

I, Rissi Palmer, stand before you, the evidence of the power of the microgrant. You see, three times in my independent artist career, I have been the recipient of \$500-1.5k grants that have changed the course of my work and life.

In 2017, I applied for and received the Durham Arts Council's Emerging Artist Grant as well as the Imagine the Vote Contest grant. With the combined \$2000, I was able to go into the studio and record my first ever protest song, "Seeds", written in 2014 after the murder of Michael Brown in my native St. Louis, MO. From there, I filmed the video, a video that changed the trajectory of my career. It was with that song, I found my voice as an advocate, an arts activist, someone not afraid to tell the truth. Not bad for \$2k

In 2020, Kelly McCartney, host of Record Bin Radio on Apple Music Country, gave me a \$1k grant from the Rainey Day Fund, a grant created by Kelly for Americana BIPOC/LGBTQ+/Disabled artists. With that money, I was able to trademark my name, the name of my little Pandemic project I was working on called Color Me Country...now CMC Radio w/ Rissi Palmer, also on Apple Music Country. Created to highlight the contributions and often unsung stories of people of color in Country and Americana music, the show has since been featured in the Washington Post, NY Times, Good Morning America, CBS Morning Show, and in exhibits in the Country Music Hall of Fame and Grammy Museum.

An overwhelming majority of independent artists, including myself, find themselves unable to finish projects without the help of outside funding. With the help of three microgrants, my whole life was changed. A new chapter in my career was born.

Micro-grants are an investment, and a means to increase endurance among artists in the development of their work and their ability to secure additional resources ...in other words, they provide Hope or as I like to call them, "postcards from God". That little push that says, "Keep Going, what you are doing matters." It is a method to stimulate the local creative economy by investing in its producers so they continue to participate.

The following stats are from Americans for the Arts in 2021:

1. **Arts unify communities.** 72% of Americans believe "the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity" and 73% agree that the arts "helps me understand other cultures better"—a perspective observed across all demographic and economic categories.
2. **Arts improve individual well-being.** 81% of the population says the arts are a "positive experience in a troubled world," 69% of the population believe the arts "lift me up beyond everyday experiences," and 73% feel the arts give them "pure pleasure to experience and participate in."
3. **Arts strengthen the economy.** The nation's arts and culture sector—nonprofit, commercial, education—is an \$919.7 billion industry that supports 5.2

million jobs. That is 4.3% of the nation’s economy—a larger share of GDP than powerhouse sectors such as agriculture, transportation, and construction. The arts have a \$33 billion international trade surplus. The arts also [accelerate economic recovery](#): a growth in arts employment has a positive and causal effect on overall employment. **Look at festivals like Dreamville, Hopscotch, and IBMA right here in the Triangle.**

4. **Arts drive tourism and revenue to local businesses.** [The nonprofit arts industry alone generates \\$166.3 billion in economic activity annually](#)—spending by organizations *and their audiences*—which supports 4.6 million jobs and generates \$27.5 billion in government revenue. Arts attendees spend \$31.47 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission on items such as meals, parking, and lodging—vital income for local businesses. Arts travelers are ideal tourists, staying longer and spending more to seek out authentic cultural experiences.
5. **Arts improve academic performance.** Students engaged in arts learning have higher GPAs, standardized test scores, and college-going rates as well as lower drop-out rates. These academic benefits are reaped by students across all socio-economic strata. Yet, the Department of Education reports that access to arts education for students of color is significantly lower than for their white peers. [91% of Americans](#) believe that arts are part of a well-rounded K-12 education.
6. **Arts spark creativity and innovation.** *Creativity* is among the top five applied skills sought by business leaders—per the Conference Board’s *Ready to Innovate* report—with 72% saying creativity is of “high importance” when hiring. Research on creativity shows that Nobel laureates in the sciences are 17 times more likely to be actively engaged as an *arts maker* than other scientists.
7. **Arts have social impact.** University of Pennsylvania researchers have demonstrated that a high concentration of the arts in a city leads to higher civic engagement, more social cohesion, higher child welfare, and lower poverty rates.
8. **Arts improve healthcare.** Nearly one-half of the nation’s healthcare institutions provide arts programming for patients, families, and even staff. 78% deliver these programs because of their healing benefits to patients—shorter hospital stays, better pain management, and less medication.
9. **Arts for the health and well-being of our military.** The arts heal the mental, physical, and moral injuries of war for military servicemembers and Veterans, who rank the creative arts therapies in the top four (out of 40) interventions and treatments. Across the military continuum, the arts promote resilience during pre-deployment, deployment, and the reintegration of military servicemembers, Veterans, their families, and caregivers into communities.
10. **Arts Strengthen Mental Health.** The arts are an effective resource in reducing depression and anxiety and increasing life satisfaction. Being able to

