



Montgomery County Arts and Cultural District

SPECIAL PROJECTS GRANT

2025-2026 Program Guidelines



Administered by Culture Works

Key Dates to Remember

Grant Info Session via Zoom:
Wednesday, February 12, 2025, at 2:00pm EST

Intent to Apply Deadline:
Wednesday, March 5, 2025, by 4:00pm EST

Final Application Deadline:
Wednesday, April 30, 2025, by 4:00pm EST

Intent to apply forms and grant applications must be submitted online using the e-CImpact application system at cultureworks.org.

No late submissions
will be accepted.



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Montgomery County Arts and Cultural District 2025-2026 Special Projects Grant Program Guidelines

Welcome to the Montgomery County Arts & Cultural District (MCACD) Special Projects Grant program. The MCACD is a special purpose unit of Montgomery County government. Montgomery County believes the arts play a valuable role in our quality of life, education, workplace creativity, and more. The arts can also build community and break down barriers by bringing people together for common experiences and to share in each other's culture.

The Special Projects Grant program was created to provide an opportunity for small and mid-sized arts, cultural, and other nonprofit organizations to produce and present arts and cultural projects that will benefit the Montgomery County community. As of 2022, arts and cultural nonprofits may also use Special Projects Grant funding to complete capacity building projects that enhance their ability to carry out their missions. **The MCACD is providing \$250,000 to support the 2025-2026 Special Projects Grant program.** The program is administered by Culture Works, the Dayton Region's united arts fund and local arts agency.

Program Goal

Special Projects Grants provide support for one or a series of high-quality arts and cultural activities that reflect the diversity of our community. The grants support performing, visual, media, literary, and folk arts; festivals; artists' series; arts and cultural programs of schools, colleges, and universities; cultural traditions; public art programs; and other community and neighborhood arts and cultural partnerships. Organizations with arts and culture-focused missions may also use the grants to complete capacity building projects such as strategic plans, board development, marketing and branding initiatives, website development, staff professional development training, and feasibility studies. The 2025-2026 grant program will fund projects taking place between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2026.

Eligibility

All applicants must document the following to be eligible:

- Organization is located in or provides a majority of its programs and services in Montgomery County.
- Project has an arts/cultural focus.
- Project takes place between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2026.
- One application per organization, school, college, university, municipality, or government agency.
- Nonprofit and tax-exempt status (Collectives and other unincorporated organizations may apply in partnership with a nonprofit, tax-exempt fiscal agent). **Note:** During the eligibility review, Culture Works will verify the applicant organization or fiscal agent's:
 - Tax-exempt status through the [IRS Tax-Exempt Organization database](#)
 - Nonprofit incorporation status through the [Ohio Secretary of State](#)
 - Current charitable registration through the [Ohio Attorney General's office](#)

Before applying, be sure your records are up to date with each of the above.

- Compliance with previous grant conditions and final reporting (applies only to repeat applicants).
- Fiscal accountability and management.
- Grant amount requested meets the requirements outlined for new and repeat projects and appropriate matching funding (see p. 7).

Restrictions

Special Projects Grants will *not* fund:

- Organizations that are not located in, or do not provide a majority of programming and services within, Montgomery County, Ohio.
- Projects that do not have an arts/cultural focus.
- Activities taking place outside Montgomery County.
- Activities before July 1, 2025 or after June 30, 2026.
- Multiple applications from an organization.
- Multiple applications for the same project.
- Capital expenditures for facilities or equipment purchases not related to a specific project.
- Fundraising events, religious activities or events, or advocacy of specific political causes or candidates.
- Regranting, awards, or prizes.
- Revenue replacement (e.g., offsetting the cost of free tickets)
- Hospitality expenses (e.g., food and beverages).
- Multi-year grants (e.g., requests for two-year projects).
- Arts and cultural organizations (and their auxiliary groups) that receive general operating support from MCACD.
- Applications with no evidence of a true collaboration between an applicant and fiscal agent, if applicable.

