



City of Santa Fe, New Mexico

Memorandum



DATE: September 30, 2026

TO: Mayor Michael Garcia

FROM: Chelsey Johnson, Arts & Culture Director

SUBJECT: Arts Commission Appointments

Summary:

As of October 2026, the Arts Commission has five renewals of appointment to put forward, one new appointment to approve, and a vacancy as chair to fill. This memo recommends the new appointment of one Arts Commissioner, the reappointment of five current Commissioners, and the appointment of the new chair.

Background:

Per City ordinance:

There is created the "Santa Fe Arts Commission," hereinafter referred to as the "commission." The commission shall be advisory to the governing body and shall initiate, sponsor or conduct, alone or in cooperation with other public or private agencies, public programs to further the development and public awareness of, and interest in the fine and performing arts and cultural properties. The commission shall organize and adopt administrative rules and procedures necessary to accomplish its purposes. (Code of Ordinances 6-1.1)

... The commission shall consist of nine (9) members. On the first commission, four (4) of the members shall be appointed for one (1) year terms and five (5) shall be appointed for two (2) year terms. Subsequent terms shall be for two (2) years to maintain staggering of terms. Vacancies, other than by expiration of terms, shall be filled for the unexpired term in the same manner as original appointments. The mayor, with the advice and consent of the city council, shall appoint the commission members and the commission chairperson. All terms expire in October. (Code of Ordinances 6-1.1)

Brought forward for appointment the Arts Commission by Mayor Garcia and confirmation by the Governing Body:

Elena Higgins, to serve a first term of October 2026-October 2028

Brought forward for appointment to Chair of the Arts Commission by Mayor Garcia and confirmation by the Governing Body:

Erin De Rosa, to chair the Arts Commission starting in October 2026

Brought forward for reappointment by Mayor Garcia and confirmation by Governing Body, to serve renewed full terms from October 2026 through October 2028:

- Erin De Rosa
- Hernan Gomez Chavez
- Mayrah Udvardi
- Karina Hean
- Heidi Brandow

Action Requested:

The Arts Commission, along with Arts and Culture Department staff, respectfully requests appointment of Erin De Rosa as Chair of the Arts Commission, the appointment of new Arts Commissioner Elena Higgins, and renewed second terms for Commissioners Heidi Brandow, Hernan Gomez Chavez, Mayrah Udvardi, Karina Hean, and Erin De Rosa.

Heidi K. Brandow (Diné & Kānaka Maoli) is a versatile artist whose work prioritizes the inclusion of Indigenous people and perspectives in creating ethical and sustainable forms of creative engagement and artistic expression. She has lived in Santa Fe for more than 30 years. Alongside co-founding the [Harvard Indigenous Design Collective](#), which champions design by and for Indigenous communities as an integral component of design fields' history, theory, and practice, Heidi currently serves as a Master Artist Mentor at the [Institute of American Indian Arts' Master of Fine Arts - Studio Arts Program](#). In previous roles, she was an Artist Liaison and Guest Curator at the [Coe Center for Art](#). She served as a Tribal Liaison at [Local Contexts](#), assisting Indigenous communities in reclaiming authority of their material culture and archives. Currently, Heidi is the Associate Director of Communications at [First Peoples Fund](#), where she continues to uplift and promote the work and stories of Indigenous artists and culture bearers to a national audience. Brandow completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Institute of American Indian Arts, studied industrial design at Istanbul Technical University, and received a Master of Design Studies from Harvard University.

Erin De Rosa, SITE SANTA FE's Grants Manager, is a painter, muralist, and creative project director. Erin's work in the grantmaking field began at the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance more than 10 years ago, where she managed a statewide regranting partnership and annually allocated \$400,000 of funding to

200+ local artists and organizations. Invigorated with the behind-the-scenes knowledge of equipping artists with money for their work, she has since generated funding for a variety of multidisciplinary creative projects, including the City of Albuquerque's Public Art Program, [MurosABQ](#), and the Indigenous Design and Planning Institute's [A Living Archive of Urban Indians](#). In her current role, she collaborates with SITE SANTA FE's development department to raise funds for exhibitions, education programs, and museum operations.

