

Cultural Sustainability: Equity-Based Operating Grants

Live Informational Webinar – Q&A

What is an operating grant?

An operating grant is unrestricted funding used to support your organization’s operations and mission. There is no required project or deliverables tied to Cultural Sustainability: Equity-Based Operating Grants.

What is fiscal sponsorship?

Fiscal sponsorship is used by organizations/collectives who are providing services or programming but do not have, or do not want, a nonprofit status with the IRS. These organizations/collectives will then seek a partnership with an organization that does not have a 501c3 nonprofit status who can act as their fiscal sponsor to accept grants and manage the funds on their behalf.

What is the definition of “well-being” for Cultural Sustainability: Equity-Based Operating Grants?

Cultural Sustainability: Equity-Based Operating Grants defines well-being as the social, economic, and cultural conditions that strive to support a sense of belonging, acceptance, and curiosity within your organization and community.

What does artistically/administratively led mean?

We welcome self-defined leadership with this but here’s some suggestions of what this may mean:

- The President & CEO self-identifies as a person of color
- Majority, or over 50%, of staff self-identify as people of color
- You engage with a community advisory group that is made up of artists of color who co-design programs/services in collaboration with your organization
- You contract majority artists of color to implement your organization’s programs/services.

Will grantees be expected to present to peers during the networking sessions?

No, there are no expectations for presenting to peers at any point during the program. Opportunities may arise if you’d like to knowledge-share, but it is not required.

The guidelines say that organizations must have a 3-year history of creative practice or arts programming. Our programming was disrupted by the pandemic. How do we account for this in the application?

Examples of your organization's arts programming do not have to be from consecutive years or seasons. We know that most organization's programming and activities were disrupted by the pandemic. As a result, it's acceptable to talk about your work from recent years other than 2023 or 2022.

Do you have a preview of the full application I can look at?

You can view a PDF of the application [here](#).

If I received an award for a previous Arts Midwest grant, may I still apply for Cultural Sustainability: Equity-Based Operating Grants?

Yes, for the most part. If you received an ArtsHERE grant, you are not eligible for Cultural Sustainability. If you received any other Arts Midwest grant, you are eligible to apply.

How many applications will be funded?

We anticipate funding approximately 18 grants.

I don't qualify for Cultural Sustainability: Equity-Based Operating Grants. What other funding sources would you suggest?

We encourage applicants to check with your [state arts agency](#) for other funding opportunities.

When will the next cycle of Cultural Sustainability: Equity-Based Operating Grants open?

This is a one-time pilot program designed to measure interest and impact of general operating support to small organizations. We do not have plans for this program's future cycles, but please tell us if this grant resonates with you and your community. We continually strive to provide relevant granting opportunities that the arts community within the Midwest wants to see.

Is there a minimum budget requirement?

No, and you will not be penalized if you are operating/volunteering at a \$0 budget.

Does the \$500k operating expense limit reflect the entire organization's expenses or can we use specific program budgets?

\$500k is the entire budget for the organization, not just specific program budgets.

I'm over the \$500k operating expense limit 1 out of the 3 required years, am I ineligible?

Unfortunately, the \$500k operating expense limit is in place for all 3 years, unless the overage is due to COVID-relief funding.

Is the required minimum 3-year history of programs/services due at the time of submission or when the award happens? What are some ways we can show this in our application?

Yes, you must have at least a 3-year history of engagement via programs/services at the time of submission.

Applicants can speak to this throughout their answers to the narrative questions, with optional additional examples provided through support materials.

How many applicants are you expecting to receive?

We expect to receive 600-700 applications, in line with other similar recent initiatives.

Do I need to be an arts/cultural organization to be eligible?

No, but applicants must have programs and services centered primarily on arts/culture and community.

Must the community we serve be located within the Midwest?

Yes.

What are some more examples of eligible and ineligible expenses?

An operating grant is unrestricted funding used to support your organization's operations and mission, there are no expected outcomes or projects tied to Cultural Sustainability's grants. Cultural Sustainability is funded by non-federal dollars through the Wallace Foundation.