Deadlines and Key Dates

Wednesday, February 12, 2025, 12:00-1:30pm: Applicants are encouraged to attend the free, virtual **Special Projects Grant Info Session via Zoom** to learn about the program rules and guidelines. Information about the Intent to Apply form will also be provided.

Support for the Intent to Apply - Schedule in Microsoft Bookings: Culture Works staff will offer free, virtual drop-in sessions for organizations who wish to receive feedback on their project concepts before submitting their intent to apply.

Wednesday, March 5, 2025, 4:00pm: **Intent to apply form deadline.** All organizations must submit an intent to apply form indicating the proposed activities, the amount requested, and the organization's nonprofit status. Culture Works and the MCACD will review all intent to apply forms for eligibility, and approved organizations will then be invited to complete the full grant application in late March. An organization may subsequently choose not to apply. However, organizations that do not submit the intent to apply form will not be able to complete an application for funding. **Intent to apply forms must be submitted online in e-CImpact.**

Thursday, April 10, 2025, 4:00pm: Deadline to submit a draft application for feedback. First-time applicants, small to mid-sized organizations, and applicants proposing new projects are encouraged to submit a draft of their application for feedback prior to the application deadline. Applicants may only submit one draft for feedback. Organizations will receive draft feedback by Thursday, April 21st to allow them time to incorporate suggestions into their final application. Feedback requests are completely optional, are not shared with grant panelists, and do not affect scoring.

Wednesday, April 30, 2025, 4:00pm: Application deadline. No late applications will be accepted, and all applications **must be submitted online through the e-CImpact portal.**

Funding decisions will be made at a virtual public meeting in June, and award payments will begin in July (see p. 13).

Project Categories

The following definitions represent the program categories applicable to Special Project support.

- **Cultural/Multi-Arts:** Projects involving more than one art/cultural discipline (e.g., festivals, neighborhood events, etc.) or the humanities.
- **Education:** In-school arts and cultural residencies or education-based community projects. Applicants may use this category to integrate the arts and culture into the basic curriculum.
- **Literary Arts/Performing Arts:** Projects involving creative writers--including poets, fiction and nonfiction writers--or the performing arts--theater, dance, and music--presented or produced by the applicant organization.
- **Visual Arts:** Projects involving painting, film, photography and digital media, crafts, sculpture, and design arts.
- **Capacity Building:** Projects designed to enhance an organization's ability to carry out its mission. Note: To apply in this category, an organization's mission must have an arts or cultural focus.

New and Repeat Projects

Special Projects Grants are one-year awards. Organizations are allowed to receive funding for the same project more than once, but they must reapply in each grant cycle. Organizations will be asked to indicate on their intent to apply form whether they are applying for a New or Repeat Project using the following definitions:

New Project: Any project that has not received funding from the MCACD is a new project (regardless of whether the organization has been previously funded for other projects).

Repeat Project: A project may be considered a repeat project if:

- 1) The same project received MCACD funding in a previous grant cycle.
- 2) The project is part of an ongoing program/series of the organization that has been funded by MCACD in the past.

- 3) The scope/style of the project is the same as the previous year but with a different theme/focus.

Funding priority will be given to new projects. Applicants are encouraged to contact the Director of Grantmaking & Impact at ren@culturworks.org if they are considering applying for a repeat project or if they are unsure if their project/program is a repeat project. During the eligibility audit, Culture Works staff will review the intent to apply form and approve or deny your categorization of new or repeat project.

Funding and Applicant Match

Applicants may request up to \$10,000 per grant cycle.

Colleges, universities, municipalities, and government agencies must provide a 1:1 cash match. the maximum grant request cannot exceed \$10,000 or 50% of the total project budget (i.e. to receive a full \$10,000 award, the project expenses must be \$20,000 or greater).

There is no matching funding requirement for nonprofit organizations, regardless of whether they are applying for a new or repeat project.

