



Creative Communities

Grant Program

Phase 2 Guidelines
Fiscal Year 2026

This program is supported with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts



Wisconsin Arts Board - FY2026 Creative Communities Grant Program

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Wisconsin Arts Board – FY2026

Creative Communities Program Phase 2 Guidelines

Creative Communities Grant Program

Program Description:

The Creative Communities grants program encourages arts education, cultural understanding, and community arts development in Wisconsin. It provides support for projects that applicants do *with* the community rather than just *for* the community, and that further the Arts Board's goals in the following three areas:

- [Arts Education](#)
- [Folk and Traditional Arts](#)
- [Local Arts](#)

Applicants are welcome to submit one proposal to one of these three categories per year. For a full overview of the Creative Community Program guidelines for Phase 1 and Phase 2, see the [Creative Communities webpage](#).

Eligibility:

Applicants must have submitted a Phase 1 application and received a specific invitation from the Arts Board to submit a Phase 2 application.

FY26 Application Calendar	
March 14, 2025	Eligible applicants are invited to submit a Phase 2 application
April 3, 2025	Virtual Q&A session for Phase 2 applicants*
April 3, 2025	Deadline for applicants to submit draft applications for staff review (not required)
April 10, 2025 by 3pm	Deadline for Phase 2 online application
April 30, 2025	Arts Education panel meets in Madison
May 1, 2025	Local Arts panel meets in Madison
May 2, 2025	Folk Arts panel meets in Madison
May 9, 2025	Wisconsin Arts Board meets in Madison to make grant determinations
May 2025	Arts Board makes grant award announcements.

<u>Application Calendar</u> (cont'd):	
June 2025 <i>(Depending on State Legislative and Administrative action)</i>	<p>Arts Board sends contracts and grant proposal revision report forms to grant recipients.</p> <p>Grant recipients submit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • signed contracts • grant proposal revision report forms, and • copies of the letters that they have sent to their legislators in which they notified them of the grant and invited them to a specific project activity/event.
July 2025 <i>(Depending on State Legislative and Administrative action)</i>	<p>Once the state legislature has passed the state budget and the grantee has submitted the signed contract and other required materials, Arts Board mails grant check (via the Department of Administration).**</p>
July 1, 2025	Activities on which grant can be spent, begin (no earlier than)
June 30, 2026	Activities on which grant can be spent, end (no later than)
July 31, 2026	Final Report due
<p>*Virtual Q&A - Use this time to ask questions of WAB staff and hear other applicants' questions. A Q&A meeting link will be sent directly to Phase 2 applicants. While this is not required, it is encouraged.</p> <p>**Please note: While funds should be available on July 1, grant checks may not arrive until as late as October, depending on State Legislative and Administrative action. If your project occurs before October, please contact staff to discuss the impact this may have on your project.</p>	

Grant Amounts:

Grants will range from a minimum of \$1,500 to a maximum of \$6,000 and must be matched 1:1 by the applicant. At least 50% of the match must be in cash.

The Granting Process

How to Apply:

A completed Creative Communities Phase 2 grant application must be submitted online using the Arts Board's Online Application System (<http://wab.smartsimple.com/>) **by 3 p.m. on April 10, 2025**. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted. Hardcopy application materials are no longer required.

- Log-in to WAB's [online application system](#) and click 'In Progress.'
- Select your Creative Communities application.
- Complete the application form, clicking 'Save Draft' at the end of each page.

- When finished, click 'Submit.' *Reminder: Submission deadline is 3pm, April 10, 2025.*
- You will receive a confirmation email once your submission has been accepted.

Complete the Application Form:

First complete the **Application Information** tab and click the 'Save Draft' button at the bottom of the page.

At this point, you may begin completing the other 9 tabs:

Project Details

Summarizing information of the project, including the number of people whom you anticipate the project will engage.

Narrative

The equivalent of 4 pages (2000 words) of detailed information about your project, in response to the narrative questions. If your narrative exceeds this limit, your application will be ineligible.

Budget

A detailed project budget, including sources of income, whether those matching funds are secured or pending, and expense items. A sample budget is available on the [Creative Communities webpage](#).