Eligible expenses might include, but are not limited to, staff salaries, supplies and equipment, rent, utilities, project costs, professional development, endowments, and operating reserves. Eligible expenses must be made within or predominately impact the Midwest region.

Ineligible expenses include capital projects such as construction of a new building, renovations, and land and building purchases. Additionally, Cultural Sustainability grant awards may not cover the cost of compensation to foreign nationals currently embargoed by the federal government (e.g., North Korea), international travel, lobbying, memberships in airline travel clubs, and memberships in civic, social, community organizations or country clubs.

Funds may not be used for the sole benefit of any private shareholders or individuals.

We're a new 501c3 but have been doing programming for longer than 3 years, are we eligible or do we need a fiscal sponsor?

Yes, you are eligible to apply using your 501c3 status.

Does the fiscal sponsor need to be located within the Arts Midwest region?

No. As long as your organization is located within the Arts Midwest region, your fiscal sponsor can be located elsewhere in the United States. For example, Fractured Atlas, located in New York, fiscally sponsors arts organizations all over the United States.

Does the fiscal sponsor need to meet the eligibility requirements as well?

No, only the applicant who will benefit from the grant must meet the eligibility requirements.

It appears there's three review criteria for the program. Are there other criteria that count for additional points?

No, your application will be reviewed and scored using only the three review criteria of:

1. Relevance and impact of artistic or cultural work in community (5 points max)
2. Potential impact of the grant on organization and community (5 points max)
3. Potential impact of the organization within the pilot cohort (5 points max)

Will we be expected to use the full 1,000-word count for the narrative questions?

We invite you to use how many words you feel accurately portrays your organization and services, but we recommend using at least 500 words.

We are an arts/culture department operating through a federally recognized reservation, are we eligible?

Yes, in this situation, you would use your reservation/tribal office as your fiscal sponsor.

Are 501c3 colleges eligible?

Colleges or universities and affiliated centers, institutes, and foundations are not eligible to apply.

What financial information is needed for the application?

You will need totals for each of your three most recent years of completed annual operating expenses, excluding any COVID-relief funding.

I don't see a registration option in SmartSimple for fiscally sponsored applicants, what should I do?

If you are fiscally sponsored, you must have your fiscal sponsor register as a 501c3 Nonprofit in SmartSimple and submit your application on your behalf.

Does our fiscal sponsor have to complete the application for us? Can we have shared access to the application?

Yes, you may work with your fiscal sponsor on the application, but they must submit the application on behalf of you. Your fiscal sponsor may add you as a Collaborator in SmartSimple but they must remain the entity to submit the application.

Can you explain the Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 boxes for operating expenses in the application?

Year 3 is your most recently completed year of operating expenses, Year 2 is the year prior, and Year 1 is expenses prior to Year 2.

What are some examples of support material?

Support material is optional and can include work samples, community testimonials, quotes from partners, photos, excerpts from annual reports, and short videos. This may also include links to or screenshots of social media posts.

Support material will be limited to 3 uploads, 5 pages per upload, and videos may be up to 5 minutes long.

Will organizations with smaller operating budgets be penalized in the panel review process?

No. Operating budget information is for eligibility only.

Will the panel review be done at a live Zoom event?

No. Panelists will submit their scores and feedback via the Smart Simple portal, and Arts Midwest staff will review.

If I don't get selected to receive a grant, how can I obtain panel feedback?

Please email culturalsustainability@artsmidwest.org for written panel feedback. As this is a one-phase application and we expect a large volume of applications, we ask that you are patient with us while waiting for requested feedback.

Can I use the funds to match the 3 eligibility criteria, or do I need to have that in place at the time of submission?

Eligibility criteria must be met at the time of application.

Who will be making up the panel review team?

We have recruited a pool of panelists consisting of arts and cultural leaders and predominantly self-identified BIPOC artists from across the Arts Midwest region to review all applications.

Do we qualify if we serve more than one community of color?