Additional Requirements for Colleges/Universities, Municipalities, and Government Agencies

Applications from colleges/universities, municipalities, and government agencies must:

1. Show how the applicant will involve the community outside the college, university, or agency in planning or scheduling committees and in implementing the project.
2. Show how the project will be marketed to the general community beyond college or university students, faculty and staff, or the agency.
3. Demonstrate a broad financial base of support and contain a cash match; that is, a match beyond staff time and overhead provided by the college, university, or agency. Indirect costs* may not be used to match MCACD funds; they should not be shown in the cash section of the application. Indirect costs, if listed, should be shown in the in-kind section of the application.

*Indirect costs are real costs that the institution incurs but which cannot be directly charged to a specific grant or contract. General categories of indirect costs include general administration (accounting, payroll, purchasing, etc.), sponsored project administration, plant operation and maintenance, library expenses, departmental administration expenses, depreciation or use allowance for buildings and equipment, and student administration and services. Indirect costs also are sometimes called Facilities & Administrative (F&A) Costs or institutional overhead.

Review Criteria – Scoring Categories

Panelists evaluate each application—and provide comments on its strengths and weaknesses—based on three major scoring areas: Project Quality and Artistic Vibrancy, Community Impact and Engagement, and Ability to Complete and Manage the Project. The maximum number of points is 100, with each of the three major scoring areas worth between 30 and 40 points. The scoring criteria for each category are described below. Capacity Building projects will be evaluated in relation to how

the project advances the mission of the organization to provide arts and cultural programming that impacts the community.

This is a competitive grants process and projects are recommended for funding based on the applicant’s ability to respond effectively to the published criteria. The following section is meant to give applicants a sense of what qualifies as a “weak,” “good,” or “strong” application.

Project Quality and Artistic Vibrancy	
Criteria	Evidence (can support any criteria)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quality of the production, exhibit, festival/community event, works of art, and other project activities. ▪ Qualifications of the individuals responsible for shaping and executing the creative vision of the project (i.e., artists, artistic directors, jurors, curators, creative consultants, etc.). <p>For Capacity Building projects only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evidence that the project activities will enhance the organization’s ability to carry out its mission. ▪ Qualifications of the consultants, contractors, and creative personnel involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grant narrative. ▪ Resumes or bios of artists, jurors, consultants, and other artistic and creative personnel. ▪ Evidence of commitment from participating artists/creative personnel. ▪ Artistic documentation. ▪ Printed materials (programs, catalogs, and newsletters). ▪ Press clippings. ▪ Previous MCACD final report (if applicable).

Weak/Fair:

- Project is not a meaningful arts/cultural project.
- Project activities are loosely defined and/or quality is low or difficult to determine.
- Artistic/creative personnel are not identified and/or their qualifications are limited/difficult to discern.
- Roles of artistic/creative personnel are undefined or unclear.

For Capacity Building:

- It is difficult to determine if/how the project will enhance the organization’s ability to carry out its mission.
- The organization has not provided a clear explanation of how/whether the project will improve the quality of the organization’s artistic, educational, and/or cultural offerings.
- Consultants, contractors, and other creative personnel are undefined and/or their qualifications are limited/difficult to discern.

Good:

- Project is artistic/cultural in nature but not necessarily compelling.
- Project activities are defined and meet professional standards.
- Artistic/creative personnel are qualified but not exemplary.
- Roles of artistic/creative personnel are mostly defined.

For Capacity Building:

- Project activities will enhance the organization’s ability to carry out its mission.

- The project will improve the quality of the organization’s artistic, educational, and/or cultural offerings.
- Consultants, contractors, and other creative personnel are qualified but not exemplary. Their roles are mostly defined.

Strong/Exceptional:

- Project is compelling, imaginative, and/or innovative.
- Project activities are described in detail and demonstrate high professional standards.
- Artistic/creative personnel are highly qualified, and all have been confirmed.
- Roles of artistic/creative personnel are clearly defined.