Board and Staff

Lists of current board and staff that include years of service and other information.

Access

Information about how you will publicize your project and make it accessible to people with disabilities.

Evaluation

Information about how you will evaluate your project. You may share additional details within the narrative and reference our [Sample Evaluation Tools](#) resource.

Work Sample

A piece of supporting documentation that demonstrates the artistic merit of the proposed project (past work by the artist(s) involved in the project, work created in an earlier year/phase of the project, etc.). All applicants must submit at least one work sample and no more than three. Work samples must be no more than three years old, should reflect the artistic quality of the activity and should not simply be a marketing piece for the artist or group. Please avoid voice-over promotional videos.

NOTE: We recommend that video/audio work samples be less than 3 minutes. Panelists have many applications to review and will not have time to watch/listen to lengthy work samples.

Because the panel bases the majority of its Artistic Value score (which is worth 25% of the application's total score) on the work sample, please select your samples carefully.

Instructions that will help to prepare the work sample are embedded in the application form.

Support Material

The following material will be uploaded in this section:

- **Required Financial Documentation** - Upload a copy of the applicant organization's budgets from its most recently completed fiscal year, its current fiscal year, and a projected budget for its next fiscal year. For college/university/school/tribal applicants: upload copies of the relevant arts program's budgets from its most recently completed fiscal year, its current fiscal year, and a projected budget for its next fiscal year – not the entire university/school/tribal budget.
- **Key Artistic and Administrative Personnel Biographies** - No more than 2 pages total
- **If applicable, Letter of Commitment from Significant Partner Organizations** - See [Glossary of Terms](#); up to 3 letters may be submitted in one document.
- **Sample Evaluation Tool** (one recent/current or future [sample evaluation tool](#) – survey, post-event notes, etc.)

Up to four of the following **optional support materials** may also be uploaded in this section:

- Sample of Educational Materials (from within the past 3 years)
- Up to Three Letters of Support for this Project
- Most Recent Newsletter
- Press Clipping – No more than 2 years old
- Press Release – No more than 2 years old
- Other – Please consult with Arts Board staff prior to uploading

Evaluation Criteria

Arts projects will be evaluated based on the following criteria.

a) Artistic/Educational/Cultural Value

- For projects directly involving artists, the proposed activity has high artistic merit.
- For projects not directly involving artists (such as feasibility studies), the overall quality of the proposed project is high.
- Proposed activities are appropriate to the community that the applicant serves, and demonstrate artistic, cultural and/or educational value for that community.
- Activities meet the goals of the relevant Creative Communities component.
 - For Arts Education Applicants: The project supports arts opportunities that foster imagination, creativity, and innovation in K-12 formal and informal education.
 - For Folk Arts Applicants: The project enhances the appreciation of and ensures the continued vitality of the folk and traditional arts of Wisconsin.
 - For Local Arts Applicants: The project supports the creation and development of the arts at the local level.

b) Organizational and Financial Management

- Appropriately skilled and experienced people including (when applicable) artists, staff, board and committee members are involved in the project with clearly defined roles.
- The activity is feasible as planned with a realistic timetable and attainable goals.
- The project is financially feasible.
- There are adequate earned and/or contributed matching funds from an appropriate variety of public and private sources, relative to the community.
- Project budget correlates to the applicant's narrative.
- Applicant demonstrates ability to develop and manage resources (financial, people, etc.) appropriately.
- If there is an organizational deficit, applicant has a plan to reduce it.

c) Community Participation & Accessibility

- Activities indicate understanding of the community served by the project.
- For projects that are designed to serve the entire community:
 - nondominant community(s)* are specified and included in project planning and implementation, in order to ensure positive and meaningful engagement for everyone with the project.
- Inclusion of community members in project planning and implementation is appropriate to the project.
- Applicant has forged appropriate partnerships for this project with an appropriate variety of public and private organizations.

