



FY26/27 General Operating Support Grant

City of Berkeley | Civic Arts Grant Guidelines

APPLY HERE

Important Dates (Subject to change)

Applications Open	January 6, 2025
Application Deadline	March 12, 2025, 11:59 pm
Grant Review Panel Meeting	May 2025
Grants Subcommittee Meeting – Funding Recommendations	June 6, 2025
Civic Arts Commission Meeting – Grant Awards Approval	June 25, 2025, 6:00 pm
Grant Activity Period	July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2027
Progress Report Due	July 30, 2026
Final Report Due	July 30, 2027

1. OVERVIEW

1.1 Purpose – Why these grants are offered.

The Civic Arts program supports a culturally vibrant and diverse arts ecosystem within the City of Berkeley by funding grants to artists, arts organizations, and festivals.

General Operating Support grants support the growth and stability of Berkeley’s arts community through funding the operational expenses of nonprofit arts organizations. This funding is intended to empower and promote equitable representation of organizations that have been historically and systemically marginalized.

This grant program operates and is open on a two (2) year cycle. If awarded, grantees receive their award amount for Fiscal Year 2026, and will receive the same award amount for Fiscal Year 2027. A two-year cycle is used to reduce the amount of administrative time and effort required to apply for City funding.

1.2 Land Acknowledgment

The City of Berkeley recognizes that the community we live in was built on the territory of xučyun (Huchiun), the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo-speaking Ohlone people, the ancestors and descendants of the sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to all of the Ohlone Tribes and descendants of the Verona Band. We acknowledge and honor the original inhabitants of Berkeley, the documented 5,000-year history of a vibrant community at the West Berkeley Shellmound, and the Ohlone people who continue to reside in the East Bay. We recognize that Berkeley’s residents have and continue to benefit from the use and occupation of this unceded stolen land since the City of Berkeley’s incorporation in 1878. As stewards of the laws regulating the City of Berkeley, it is not only vital that we recognize the history of this land,

but also recognize that the Ohlone people are present members of Berkeley and other East Bay communities today. The City of Berkeley will continue to build relationships with the Lisjan Tribe and to create meaningful actions that uphold the intention of this land acknowledgement.

1.3 Cultural Equity Statement

The City of Berkeley Civic Arts program commits to equity within the arts and culture sector by consistently evaluating its programs and practices. The City recognizes the multiple benefits the arts provide, regardless of race, color, religion, age, disability, national origin, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

Beyond ensuring access to the arts, the City of Berkeley commits to supporting artists and arts organizations that represent diverse cultures, life experiences, and socio-economic backgrounds. The City supports the empowerment of perspectives and identities that have been historically and systemically underrepresented.

1.4 Arts Organization Definition

An arts organization is defined as an entity with a primary purpose of providing arts, creative, or cultural programming/services. The organization's purpose is assessed and verified by staff using the organization's website, mission, core activities, and IRS National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) codes.

1.5 Eligibility – Who can apply?

Applicants must meet all of the following eligibility requirements:

- Official business address is located in the City of Berkeley
- Applicant is an arts organization as described in section 1.4 Arts Organization Definition

Applicants must also meet one of the following eligibility requirements:

- Nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization
- Applicant is an organizational entity that is nonprofit in nature (for example, artist collectives and guilds) and using a Fiscal Sponsor to apply. Fiscal Sponsors must be a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.
 - See additional requirements regarding the use of Fiscal Sponsors in section 1.12 Fiscal Sponsors

1.6 Eligibility – Who can't apply?

- City of Berkeley government departments or units
- For-profit businesses or sole proprietorships
- Individual artists
- Nonprofit organizations that are not arts/cultural organizations (for example, social service nonprofits, religious institutions, etc.)
- Public or private school districts

1.7 Who is encouraged to apply?

Organizations representing systemically marginalized identities, including but not limited to: Arab, MENASA (Middle Eastern, North African, South Asian); Asian; Black, African American; California Native American, Indigenous, Tribal; Disabled; Elders, Seniors; Latinx, Chicax; LGBTQIA2S+; Low Income; Neuro-Divergent; Pacific Islander; People of Color; Trans and/or Non-Binary People;

Immigrants (Documented and/or Undocumented), Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Migrants; Unhoused; Unsheltered; Veterans; or Youth 18 years of age or older are strongly encouraged to apply.