For Capacity Building:

- Project activities will provide the organization with innovative practices, tools, and/or knowledge that will improve its ability to carry out its mission.
- The project will enable the organization to present innovative artistic, educational, and/or cultural offerings.
- Consultants, contractors, and other creative personnel are highly qualified, and all have been confirmed. Their roles are clearly defined.

Community Impact and Engagement

Criteria	Evidence (can support any criteria)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organization’s understanding of, and responsiveness to, the needs and interests of its community/constituents. ▪ Clarity of the project goals and target audience ▪ Potential impact of the project on the target audience. ▪ Quality of the evaluation plan to measure project impact and success. ▪ Availability and accessibility of the project to diverse audiences. ▪ Compliance with federal ADA requirements. ▪ Quality of the promotional plan to reach the project’s target audience. <p>For Capacity Building projects only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potential impact of the project on the organization’s ability to engage the community. ▪ Evidence of the organization’s commitment to serving diverse audiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grant narrative, particularly sections describing goals, planning, impact, evaluation, promotion, and projected attendance. ▪ Grant narrative, particularly areas describing audience diversity and project accessibility. ▪ Sample evaluation tools. ▪ Sample promotional materials detailing range of admission prices, performance times, and venue accessibility. ▪ Previous MCACD final report (if applicable), particularly past attendance figures and diversity of participants.

Weak/Fair:

- Project goals are undefined, unrealistic, and/or do not address community needs or interests.
- The public participation component is undefined or unclear.
- The target audience is undefined or unclear.

- Project activities will not be accessible to diverse audiences, or limited consideration has been given to making the project activities accessible to diverse audiences.
- Evaluation plan is non-existent or does not clearly measure project impact.
- Promotional plan is unrealistic and/or undefined.

For Capacity Building:

- Project goals are undefined or unrealistic.
- The evaluation plan is non-existent or unclear.
- It is unclear whether the project will enhance the organization’s ability to engage the community.
- The project will not improve the organization’s ability to serve more diverse audiences, or it is unclear how it will do so. As applicable, the organization has not considered how it will ensure diverse representation among project participants.

Good:

- Project goals are explained and realistic, but response to community needs/interests is limited or requires additional explanation.
- The public participation component and the target audience are defined.
- Project activities are affordably priced and scheduled at times and locations to enable participation among diverse audiences.
- Evaluation plan is evident and designed to measure project impact but could be strengthened by incorporating additional/a greater variety of metrics.
- Promotional plan is realistic and defined but mostly “business as usual.”

For Capacity Building:

- Project goals are explained and realistic.
- Evaluation plan is evident and designed to measure project impact but could be strengthened by incorporating additional/a greater variety of metrics.
- Project activities will enhance the organization’s ability to engage the community.
- The project will enable the organization to serve more diverse audiences. As applicable, the organization has provided the opportunity for input from diverse project participants.

Strong/Exceptional:

- Project goals are specific, realistic, and developed in direct response to a community need/interest.
- The public participation component is clearly defined and reaches a significant number of people, impacts the target audience in a deep and meaningful way, and/or takes place in a community or setting with limited cultural resources.
- The organization has a proactive plan to encourage participation among diverse audiences, and/or project activities are fundamentally inclusive and culturally responsive (e.g., incorporate translators, feature sensory-friendly experiences).
- Evaluation plan is thorough and incorporates both qualitative and quantitative metrics.
- Promotional plan is thorough, creative, and will strongly engage the target audience.

For Capacity Building:

- Project goals are specific, realistic, and informed by community/stakeholder feedback.
- Evaluation plan is thorough and incorporates both qualitative and quantitative metrics.
- Project activities will significantly enhance the organization's ability to engage the community.
- The project is designed to increase the organization's ability to serve diverse audiences and provide inclusive programming; or, the organization has a proactive plan to ensure diverse representation among project participants.

