



Cultural Sustainability



Cultural Sustainability: Operational Impact Grants for Small Arts Organizations Program Guidelines

Cultural Sustainability is a new pilot grant program offered by the six U.S. Regional Arts Organizations (USRAOs) in partnership with The Wallace Foundation as part of its [Advancing Well-Being in the Arts initiative](#).

Cultural Sustainability acknowledges the invaluable contributions arts and cultural organizations make in our communities and the broader cultural landscape.

This program endeavors to support and understand how small, community-based arts organizations can advance their sustainability and well-being with resources to expand their practices and increase arts engagement in their communities.

M-AAA's Cultural Sustainability: Operational Impact Grants for Small Arts Organizations* is available to arts and cultural organizations and arts-centric businesses in Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas, and the Native Nations that share this geography). Through operational grants, capacity building, and cohort learning, Cultural Sustainability will support culturally driven organizations in M-AAA's six-state region with annual operating expenses under \$500,000.

This opportunity expands the types of operational structures eligible for support to include nonprofits as well as art-centric businesses to better serve groups that may face barriers with other grant programs. M-AAA hosted two roundtable sessions with individuals throughout our region on October 10 and 17 to help inform, define, and shape this new grant program in our six-state region.

M-AAA expects to grant a total of \$1,100,000 in the region, through 22 unrestricted, non-matching organizational grants of \$50,000 each.

These guidelines are specific to M-AAA's Cultural Sustainability: Operational Impact Grants for Small Arts Organizations. *If your organization is located outside of M-AAA's six-state region, you still may qualify for a Cultural Sustainability grant through another USRAO.* [Learn more here.](#)

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Cultural Sustainability: Operational Impact Grants for Small Arts Organizations endeavors to support arts and cultural nonprofits as well as art-centric businesses in M-AAA's six-state region (Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, and the Native Nations that share this geography).

1. Through financial support of \$50,000 nonmatching, operational support grants, grantees will work toward expanding their impact and improving the well-being and health of their organizations for the communities they serve, and
2. Through collaborative learning, grantees will regularly connect with fellow culturally driven organizations and businesses and learn from workshops with experts in evaluation and data collection to develop strategies to catalyze broad impact across the sector.

Through this program, M-AAA is exploring equitable grantmaking practices and how to implement them in the region.

Successful applicants will help diversify M-AAA's historical grantmaking by including:

- Organizations led by people of color or members of other underrepresented communities, either artistically or administratively
- First-time applicants or those who have received few or no grants from M-AAA
- Organizations with new leadership in key roles

ELIGIBILITY

Cultural Sustainability: Operational Impact Grants for Small Arts Organizations applicants must:

- Be a culturally driven organization or business
- Located and have an arts and culture presence in Mid-America Arts Alliance's six-state region of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, or the Native Nations that share this geography
- Be a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization; fiscally sponsored group; artist-centered or artist-led collective business (LLC, S Corps, Limited or General Partnerships); state or federally recognized tribal government
- Have at least three years of arts programming in any artistic discipline and genre. The years of activity do not need to be consecutive or connected to the date of formation/incorporation but do need to reflect the work of the entity that will receive the funding and participate in the cohort learning
- Have a current operating budget under \$500,000
- Provide the three most recently completed fiscal years' tax filings or profit/loss statements

- Have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)
- Have an Employer Identification Number (EIN)
- Predominantly serve Black, Latine, Asian, Arab, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and/or Caribbean communities, or another underrepresented community*
- Self-identify as being founded by and/or for a community of color or another underrepresented community*
- Be willing to have at least one staff person participate in monthly cohort meetings throughout the 15-month pilot program

*For the purpose of these guidelines, “underrepresented communities” refers to those whose opportunities to experience the arts and/or receive arts funding have been limited by geography, race/ethnicity, economics, and/or disability. Age (e.g., youth, seniors), gender, or sexuality alone do not qualify a group as underrepresented.

