



ARTS AND YOUTH

2026 Grant Guidelines

Deadline: May 12, 2026

The mission of the California Arts Council, a state agency, is to strengthen arts, culture, and creative expression as the tools to cultivate a better California for all.

Learn more at www.arts.ca.gov

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ARTS AND YOUTH

DEADLINE: May 12, 2026, 11:59 PM
Grant Request Amount: Up to \$25,000
Grant Activity Period: October 1, 2026–September 30, 2027

Apply at: calartscouncil.smartsimple.com

Please refer to the [California Arts Council Grants Manual](#) for all policies, procedures, and resources for applicants and grantees.

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Program Timeline

Application Opens	March 17, 2026
Application Deadline	May 12, 2026
Panel Review	Approx. June - July 2026
Funding Decision	Approx. August 2026
Funding Notification	Approx. August 2026
Grant Activity Start	October 1, 2026
Estimated Arrival of Funds	Approx. January - March 2027
Grant Activity End	September 30, 2027
Final Report Deadline	November 1, 2027

Eligibility

Organizations eligible to apply include:

1. Nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) California organizations
2. Units of municipal, county, or tribal governments
3. Fiscally sponsored organizations

Non-eligible applicants include:

1. Organizations that are registered and primarily operate as for-profit corporations/entities, even if they have a fiscal sponsor.
 - a. This includes LLCs and any for-profit entities (including charitable arms or branches).
2. Non-arts organizations that do not offer ongoing arts activities and/or services
3. Individuals (including individuals with a fiscal sponsor)
4. State agencies
5. Federal agencies
6. Elementary and secondary schools (public, private, charter)
7. School districts
8. County offices of education
9. Parent-teacher associations (PTAs)
10. Booster clubs

Eligibility Requirements

Applicant organizations and fiscal sponsors must meet the requirements below:

1. Have a principal place of business in California and a California address.
2. Have a minimum two-year history of consistent arts programming and/or services prior to the application deadline.
3. Demonstrate proof of nonprofit status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or section 23701d of the California Revenue and Taxation Code.
 - Eligible applicant organizations without 501(c)(3) status, please see the *Fiscal Sponsorship* section of the [2026 Grants Manual](#).
4. Have “active” status with the California Secretary of State (SOS) showing evidence of “good standing” at the time of application.

Eligible Request Amounts

- Applicants can request up to \$25,000 for the one-year Grant Activity Period.

Funding Restrictions

- Organizations with total revenues at or above \$5,000,000 are not eligible to apply for this grant program.
 - The CAC’s definition of total revenue is the total cash inflow from your organization’s most recently completed fiscal year. Cash inflow/income includes all earned income (ex: ticket sales) and contributed income (ex: grants, donations/contributions, one-time organizational funding, operational grants).
Re-granting, pass-through, and restricted capital improvement funding are excluded from the organization’s total revenue calculation.
- Applicants cannot apply to this program and the Impact Projects grant program; they must choose one.

Matching Funds

- Matching funds are not required for this grant.

Funding Priorities

Every eligible application will be adjudicated by peer review panels and receive a final rank (see [2026 Grants Manual](#)). All applications that receive final ranks of 6 through panel adjudication will be funded regardless of whether they meet any of the funding priorities. Applications receiving ranks of 4 and above through the adjudication process will then receive added weighting for meeting the following priorities:

- Organizations serving historically and systemically under-resourced communities located in the lower two quartiles of the [Healthy Places Index \(HPI\)](#), including rural and inland areas as well as regions with a history of low investment from the CAC
 - Applicants with 50 percent or more of ZIP codes served falling in the lower two quartiles of the HPI will meet the HPI priority criteria.
 - Additional 1 point added to the rank.
- First-time grantees who have not previously received direct CAC funding (except for organizations whose only previous CAC funding was a Cultural Pathways grant)
 - Additional 0.5 point added to the rank.

- Small organizations with total revenues of \$250,000 or below
 - Additional 1 point added to the rank.

Applications with final ranks of 6 through panel adjudication will be funded first. Allocations for final ranks below 6 will be made in order of weighted ranks as funding availability permits.