Ability to Complete and Manage the Project	
Criteria	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quality of the plan for project implementation and success, including evidence of anticipating potential COVID-19-related challenges ▪ Organization's history of successful project implementation. ▪ Thoroughness, clarity, and feasibility of the project budget and budget breakout. ▪ Thoughtfulness of funding reduction response. ▪ Qualifications of the project manager. ▪ Commitments from key project personnel. ▪ Evidence of support from appropriate staff, board, and committee members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grant narrative, particularly project implementation plan, organizational history, and COVID-19 planning. ▪ Brochures and press clippings from previous projects. ▪ Budget spreadsheet and breakout document showing some or all-matching funds are confirmed. ▪ Grant narrative, particularly funding reduction response. ▪ Artist resumes; project manager resume, letters of agreement from artists. ▪ Planning committee information. ▪ Timeline that clarifies project activities. ▪ Previous MCACD final report (if applicable), particularly history of handling funds.
<p>Criteria in this section are the same for Capacity Building projects</p>	

Weak/Fair:

- Project implementation plan is unclear/the project is still mostly in the ideation/conceptual phase.
- History of successful project implementation is not evident.
- Project budget does not balance/is unrealistic.
- Budget breakout is not included, does not align with the budget, or is difficult to interpret.
- No matching funds are secured (where applicable).
- It is unclear who will manage the project or the project manager's qualifications are limited or unclear.
- Key project personnel roles are undefined or unclear.

Good:

- Project implementation plan is evident but could benefit from greater detail.
- Project budget is balanced and realistic.
- Budget breakout is aligned to the budget but not as detailed as would have been helpful.
- No matching funds are secured (where applicable).
- Project manager is identified and qualified.
- Key project personnel roles are mostly defined.

Strong/Exceptional:

- Project implementation plan includes a realistic timeline and thoughtful responses to COVID-19 and funding reduction questions.
- Organization has a history of successful project implementation.
- Project budget is balanced, realistic, and supported by a thorough budget breakout document.
- Some or all matching funds are secured (where applicable).
- Project manager is highly qualified, with experience relevant to this project.
- All key project personnel are confirmed, and appropriate staff, board, and committee members will be involved.

Grant Review Process

Phase 1 – Eligibility

All applications will undergo an eligibility audit by Culture Works and Montgomery County staff. The staff will make no assessment of the review criteria, only eligibility. If an organization fails to meet the eligibility requirements, the application will not be forwarded to the panel. All applicants will receive notification of their eligibility status.

Phase 2 – Panel Review

The MCACD relies on arts, cultural, and community members within and beyond Montgomery County to review Special Projects Grant applications. Panelists can be selected based on their knowledge of the discipline, nonprofit sector, and community. Every effort is made to avoid conflicts of interest.

Panelists review and evaluate each application independently using the scoring criteria outlined on pages 8-12. Panelists assign points in three major scoring categories:

1. Project Quality and Artistic Vibrancy
2. Community Impact and Engagement
3. Ability to Complete and Manage the Project

The maximum number of points is 100, with each of the three major scoring areas worth between 30 and 40 points. Panelists will discuss scores and provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of each application at two public panel meetings (June 13 & 16, 2025). Once all applications have been discussed, staff will average panelists' scores to compute an aggregate rating for each application. Staff will post the application rankings from highest to lowest score. The panel will make funding recommendations based on these rankings and the amount of funding available. This is a competitive process. Not all applications will receive funding, and not all applications selected for funding will receive their requested amount.

Phase 3 – Grants Committee

The MCACD Grants Committee will review a summary of all Special Projects Grant panel deliberations. By considering the panel's funding recommendations, the Committee ensures an equitable distribution of funds. The Committee has the discretion to consider applications that have 'development potential' for funding or technical assistance.

The Committee approves the panel's funding models and recommends the distribution of funds based on the available allocation.

Phase 4 – MCACD Board Approval

The MCACD board considers the Grants Committee's recommendations. Following the MCACD board's approval, applicants receive written notification of the results of their grant applications along with panel comments.