Those not eligible to apply include:

- Single-artist sole proprietorships
- Individuals
- Units of local, state, or federal government
- Schools, including public or private preschools, K-12, colleges, and universities
- ArtsHERE grant recipients

UNRESTRICTED FUNDING

Cultural Sustainability: Operational Impact Grants for Small Arts Organizations provides unrestricted funding with no cost-share or match requirement to support the organization's mission and advance organizational/business goals, including current and new programs and initiatives. Funding can be used to pay for overhead expenses such as rent, utilities, salaries, infrastructure, supplies, and day-to-day business expenses.

Funding cannot be used for:

- the sole benefit of any private shareholder or individual
- capital projects such as new construction
- the purchase of land or buildings
- the compensation of foreign nationals currently embargoed by the federal government (e.g., North Korea)
- International travel
- lobbying
- membership in airline travel clubs
- membership in civic, social, community organizations, or country clubs

APPLICATION REVIEW

Cultural Sustainability: Operational Impact Grants for Small Arts Organizations applications will be accepted through M-AAA's online grant portal and reviewed by M-AAA staff to determine completeness and eligibility. Ineligible applicants will be notified by email.

Eligible applications will be reviewed by a demographically diverse group of arts leaders, professionals, and practitioners who reside in the M-AAA region with experience and knowledge in one or more art forms.

REVIEW CRITERIA AND RUBRIC

Eligible applications will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

- **Overall Mission Alignment with the Grant Program**
The application illustrates that the organization's mission aligns with the intentions of the Cultural Sustainability: Operational Impact Grants for Small Arts Organizations program.
- **Organizational Impact in its Community**
The application demonstrates an arts and culture presence and impact in the M-AAA region that aligns with and is accountable to the community it serves.
- **Organization Sustainability**
The application displays planning for the sustainability of services and impactful programming.
- **Cohort Participation**
The applicant understands the expectations of and shows an enthusiasm for participation in cohort meetings.

Reviewers will evaluate each eligible application using the following 6-point ranking scale for each criterion listed above.

- 6 – Exemplary: Fully achieves the stated criteria. Meets all of the review criteria requirements to the HIGHEST degree.
- 5 – Strong: Strongly achieves the stated criteria. Meets all of the review criteria requirements to a SIGNIFICANT degree.
- 4 – Good: Sufficiently achieves the stated criteria. Meets all of the review criteria requirements to SOME degree.
- 3 – Fair: Moderately achieves the stated criteria. Meets MOST of the review requirements.
- 2 – Marginal: Minimally achieves the stated criteria. Meets SOME of the review requirements.
- 1 – Weak: Does not achieve the stated criteria. Inadequately meets the review requirements.

FUNDING PRIORITIES

In addition to panel review, funding priority will be given to applications that meet one or more of the following:

- Organizations led by people of color or members of other underrepresented communities, either artistically or administratively
- Organizations with a demonstrated commitment to underrepresented communities
- Organizations located in rural or isolated areas of the region
- First-time applicants or those who have received few or no grants from M-AAA
- Organizations with new leadership in key roles

Applicants not selected for the grant may request panel feedback at the time of grant status notification. Since this is a one-time opportunity and we expect a large volume of applications, we ask that you be patient with us while we respond to each request.

GRANT AWARDS

Cultural Sustainability is made possible through the generous support of The Wallace Foundation. M-AAA will disburse grants of \$50,000 to 22 organizations for operational support.

If selected, the applicant will enter into a grant agreement with M-AAA. The agreement will outline the terms and conditions to ensure compliance with our grant requirements.

Funding will be distributed through two partial payments:

1. 80% upon execution of the grant agreement, W-9 Form, and completion of the cohort learning baseline assessment form.
2. 20% upon successful review of the Final Report due by June 15, 2026.

To assist grantees in managing their grants, M-AAA can provide flexible and unique disbursement plans upon request. Additional information and resources for grantees can be found at: www.maaa.org/resources/for-grantees.

