

Evanston Arts Council

Cultural Fund Grant Guidelines: 2026 Application Cycle

Questions should be directed to artscouncil@cityofevanston.org

IMPORTANT DATES

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|-------------------------|--|
| February 26, 2026 | Applications open online |
| February and March 2026 | Technical assistance available by email |
| March 12, 2026 | Application info session via Zoom* |
| From March 12, 2026 | Video recording of the info session available online |
| April 1, 2026 | Application submission deadline 11:59 pm |
| May 9, 2026 | Review panel meets virtually |
| May 19, 2026 | Arts Council allocates grants in open meeting |
| By June 1, 2026 | Applicants notified |
| By June 30, 2026 | Grants disbursed |
| June 30, 2027 | All grant monies to be spent |
| July 31, 2027 | Final Reports due |

**This session will be recorded and available on our website for those who cannot attend live on March 12, 2026.*

OVERVIEW

Non-profit 501(c)(3) and community organizations with a 501(c)(3) designation may apply for up to **\$5,000** to support specific arts programs or the general operation of their cultural organization. Funding allocations will be determined by application score and the total amount of funding available. In some cases, a percentage of the total amount asked will be awarded. The applicant must complete the following application process to be considered eligible for a Cultural Fund grant. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

1. Complete the online application with an electronic signature of the authorizing official on the Statement of Assurances.
2. Upload the support materials requested.
3. Submit the application by the April 1, 2026 deadline.

APPLY HERE

You may also preview the Cultural Fund grant application narrative questions [here](#).

ARTS COUNCIL PURPOSE AND VALUES

The Evanston Arts Council was established by mandate of the Evanston City Council in 1975 to provide leadership and advocacy for the promotion, development, and accessibility of the arts and to create opportunities for artistic excellence in our community. As articulated in the [Purpose, Vision and Values](#) of the Evanston Arts Council:

- We maintain that art is for everyone; it should be a catalyst for building a welcoming community for all.
- We support all forms of creative expression.
- We value the voices of artists to enrich lives and move society forward.
- We believe the arts are a vital reflection of our humanity.

CULTURAL FUND GRANT OVERVIEW AND AMERICA 250

The goal of the Cultural Fund Grant Program is to sustain and advance our community's arts ecosystem and provide meaningful opportunities for all Evanstonians to engage with creative expression. We seek to fund a variety of artistic disciplines, sizes of organizations, and forms of cultural expression. The Arts Council encourages Cultural Fund applications from new and first-time applicants, from organizations that represent varied perspectives and backgrounds, and from organizations that collaboratively and creatively bring the community together.

For the 2026 Cultural Fund Grant, the Arts Council also encourages applicants to submit proposals honoring America250. Project activities may focus exclusively on celebrating the anniversary, or they may incorporate a special America250-related component or focus within a larger project. Projects could include activities in 2026 to 2027 that examine the work of American artists, present or create art recognizing the milestone, or undertake educational activities or related programming.

ELIGIBILITY

Funding is awarded to 501(c)(3) arts organizations and community organizations based in or serving Evanston for arts programs or projects that benefit the community.

THE CULTURAL FUND GRANT CANNOT FUND:

- For-profit entities
- Religious entities
- Organizations not working with the arts
- Individual artists (individual artists should instead apply through the Evanston Arts Council [Special Projects Grant](#), a rolling grant)
- Organizations without 501(c)(3) non-profit status and a valid UEI number
- Projects that replace arts instruction provided by an arts specialist
- Capital improvements or construction costs
- Organizations whose activities occur in venues that are not accessible to people with disabilities
- Purchase of permanent equipment
- An existing deficit from a previous year or project
- Activities not open to the general public
- Scholarships, fundraising events, or social activities such as receptions, parties, or galas
- Personal expenses such as child care and unrelated wages lost due to proposed project commitment
- Awards to individuals or organizations to honor or recognize achievement
- Generally, courses in degree-granting institutions
- Literary publishing
- Generally, exhibitions of, and other projects that primarily involve, single, individually-owned, private collections
- Cash reserves and endowments
- Applicants who submit incomplete applications
- Applicants that are taxing bodies (including schools, libraries, and park districts)
- Applicants that are neither located in Evanston nor serve the Evanston community
- Food or drinks

SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCESS

Applications will be reviewed by peer advisory panelists who are arts professionals that represent a variety of disciplines. Applications will be reviewed and scored according to the following criteria (for which the scoring matrix is available [here](#)):

Artistic Excellence and Artistic Merit: 33.3%

- Artistic goals and purpose
- Artistic merit of the project or programming and artists involved

- Originality

Community Impact: 33.3%

- Involvement of Evanston community members - as audience members, participants, or collaborators
- Reaches varied audiences
- Accessibility for all community members, including for people with disabilities

Use of Funds: 33.3%

- Need for funds
- Intended use of funds
- Capacity to implement the project/programming

GRANT DISTRIBUTION and FUNDING POLICIES

1. 501(c) 3 organizations must obtain a SAM Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) assigned by SAM.gov.
2. All grants will be paid in full upon receipt of required agreements and requested documentation. All grant fund expenditures must be incurred between July 2026 and June 2027.
3. All grant recipients are required to submit a written final report, due upon completion of the project and no later than July 31, 2027, as a condition of grant award. Any grantee not completing a timely grant report will not be eligible to apply for a grant in the following year.
4. All applicants are advised that litigation with or indebtedness to the City of Evanston may preclude the applicant's ability to receive grant funds.

In addition, all applicants must ensure that you implement the funded project in full accordance with the US Constitution, federal law, and public policy requirements including, but not limited to, those protecting free speech, religious liberty, public welfare, and the environment, and those prohibiting discrimination (§ 200.300).

