NEA Big Read

# 2024-2025 Application Guidelines

Intent to Apply Deadline: January 10, 2024 at 11:59p.m. Central time

Application Deadline: January 24, 2024 at 11:59p.m. Central time

### Program Overview

An initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest, the NEA Big Read broadens our understanding of ourselves and our neighbors through the power of a shared reading experience. The goals of the NEA Big Read are to inspire meaningful conversations, celebrate local creativity, elevate a wide variety of voices and perspectives, and build stronger connections in each community.

Nonprofit organizations around the country selected to receive an NEA Big Read grant will host dynamic community-wide programs in collaboration with local partners to develop and conduct engaging events and activities.

### New this year! Explore a theme

Programming for the 2024-2025 grant cycle will center around the theme *WHERE WE LIVE*. Using a book selection as inspiration, applicants will choose one or more aspects of this theme as it relates to their own communities. For example, a community may explore its physical environment, people, industry and culture, history, and/or imagine an alternate reality.

To help applicants choose a book that inspires community programming and relates to the theme *WHERE WE LIVE*, the NEA Big Read has gone back to its roots. The NEA Big Read library now includes a selection of 50 titles culled from years past that showcase a wide range of genres, perspectives, and geographic regions.

Applicants will facilitate book discussions, writing workshops, and creative programming that celebrates the unique aspects of their communities. Activities will seek to include local artists and welcome participation from a wide range of audiences.

Who should apply?

The NEA Big Read welcomes applications from a variety of organizations, including first-time applicants; organizations serving communities of all sizes, including rural and urban areas; and organizations with small, medium or large operating budgets.

### Eligible applicants

* 501c3 non-profit organizations and other federally tax-exempt entities including, but not limited to: universities/colleges, school districts, public libraries, tribal organizations, museums, and community service organizations.
* Organizations located within the United States, US Territories, and the Native Nations that share this geography.
* Arts and cultural organizations in any arts discipline (literature, performing arts, visual arts, traditional arts, multidisciplinary arts, etc.) or nonprofit organizations that provide arts programming (social service agencies, etc.)
* Organizations that do not have overdue reports or funding moratoria with Arts Midwest.
* Organizations with or without a UEI number from SAM.gov, though applicants will need to have a UEI number on file by late April 2024 in order to receive grant funds. Apply for a free UEI at [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration).

### Ineligible applicants

* Individual elementary or secondary schools
* For-profit business or organizations
* Individual artists, ensembles, and artist’s agents
* Applicants using fiscal sponsorship

Project Requirements

This round of NEA Big Read grants is for activities taking place between September 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025.

Each NEA Big Read applicant will:

### Select a book currently offered in the *NEA Big Read* library. Describe why you chose the book, how it will resonate with your community, and how it relates to one or more aspect of the theme WHERE WE LIVE (i.e., sub-themes):

* The environment – a community’s physical/natural surroundings
* The people – a community’s ancestors and/or current members (including, for example, those who recently arrived, whose familial roots go back generations, and those who left but still feel its pull)
* Industry and Culture – landmarks, work centers, traditions, and other aspects that define a community
* History – aspects of the past that have influenced a community, including legends
* Alternate realities – an imagining of what a community could be or become

For example, you might select Alberto Rios’s *A Small Story About the Sky* or Hope Jahren’s *Lab Girl* as inspiration for exploring your community’s treasured natural resources; Ron Rash’s *Burning Bright* or Kao Kalia Yang’s *The Latehomecomer* as inspiration for understanding the people in your community; Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen* or Tommy Orange’s *There, There* as inspiration for contemplating the origins of your community and its cultural influences; Charles Yu’s *Interior Chinatown* or Nathaniel Philbrick’s *In the Heart of the Sea* as inspiration for examining the history and legends that define your community; or Andrew Krivak’s *The Bear* or Ilya Kaminsky’s *Deaf Republic* as inspiration for imagining an alternate present or future for your community.

If you are a returning grantee, we encourage you to choose a title that you have not programmed in the past through the NEA Big Read.

1. Engage with community partners.   
     
   Each awarded organization must work in collaboration with local partners and artists to develop and conduct engaging literary and artistic programs that illuminate the theme *WHERE WE LIVE*. Applicants and community partners must promote their programming and outreach efforts to ensure community participation, inclusivity, and reach to broad and diverse groups.

Required partners:

* A library, unless the applicant itself is a library. Higher education applicants must partner with a library that is not directly affiliated with their institution.
* At least one community organization or group that expands the applicant’s existing audience to include new participants of various abilities, ages, cultural backgrounds, education levels, and occupations.

Describe the role each partner will play and whether these partnerships are confirmed or pending. Examples of community organization partnerships include: YMCAs, schools, parent/teacher associations, local media outlets, parks and recreation departments, places of worship, unions, Kiwanis, Lions Clubs, local historical societies, etc.

### Program events and activities related to your chosen book, the theme *WHERE WE LIVE*, and your chosen sub-themes with the intent of reaching wide and diverse audiences.

We encourage you to be imaginative with your programming. At a minimum, include:

* One (1) public kick-off event to launch the program (e.g., a book giveaway, mayoral proclamation, etc).
* At least three (3) book discussions.
* At least one (1) presentation inspired by the book (e.g., a Q&A with the author, panel discussion, lecture, film screening).
* At least one (1) artistic project or activity that engages the community and/or responds creatively to the theme *WHERE WE LIVE* and, if applicable, your chosen book (e.g., a visual art exhibition, theatrical performance, concert, poetry slam).
* At least (3) creative writing workshops (topics might include: writing your family’s history, poetic responses to nature, Q&As with your neighbors, evoking worlds in sci fi that grapple with real-world challenges).
* At least one (1) activity that allows community voices to be shared publicly (e.g., a public reading or anthology of selected pieces from the creative writing workshops; interviews with community members by a local writer featured in a local newspaper or on a local radio station; a website of archived community stories).