GRANTEE REQUIREMENTS

❖ Grant Agreement: Required

Grantees must comply with all requirements as stipulated in the grant agreement, including, but not limited to the following:

- a. Grantees are required to carry out activities consistent with the application as approved for funding.
- b. Changes to funded activities must be proposed in advance by the grantee and require written approval from M-AAA staff before implementing project changes. Requests for changes are considered on a case-by-case basis; approval is not guaranteed.
- c. Grantees commit to M-AAA's Grantee Assurance of Compliance and Federal Suspension and Disbarment Policy at www.maaa.org/resources/assurance-of-compliance;
- d. Grantees must complete an online final report form provided by M-AAA. The online final report form summarizes grant-funded activities and accomplishments at the end of the 15-month pilot program.
- e. Grantees must agree to credit acknowledgment of M-AAA's support in all promotional materials. To learn more visit, www.maaa.org/resources/grantee-crediting-requirements;
- f. Grantees are responsible for and must retain all records, receipts, and proof of expenses for a minimum of three (3) years following the 15-month pilot program and provide those documents to M-AAA upon request; and
- g. Grantees must expend all funds on or before June 15, 2026.

❖ **Technical Assistance Participation: Required**

Throughout the 15-month pilot program, grantees are expected to participate in monthly cohort workshops and one-on-one meetings with professional development consultants. Additionally, organizations will be asked to complete quarterly surveys and evaluations to help inform the services and offerings of the program.

❖ **Final Report: Required**

M-AAA will provide an online Final Report form. Grantees *must* complete and submit one on or before June 15, 2026. The Final Report form requires attendance information for funded public-facing activities, photos or screenshots of those activities, documentation of award acknowledgments, and, when available, press reviews and/or evaluations of activities including anecdotal feedback. Pictures and documentation *must* be uploaded into the online Final Report form.

❖ **Grant Record Retention: Required**

Grantee's financial records, supporting documents, and all records related to this pilot program must be retained for three (3) years from the date of the Final Report. Grantee shall provide Mid-America Arts Alliance access to any records kept by Grantee to make audits or examinations as necessary.

PROGRAM TIMELINE

- Application opens on **October 30, 2024**, at 11:00 a.m. CT
- Application closes on **January 10, 2025**, at 5:00 p.m. CT
- Awards for Cultural Sustainability: Operational Impact Grants for Small Arts Organizations made **April 2025**
- Public announcement **April 2025**
- The Technical Assistance Learning Cycles will occur in three-month cycles with a one-month break at the end of each cycle.
 - **Cycle 1: May 2025–July 2025**
 - May 15, June 19, and July 17
 - **Cycle 2: September–November 2025**
 - September 18, October 16, and November 20
 - **Cycle 3: January 2026–March 2026**
 - January 15, February 19, and March 19
- Final Report due **June 15, 2026**

INFORMED CONSENT NOTIFICATION

Mid-America Arts Alliance is participating in a research study that is part of the [Wallace Foundation's Advancing Well-Being Through the Arts initiative](#), which aims to illuminate how arts organizations founded by, for, and with communities of color represent, support, and advance the well-being of their communities. The goal of the study is to understand what inclusive and equitable grantmaking practices look like across communities and as they are applied to more specific, regional contexts, and to expand our knowledge of grassroots, BIPOC arts organizations that often function under the radar of funders. As part of the study, there might be staff from the research team at [Creative Equity Research Partners](#) observing some activities related to the Cultural Sustainability grant program including outreach activities, grants panel, etc. The research team will also look at application and reporting data to understand who the RAOs reach and fund. All quantitative and qualitative data will only be reported out in aggregate and no information will be attributed to an individual or organization. If you have questions about the study, please contact creativeequityresearch@gmail.com.

SERVE ON THE GRANT REVIEW PANEL

Mid-America Arts Alliance relies upon arts leaders in the field to serve as reviewers for various programs including Cultural Sustainability: Operational Impact Grants for Small Arts Organizations. A review of application materials followed by a review panel meeting is planned to take place in March or April 2025. The meeting is held in a web-based format via Zoom. Therefore, reviewers must have a computer capable of browsing and joining online meetings as well as reliable internet access. Reviewers are not expected to travel; however, each reviewer must be able to commit to an independent review of applications in advance of the meeting.

A stipend is provided based on the number of applications the reviewer completes as assigned.

Submitted panel service interest forms will be held for consideration for two years. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Christine Bial, Director of Grant Programs at christine@maaa.org.

