Cultural Sustainability: Equity-Based Operating Grants

# Application Guidelines

**Application Opens: September 10, 2024**

**Application Deadline: October 15, 2024 @ 11:59p.m. Central time**

Cultural Sustainability seeks to support and provide resources to small arts and cultural organizations rooted in communities of color, acknowledging their invaluable contributions to their communities and the broader cultural landscape. Through this pilot program, we strive to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within the arts sector while learning how organizations that have historically been underrepresented advance sustainability.

## Pilot Program Overview

Cultural Sustainability is a 15-month pilot program that provides general operating support for arts and cultural organizations of color with annual operating expenses up to $500,000.

We define arts and cultural organizations of color as having at least **two** of the following:

* Led by a person(s) of color, artistically and/or administratively.
* Predominantly in service of Indigenous/Native American, Black, Latine, Asian, Pacific Islander, and/or Caribbean communities, or another community of color.
* Founded by and for a community of color.

### Program Activities

Over the 15-month pilot program, Arts Midwest will offer five virtual workshops on topics focusing on long-term visioning and sustainability planning. Grantees are not required to attend all five but are encouraged to attend at least three workshops. Workshops are open to grantee staff, volunteers, and/or board members.

Workshops may cover topics such as:

* Branding and Marketing
* Budgeting Practices
* Fundraising Strategies
* Board Development

### Feedback and Support Opportunities

Arts Midwest will hold 30-minute quarterly check-ins with grantees to gather feedback, ensure the workshops feel relevant, and address evolving needs and challenges. Grantees will also have the chance to join optional virtual peer networking sessions. These informal sessions offer a space for grantees to connect, share experiences, and find inspiration from similar initiatives across the Midwest.

## Grant Awards

Arts Midwest will be awarding 18 general operating grants across the nine-state region. Using a tiered system, grant awards will be administered throughout the pilot program in the following two ways:

* Organizations with operating expenses between $0-$249,999 will receive a $55,000 general operating grant. 1 per state.
* Organizations with operating expenses between $250,000-$499,999 will receive a $67,000 general operating grant. 1 per state.

Arts Midwest plans to disburse a majority of the grant at the time of award. We will also provide the option for grantees to opt into spacing their award payments throughout the grant period.

### Eligible expenses

Eligible expenses include, but are not limited to staff salaries, supplies and equipment, rent, utilities, project costs, professional development, endowments, and operating reserves.

### Ineligible expenses

Ineligible expenses include capital projects such as construction of a new building, renovations, and land purchases. Funds may not be used for the sole benefit of any private shareholders or individuals.

## Eligibility

### The following organizations are eligible to apply:

* 501c3 nonprofit organizations of color.
* Fiscally sponsored organizations color.
* Federally recognized tribes or tribal communities.

All applicants must be located and operate within Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and the Native Nations that share this geography.

Applicants must have programs and services centered primarily on arts/culture and community.

Applicants must have at least three years of creative practice or arts programming.

Applicants with current operating expenses of up to $500,000, or pre-COVID (2021) annual operating expenses of up to $500,000.

There is no minimum budget requirement.

Applicants are not required to have full or part-time staff.

Nonprofit organizations and fiscal sponsors must be a 501c3 nonprofit.

### The following are not eligible to apply:

* Individuals
* For-profit entities
* Federal agencies or local departments of federal agencies
* Units of municipal, county, or state government
* Colleges or universities and affiliated centers, institutes, and foundations
* Public, private and charter K-12 schools and pre-schools
* Organizations/entities that have had their IRS status revoked. Tax-exempt status of applicant or fiscal sponsor must be current at the time of application.

Late applications are considered ineligible and will not be considered for funding.

Applicants must be in good standing with Arts Midwest and have no overdue or incomplete reporting requirements on any other projects.

Applicants may not receive support from both Cultural Sustainability and ArtsHERE.

Cultural Sustainability is happening in different regions across the United States through the six US Regional Arts Organizations (USRAO). Applicants should only apply to the USRAO in which they are located. You can learn more about the other USRAO Cultural Sustainability grant programs on the [USRAO website](https://usregionalarts.org/cultural-sustainability-grants/).

## Timeline

### Apply

Applications open September 10, 2024.

Applications close October 15, 2024, at 11:59pm Central time.

