

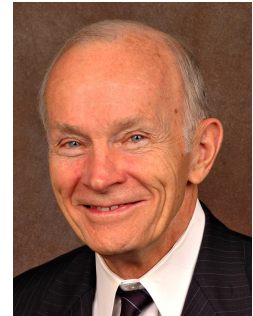


Vote to reauthorize the SCFD

By Daniel L. Ritchie
Guest Commentary
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Over the past 27 years, citizens throughout our metro area have made a commitment to culture: The Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) receives one penny on every \$10 you spend. It's more than a tax. It's more than a regional funding source. It's an investment in our future -- and it's paying off.

In a recent study, the National Endowment for the Arts cited Colorado as leading the nation in attendance at museums, concert venues and theaters. Last November, the Colorado Business Committee for the Arts reported that our arts, science and cultural organizations account for \$1.85 billion in economic activity. Our own local gems are outpacing their national peers.



Having just finished eight years as the volunteer CEO of the Denver Center, I know these achievements would not be possible without the vision of our community and the help of the SCFD. The Cultural District is a highly respected national model that brings in more than \$50 million annually to benefit nearly 300 organizations. The SCFD is a catalyst for tourism, business development and cooperative efforts among cultural organizations that provide value to our citizens. The SCFD funding allows our cultural institutions to provide the free days, reduced rates, and spectacular shows and exhibits.

As with any community, our region has evolved. Because you will be asked to extend the tax in 2016, the SCFD wanted to ensure that your investment aligns with the seven-county area's growing needs. Hundreds of citizens volunteered to evaluate how the SCFD is working. Some gaps were identified and adjustments were considered. More than 3,000 hours were spent

crafting recommendations to improve our funding model.

After more than four years, recommendations from those volunteers were given to an SCFD Board-appointed Reauthorization Task Force. This group -- 18 people representing the seven metro counties, a variety of disciplines and organizations -- was asked to recommend changes in order to ensure stability of all funded organizations. Members discussed, debated and overwhelmingly approved measures that would keep SCFD aligned with the needs of our citizens -- access for the broadest range of the community, the growth of cultural offerings throughout the metro area, and world-class, stable institutions.

Highlights of these recommendations include:

- * Stricter eligibility requirements requiring organizations in the small and mid-range of funding to be established for a longer length of time before seeking funds;
- * Incentive for mid-level organizations to encourage more free and reduced attendance;
- * A reallocation of funds from the five largest regional cultural organizations that, according to The Denver Post, "add up to millions more for the smaller groups ... an additional \$2.5 million in the first year of the new authorization, with the numbers increasing into the tens of millions over the decade."

Of course that last point is the biggest and most controversial among the suggested changes. I have been an advocate of reallocation and I am confident that the proposal made by the task force is the right one at the right time for the largest percentage of beneficiaries.

As a member of the task force, I take great pride in the cooperative, transparent and constructive quality of our deliberation. I am delighted that the SCFD collaboration has allowed organizations to provide valued events, exhibits and educational programs.

Add to that the full spectrum of opportunities from all SCFD recipient organizations. In 2013, 14.3 million people attended cultural events in the seven-county area and of those, 9.45 million were free or reduced-price admission. This has made us the envy of the nation and enabled us to become collaborators instead of competitors. I trust that we will continue to work together.

Daniel L. Ritchie is a member of the SCFD Reauthorization Task Force.