Submit your interest by filling out the [Cultural Sustainability Grant Panel Reviewer Interest Form](#).

M-AAA POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Grantees must comply with the federal policies and legal requirements, statutes, and regulations as stated in M-AAA's Assurance of Compliance.

Grantees are required to make access accommodations upon request for constituents with disabilities at M-AAA-funded activities. [The NEA has resources to assist arts organizations in making accommodations for Accessibility.](#)

Grantees must compensate all professional performers and related or supporting professional personnel at no less than the prevailing minimum rate of compensation. This requirement is in accordance with the regulations issued by the Secretary of Labor in part 505 of Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Part 505 does not provide information on specific compensation levels.

Grant awards are considered income. Grantees are responsible for all tax obligations under federal, state, and local laws. M-AAA recommends that grantees consult a tax accountant or local Internal Revenue Service office with questions or concerns regarding deductions and reporting.

Grantees who fail to acknowledge M-AAA support online or in print materials for the project may not be considered for future funding opportunities. Visit and use the toolkit to help you manage and announce your grant from M-AAA at www.maaa.org/resources/for-grantees.

All changes to a project must be submitted in writing to M-AAA before the public-facing activity takes place. M-AAA will work with organizations on project changes and/or cancellations such as identifying alternative artists on a case-by-case basis. Awards may be revised or revoked in light of such changes.

Failure to comply with these requirements may result in suspension or termination of the grant award.

HOW TO APPLY

M-AAA accepts applications via an online platform. The latest version of Google Chrome is the recommended web browser to use when working in the online application form. To maximize the functionality of the online platform, try clearing your browsing data, cookies, and search history before you begin.

The [Application At-A-Glance](#) document is to be used by applicants to support them in preparing their answers. While draft application forms can be saved online, technology is unreliable. We strongly recommend applicants prepare their narrative responses in Microsoft Word, Google Docs, or similar note-taking applications to ensure they have a backup for reference.

All documents uploaded into the application must be in Microsoft Word, Excel, or PDF format. The application does not support file types saved as Mac Pages or Numbers.

See the Document Checklist to ensure you have all required documents and any optional materials ready for upload to your application form.

Draft application forms can be saved for editing later by clicking “Save my progress and resume later” at the top or bottom of the application form webpage. Each time you save your application you will be asked for an email address and a password. An email with new instructions on how to resume the most recent draft of your application will be sent to that email address each time it is saved. To resume a saved draft of your application, refer to the most recent email in your inbox or bookmark and return to the “Thank you for saving/resume your application” webpage.

Applicants experiencing trouble logging into their application form or unable to save and upload files should email program staff at: culturalsustainability@maaa.org.

If your application is received after 5:00 p.m. CT, it is considered late and not guaranteed for review.

Applicants who experience technical difficulties at the time of application must immediately email staff at culturalsustainability@maaa.org. Staff will evaluate if your application can be processed after the deadline.

ACCESSIBILITY

M-AAA works to ensure that grant guidelines, presentations, and other written materials are created with accessibility and disability experiences in mind. For all grant programs, M-AAA uses an online platform called Form Assembly, unless applicants request another route. We want this opportunity to be accessible to all

and will work with applicants who need to use other means to apply. Alternative application options may include:

- Using an adapted form in Microsoft Word (available upon request)
- Sharing a video application responding to the application questions (available upon request)

Applications are due on **January 10, 2025**, at 5:00 p.m. CT

[Click Here](#) or cut and paste the following link into your browser to begin the application:

<https://maaa.tfaforms.net/5112332>

HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions about the Cultural Sustainability: Operational Impact Grants for Small Arts Organizations, please visit the [FAQ](#) to see if your questions are addressed in that document. Applicants should read through all questions and answers before emailing any inquiries to M-AAA. If you did not see your question addressed in the FAQs, please email us at CulturalSustainability@maaa.org.

Applicants can consult with staff before applying during drop-in office hours on Wednesdays from 2:00–4:00 p.m. [Sign up for the Zoom link here](#).

M-AAA staff will not review or provide comments on draft materials.

For programmatic questions and/or technical issues, email program staff at CulturalSustainability@maaa.org.