Utah Gov. Gary Herbert is asking Utah lawmakers to approve a $6 million budget recommendation to fund the state's arts and museums grants program. Directors of organizations applying for these grants gathered at the Utah State Capitol Tuesday in Salt Lake City to lobby lawmakers.

Cache Valley Center for the Arts Director Wendy Hassan and her staff are encouraging
"More Utahns attend performing arts events than any other state in the nation," she said. "This is what we do and we do well. Just look at the cultural facilities we have invested in publicly and privately and how much a part of our culture this is. But what I think is most important about this opportunity is the return on investment for the state."

The 2019 Utah Legislative Session opened Monday. Potter and Sen. Scott Sandall, R-Tremonton, chair the legislative Business Economic Development and Labor subcommittee. They are scheduled to review the governor’s funding recommendations during the 2019 session.

Utah Division of Arts and Museums Director Vicki Bourns manages the current grants budget of $1.6 million. The majority of the money comes from the state. Nearly $600,000 of support comes from the National Endowment for the Arts.

"This $6 million brings the investment up by 3 percent," Bourns said. “Three percent is not that much. We think it is a good start to increase the vibrancy throughout Utah."

"I think it is the best place for their money, because of the process that we go through, because of the training that we provide and because of the support we give to museums and arts organizations," Bourns said.

Directors of Utah's arts and museums organizations will gather at the Utah State Capitol for Museums Day in January and Arts Day in February. Bourns expects organizers will meet with lawmakers and demonstrate what they do through displays and conversation.

"I think there is a lot of challenges facing our cultural administrators right now," she said. “There is the change in demographics. There is a change in what donors expect when they give money. They want a return on investment. They want you to evaluate your programming. They want you to tell them how you are serving your community."

Unlike most organizations or agencies that support funding for the arts and museums, Bourns said the UDMA is able to help with general operating support. Applications for the next round of funding are due March 22. Projects that are eligible for funding include bus transportation for public school field trips or cultural celebrations similar to the Moab Valley Multicultural Center’s Dia de Los Muertos Festival.
"If you are in a more rural area you don't have access to the large cooperation and the large foundations that maybe the large urban museums and arts organizations have access to," she said. "So we want to make sure those organizations get a fair shake as well.

Arts and museums managers won't learn until March 14, the last day of the session, whether or not the governor's proposed funding increase request is approved.

Kerry Bringhurst

At 14-years-old, Kerry began working as a reporter for KVEL “The Hot One” in Vernal, Utah. Her radio news interests led her to Logan where she became news director for KBLQ while attending Utah State University. She graduated USU with a degree in Broadcast Journalism and spent the next few years working for Utah Public Radio. Leaving UPR in 1993 she spent the next 14 years as the full time mother of four boys before returning in 2007. Kerry and her husband Boyd reside in Nibley.

See stories by Kerry Bringhurst