Program Overview

Background & Purpose

The **Arts and Youth** program is rooted in the CAC's belief that arts learning and engagement should be available to all young people in California. Providing access to meaningful, culturally responsive arts experiences helps youth develop a greater sense of self, deepen their connection to their communities, and make meaningful connections across histories and cultures. By participating in the arts, youth gain the knowledge, skills, and understanding to actively take part in creative processes, projects, and pursuits throughout their lifetimes as culturally literate, engaged citizens.

The CAC acknowledges that barriers to access are compounded by factors such as socio-economic status, geographic isolation, gender identity, racial identity, cultural identity, digital divide and disability and is committed to addressing these barriers in order to achieve greater equity. The Arts and Youth program expands meaningful arts participation and learning in diverse settings and contexts for infants, children, and youth ages 0-25 by prioritizing programs that directly bridge barriers to access and participation.

Program Goals

- Increase priority population youth participation in and access to quality arts experiences and learning opportunities.
- Provide creative experiences that promote positive social and emotional development in safe, healthy, and appropriate venues.
- Engage a new generation of arts participants, advocates, and creators by supporting art programs and experiences that invite, involve, or center youth voices, narratives, and perspectives.
- Create access to culturally and linguistically responsive quality arts experiences and learning opportunities using cultural knowledge to support the cultural assets of the local community and students' positive self-identification and respect for diverse cultures.
- Build capacity of educators and educational institutions to integrate arts learning into their teaching practices across the curriculum.
- Cultivate valuable life skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, collaboration, communication, and positive self-expression through the arts.

Project Requirements

- The project must engage youth (ages 0-25) that may not otherwise have access to or participate in arts learning activities.
- The project plan must reflect a collaborative relationship between the applicant organization, artists and/or culture bearers, youth, and the participating community.
- The anticipated project timeline must show how it will be completed on budget within the Grant Activity Period in alignment with the program's purpose and goals.

- The project may occur during or outside of traditional school hours and take place at arts and culture venues, schools, community centers, court/school sites, juvenile halls and camps, county-operated correctional facilities, social services agencies, and other youth-oriented settings.
- The project design must include safe, healthy, and appropriate learning and community engagement environments for youth.
- If proposing therapeutic outcomes, applicants must establish the qualifications of service providers, how strategies are appropriate to the clinical and/or community arts setting, and how support is culturally responsive to participants.

Reporting Requirements

- Provide a final report summarizing grant-funded activities and accomplishments within 30 days of the end of the Grant Activity Period (or by the stated deadline). Reporting should include:
 - Details on use of grant funds, including final project budget expenses
 - Narrative description of project activities, including program location and timeline, and how activities accomplished Arts and Youth Program goals as outlined above
 - Description of participants (how many, age range, from where, etc.)
 - Summary of project evaluation, including impact on participants
 - Description of engagement with diverse and under-resourced communities and promotion of racial equity
 - Documentation materials such as photographs, video, or other media
 - Geography of activities
 - NEA-specific required reporting about type of organization, activity, and project locations
- Optional possible midpoint grantee webinar to share progress and areas of challenge.
- Participate in any CAC-initiated evaluation activities related to this program, CAC programming in general or California's arts and culture ecosystem.
- **Grantees that do not collaborate with the CAC on reporting or who do not submit reports will be ineligible to apply for future funding opportunities.**
- Reports are to be completed and submitted in the grant application portal, using the CAC-provided format. The Application Owner will receive an email when reports are available in the Requires Attention section of the Application Owner's account.

Grant Application Questions & Review Criteria

The full application and detailed instructions are available at calartscouncil.smartsimple.com.

Application Summary

Provide a brief summary of your proposal indicating how CAC grant funds would be used. This description will be used to introduce your proposal to the review panel. If funded, this description may be used as the Scope of Work in your grant contract and will be binding. It may also be edited by the CAC and used to summarize your proposal in public documents. Please review the [What We Do Not Fund](#) resource document before completing this section.

Criterion #1: Centering Equity and Accessibility

The application must demonstrate your organization's experience, capacity, and ongoing commitment to engaging and uplifting [historically under-resourced, excluded, and erased artists, audiences, communities](#), and cultural practices. This dedication should be reflected throughout the proposal.