1.8 Grant Amount and Investment

All applicants may request up to **\$10,000** for operating-related expenses for each year of the Grant Activity Period. (\$20,000 over two years.)

Awarded organizations will receive two payments, one in Fiscal Year 2026 and one in Fiscal Year 2027. Awards will be the same amount for each of the two fiscal years in the Grant Activity Period.

A projected total of \$450,000 is allocated for this grant category in FY26 and \$450,000 in FY27. Award amounts and the number of awards will be determined by the amount of applications received, request amounts, and final scores.

Final award amounts are contingent upon City Council's adoption of the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, Fiscal Year 2027 budget, and Civic Arts Grants allocations for each of those years; amounts are subject to change.

1.9 Funding Use – Grant money can be used for these things.

Although a two-year organizational budget form is required, a project budget outlining how the grant funds would be used is not required for this application. Examples of eligible expenses for this funding include, but are not limited to:

- Artist and contractor stipends
- Equipment rentals
- Professional development and training
- Program supplies and materials
- Staff salaries
- Rent and utilities
- Venue and permit fees

1.10 Funding Use Restrictions – Grant money can't be used for these things.

Grant funds may not be used for:

- Activities in schools during in-school hours
- Activities that are primarily for university- or college-enrolled students
- Capital improvement projects
- Deficit or debt reduction
- Equipment purchases
- Expenses incurred outside of the Grant Activity Period
- Fundraising
- Political advocacy or lobbying
- Projects with religious or evangelical purposes
- Start-up costs for new organizations or businesses
- Trusts, endowments, or cash reserves

1.11 Funding Requirements

Funds must be used for operating and programming expenses within the Grant Activity Period.

1.12 Fiscal Sponsors

For the purposes of Civic Arts grants, a Fiscal Sponsor is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, nonprofit organization that receives awarded funds on behalf of an organizational entity that does not have Federal Tax-Exempt status. Fiscal sponsorship is unique to each circumstance and may take the form of processing a single check, providing complex accounting services, and/or project oversight. Fiscal Sponsors may have an official business address anywhere in the United States.

Organizational entities applying with a Fiscal Sponsor must be nonprofit in nature and have their own accounting documentation. These organizational entities must also be comprised of more than one staff member or volunteer.

NEW: Applicants using a Fiscal Sponsor must be registered with the [California Secretary of State](#) as a Nonprofit Corporation.

Fiscally sponsored applicants and Fiscal Sponsors should note the following:

- Proof of the Fiscal Sponsor's nonprofit status is due at the time of application
- Proof of the applicant organization's nonprofit registration with the Secretary of State is due at the time of application
- A Letter of Agreement between the applicant organization and the Fiscal Sponsor outlining the conditions of the fiscal sponsorship is due at the time of application
 - The Letter of Agreement must be valid through the end of the Grant Activity Period
- Grant application questions and materials—including all budget information—apply to the applicant organization, not the Fiscal Sponsor
- The primary point of contact between Civic Arts and the fiscal sponsorship is the applicant organization, not the Fiscal Sponsor
- Fiscal Sponsors are responsible for all fiscal obligations of the applicant's awarded funds

2. APPLICATION PROCESS

2.1 Grant Application Materials

All application materials must be submitted electronically before the deadline. The General Operating Support grant application consists of the following components:

- Proof of Berkeley business address
- Proof of nonprofit status for applicant or Fiscal Sponsor
- Narrative questions
- Work samples and support materials
- Board of directors' biographies, including city of residence
- Key personnel biographies/qualifications
- Budget form and budget notes
- If fiscally sponsored: Letter of Agreement between the applicant and Fiscal Sponsor
- If fiscally sponsored: Proof of registration as a nonprofit with the California Secretary of State

2.2 Grants Management System

All application materials must be submitted electronically using the Office of Economic Development's grants management system, [Submittable](#). Technical assistance creating a Submittable account is available through [Submittable's Customer Support](#).