As a registrant with SAM.gov, in most cases, you have already self-certified to your compliance with these policies and legal requirements through the Financial Assistance General Certifications and Representations, including attesting to the accuracy of the certification and acknowledging that you may be subjected to criminal prosecution under Section 1001, Title 18 U.S.C., or civil liability under the False Claims Act if you have misrepresented the information. A copy of this Financial Assistance Certifications Report is available in your SAM.gov entity registration record.

Nondiscrimination Policies

As a condition of receipt of federal financial assistance, you acknowledge and agree to execute your project, and require any contractors, successors, transferees, and assignees to comply with applicable provisions of national laws and policies prohibiting discrimination, including but not limited to:

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, and implemented by the National Endowment for the Arts at 45 CFR 1110, provides that no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.).

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as amended, provides that no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (20 U.S.C 1681 et seq.).

The Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, provides that no person in the United States shall, on the basis of age, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (42 U.S.C 6101 et seq.).

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), as amended, prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment (Title I); State and local government services (Title II); and places of public accommodation and commercial facilities (Title III) (42 U.S.C 12101-12213).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, provides that no otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of his/her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (29 U.S.C 794).

Access should be integrated into all facets and activities of an organization, from day-to-day operations to long range goals and objectives. Access accommodations and services should be given a high priority, and funds should be available for these services. All organizations are legally required to provide reasonable and necessary accommodations for staff and visitors with disabilities.

Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA), applies to any federal funds that would support an activity that may have environmental implications. The NEA may ask you to respond to specific questions or provide additional information in accordance with NEPA. If there are environmental implications, the NEA will determine whether a categorical exclusion may apply; to undertake an environmental assessment; or to issue a "finding of no significant impact," pursuant to applicable regulations and 42 U.S.C. Sec. 4332.

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (NHPA), applies to any federal funds that support activities that have the potential to impact any structure eligible for or on the National Register of Historic Places, adjacent to a structure that is eligible for or on the National Register of Historic Places, or located in a historic district, in accordance with Section 106. This also applies to planning activities that may affect historic properties or districts. The NEA will conduct a review of your project activities, as appropriate, to determine the impact of your project activities on the structure or any affected properties. NEA review must be completed prior to any award funds being released. You may be asked to provide additional information on your project to ensure compliance with NHPA at any time during your award's period of performance (16 U.S.C. 470).

IF AWARDED CULTURAL FUND MONIES, APPLICANT AGREES TO:

1. RECORD RETENTION AND ACCESS

- Awardees must permit the City of Evanston and City's financial auditors with access to records and financial statements, as necessary to ensure compliance with the federal award requirements.
- Awardees must retain financial records and other supporting documents related to the Award for a period of 3 years from the date of submission of Final Report
- To receive payment, awardee shall sign and return Grant Agreement, complete [Vendor Registration Form](#), if you have never received a payment from the City.
- Send an invoice to the City of Evanston from you/your organization for the amount of the award indicated in your letter and agreement

2. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.** Applicants that receive funding must acknowledge the City of Evanston/Evanston Arts Council support in all publicity and media materials used in connection with the funded project. Acknowledgement is required of the support of the Illinois Arts Council Agency and the National Endowment for the Arts. Evanston Arts Council [Logo](#) (you can find the [IACA logo](#) and the [NEA logo](#) in the links embedded). You will need to use these logos in your materials. Please read the agreement for more information.

3. **FINAL REPORT.** Final report and supporting documents must be received by the City by September 30, 2027. Organizations failing to submit final reports by this date risk not being eligible for funding during the next application cycle.

FAQ's:

Can my partner organizations also apply for NEA funds to support our collaborative work?

A partnering organization may apply for funds to support a joint effort but there can be no overlapping project costs between the applications. For example, if you are a dance company, and you are applying for the development of a new work and a presenting organization/theater is also applying for a residency/performance project that includes your company and the presentation of the new work, you must ensure that the costs are kept separate. You cannot include travel costs in your budget if these same costs are also reflected in the presenter's budget. You cannot include as cost share/match any income that is derived from a federal grant made to another entity (e.g., if a presenter includes your artist fees as an expense in their budget, you cannot use that as income in your own budget). In short, you should communicate closely with your partners to be sure that you are each clear on the division of costs and activity between the applications.

Can my organization be issued grant funding without providing the City with a Unique Entity Identifier?

501(c)3 organizations that do not provide the City with a Unique Entity Identifier will not be issued funding.

If I received funding from the NEA grant awarded to the City, as noted in my award letter, can I use this award for another federal cost share/match grant?

No, recipients awarded NEA funding cannot use funds as cost share/match for another federal grant.

Do I need to download any software or documents in order to apply?

No. We use Formstack, which has online forms with fields. You will be asked to upload various files, but will not need to download anything. NOTE: Formstack does not seem to work as well with Safari as other browsers. We recommend Google Chrome. If you are having trouble submitting, it is most likely a conflict with your browser.

What happens if my program, project, budget or plan changes after I have applied or received a grant?

If you have to make minor adjustments to your project or budget, you can simply proceed and note them in your final report. If major changes are necessary, please outline those changes and submit to artscouncil@cityofevanston.org for advice.

The grant application will not let me go to the next page until the current page is complete. How do I see the questions ahead of time? Also, can I start it and then finish it at a later time or date?

You may type in a few characters to the fields. The form will read that as "answered" and will allow you to move on. When you save your document, the program will send you an email with a link to go back and edit your application. You may do that as many times as needed until you "submit", at which time your application is final. Make sure you check your filter if you do not see the program-generated link to go back.