Several of these requirements can be met in one event (e.g., a presentation inspired by the book could include a book discussion). Describe the communities you plan to reach with your programs. Events and activities may take place virtually and/or in-person. Activities must be conceived with accessibility in mind for participants of all abilities and strive to reach audiences with limited access to the arts.

Budget requirements

Organizations may request a grant ranging from $5,000 and $20,000. These grants are federal funds that derive from the National Endowment for the Arts (CFDA No. 45.024: Promotion of the Arts Awards to Organizations and Individuals).

### Eligible expenses

### Eligible expenses are those that directly relate to conducting your community-wide program, such as speaker fees, artist stipends, book purchases, supplies, promotional and marketing fees, project staff salaries, and venue rentals. Contact Arts Midwest with inquiries about other potential expenses. Please do not include [unallowable costs](https://artsmidwest.org/get-support/federal-eligibility-requirements/).

### Matching requirement

Applicants must demonstrate matching funds on a one-to-one basis for the grant. Potential sources for the match include salaries and wages not covered by this grant, in-kind contributions, volunteer hours, earned and contributed revenue (donations, ticket sales, other non-Federal grants), or cash. You will be asked to demonstrate this match on your application budget. To demonstrate the match, your expenses and revenues should each be at least double your grant request. For example, if you request a $10,000 NEA Big Read grant, the total project budget must be at least $20,000. You will be required to list the sources and amounts you are using for this match.

Intent to Apply Requirements

* Applicant organization details (EIN, UEI number from SAM.gov if available, annual operating budget, mission statement, organization location information).
* Project start and end dates
* Chosen NEA Big Read book
* Statement on how the chosen title connects to your community and the theme *WHERE WE LIVE*
* Grant request amount

Application requirements

* Summary and description of proposed activities
* Anticipated number of partners, events and individuals served
* Accessibility accommodations
* Programming, partnerships, community/audiences, leadership descriptions
* Project Budget

[*View sample applications*](http://artsmidwest.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Sample-Applications.zip) *from last year for programming ideas and information about the application process.*

[*View a sample of the full application for this year*](http://artsmidwest.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/NEABigReadApplicationPreview.pdf)*.*

## Selection Criteria

Applications are reviewed by an independent advisory panel composed of a diverse group of literary arts experts and other individuals with broad knowledge of community programs. Panel composition changes annually.

Grantees are selected based on:

* Artistic excellence and merit of programming. The panel will assess an application’s proposed programming using the following criteria.
  + Relevance and rationale of the chosen NEA Big Read book.
  + The quality of diverse and imaginative literary programs that address the book, the theme *WHERE WE LIVE*, and the chosen sub-themes.
  + Whether or not all programming requirements have been met.
* Depth of audience engagement. The panel will assess the relevance and depth of involvement with individuals and organizations, including project partners, using the following criteria:
  + Applicant’s efforts to foster new partnerships and broaden audience participation beyond the primary constituent base.
  + Applicant’s efforts to engage audiences of various abilities, ages, cultural backgrounds, educational levels, races, ethnicities, and occupations as partners and participants.
  + The variety of locations where programs will occur.
* Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. The panel will evaluate the applicant’s commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility as they relate to the proposed activities, partners, and audiences served.
* The ability and capacity to carry out the project. The panel will consider the applicant’s ability to manage and implement an NEA Big Read program using the following criteria.
  + The applicant’s and partners’ functional capacity
  + The planning timeline
  + The participation of appropriate personnel
  + A reasonable budget plan that represents the required 1-to-1 match.

## Timeline

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| Apply | There is a two-step application process.   * Submit an intent to apply by January 10. * Submit a complete application by January 24.   Arts Midwest staff will review eligibility and completeness. We will follow up with any questions or corrections before applications proceed to the panel stage. |
| Review | All complete and eligible applications will be reviewed by a panel between February 2024 and April 2024. |
| Award | All applicants will receive an email notification of award decisions in April 2024. |
| Engage | New grantees will participate in an online orientation in June 2024.  Funded project activities occur between September 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025.  Any changes or updates to planned activities should be communicated to Arts Midwest staff as early as possible. |

## Reporting Requirements

A final report will be due 45 days after the project is completed. Visit the [Tools for Grantees](https://artsmidwest.org/get-support/nea-big-read/) section of our website to view final report requirements.

Accessibility

Arts Midwest works to ensure that grant guidelines, presentations, and any other written materials are created with accessibility and disability experiences in mind.

For all grant applications, we use an online platform called [SmartSimple,](https://artsmidwest.us-1.smartsimple.com/s_Login.jsp) unless applicants request another route. SmartSimple has a dedicated Quality Assurance Team and a consultant who helps test usability on a quarterly basis.

We’ve used other tools for grant applications and are happy to work with you such as providing an adapted form in Microsoft Word or taking verbal responses.

Please [complete this form](https://form.asana.com/?k=qktzhgcymrEcAOig3CaedQ&d=7149965253701) so we can help make a grant or program accessible to you.

Visit our [Accessibility Policy](https://artsmidwest.org/accessibility-policy/) for more information on our commitment to accessibility.

Contact

For any questions, please email grants@artsmidwest.org or call 612.238.8024.

### 15-minute consultations

Arts Midwest staff are available to help with your application. We can do some initial brainstorming with you about ideas and can review application materials for eligibility and completeness. We are not able to help with reviewing content beyond eligibility. To schedule a meeting with a staff member, fill out the [15-minute consultation request form](https://form.asana.com/?k=Yn20Xi4LtUdF1ZKvKZM4UQ&d=7149965253701).