write and sing about my emotions has been a saving grace for me...not so much for some of the subjects of my songs but what are you gonna do?

For me personally, it's an investment in representation. In 2007, I was the first black woman to chart a country song on the Billboard Country charts in 20 years. I am the 5th ever to chart a song, the first and highest being Linda Martell in 1968 with "Color Him Father". If that doesn't tell you something, maybe this will do it. The following stats come from the 2020 report, "Redlining in Country Music" written by Dr. Jada Watson:

In the past 20 years, white male artists average 77% of Country radio airplay. When combined with the airplay for white women (14.8%) and male-female ensembles (1.9%), an average of 94.1% of the airplay has been for songs by white artists. The remaining 5.9% has gone to BIPOC artists: 5.8% for songs by BIPOC men, and an average of 0.1% for songs by BIPOC women. (I was one of that .1%)

Between 2013-2020, 264 artists have been signed across the five major labels in Nashville. Not surprisingly, the majority (65.9%) are white male artists, 23.9% are white female artists, and 4.5% are white male-female ensembles – making up 94.3% of the artists signed. Just 5.7% of those signed to these five labels are BIPOC artists: 4.2% male artists, 1.1% female artists, and 0.4% male-female ensembles. Only three BIPOC woman and one multi-racial female ensemble are currently signed to a major label.

Kelly and I joined forces to create the Color Me Country Artist Grant Fund for artists of color in Country/Americana. I started this fund because with all the obstacles (seen and unseen), I never wanted finances to be the reason someone was forced to walk away from their dream. Since it's inception in December 2021, we have been able to fund 70+ artists and have raised over \$100k, thanks to organizations like the Country Music Association, Academy of Country Music, Brandi Carlile's Looking Out Fund, and the generosity of private donors. In addition to the grant, with the fund I was able to take 7 women of color and an all Black band, all expenses paid, to the UK to perform on the first ever Color Me Country Takeover stage at the Long Road Festival in August 2022 and will be doing it again this year (and I'm raising money for that trip as well *wink*). Let me break down the power of the grant in numbers:

- **8 CMT Next Women of Country - Chapel Hart, Sacha, Camille Parker, Madeline Edwards, Brittney Spencer (Rainey Day Fund recipient), Miko Marks (Rainey Day Recipient), Julie Williams (CMC), and Roberta Lea (CMC)**
- **1 finalist on America's Got Talent – Chapel Hart**
- **2 Major Label Signings: Madeline Edwards & Brittney Spencer**
- **5 out of the 12 Nashville Scene Country Music Almanac Artists to Watch in 2022 - Roberta Lea, Aaron Vance, Lilli Lewis, Jett Holden, & Lizzie No**
- **2 CMA Awards Performers - Madeline Edwards & Brittney Spencer**
- **1 NPR Tiny Desk Winner – Neffy**
- **3 opening acts on major tours**

- **2 Contestants on the Apple +/Reese Witherspoon/Kacey Musgraves show, “My Kind of Country”**

I now have 501 3 C status and am building and looking to fund the Color Me Country Foundation, supporting a generation of artists that are equipped with knowledge and financial resources who can then in turn support themselves through artist advocacy programming and grants. You see, I believe in circumventing the system. You can't turn me away from a table that I've built and invited the guests to. I believe that when artists are given information and finances, the possibilities are endless.

Microgrants provide a “spark” for artists, igniting a sense of purpose, confidence, and inspiration. They are a means of changing the way our culture sees and feels about itself. They are the drums of revolution. They are seeds...