2027–2028 Shakespeare in American Communities: Schools

Application Guidelines

About this Opportunity

Through $15,000 to $50,000 cost-share grants to nonprofit theater companies, this program supports high-quality productions and educational activities related to the works of Shakespeare to young audiences throughout the United States.

These awards require a nonfederal cost-share of 1 to 1. Programming must take place between August 1, 2027, and July 31, 2028.

Note: Applicants must choose one Shakespeare in American Communities grant opportunity to apply for—Schools, Juvenile Justice, or Apprenticeships. Applicants can explore which grant opportunity might be the best fit for them using our eligibility quiz.

How to Apply at a Glance

1. Read the guidelines

Download a copy of the guidelines, which includes all the application questions.

2. Prepare your application

Visit our grants portal, SmartSimple, to begin this process.

3. Complete the application form

Phase 1 (Eligibility Review) is due January 26, 2027, at 12 pm (noon) Central Time.

Phase 2 (Full Proposal) is due February 9, 2027, at 12 pm (noon) Central Time.

Accessibility

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, but are not limited to:

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

- Working over the phone with a program manager on any questions about the application

Please contact Carlianne, program manager, as early as possible with accessibility requests. We may not be able to accommodate requests made after January 21, 2027. Carlianne can be reached at grants@artsmidwest.org or you can sign up to attend an informational session or office hours (see schedule and details below in 'Timeline' section).

You may also enlist assistance from another person to complete the application. Please see the "How to Use SmartSimple" section for more information.

Eligibility

Who should apply?

- Professional theater companies: 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations that have a minimum of two years' experience providing professional performances and related educational activities to middle and/or high schools. Applicants needing fiscal sponsorship are not eligible.
- Within the United States, US Territories, or the Native Nations and communities that share this geography.
- Focused on schools: Matching project grants ranging from $15,000 - $50,000 to support performances and related educational activities for students.
- With a UEI: Organizations will need to have a UEI number from SAM.gov in order to receive funding. Apply for a free UEI at SAM.gov.
- In Good Standing: Organizations must not have overdue reports or funding restrictions with Arts Midwest.
- In Compliance with Federal Requirements: These funds originate with the National Endowment for the Arts and require that applicants comply with federal eligibility requirements and the NEA's Assurance of Compliance.

Organizations may submit an application for only one Shakespeare in American Communities grant opportunity. You must choose between Schools, Juvenile Justice, or Apprenticeships.

What is the Timeline?

Date	Activity
January 26, 2027	Phase 1 (Eligibility Review) due

February 9, 2027	Phase 2 (Full Proposal) due
March - April 2027	Panel review
May 2027	Award notifications
August 1, 2027 – July 31, 2028	Project period
Mid-late Summer 2028	In-person convening in Minneapolis

What are the Project Requirements?

Each Shakespeare in American Communities: Schools project must meet these requirements:

1. **Perform a play written by (or inspired by) William Shakespeare; an adaptation of Shakespeare's text; or a production that incorporates scenes, monologues, and/or sonnets by Shakespeare.**

    - The actors in the production must be professionals, paid at no less than the prevailing minimum 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.)* It is not required that actors be part of an Actors' Equity contract.
    - Performances may be held in a theater company's facility, a school, a community venue, or virtually.

2. **Conduct educational activities with young audiences that explore and address Shakespeare's work in modern context.**

    - Activities must be led by experienced teaching artists, educators, or actors with strong credentials and training.
    - Examples include workshops, pre- or post-performance discussions/talkbacks, curriculum-based residencies, or other activities that offer interaction between students and teaching artists or actors. Study guides *do not* qualify as an activity.
    - Activities must be related to the production being performed for students.
    - Virtual and/or pre-recorded activities are eligible as long as students have the opportunity to interact live and in real-time with teaching artists in some capacity.

3. **Reach five or more middle and/or high school-age, underserved audiences with performances and related educational activities.**

- Underserved refers to groups whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited relative to geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability.