Requirements After Being Selected for Funding

1. Grantees must sign the grant agreement and complete a project revision form (if applicable) in its entirety.
2. If there are significant changes to your project at any point during the grant period, you must submit the proposed changes to Culture Works, in writing, for approval prior to implementing the changes.
3. Recipients will be expected to participate in promotional activities (e.g., a press conference announcing the awards, sharing social media announcements, etc.).
4. Grantees must acknowledge **Montgomery County** as the funding source for the project and include the **MCACD logo** in programs, publications, and media releases associated with the project.
5. All projects should take place in facilities that are ADA compliant.
6. Grant funds will be issued approximately 30 days prior to the Project Start Date. Grantees may request an earlier payment based on proof of expenditure such as needing to place a deposit on a venue, etc. Payments will be issued as follows:
 - a. For projects receiving less than \$2,000 in funding, the grant will be paid in one lump sum upon completion of the grant agreement and project revision form (if applicable).
 - b. For projects receiving \$2,000 or more in funding, 75% of the award will be paid upon completion of the grant agreement and project revision form (if applicable), and the remaining 25% will be paid after the final report has been completed and approved.
7. Special Projects Grant activities must be completed by June 30, 2025.
8. A final report and support materials are due 30 days after the completion of the funded project. Extensions are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and may be granted if a written request is submitted before the final report due date.
 - If the final report is not submitted on time, 10 points will be automatically deducted from the score of the next application.
 - If no extension was granted, the close-out date for final reports to be submitted will be sixty days after the due date. If an acceptable report is not filed within this time, any remaining grant payments will be cancelled. Determination will be made if previously distributed funds need to be returned to Montgomery County.

On-Site Evaluations

Montgomery County and Culture Works representatives may attend, at random, funded activities to monitor compliance with the terms of the grant agreement.

Application Checklist

Applicants are encouraged to use this checklist to begin preparing application materials well in advance of the application deadline. Applicants should prepare to respond to questions regarding:

- The project timeline and implementation plan
- The key project personnel (e.g. artists, contractors, administrative team)
- The project's impact (on the applicant organization and the community)
- The project evaluation plan
- Accessibility and inclusion
- The use of grant funds and how the organization will modify the project in the event of a funding reduction
- COVID-19 planning

In addition to the application narrative, applicants will be asked to submit supporting documentation to provide additional detail and clarification regarding their organization and proposed project.

Applicants should be prepared to provide:

- Your **IRS letter of determination**. If your organization is applying with a fiscal agent, you will be asked to provide the letter of determination from the fiscal agent organization. *(Required)*
- If your organization is applying with a fiscal agent, you will need to provide a **letter of agreement from the partnering fiscal agent organization** detailing each organization's role and responsibilities in completing the project. *(Required if working with a fiscal agent)*
- Letters of commitment from key artist(s)/creative personnel** with whom you will be collaborating on the project and who are not employed by your organization. *(Optional, but strongly encouraged.)*
- Letters demonstrating commitment or support from project partners** or addressing the impact the project will have on its intended audience. *(Optional, but strongly encouraged.)*
- Resumes and/or biographical statements** for any key project personnel (project manager/coordinator, contracted artists, consultants, etc.). *(Required)*
- A **sample evaluation tool**--such as an audience survey--that your organization has used for previous project evaluations. If possible, select an example that could be used as a model for evaluating this project. *(Required)*
- Two examples of marketing materials** your organization has used to promote past programs/projects. Examples might include press clippings, brochures, flyers, etc. *(Required)*

- ❑ Up to two high-quality artistic **work samples** that clearly illustrate the merit of your organization’s work or the work of the artists/creative personnel participating in the project/program. Work samples may include a selection of images, video, audio, or manuscripts/publications, depending on the nature of the project. *(Required)*
- ❑ A **budget spreadsheet**. **Organizations must use the template provided by Culture Works.** Note: Colleges/universities, municipalities, and government agencies must demonstrate a cash match. See p. 7 for a full overview of matching requirements. *(Required)*
- ❑ A **budget breakout document** providing additional detail about the expenses and revenue shown in the budget spreadsheet (no required format). *(Required)*

Contact Information

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