INSPIRE WASHINGTON
Opening doors to science, heritage, and the arts.

October 16, 2026

Letter from Executive Director

We are excited to announce an addition to our annual program. To honor a foundational leader of our movement and spotlight exemplary advocacy, Inspire Washington is creating the **Kevin Hughes Award for Cultural Advocacy**. This annual award aims to recognize a hometown hero from anywhere across the state whose passion and advocacy advance arts, heritage, and/or science.

Kevin passed away unexpectedly on Christmas Day, 2025. Many of the funding and programmatic advances in Washington's arts, heritage, and science sectors are directly attributable to his tireless advocacy, high-integrity policymaking, and driving role in Cultural Access legislation. This award honors that legacy and recognizes those who share his passion.

Kevin was both an advocate and a passionate practitioner—actor, theater manager, educator, lobbyist—who engaged everyone with curiosity, wit, and humor. His advocacy days began as executive director of the Washington State Arts Alliance, one of Inspire Washington's predecessor organizations, where he supported programs and funding for the arts. Later, he established a respected lobbying business focused on arts and science. Kevin was the driving force behind Washington's Cultural Access legislation at both the state and local levels.

This annual award honors Kevin's legacy by recognizing a hometown hero whose passion and advocacy advance cultural and community-centered programming anywhere across Washington state.

We want to know about the individuals who are making a difference in your community! Who is building bridges, mentoring the next wave of advocates, and championing culture in your corner of the state? Help us celebrate leaders from every region, identity, and experience. We are excited to share their story and ignite inspiration.

Manny Cawaling, Executive Director

Award Schedule
September:

- Announce award and promote nomination process

October - November:

- Responding to initial nomination questions, October 19-23. A final FAQ will be issued after.
- Nominations open October 16 and are accepted until 5 pm on November 20, 2026.

November 23:

- Evaluation Committee Review commences.

December:

- Awardee selected.

February 3, 2027

- Celebrate the winner! Reception to be held in conjunction with Inspire Washington's Arts, Heritage, and Science Advocacy Week, February 1-5, 2027.

Join our celebration!

Please join us at the Governor's Mansion in Olympia, on February 3, 2027, to celebrate the winner. Tickets will be available to the public December 1st. More information to come.

Eligibility criteria

The Kevin Hughes Award recognizes the contributions of any individual who has dedicated significant time and energy to the success of arts, heritage, and science organizations in Washington state. It intends to match Inspire Washington's mission of making sure that people of every region, ethnicity, gender, or background are recognized for their work promoting science, heritage, and/or the arts.

- **Washington State Impact:** Works in Washington on either a paid or volunteer basis with a passion for supporting culture.

· **Ethical Champion:** Speaks up for the cultural community with honesty, heart, and a drive to engage in disagreements, champion solutions, and invite new allies into partnerships that make cultural programs better for everyone.

· **Generous Mentor:** Loves helping others succeed by sharing knowledge, making introductions, and opening doors for new leaders.

· **Spirit of Kevin:** Brings warmth, quick wit, curiosity, and kindness to the work—caring more about getting things done than taking the credit.

- **Ineligible:** Current Inspire WA staff and active board members.

Nomination instructions

Nominations should be submitted electronically as a PDF document and emailed to inspirewashington@gmail.com.

A nomination must include:

- **Letter of introduction** nominating the advocate (not exceeding one page). The letter should include biographical/professional information and articulate your connection to the advocate and the reasons and inspirations for nominating this person.
- **Completed nomination questions** (not exceeding two pages). This provides an opportunity to speak directly to the award committee; spotlighting the qualities and accomplishments that embody our eligibility criteria.
- **Letter(s) of support** (not exceeding one page each), One letter is required and up to three accepted. This provides an opportunity to reinforce your nomination with further information, a vote of support, or additional stories. Such letters could be from a community member, allied business/organization, elected official, community leader, etc.
- **Optional Supporting Materials**: news articles, reports, videos, photos or related collateral.

If you have additional questions, please send them to inspirewashington@gmail.com.

No person or organization may self-nominate and/or submit more than one application per year.

Nomination window is October 16 – November 20, 2026.

Nomination Questions

In addition to including biographical and professional information about a nominee, information submitted should also include how the nominee reflects Kevin's values.

Throughout Kevin's successful career, he maintained a sense of humor, imagination, and passion for community service. When asked to describe Kevin, here are just a few traits that his family, friends, and colleagues mentioned:

- Inspirational
- Ethical advocacy
- Mentor
- Taking a vision to reality
- Connecting civic and cultural leaders

These qualities frame the type of advocate the award aims to spotlight.

Questions:

1. An exemplary advocate must motivate and change the hearts and minds of people in the community and within government chambers (city or county council, school boards, state legislature, congress, or other places where critical civic decisions are being made). Please explain, with examples: *How has your advocate inspired others to champion and build a community or region's cultural programming, access and experiences?*

2. At the heart of any good advocacy is the passionate desire to improve or strengthen a community. Policymaking is complicated and requires negotiation, compromise, and exploring new paths towards a goal. *How do your advocate's values display their ethics and commitment to broad and positive impacts?*

3. Ambitious advocates push against skeptics and conventional practice. *How has your nominee transformed a bold vision into reality, enacting positive change for their community's cultural sector?*

4. Grassroots advocacy requires collective action. It's necessary to build a broad coalition to accomplish any goal and build the ranks for future objectives. *What concrete steps has the nominee taken to nurture the next generation of advocates?*

5. Effective advocacy leaders build a broad and diverse coalition of fellow advocates, allies, and policy makers. They work hard to ensure many people

champion the objective and many join the ranks because everyone believes in the broad benefit. *How has your nominee intentionally built a diverse, inclusive coalition for their work?*

Kevin's Story

Kevin Hughes was an actor, theater manager, arts and culture and science advocate, lobbyist, educator, autodidact, prolific reader and avid crossword puzzler. In his down time he was a husband, father, grandfather and close friend and mentor to many. He engaged everyone in his orbit with great curiosity, wit, and humor while helping those around him to the best of his abilities.

He was an accomplished, ethical lobbyist and fundraiser, and over the course of his career he was involved in many major campaigns and organizations in the community, including Pacific Science Center, Seattle Aquarium, McCaw Hall, and Building For The Arts. He served on the Washington State Housing Commission. Kevin Hughes was instrumental in the establishment of Seattle's Historic Theatre District, Cultural Access Washington/Inspire Washington, and CulturePAC.

These were some of his greatest passions and successes. Kevin spent a career working in and around the cultural scene to help make improvements for organizations, artists and employees, and patrons. His impact can be seen and appreciated throughout Washington State. It is with these attributes in mind that we seek recommendations for the newly established Kevin Hughes Cultural Advocacy Award.