**Nondominant communities include but are not limited to people with disabilities, people of color, older adults, youth, veterans, low-income and LGBTQ+ communities.*

d) Evaluation and Documentation

- The level of community involvement in the evaluation and documentation of this project is appropriate to the project.
- There is evidence of appropriate [evaluation methodology and tools](#).
- For projects in their second or third year, there is evidence that previous evaluation results have been used in planning this project.

Review Process

Peer Advisory Panels

The Arts Board uses a peer advisory panel review process for grant application review. Panels, comprised of individuals knowledgeable in the arts, review grant applications and make recommendations for approval of funding to the Board, which makes the final funding decisions. The Arts Board strives to select panelists who represent various geographic areas and diverse aesthetic, cultural, and demographic perspectives. The panels, chaired by members of the Board who serve as non-voting facilitators, are comprised of arts administrators, artists, educators and other professionals and volunteers knowledgeable in the arts. Membership on panels rotates; applicants should not assume that panelists have prior knowledge of the applicant.

NOTE:

- The information provided in the application is the principal source of information for panel review. Therefore, applications should be clear, complete, and compelling in presenting all information.
- The responsibility for making a compelling case for state government support rests entirely with the applicant.
- Only the information required or suggested by the Arts Board will be presented to the panel. Applicants must adhere to the limits on support materials and work samples.
- Panelists may recommend little/no funding if information is missing/incorrect/unclear.

Steps of the Review Process

1. Arts Board staff reviews Phase 2 applications to determine compliance with basic eligibility requirements.
2. The application materials are provided to the peer advisory panel, which is comprised of five panelists and chaired by a member of the Board who serves as a non-voting facilitator. Panelists' names will not be released to the public until the day of the panel meeting, as exempted from the open meeting law according to Wisconsin Statutes s.19.85(1)(e).
3. Panelists review all applications prior to the panel meeting. In addition, each panelist is assigned specific applications to study in-depth and present during the meeting. Panelists are instructed not to contact or discuss pending applications with applicants prior to the panel meeting.
4. Panel meets in Madison or via Zoom in April (specific panel meeting dates are noted on p. 3 of these guidelines and posted on the Arts Board's website). The meetings are open to the public. Applicants are encouraged to attend and observe the in-person or live streamed meeting. Applicants will not be permitted to present to or communicate with the panel in any way at the meeting.
5. At the panel meetings, panelists score applications based on evaluation criteria established by the Board (see Evaluation Criteria on p. 6-7 within these guidelines). The panel makes qualitative recommendations to the Board.
6. The recommendations of the peer advisory panel are reviewed by the fifteen members of the Arts Board, and accepted or denied at the Board's May quarterly board meeting, wherein grant awards are determined.
7. By mid-May, applicants will be notified of the Board's decisions. Contracts and other required material will be sent to grant recipients after the state has passed its biennial budget. **(PLEASE NOTE:** Arts Board cannot guarantee an exact timeframe for payment. It is possible that grant checks may not be sent until late fall, depending on State Legislative and Administrative action. This means that summer and early fall projects might not receive their funding until after their project is completed.)
8. Applicants that did not receive a grant will have 30 days from receiving Board notification to appeal the decision. Appeals must follow the appeals process outlined within these guidelines.

Award Administration

The Arts Board uses a formula that incorporates the panel scores to determine funding for Creative Communities awards. While Arts Board staff is available throughout the application process to advise applicants, this advice does not represent or influence the decision of the panel or the Board, nor bind the Board in future determinations. Once the Board has determined the awards, the Arts Board will notify the applicants.

Grantee Reporting Requirements

If awarded a WAB Creative Communities grant, each grantee agrees to comply with the following requirements:

Acknowledgement of Arts Board Support

Grantees are required to give credit for grant-supported activities in all printed, online, and broadcast promotion, publicity, advertising, and printed programs by including the following credit line: “This project is supported in part by a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts.”

The Wisconsin Arts Board logo and credit line must be used in all printed and online materials. Please use the camera-ready copy of the [WAB logo](#), together with specific size and color requirements found on our website.

Articulating the Public Value of Creative Communities Grants

Grantees are required to write to their representatives within the Wisconsin State Legislature (Assemblyperson and Senator) and the Governor about the fact that they have received a Creative Communities grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board. The letter should describe how their project will serve their community, and invite these elected officials to connect with the project in some specific way. These letters will help to inform their elected representatives of the importance of the arts - especially the arts involved in this proposed project - to Wisconsin’s economy and quality of life.

