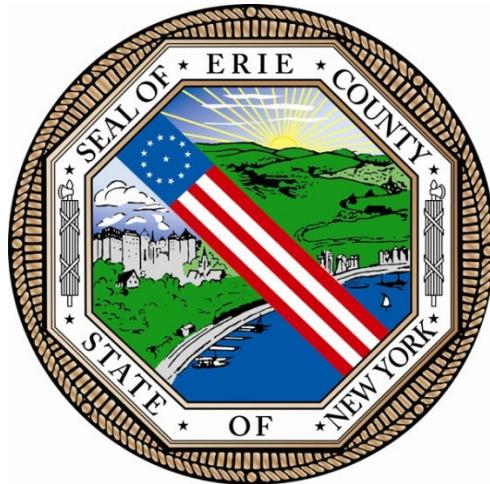


January 2026

**Erie County Cultural Funding Grant Monitoring Program
Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village
January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2022**



**HON. KEVIN R. HARDWICK
ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER**

**HON. KEVIN R. HARDWICK
ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE
DIVISION OF AUDIT & CONTROL
95 FRANKLIN STREET
BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14202**



January 9, 2026

Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin Street, Fourth Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

Dear Honorable Members:

In 2023, the Erie County Comptroller's Office, Division of Audit & Control initiated a regular Monitoring Program of Erie County Cultural Funding Grants. The Erie County Cultural Funding program provides annual grants to non-profit arts and cultural organizations operating within the County. County funds are intended to be limited in their use to current operating expenses including salaries, program costs, fringe benefits, rents, utilities, office supplies, and equipment. Grant funds may not be used for or applied towards capital projects or physical improvements of buildings or facilities, nor as a revenue offset against accounts receivable. No funds received shall be used for any services provided or activities performed outside Erie County. The County's Department of Environment and Planning executes contracts with organizations and is the primary agency charged with monitoring.

Objective

The objective of the Cultural Funding Monitoring Program is to verify that the recipients have utilized County funds according to the terms and conditions associated with the Erie County Cultural Funding grant process and the recipient's contract with the County. In order to verify the proper use of the grant award, a number of agencies were selected in order to review their expenses and financial records.

Scope and Methodology

Approximately 120 different organizations receive funding annually from Erie County. The Comptroller's Cultural Funding Grant Monitoring Program is intended to review organizations that received a minimum of \$5,000 in funding during any of the three prior years. Approximately 80 agencies were identified as receiving \$5,000 or more in grant funding. The list of recipient organizations was split into two groups of approximately 40 agencies. The first batch of letters announcing the commencement of a review was sent to the selected non-profit organizations during mid-February 2023, with a second batch scheduled to be sent in early October 2023. The review of all agencies is expected to be completed by December 31, 2025.

2023 Program

During the interview phase, the Auditor identifies use of funding to narrow down the expenses to be verified. A table of agencies which meet the criteria for review along with the amount of grant awards can be found on the following page.