The application must also demonstrate that the programs, services, information, and facilities—including [online spaces](#)—will be [accessible to individuals with disabilities](#), such as those who are [deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind](#), or who [have physical, visual, developmental, learning, or cognitive disabilities](#), as well as [mental](#) or [chronic illnesses](#).

Application Questions and Required Documents

1. Describe your organization's equity and accessibility goals.
2. What does your organization do to achieve these goals?
3. How does your organization determine progress in achieving these goals?
4. Describe your organization's approach to ensuring that people with disabilities can fully participate in all programs and services.

Criterion #2: Program Design & Implementation

Provide a detailed description of your proposed project and how your project will accomplish one or more of the program goals.

Application Questions and Required Documents

1. Provide a detailed description of your proposed project and how your project will accomplish one or more of the program goals.
2. Is your project free to participants/audiences? If no, describe how your project is accessible and/or affordable to participants/audiences.
3. Provide a list of each key individual (artistic, technical, or administrative) involved in this project. Include name, title, whether to be supported by CAC funds, and role within the proposed activities.
4. Provide a clear timeline of all the main arts programs or services that will take place during the Grant Activity Period.
5. Complete a two-year budget snapshot table. Provide revenue and expense amounts. Using the notes field, address any significant changes in line items from one year to the next and explain anticipated surpluses or deficits.
6. Provide the total amount of pass-through funds your organization manages. This includes grant funds passed to fiscally sponsored organizations. This total should not be included in your organizational total revenue calculation.
7. Provide the total amount of funds used for regranting in the field. This total should not be included in your organizational total revenue calculation.
8. Provide the total amount of restricted capital improvement funding your organization received in the last fiscal year. This total should not be included in your organizational total revenue calculation.
9. Complete a detailed project budget, including all expenses relevant to the stated project activities, and include rates of pay that appropriately compensate the labor of all individuals working on the project. Provide details for each line item to be funded by this

grant. Consult the [What We Do Not Fund](#) document and do not include items listed in the document.

Criterion #3: Artistic Merit

The application must demonstrate how California artists are involved at every stage of the project design and execution. Artists demonstrate skills, expertise, and experiences that are central to the goals of the project.

Application Questions and Required Documents

1. Select the artistic discipline(s) your project uses:
2. Provide a written statement from the lead artist(s) describing their vision for the project and their connection to the community to be engaged. Include how the artist(s) leading the project identify as members of the community that will be engaged and have expertise in the forms of arts and cultural expression that are unique to, and/or historically rooted in, that community.
3. Provide at least one (1) but no more than five (5) support materials that best portray your organization and its work. These may include artistic work samples, letters of support, marketing materials, and/or partnership agreements. Samples must have been created within the past three years and should be relevant to this grant opportunity.

Criterion #4: Community Engagement and Social Impact

The application must show the project's reach and/or depth of engagement within a defined community. It should include clear methods to evaluate success and document activities. Both project implementation and evaluation should involve meaningful community participation aligned with the project's identified outcomes.

Application Questions and Required Documents

1. Describe the youth population(s) this program serves and the existing barriers to their access to arts engagement and/or arts learning opportunities.
2. Describe how your project will address the healing, stabilizing, uplifting, and transforming of an identified community and their needs.
3. Describe how you will center community members' voices throughout the project, including development, implementation, and measures of success/evaluation (if applicable).
4. Provide the ZIP codes that this proposed project will serve during the Grant Activity Period.

Staff Assistance

Before contacting staff, check [FAQs](#) and [Grant Resources](#) to see if application questions can be answered. If staff assistance is still required, email is the best way to contact Arts Program Specialists. **We recommend that you contact staff well in advance of the May 12 deadline to ensure you can be accommodated.** People who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, or have difficulty speaking may dial 711 to reach the California Relay Service (CRS). Large print is available upon request. Translation services may also be available upon request.

Applicants seeking staff assistance should contact:

Emily Taggart (she/her)

Arts Program Specialist

California Arts Council

artsyouthgrant@arts.ca.gov