Yes! As long as your programming remains predominately, or at least 50%, in service to communities of color.

Our organization was operating for many years prior to COVID but we had to close from 2020 to 2022, reopening in 2023. Does this affect our eligibility?

No, any COVID related closures or relief funding does not affect your eligibility.

Is it possible to re-grant funds through this program? For example, my organization would love to use this grant to create microgrants for artists of color in our community.

An operating grant is unrestricted funding used to support your organization's operations and mission. This includes re-granting funds. There are no required projects or deliverables tied to *Cultural Sustainability: Equity-Based Operating Grants*.

Can grant writing expenses be reimbursed with part of the awarded amount if our application is successful?

Yes. An operating grant is unrestricted funding used to support your organization's operations and mission, including grant writing expenses.

Do I need to attend Office Hours in order to register/apply?

No. If you need assistance with registering in SmartSimple, please contact grants@artsmidwest.org

I'm an LLC, are we eligible to apply?

You will have to apply through a 501c3 nonprofit fiscal sponsor.

This is my first-time hearing of Arts Midwest! Can you share more about what a USRAO is?

Arts Midwest is one of 6 nonprofit United States Regional Arts Organizations, we work to strengthen local arts and culture efforts in partnership with the National Endowment for the

Arts, state agencies, private funders, and other. Please visit [our website](#) and [the USRAO website](#) for more information and other funding opportunities.

How does Arts Midwest define “arts and culture”?

“Arts and culture” is an inclusive term Arts Midwest to define activities and programming that are focused on various artistic disciplines or cultural expressions. These offerings strive to promote and support a sense of creativity, curiosity, and belonging within community.

Arts Midwest measures equally many forms of artistic and cultural disciplines, including but not limited to, media arts, dance arts, folk and traditional/cultural art, literary arts, performance arts, visual arts, and public arts.

Many of these artistic and cultural disciplines may be rooted in a specific lineage of practice, connected to community, and prioritize sharing with the next generation. We welcome organizations who identify as or serve artists, culture bearers, knowledge bearers, and beyond.

If you are unsure, we invite you to reach out via culturalsustainability@artsmidwest.org to determine if your practice aligns with our intended audience.

My community is multi-racial, are we eligible to apply?

Yes, as long as you remain predominately, or at least 50%, in service to communities of color.

What are the reporting requirements for those awarded the grant?

Yes. There will be a simple final report due on June 15, 2026. We may ask for reflection statements throughout the program.

Can I use the award to pay a fiscal sponsor fee?

Yes. An operating grant is unrestricted funding used to support your organization’s operations and mission, including fiscal sponsor fees.

Are there criteria that are more heavily weighed than others?

No. All three review criteria are weighed equally.

For the supporting material, can we share 3 separate 5-minute videos or must the videos total 5 minutes?

You may upload 3 separate 5-minute videos.

What does “in service” to communities of color mean?

This can look many different ways, like creating and curating your programs/offerings to be relevant for the community of color you work within, or you highlight this community in your organization's mission, vision, and values. Your organization and application must reflect how you build relationships with the community of color you work with.

We're a very small organization and don't have many resources to drive to creating "nice" support material. Can we share items such as Facebook or other social media posts that speak to our work?

Of course! Links to or screenshots of social media posts are acceptable forms of support material.

I don't have my 2024 budget yet; can I use 2023 as my most recent year to show expenses?

Yes. Please use the years of your most recently completed budgets, excluding any COVID-relief funding.

Do you have any preferred uses that grantees spend the funding on?

No. This is a general operating support grant designed to support you in the way you deem best for your organization and community. We have no expectations or preferences for how you'll spend this, so long as you remain within eligible expenses, and it aligns with your mission, vision, and values.

What is the estimated time it takes to complete the grant application?

This varies from applicant to applicant, but we recommend setting aside anywhere from 1-3 hours.

I still have questions, who do I contact?

Please email Program Manager Holly Doll at culturalsustainability@artsmidwest.org with any remaining questions you may have.