4. **Participate in virtual and in-person convenings with other grantees.**

    - Arts Midwest will host several virtual convenings and one in-person networking and professional development convening for Shakespeare in American Communities grantees.
    - Travel, lodging, and limited food costs for one company representative will be covered by Arts Midwest for the in-person convening at the end of the grant cycle.

Grant Awards

Applicants may request a grant between $15,000 and $50,000.

These grants are federal funds that derive from the National Endowment for the Arts. Project budgets must show at least a one-to-one cost-share, or match, for the requested amount.

To demonstrate the match, your expenses should be at least double your grant request.

Matching funds may include:

- Staff salaries and wages
- Volunteer time and in-kind contributions
- Donations, non-federal grants, and ticket revenue
- Cash contributions from the applicant or partners.

Federal funds cannot be used as match.

Eligible Expenses

Project budgets must include only eligible expenses. Eligible expenses are those that directly relate to conducting your program.

Examples of eligible expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Artistic fees for actors, directors, designers, choreographers, etc.
- Production costs of props, costumes, set, etc.
- Travel costs associated with touring productions or artist travel
- A prorated portion of staff salaries
- Printing and marketing expenses
- Other direct costs associated with project

Ineligible expenses

Please do not include unallowable costs in your budget. Unallowable costs include, but are not limited to:

- Refreshments, concessions, food, and alcohol
- Fellowships or cash prizes
- Purchase of capital equipment
- Overlapping project costs between federal awards, whether received directly from a federal agency or indirectly, such as through a state agency or other entity
- Entertainment costs, such as opening parties, receptions, or fundraisers designed to raise funds for your own organization and on behalf of another person, organization, or cause

Awards are federally funded, so all costs must be allowable per 2 CFR 200, also known as the Uniform Guidance.

How to Use SmartSimple

Arts Midwest uses SmartSimple grants portal for applications. You must register in the system before you apply, if you are a new user. Please follow the steps below to complete your registration and your application.

Step 1: Registration (for new users only)

1. Register in our SmartSimple grants portal
2. On the registration page, select "Registered Non-profit Organization."
3. Input your information.
4. Once you have filled out your registration and submitted, you will receive an email with a login link. Select the login link.
5. The link will take you to a screen where you will create a new password for your account. Then submit.
6. Once you have created the password, you will receive a verification code in your email. Copy the verification code from that email, and paste in the box on the login page.
7. Now you're in the SmartSimple portal! Make sure your profile is correct. Go to the top right corner with your name letter symbol and click on Personal Profile. Confirm the info is correct from your registration.

Step 2: Application

Navigate to the Organization Portal Home. To begin the application, select "Begin a new application." Select "Apply Now" on Shakespeare in American Communities: Schools.

1. Save and begin your application.

Application Questions

Application Phase 1: Eligibility Review (Due January 26, 2027)

Questions and requirements:

- Applicant organization details (EIN, UEI number from SAM.gov, annual operating budget, mission statement, organization location information, publicity name)
- Primary contact information
- How did you hear about this opportunity?
- Short summary of project activities (100 words)
- Have you received funding from Arts Midwest before? (yes/no)
- What is the population of the city where you are located? (0-9,999; 10,000-49,999; 50,000+)
- Is your organization based in or within 25 miles of a city with a population of 50,000+? (yes/no)
- Project start and end dates
- The name of the production/play
- Grant request amount
- Did your organization expend $1,000,000 or more in federal funds during your most recent fiscal year? (yes/no)
    - If yes, please provide your most recently completed Single Audit financial statement. (upload field)
- Please provide your most recently completed Financial Statement Audit.
- Within the last three years, has your organization experienced any of the following related to grant funding?
    - Single and/or Financial Statement Audit findings, Repayment of grant funds, Revocation of a grant award, Corrective action required by a funder (select all that apply)
        - Please briefly describe the issues and any corrective actions taken (text field)
- If grant funds are provided on a reimbursement basis, does your organization have the financial capacity to pay project expenses before requesting reimbursement? (yes/no)
- Please review the following assurances form, which is current as of September 14, 2026, and attest you will be able to comply with these statements, if funded.

