aim to achieve:** 85% of attendees report feeling more connected to their community; at least 50% of concerts feature local artists; and attendance grows by 15% annually while maintaining our diverse audience demographic.
2. **Strengthen local economic vitality** by activating downtown Riverside during evening hours and creating sustainable revenue streams for community businesses. Each concert will feature a curated selection of local food vendors, artisans, and community organizations, creating a festival atmosphere that encourages exploration of our downtown district. **Specific outcomes we aim to achieve:** Participating businesses report 25% increase in sales on concert nights; at least 8 local vendors participate in each concert; and 70% of attendees visit downtown businesses before or after concerts.
3. **Build community leadership capacity** through expanded youth programming and volunteer engagement opportunities that create pathways for residents to become active participants in their community's cultural life. Our enhanced Youth Rising program will provide paid internships for young community members in event production, marketing, and artist relations. **Specific outcomes we aim to achieve:** 12 youth participate in paid internship opportunities annually; 75 community volunteers contribute 1,500+ hours of service; and 4 Youth Rising alumni secure ongoing employment or educational opportunities in creative industries.

Meet Jordan Stuart, Youth Rising Alumni and Community Leader

Jordan Stuart was 18 when he first performed at a Riverside Community Concert. Now 23, Jordan works as our Community Engagement Coordinator while pursuing a degree in community development. "The concerts didn't just give me a place to share my music," Jordan reflects. "They showed me that I could overcome my fear and share my talents with the community. Now I get to help other young people find their voices too."

Jordan's journey exemplifies our program's ripple effect. Through Youth Rising, Jordan found confidence and community. Today, he mentors younger participants while serving as a bridge between different

groups in Riverside. Jordan's mother, who initially worried about Jordan's involvement in music, now volunteers as a sound technician at our events.

"With all the cuts to arts funding happening nationally, programs like this feel even more precious," Jordan adds. "We're not just making music—we're making sure that communities like ours don't get forgotten."

Monitoring & Evaluation

RHC employs a comprehensive evaluation framework that combines quantitative metrics with qualitative storytelling to track our progress and community impact. Our evaluation methods include pre- and post-event surveys available in multiple languages, focus groups with diverse community stakeholders, economic impact assessments conducted in partnership with the Riverside Chamber of Commerce, and annual community asset mapping to track changes in social cohesion and civic engagement.

- **Audience demographics, attendance numbers, and retention rates:** 15% annual attendance growth; sustain 60% audience return rate season-to-season
- **Community connection indicators:** 85% of attendees report feeling more connected to their community; 40% of survey respondents report meeting new neighbors at concerts
- **Economic impact measurements:** Participating businesses report 5% increase in sales on concert nights
- **Artist development outcomes:** 50% of featured artists are local or regional performers; 4 alumni annually secure ongoing employment or educational opportunities in creative industries
- **Youth engagement levels:** 12 youth participate in paid internship opportunities annually; 90% of youth participants report increased leadership skills; 80% of youth alumni remain engaged in community cultural activities
- **Community partnership growth:** 15 active organizational partnerships maintained annually; 75 community volunteers contribute 1,500+ hours of service; 20% annual growth in volunteer base

We conduct quarterly review sessions with our Community Advisory Board—a diverse group of residents, business owners, and cultural leaders who provide guidance and accountability for our work. Additionally, we participate in peer learning networks through the Oregon Cultural Trust and Western Arts Alliance to incorporate best practices and contribute to the broader field of community-based cultural programming.

Vision for the Future

In an era when federal support for community arts is increasingly uncertain, our vision is to establish Riverside as a regional model for how private philanthropy and community partnership can ensure that music continues to strengthen community bonds, activate public spaces, and create economic opportunity in small cities. Through the Starr AMP partnership, we will transform Waterfront Park into a year-round community asset that hosts not only concerts but also farmers markets, cultural festivals, and civic gatherings. We envision a future where every resident of Riverside—regardless of age, background,

or economic status—sees themselves reflected in our programming and feels a sense of ownership in our community's cultural life.

Over the next three years, we plan to expand our Community Sound Collective to reach every neighborhood in Riverside, ensuring that music and community building happen close to where people live, work, and play. We will develop a Community Cultural Fund that provides microgrants to residents who want to organize their own small-scale cultural events, creating a truly grassroots network of community organizers and culture bearers.

Together, we will ensure that music creates lasting bridges between communities, where public spaces are activated and beloved, and where every resident feels they belong to something larger than themselves. Music becomes a catalyst for connection, economic development, civic engagement, and community pride that strengthens the social fabric for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration of our proposal.