Arts Midwest staff will review submissions for eligibility. *We will follow up with any questions or corrections before applications move to the panel review stage.*

### Review

All eligible applications will be reviewed by a panel in November 2024. The panel will consider the following criteria:

* Relevance and impact of artistic or cultural work in community.
* Reviewers will be looking for how the artistic and/or cultural work your organization offers aligns with community needs and wants. Share how your community responds to your work and how you stay accountable to community feedback.
* Potential impact of the grant on organization and community.
* Reviewers will look for ways this grant will support your organization and community’s well-being. Share your plan for the grant and any specific goals you intend to work towards that will impact your organization and community.
* Potential impact of the organization within the pilot cohort.
* Reviewers will be looking for ways your organization will grow within the pilot cohort. Share some ways in which participating in the pilot cohort could support your work and organization.

### Award

All applications will receive an email notification of award decisions in January 2025. A public announcement of grantees will be shared in February 2025.

### Grant Period

Selected grantees will receive their award in March 2025. Pilot program activities occur between March 2025 and June 2026. Final reports are due June 15, 2026.

## Reporting Requirements

A final report will be due June 15, 2026. The report will consist of short narrative questions and a brief financial report detailing how the grant supported your organization.

## 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 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 application questions (available upon request)

Please [complete this form](https://form.asana.com/?k=qktzhgcymrEcAOig3CaedQ&d=7149965253701), as early as possible with accessibility requests. We may not be able to accommodate requests made after Thursday, October 10, 2024.

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

## Application Questions

The application will ask whether you are acting as a fiscal sponsor, the applicant’s operating expenses over the last 3 years, and the following three eligibility questions (at least two answers must be “yes” to be eligible).

* Is the applicant organization led by a person(s) of color, artistically and/or administratively? (yes/no)
* Is the applicant organization predominantly in service of Indigenous/Native American, Black, Latine, Asian, Pacific Islander, and/or Caribbean communities, or another community of color? (yes/no)
* Is the applicant organization founded by and for a community of color? (yes/no)

You will then be guided to answer the following four narrative questions. Each answer may be up to 1,000 words.

* Tell us about your organization and any values that drive your work.
* Describe the community you serve. How are you addressing your communities’ needs and interests through your work, and how has community support directly contributed to your organization’s success?
* How will this grant impact your organization’s work and the well-being of the community you serve?
* What could the pilot program and cohort provide you with to support your work, unique expertise, and knowledge?

Support material is optional and can include work samples, community testimonials, quotes from partners, photos, excerpts from annual reports, and short videos.

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

## Contact

For any questions, please email Program Manager Holly Doll at culturalsustainability@artsmidwest.org.

### Office Hours + Resources

 Consider attending the live informational webinar to learn more about the program.

The webinar will be held at 1pm CT, September 19, 2024. [Please register here.](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_8_Xs6PksTNuBes5IHD7MZw)

If you have additional questions, we invite you to join Program Manager Holly Doll for office hours. You can sign up for office hours using the links below:

* 11am-12pm CT Monday, September 16, 2024. [Sign up here](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEkduuupzkjE9UGqdemFRKiUnL4rBkn7KGW#/registration).
* 1-2pm CT Monday, September 23, 2024. [Sign up here](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZIodO2tqTgjHdJ3y084t-N9Cno3vVVVVxO3).
* 11am-12pm CT, Thursday, October 3, 2024. [Sign up here](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0od-ihrzgjHdZMlgU80ZwV6JQj-UruWOvf).
* 1-2pm CT, Thursday, October 10, 2024. [Sign up here.](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcofuyrrTIuH9Br29zriJVGi96yGUK0VvW6)

*You can also always email Holly with your questions at* *culturalsustainability@artsmidwest.org*

## Funders

Cultural Sustainability is made possible by support from The Wallace Foundation in partnership with the six US Regional Arts Organizations (USRAOs). This opportunity is part of the Wallace Foundation’s Advancing Well-Being in the Arts initiative, which funds arts organizations rooted in communities of color to advance their well-being, enhance understanding of their contributions to community, and ultimately help to build a more equitable and sustainable arts ecosystem.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 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 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 activities were disrupted by the pandemic. As a result, it’s acceptable to list programming from a recent year 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 questions [here](https://artsmidwest.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Application-Preview.pdf).

### 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](https://artsmidwest.org/our-partners/) 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.

### 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.