Application Phase 2: Full Proposal (Due February 9, 2027)

Once Arts Midwest reviews your eligibility from Phase 1, you can move on to Phase 2.

Summary and Statistics for Proposed Activities

- Anticipated youth served, anticipated adults served
- Venue(s) for performance(s)
- Types of performances
- Number of schools reached
- Grade levels reached
- Types of educational activities
- Percentage of schools that will receive workshops or residency activities
- Percentage of schools that will participate in pre- or post-show discussions
- Number of performances for students
- Number of actors in production(s)
- Geographic areas reached

Narrative Questions

1. Tell us about your organization and the values that drive its work. (500 words)
2. Artistic Excellence and Merit of Programming narrative (700 words)
    - Describe the selected production and why it was chosen, its relevance to today, and how it relates to the work of William Shakespeare (if it is not one of his plays).
    - Explain your company's approach to the play(s).
    - Describe the professional artistic team (director, designers, actors, etc.), if known, and why they were chosen.
    - Provide the run time, and if shortened, why this decision was made and how the themes of the play will be maintained.
3. Depth of Audience Engagement narrative (700 words)
    - Describe, in detail, the content of the educational programming activities.
    - Describe the credentials of teaching artist or other staff who will lead these activities.

- Explain how you will address the needs of students of different backgrounds, abilities, ages, and learning styles.
- If offering virtual or hybrid activities, describe how students will have access to the activities and how you will ensure participation and engagement.

4. Planning for Success narrative (700 words)
    - Describe your company's strategy to reach at least five middle and high schools.
    - Explain your experience providing performances and educational activities to students. Provide details about any existing relationships with schools/educators.
        - Briefly describe the fee structure of your educational programming (e.g. free tickets, bus subsidies, etc.) and how any subsidies are determined and funded.
        - Describe how your company would pivot the proposed programming in response to unforeseen challenges.

Other Required Information

- List of core partner schools
- Organization's total revenue (current fiscal year and last fiscal year)
- Organization's total expenses (current fiscal year and last fiscal year)
- Project Budget
- Additional details about your budget (optional)
- Did you use AI to help you complete your application? If yes, please describe how you used AI. *Applicants may use AI in editing or proofreading narratives. Arts Midwest does not allow AI-generated artwork to be submitted as part of an application.*

Review Criteria

Applications are reviewed by an independent panel using four equally weighted criteria:

- Artistic excellence and merit of programming.
- Depth of audience engagement.
- Planning for success.
- Resource management.

Geographic spread of final awards will also be considered.

Reporting and Crediting Requirements

Grantees must submit:

- An activity listing at least 30 days before the project begins.
- A final report within 30 days after project completion.

All funded projects must acknowledge both the National Endowment for the Arts and Arts Midwest in promotional materials.

Drop-in Office Hours

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

- December 15, 2026, from 11 am-12 pm Central Time. Sign up.
- January 18, 2027, from 1-2 pm Central Time. Sign up.

You can also email Carlianne with your questions at grants@artsmidwest.org.

Other Guides, Tools, Resources

Here is a list of helpful resources for planning and conducting your Schools programming.

Arts Midwest Resources

- Understanding your Federal Award Requirements
- How to Build your Federal Award Budget
- Reporting on your Federal Award
- View sample application for programming ideas and information about the application process.

Accessibility Resources

- Section 504 Self-Evaluation Workbook
- Arts Midwest's Accessibility Center

Crediting and Visibility

- Downloadable logos for crediting.

Other Resources

- SmartSimple Registration Instructions

- Getting a UEI from SAM.gov Instructions

Contact

Please email Carlianne with your questions at grants@artsmidwest.org.