Monitoring Program – Phase I

ACT #	APPROPRIATION	VENDOR NUMBER	TAX YEAR 2019	TAX YEAR 2021	TAX YEAR 2022
517725	Enlightenment Literary Arts Center & Dog Ear Bookstore	152183	\$ 28,600.00	\$ 36,600.00	\$ 55,000.00
518004	African American Cultural Center	112804	\$ 275,450.00	\$ 311,950.00	\$ 200,000.00
518012	Alleyway Theatre	109340	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 11,000.00
518016	American Legion Band of	109379	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 45,000.00
518017	Amherst Symphony Orchestra	109475	\$ 32,500.00	\$ 25,750.00	\$ 28,740.00
518018	Arts Services Initiative of WNY Inc	107159	\$ 26,050.00	\$ 26,050.00	\$ 30,000.00
518028	Ballet Artists of WNY (Neglia)	107074	\$ 24,000.00	\$ 24,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
518038	Buffalo Arts Studio (Arts Studio of				
518040	Western New York, Inc.	101244	\$ 38,000.00	\$ 45,500.00	\$ 53,000.00
518044	Buffalo Inner City Ballet Co., Inc.	108597	\$ 27,000.00	\$ 27,000.00	\$ 27,000.00
518050	Buffalo Music Hall of Fame	113142	\$ 4,500.00	\$ -	\$ 5,500.00
518051	Buffalo Heritage Carousel	167829	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 35,000.00
518074	Colored Musicians Club	130377	\$ 5,000.00	\$ -	\$ 12,500.00
518084	El Museo Gallery	109836	\$ 12,585.00	\$ 8,585.00	\$ 60,000.00
518104	Graciliff Conservancy	103197	\$ 59,200.00	\$ 59,200.00	\$ 60,000.00
518113	Hull House Foundation	143473	\$ 15,375.00	\$ 3,575.00	\$ 7,500.00
518119	Jewish Center Cultural	111339	\$ 13,500.00	\$ 8,750.00	\$ 13,500.00
518120	Just Buffalo Literacy Center	108577	\$ 78,100.00	\$ 78,100.00	\$ 83,500.00
518132	Locust St Neighborhood Art Classes	109985	\$ 29,250.00	\$ 25,250.00	\$ 28,500.00
518135	Martin House Restoration	104863	\$ 175,500.00	\$ 175,500.00	\$ 190,000.00
518139	Music Is Art	339615	\$ 48,000.00	\$ 48,000.00	\$ 39,000.00
518146	Polish Arts Club of Buffalo Inc	106132	\$ 7,000.00	\$ 7,000.00	\$ 3,800.00
518147	Preservation Buffalo Niagara	147177	\$ 4,615.00	\$ 4,615.00	\$ 3,000.00
518148	Spokane Center For The Arts	113386	\$ 30,500.00	\$ 28,000.00	\$ 36,000.00
518154	Stuecky Whistlers	101068	\$ 20,920.00	\$ 20,920.00	\$ 27,000.00
518172	Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural Site	106552	\$ 32,320.00	\$ 31,320.00	\$ 37,000.00
518176	Ujima Company	101047	\$ 83,000.00	\$ 83,000.00	\$ 57,714.00
518180	Western New York Arists Group	108295	\$ 6,275.00	\$ 6,275.00	\$ 7,500.00
518181	WNY Book Arts Collaborative, Inc	135959	\$ 4,640.00	\$ 4,640.00	\$ 6,000.00
518184	Young Audiences Of WNY	109818	\$ 10,500.00	\$ 10,500.00	\$ 14,000.00
518196	Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village	151996	\$ 18,500.00	\$ 18,500.00	\$ 24,500.00
518200	Michigan Str African Amer Heritage	152578	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 32,500.00
518201	General Pulaski Association	103060	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 11,000.00	\$ 12,500.00
518204	Brighton Place, Inc	156194	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 16,000.00	\$ 20,000.00
518211	Hispanic Heritage Council of WNY	159805	\$ 12,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 24,500.00
518216	Black Rock Historical Society (Black Rock-Riverside Alliance)	170369	\$ 22,500.00	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 10,000.00
518233	Centro Culturale Italiano di Buffalo	167500	\$ 25,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 15,000.00
518249	South Buffalo Irish Fes/Can You Dig	113041	\$ 18,000.00	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 15,000.00
518596	Net Positive DBA The Foundry	168005	\$ 5,000.00	\$ -	\$ 5,000.00