Please note: Paper or physical applications are not accepted at this time.

2.3 Technical Assistance

Technical assistance for grant program-specific inquiries is available from Civic Arts staff by email, phone or virtual appointment. Technical assistance can provide guidance around eligibility, application requirements, or review criteria.

Application resources available on the [Civic Arts website](#) are a FAQs (frequently asked questions) page and a recording of the Grant Program Webinar.

Staff contact: Hilary Amnah, Grants Program Lead
hamnah@berkeleyca.gov
510-981-7539
[Schedule a virtual appointment](#)

2.4 Accommodations for Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations to apply should make their requests to the Civic Arts staff at civicarts@berkeleyca.gov. Staff works with the Disability Compliance Program (ada@berkeleyca.gov) to review and fulfill the request. **Disability-related accommodation requests should be made at least 72 hours in advance of deadlines or meetings.** TTY users can dial 7-1-1 to be connected to a specially trained communications assistant from a [state relay provider](#).

2.5 Translation Services

Translation services for the grant guidelines are available upon request. Requests can be emailed to Civic Arts staff at civicarts@berkeleyca.gov. If the application is submitted in a language other than English, a third-party translation service will be used to translate application answers into English for Grant Review Panelists.

3. EVALUATION AND SCORING

3.1 Review Criteria

Applications will be evaluated by Grant Review Panelists using the following criteria:

Arts and Cultural Programming (25%)

- Organization provides high-quality programming and services that contribute to Berkeley’s cultural ecosystem
- Organization articulates clear goals for the next two years related to its mission
- Effectiveness of organizational and programmatic evaluation strategies

Organizational Leadership (25%)

- Key personnel demonstrate the ability to reach programmatic and operational goals through qualifications and/or past experience
- Board of directors demonstrate relevant skills/experience in governing organization
- Applicant demonstrates financial health through diversified funding sources and a balanced budget (relative to budget size)

Community Engagement and Impact (25%)

- Effectiveness of organizational outreach and engagement strategies appropriate to identified audience(s)
- Extent to which input and feedback is collected from community members and/or organizational partners about programming and services
- Extent to which programming and services are accessible to people with physical disabilities
- Community benefit to Berkeley residents is clearly articulated through Berkeley-based programming and services

Cultural Equity (25%)

- Extent to which the organization employs diverse personnel and is governed by a diverse board of directors
- Extent to which the organization’s programming and services are rooted in institutionally underserved communities and geographically underserved areas of the city
- Extent to which the organization meaningfully engages economically-disadvantaged individuals
- Applicant shows organizational growth through changes made directly related to cultural equity in the past two years

3.2 Scoring Scale

Grant Review Panelists use the following scale to assess how well the application meets the review criteria. Numerical values are calculated to the appropriate weight for each criterion.

5	Exceptional	meets review criteria to the highest degree
4	Strong	strongly meets review criteria
3	Good	adequately meets review criteria; average
2	Fair	moderately meets some of the review criteria; needs some improvement
1	Underdeveloped	minimally meets the review criteria; greatly needs improvement
0	Weak	does not meet any elements of the review criteria

4. REVIEW PROCESS

4.1 Eligibility Screening

Civic Arts staff reviews each application submitted before the deadline for eligibility. Eligible applications are evaluated by a Grant Review Panel in accordance with the review criteria.

4.2 Grant Review Panel

The Grant Review Panel is comprised of individuals located in the greater Bay Area with diverse backgrounds in the cultural sector. Individuals apply to be included in the panelist pool through an open call. The Civic Arts Commission approves the pool of individuals that can be selected to serve as a panelist.

Any Panelist who has a conflict of interest with an application(s) must recuse themselves from reviewing that application(s). **A ‘conflict of interest’ is defined as a situation in which a Panelist has a competing professional, financial, or personal interest that could impair their ability to perform their evaluation responsibilities objectively.**

The Grant Review Panel meeting is public and facilitated through a Zoom Webinar. All applicants receive information regarding the panel meeting’s date, time, and order in which applications will be reviewed. Applicants are encouraged to attend the panel meeting.