Hernan Gomez Chavez was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1991, where he presently resides and works. A sculptor and welder, he has been involved in numerous Arts & Culture initiatives, including art in public places, the Art is the Solution grant, and the CHART project, and he received a 2024 Mayor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in the Culture Connects category. He has studied at the University of New Mexico, the Academy of Art, Architecture and Design in Prague, and the MFA program in sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Hernan's artistic practice makes use of common motifs such as billboards, fences, and power lines to speak about the relation between power and place. Born to Mexican immigrants in the United States, his work aims to shine a light on his experience as a first-generation American living in the southwest. Coming from a blue-collar background, he deconstructs old notions of the "American Dream" in his work and aims to speak to a broad audience. Although primarily focused on the creation of sculptural objects, he has been involved in grass roots campaigns and organizing, feeding into a social practice that goes out into the streets in order to create dialogue around home, belonging, and displacement. Hernan advocates for the Arts Commission to engage with local artists in underserved and underrepresented communities, listen to their concerns, and invest in arts programs that address these challenges, especially on the Southside.

Karina Hean is a life-long art educator and now serves as Chair of Visual Arts at the New Mexico School for the Arts. She has served on the faculty of the University of Montana, Santa Fe University of Art and Design, Fort Lewis College, and New Mexico State University. She holds a BA from St. Johns College, a Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Drawing from Studio Art Centers International, and a MFA from New Mexico State University. Hean was the Associate Sales & Gallery Director at Selby Fleetwood Gallery, has worked with SITE Santa Fe in exhibitions and education, and Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts as the Visual Arts

Coordinator. Her artwork is grounded in drawing and printmaking and explores responses to landscape. She has received an American Artist Fellowship at the Ballinglen Arts Foundation, Ireland and has completed several artist-in-residence opportunities in the US, several at national parks. Her work has been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in museums, galleries, art centers, and universities throughout the US.

Mayrah Udvardi is a licensed architect and the Managing Director of the Midtown Art and Design Alliance. As the former Design Director in MASS's Santa Fe studio, she has been instrumental in crafting the Hopewell Mann Neighborhood Stabilization Plan. Her work is grounded in a deep commitment to living ecosystems, environmental justice, and architecture's role in equitably redefining territory worldwide. From 2018-2026, Mayrah led and contributed to over 45 projects across MASS's Boston, Poughkeepsie, and Santa Fe studios. Prior to MASS, she worked with Sustainable Native Communities Collaborative on building design and technical capacity in Indian Country, with Urban- Think Tank on community-led shack upgrading in South Africa, with Global Citizens for Sustainable Development on migrant housing in India, and with Enterprise Community Partners on documenting best practices in affordable housing. Mayrah holds a Master of Architecture with Honors from Columbia University, a Bachelor of Arts in Architecture and Environmental Studies with Honors from Wellesley College, and is the recipient of Kinne, Watson, Schiff, Albright, and Noble Foundation Fellowships and AirWG and ZK/U Artist Residencies. She has taught at Kent CAED, Barnard College, and the Santa Fe Art Institute Summer Design Workshop, and is the author of "On Fragile Architecture: Exploring Causes of Indigenous Housing Insecurity" and "Bangalore: Urban Development and Environmental Justice." Mayrah is fluent in English, Deutsch, Español, हिंदी, and اردو.

Elena Higgins, the Executive Director of Indigenous Ways and a performing artist, has lived in Santa Fe for 19 years, working in Districts 2 and 4. She is passionate about bridging the gaps among health, nonprofits, and the arts, and is committed to amplifying the voices of those often left out of the discussion, especially through workshops, food, entertainment, and conversations for youth. Elena's work is deeply informed by social justice issues such as youth suicide, theater/music, Indigenous sign language, and the Two-Spirit LGBTQ2+ demographic. She is also concerned about the economic disparities in Santa Fe, particularly for individuals with disabilities. Through workshops and arts programming, she

addresses these concerns and advocates for more inclusive funding practices in the arts. Elena excels in networking, outreach, and collaboration with arts organizations, especially in the areas of disabilities, rural issues, and creating community. IndigenousWays received the 2025 Mayor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in the Culture Connects category.