Monitoring Program – Phase II

ACT #	APPROPRIATION	VENDOR NUMBER	TAX YEAR 2020	TAX YEAR 2021	TAX YEAR 2022
517831	Buffalo Dimmed Parks Conservancy	140237	\$ 25,510.00	\$ 25,510.00	\$ 35,000.00
518008	Albright-Knox Art Gallery	108707	\$ 375,000.00	\$ 375,000.00	\$ 675,000.00
518009	Albright-Knox Art Curator	147238	\$ 68,250.00	\$ 68,250.00	\$ 68,250.00
518025	Assembly House 150, Inc	167747	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 6,500.00
518034	Buffalo & Erie County Botanical Garden	108743	\$ 102,000.00	\$ 125,000.00	\$ 150,000.00
518036	Buffalo & Erie Co Historical Society	108772	\$ 417,000.00	\$ 667,000.00	\$ 417,000.00
518052	Buffalo & Erie County Naval & Servicemans Park	109339	\$ 35,000.00	\$ 35,000.00	\$ 50,000.00
518060	Buffalo Philharmonic Orch Society	105032	\$ 926,500.00	\$ 926,500.00	\$ 940,000.00
518061	Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra	109798	\$ 34,500.00	\$ 34,500.00	\$ 35,000.00
518064	Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences	109799	\$ 95,000.00	\$ 95,000.00	\$ 95,000.00
518065	Buffalo String Works, Inc	167852	\$ 3,500.00	\$ 3,500.00	\$ 5,355.00
518068	Burchfield Penney Art Center	101004	\$ 155,000.00	\$ 155,000.00	\$ 160,000.00
518072	Center for Exploratory and Perceptu	109934	\$ 55,000.00	\$ 55,000.00	\$ 63,000.00
518082	Diancellability	156859	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 3,000.00
518096	Explore & More Children's Museum	102758	\$ 42,000.00	\$ 42,000.00	\$ 78,000.00
518108	Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center	108598	\$ 57,000.00	\$ 57,000.00	\$ 60,000.00
518112	Hannibal Historical Society/Penn-Dixie	108282	\$ 38,300.00	\$ 96,314.00	\$ 96,314.00
518115	High Chivalry Theatre Company	109772	\$ 35,200.00	\$ 85,500.00	\$ 95,500.00
518124	D'Youville College Kavinoky Theater	109341	\$ 11,750.00	\$ 11,750.00	\$ 12,500.00
518128	Lancaster Opera House	111581	\$ 45,300.00	\$ 30,300.00	\$ 35,000.00
518140	MusicFest Theatre	105308	\$ 61,525.00	\$ 61,525.00	\$ 66,000.00
518141	New Phoenix Theatre	109342	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 7,500.00	\$ -
518148	Road Less Traveled Productions	121043	\$ 65,500.00	\$ 65,500.00	\$ 67,000.00
518152	Roxcroft Campus Corporation	118213	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 50,000.00
518156	Shakespeare In The Park	109875	\$ 95,000.00	\$ 95,000.00	\$ 95,000.00
518170	Shaw's Main Stage	105882	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 6,000.00
518173	Torn Space Theatre	143973	\$ 20,460.00	\$ 15,460.00	\$ 29,500.00
518188	Zoological Society Of Buffalo	108623	\$ 1,500,000.00	\$ 1,500,000.00	\$ 1,700,000.00
518195	Orchard Park Symphony Orchestra	147747	\$ 4,615.00	\$ 3,500.00	\$ 6,000.00
518200	Buffalo Opera Unlimited Incorporated	155973	\$ 2,300.00	\$ 2,300.00	\$ 10,000.00
518203	Cheektowaga Comm Symphony Orchestra	109177	\$ -	\$ 7,500.00	\$ -
518209	Newstead Historical Society	105518	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 3,500.00	\$ 5,000.00
518233	O'Connell & Company Productions	159162	\$ 23,100.00	\$ 23,100.00	\$ 31,500.00
518239	Men's Club	162045	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 6,000.00
518231	Buffalo Center for Arts and Technology	152207	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 7,500.00
518235	Cheektowaga Historical Association	163121	\$ 3,250.00	\$ 6,250.00	\$ 6,100.00
518239	Second Generation Theatre Company	164957	\$ 2,020.00	\$ 2,020.00	\$ 5,000.00
518230	Steel Plant Museum of Western New York	147740	\$ 2,020.00	\$ 2,020.00	\$ 5,000.00
518260	Alden Christian Theater Society	114358	\$ 10,000.00	\$ -	\$ 3,000.00
518254	Clarence Concert Association	101711	\$ 3,500.00	\$ -	\$ 5,000.00
518255	Clarence Museum (Historical Soc. of the Town of Clarence)	118067	\$ 5,500.00	\$ -	\$ 6,000.00

BEST PRACTICES

Over the course of the Monitoring Program, the Division of Audit found a number of problematic practices and questionable expense categories on a recurring basis. In order to address issues pertaining to a large number of organizations, certain generally applicable best practices and recommendations are included here.

Alcohol

Several organizations used or appeared to use CGF funds to obtain alcohol. While the Division of Audit does not recommend that CGF awards be made contingent on the absence of alcohol from events hosted by the organization, alcohol should not be purchased with CGF funds. The Division of Audit found dozens of alcohol purchases that appeared to be personal in nature and several more which likely violated NYS Alcoholic Beverage Control Laws. Furthermore, the NYS Comptroller has long held that alcohol is not a "lawful county charge", meaning that government officials and employees may not use taxpayer funds to purchase alcohol. The Division of Audit sees no reason that organizations receiving taxpayer funds should be treated differently.

Debit Cards

Credit cards, particularly with smaller organizations, can provide a critical layer of expense control. The Division of Audit found a large quantity of small-dollar expenses appearing personal in nature. If a debit card is used, the money is gone by the time statements are typically reviewed, while a credit card bill often needs to be paid and approved by the organization's board of directors.

Alternate Funding Sources and Segregation of Accounts

Organizations may have several sources of governmental or philanthropic funding. One way to ensure that CGF funds go farthest is to tailor awards to the needs of the organization. Such an assessment would require applicants to provide certain financial documents covering prior years and a disclosure of current year funding applications. Furthermore, accounts received from Erie County should not be commingled with the other funds of the organization. Having source information upfront and requiring the segregation of accounts substantially decreases the likelihood of wasted CGF funds.