Final Reports

Grantees are required to submit a Final Report at the end of the project, no later than July 31, 2026. The Final Report will be completed through the Arts Board’s online application system, SmartSimple. Grant recipients are required to include with the final report at least 3 high-quality digital images, digital video, or digital sound recordings documenting the funded activities that can be celebrated in future Arts Board materials. Recipients must obtain documentation permission from those whose images are included.

NOTE: Applications from organizations that have not filed final reports for past grants will not be accepted for panel review.

Retention of Records

Grantees may be subject to an audit by the Arts Board or the National Endowment for the Arts. Organizations must retain financial records, including supporting documents, and all

other information pertinent to an Arts Board grant for six years after the receipt of the award. This includes invoices, canceled checks, receipts, itemization of in-kind contributions, and general ledger records.

Accessibility Requirements and Documentation

All Wisconsinites should have access to the arts as artists, participants, and audience members. By signing the Arts Board application and contract, grantees acknowledge that their programs, services, and facilities must be accessible to people with disabilities (including mobility, visual, hearing and cognitive disabilities). Monies will not be granted and the Arts Board's endorsement or sponsorship will not be provided unless the applicants are able, upon request, to provide documentation of their success, or their efforts to make real change, in creating accessible spaces and programming. Such documentation might include, but is not limited to, records of accessibility efforts completed to date, facility access changes which have been accomplished, provision for maintaining accessibility features, training or education efforts designed to improve accessibility by individuals with disabilities, and successful involvement of such individuals in planning and achieving access to facilities and programs.

This work goes beyond compliance with state and federal laws that prohibit the Wisconsin Arts Board, as a recipient of federal funds, from providing support to people or entities that discriminate against individuals with disabilities. Providing the required assurances that each grantee will comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ("Section 504") and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 ("ADA") in making its programs and activities accessible to individuals with disabilities, is only the first step to creating work that is truly accessible to all members of the grant recipient's community. The spirit of this requirement is to be encouraging, not punitive. The more people who are engaged in the arts, the better the world will be. Please visit the [National Endowment for the Arts/Office of Accessibility website](#) for more information.

Appeals

The Arts Board recognizes that errors may occur in its application process and is committed to acknowledging any such errors and responding to rectify the effects of an error. The following appeals process enables applicants to identify these errors and omissions, and bring them to the attention of the Board, if the applicant can satisfactorily document that the application was misrepresented or improperly reviewed through no fault of the applicant.

Applicants may appeal the Board's funding decision only on the following grounds:

- a) The Arts Board has made a procedural error in handling the application; or
- b) A member of the staff, peer advisory review panel, or the Board violated the conflict-of-interest policy of the Board. Board decisions are subject to reversal or modification solely on these grounds.

The appeal must be made exclusively on the basis of materials submitted at the time of application. Changes in the applicant's situation after submittal cannot be considered.

Evaluations of artistic quality or merit, including artistic excellence and leadership, the quality

of the artistic activity, or the artistic work of an individual artist are not subject to appeal. The amount of the grant may not be appealed. No interpretation or judgment of relevant peer review panels may be appealed.

Any appeal must be submitted in writing to the Arts Board's Chairperson and postmarked no later than thirty (30) calendar days after the date of the written notification of the Board's decision. The appeal letter should identify the error or omission and the effect such error had on the recommendation of the advisory panel.

The Board Chairperson will review each appeal in consultation with the Executive Director to determine whether grounds for an appeal exist based on the above criteria. If such grounds are determined to exist, the appeal will be forwarded to the Executive Committee of the Board for consideration. The Executive Committee will solicit staff comment, review records and otherwise seek information pertaining to the case, and then will formulate a recommendation for action to the entire Board. If the appeal is supported by the Board, funds will be awarded only if they are available.

Glossary of Terms

Please note that a [Glossary of Terms](#) relating to all Wisconsin Arts Board grants is available on our website.