Applicants are permitted three (3) minutes at the end of the panel’s discussion of their application to clarify any aspects that may have been misunderstood by the panelists. The allotted three minutes may not be used to communicate additional information not included in the application.

Applicants may request their panel comments after they receive official notice of award or decline.

4.3 Civic Arts Commission Approval

After the Grant Review Panel meets to review all applications, the Civic Arts Commission’s Grants Subcommittee meets to develop funding recommendations based on scores, number of applications, and availability of funds. The Subcommittee ensures proposed grant awards are aligned with granting policies and guidelines before sending the recommendations to the full Civic Arts Commission.

Funding recommendations by the Grants Subcommittee are made public at least five (5) business days prior to the Civic Arts Commission approval. The Civic Arts Commission reviews the funding recommendations and votes on final approval.

4.4 Appeal Process

Applicants who have evidence of misconduct or technical error in the panel review process may appeal the Grant Subcommittee’s proposed funding scenario by completing an appeal form. Appeal forms must be received at least 10 days in advance of the June 26, 2025 Civic Arts Commission meeting. Applicants can email appeal forms to civicarts@berkeleyca.gov.

Once an appeal form is received, Civic Arts staff reviews the appeal form for evidence of misconduct or technical error. If misconduct or technical error is evident, the appeal is reviewed by the Grants Subcommittee, and forwarded to the Civic Arts Commission for final appeal decision.

Please note: Dissatisfaction with a final score or award amount is not grounds for appeal.

5. GRANTEE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

5.1 Invoicing

Grantees must complete a Demographics Survey to receive their grant award invoice from Civic Arts. Staff will provide an invoice for 100% of the grant amount following City Council's approval of the Fiscal Year's budget and after July 1.

5.1 Progress Report and Final Report

All grantees must submit a completed Progress Report form within 30 days after the midpoint of the two-year Grant Activity Period. Progress Reports are usually due by July 30 unless otherwise noted.

Grantees must also submit a completed Final Report form within 30 days after the end of the Grant Activity Period. Final Reports are usually due by July 30 unless otherwise noted.

The Reports should demonstrate progress toward goals and how the grant funds were used. The Final Report also includes evaluation questions for reflection and for Civic Arts staff to make improvements to the program. Grantees who do not submit a Progress Report or Final Report are ineligible from applying for any future Civic Arts grants.

5.2 Grant Activity Period Extension Requests

Grantees who experience circumstances that prevent them from spending grant funds before the end of the Grant Activity Period (June 30) may request a Grant Activity Period Extension. A Grant Activity Period Extension may be requested for up to one (1) year beyond the original end-date. **Extension requests must be received before June 30 and approved by Civic Arts staff.**

5.3 Business License

Awarded organizations must have a current [City of Berkeley Business License](#).

5.4 Acknowledging City Support

Grant recipients must acknowledge the City's financial support by using the phrase "Supported in part by a Civic Arts Grant from the City of Berkeley" or including the "City of Berkeley" in lists of supporters. Grantees must display the [City's logo](#) in all promotional materials and media.

5.5 City Permits and Permissions

Receiving a grant does not imply that Civic Arts or any other City department will produce, exhibit, or promote artwork(s) created with grant funds. It is the responsibility of the grantee to secure a venue and appropriate insurance for public presentations.

The grantee is solely responsible for securing the necessary City permits or approvals for project elements such as publicly installed art, street closures, sound amplification in public space, or murals. Planning for this should be reflected in the application narrative.

Any grant-funded art installed in the public realm or on property owned by the City of Berkeley must be reviewed and approved by the Civic Arts Commission and its Public Art Subcommittee. The review process must be complete before the project is implemented. This review process applies to murals, public sculpture, and similar projects. This review process should be reflected in the project narrative.

5.6 Unused Grant Funds

Failure to use grant funds for operational purposes within the Grant Activity Period will result in a forfeiture of the award. Grantees must return unused funds to the City of Berkeley. Failure to complete the Progress Report or Final Report will also result in forfeiture of the award.