BUFFALO NIAGARA HERITAGE VILLAGE

BACKGROUND

The Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village (BNHV) is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization classified as a public charity under Section 509(a)(1). The Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village's mission centers on preserving, interpreting, and exhibiting the agricultural history and rural heritage of the Buffalo Niagara region. In addition to exhibitions, the organization's vision is to serve the community as a premier educational and cultural institution and to effectively preserve and share the history of Buffalo–Niagara agriculture and its significance to the residents of Erie County and the surrounding community.

In addition to its exhibitions and educational programming, BNHV provides services on behalf of the Town of Amherst and offers event space for various town and community needs. BNHV also serves as the co-appointed Town of Amherst Historian, in partnership with the Williamsville Historical Society. In this capacity, the organization supports the community by conducting research, responding to information requests, and maintaining a library and reading room where community members can conduct self-guided research.

\$18,500 in 2020 (including \$7,500 over the executive recommendation)

\$18,500 in 2021 (including \$7,500 over the executive recommendation)

\$24,500 in 2022 (including \$8,000 over the executive recommendation)

BNHV received \$397,953 from Town of Amherst for general annual operating funding according to multi-year operating agreement. The annual operating funding received from Town of Amherst falls outside the scope of this review.

AUDITOR'S OBSERVATIONS

Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village (BNHV) serves as the nonprofit successor to the former municipally operated Amherst Museum. Originally established in 1972, the Amherst Museum was reorganized and rebranded as Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village in 2011. BNHV is chartered in 1976 by the State of New York as an educational institution.

The BNHV campus spans 35 acres (140,000 m²) and preserves a significant body of archival material and historical artifacts that are critically important to the history of the Town of Amherst. BNHV features ten historic building structures (owned by the Town of Amherst) dating from 1840 to 1888. These structures were relocated from their original sites in response to the Town of Amherst's rapid growth and development, which had placed them at risk of demolition. In addition to the historic village, the museum complex includes a main exhibit building, a collections storage facility, the Niederlander Research Library, and a museum store.

BNHV maintains a collection of more than 40,000 items that reflect the agricultural, domestic, and industrial history of the Buffalo–Niagara region. The collections include artifacts representing agricultural and industrial trades, heritage crafts, and the material culture of 19th- and 20th-century Western New York. Through these collections and its historic structures, BNHV interprets and preserves the rural life and traditions of the Buffalo–Niagara region during this period.

During the review period, the organization's primary sources of revenue were contributions and grants, which represented the majority of total revenue. Additional revenue was generated through mission-related activities, including membership sales, program events, education/admission fees, rental income, special events and miscellaneous income.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on BNHV's operations. Scheduled programming was canceled until museums were permitted to reopen at limited capacity in July 2020. In response, BNHV developed a virtual tour and held one virtual trivia night, although comprehensive virtual programming was not implemented. Despite these disruptions, the organization did not lay off any staff. Most staff members worked remotely during the lockdown period to support ongoing projects under the organization's newly adopted Strategic Plan and assist with programming and fundraising efforts, while the Facilities Director remained on-site to maintain the facility. Two additional staff members also continued on-site work as needed to care for the facilities and the animals on the Farmstead.

Financial losses associated with pandemic-related shutdowns were partially offset by federal relief programs. BNHV received two rounds of Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funding totaling \$88,052 for the first round and \$67,947 for the second round. The organization also received Employee Retention Credits totaling \$195,537.05.

For the year under review, the organization's primary operating expenses included compensation, salaries, and employee benefits, as well as advertising and promotion, office expenses, utilities, and facility maintenance. CGF funds received from Erie County were applied to general operating expenses.

AUDITOR'S CONCLUSION

During the grant monitoring review process, BNHV provided adequate documentation to substantiate its use of the CGF awards for each year under review. Documentation included IRS Form 990s, 1099s, bank and credit cards statements, board meeting minutes, general ledgers, payroll return documents and records, policy and procurement manual. The organization's operating expenses exceeded the CGF amounts awarded by the County in each of the years under review.

A review of executive compensation revealed that, during the years under review, total compensation increased by an average of approximately 6.48% annually between 2020 and 2022, which is consistent with the national average of 3% to 5%. During the course of the review, the Auditor did not identify any unrelated expenses.

BNHV is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of 12 individuals. Officers are limited to three consecutive 3-year terms. The organization affirmed that the Board is integral to its system of internal controls. The Board is responsible for reviewing and approving IRS Form 990 before it is filed and participates in financial oversight, including decisions on grant and loan applications and conflict-of-interest monitoring. The compensation is reviewed and approved by the board annually.

At the conclusion of the grant review, the Auditor was able to determine that BNHV is in compliance with filing requirements for IRS Form 990 and New York State Form CHAR500. BNHV was in compliance with other relevant federal and state obligations for the years under review.