
FY2026 ArtsWave Circle Grant Program Guidelines



ArtsWave Circle Grants– Program Guidelines

Purpose

ArtsWave believes that arts and cultural expression creates a more vibrant and dynamic region. ArtsWave also believes that only an inclusive collection of organizations, artists, art forms and projects can celebrate our community. In FY26, ArtsWave's Circle Grant Program requests proposals for projects that celebrate Black and African American arts in the Cincinnati region.

Who May Apply

To be eligible for the FY2026 Circle Grant, an organization must meet the following requirements:

- Have a 501(c)3 designation, be non-profit in nature, or have a non-profit fiscal agent (for-profit businesses are ineligible for grant funding);
- Have a majority (51%+) of the organization's annual expenditures dedicated to arts and cultural activities.
- Have a primary mission to provide programs or activities in areas directly concerned with arts or cultural heritage for the public.
- Be based in the Cincinnati-Middletown, OH-KY-IN MSA, which includes the following counties: Brown, Butler, Clermont, Hamilton, and Warren Counties in Ohio; Boone, Bracken, Campbell, Gallatin, Grant, Kenton, and Pendleton Counties in Kentucky; and Dearborn, Franklin, and Ohio Counties in Indiana.
- Have successfully completed all previous grant requirements, including outstanding final reports for all previous grants and sponsorships.*
- Have not received funding through another ArtsWave project grant for the proposed project.**

*Any past Circle grantee that has failed to complete a grant project and or has not submitted a final report for a grant project to date is ineligible to apply for an FY2026 Circle Grant.

**Proposed projects that have already been funded through the ArtsWave Pride, Young Professionals, Catalyzing Impact, or Black and Brown Artist grant programs are not eligible for funding. A recipient of any of those grant programs is still eligible to apply if they meet the requirements above and propose a different project for this Circle grant cycle. Sustaining Impact grantees may apply for a new project outside their regular programming that is currently funded through general operating support.

NOTE: Applicants **new** to ArtsWave must schedule an introductory call or meeting prior to the application deadline. Returning applicants are also encouraged to reach out with any questions they may have related to their project or application. Please contact Lori Burkhardt at lori.burkhardt@artswave.org to schedule a time.

Eligible Requests

The ArtsWave Circle Grant Program provides funding for arts or cultural heritage projects that celebrate African American arts, advancing our Tri-State region's reputation as a welcoming and inclusive community through the arts. Projects with multiple components and/or event dates must show a cohesive theme that ties the entire project together. Proposed projects must take place between September 1, 2025-August 31, 2026 and must not be completed before grant award notification.

This grant program is designed to provide both seed funding to support the development of new programming, as well as short-term operating support for existing programming with a demonstrated impact of inclusivity.

For stronger FY2026 ArtsWave Circle Grant applications, the proposed projects should:

- Be well designed, participatory and social
- Align with ArtsWave's Blueprint for Collective Action
- Celebrate African American arts
- Have NOT received funding through another ArtsWave project grant for the same project
- If a Sustaining Impact recipient, not be part of organization's general operations that are funded through the SI grant

Grant Amounts

The dollar amount allocated for this round of ArtsWave Circle Grants will be funded from the ArtsWave's FY25 Community Campaign. Projects may be funded partially or in full up to \$10,000. There is no match requirement for the Circle grant. Up to 10% of the grant request may be allocated to general administration and overhead.

Note: Applicants will be asked if the project can be completed with partial funding, which may allow the panel to award more project grants. If applicant says the project cannot be completed with partial funding, there is no penalty; however, the panel must choose full funding or no funding for the project.

Application Instructions

All application materials must be submitted via Submittable, ArtsWave's online grantmaking system, at <https://artswave.submittable.com/submit>. We strongly recommend that you begin your online application well before the due date to familiarize yourself with the online grantmaking system and to address any technical concerns.

A. Organization Information

- Organization Contact Information *
 - Address, including County
 - Main telephone
 - Website
- Grant Contact Information*
- Organizational Leadership and Staffing

- Chief Professional Officer
- Number of FTE, PTE, contracted and unpaid staff
- Upload list of Board of Directors with affiliations (workplace)
- Organization EIN/tax ID
- 501(c)3 status or Fiscal Agent*
- Fiscal Agent contract or agreement upload and their EIN/tax ID* (if applicable)
- ATTACHMENT: High-resolution organization logo
- Provide a brief description of your organization and the type of programming you provide. (150-word limit)*
- List any funding your organization received from Artswave since 2020

B. Details of Request

- Project title*
- Provide a project description short summary; that is, how would you **describe** (not advertise) the program for an Instagram post. (25-word limit)*
- Describe the proposed project in more detail. (300-word limit)*
- Describe how the proposed project celebrates African American arts within our region. (250-word limit)*
- Describe how your organization, including staff and board, has the capacity to complete the project in an authentic and manageable way. (200-word limit)*
- List projected number of participants to be served.*
- List anticipated project start and end date*
- Provide a monthly+ proposed timeline, outlining key deliverables and milestones. (250-word limit)*
- What are the objectives of this project, and how will you measure this program's success? Please include both the measures you will use and the methodology you will use to collect the data. (250-word limit)*
- List any organizations/artists with whom you will collaborate for this program and briefly describe the nature of the collaboration. (250-word limit)
- Select of which ArtsWave grant program resource opportunities you have or will take advantage.*
- Respond if you would like to receive early submission feedback.*
- ATTACHMENT: Please upload an example of your organization's work that illustrates your capacity to accomplish the proposed project.*

C. Grant Request

- Requested Grant Amount up to \$10,000*

D. Financials

- Annual operating budget for FY2026*
- Total project budget *
- How and over what time period will the ArtsWave Circle grant funds be spent? (100-word limit)*
- Can this project be completed if partially funded?*
- ATTACHMENT: Most recent annual financial statement or 990 *

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- Complete ArtsWave Circle Grant Budget Form*
 - Organization's nonprofit determination letter.*

**delineates a field required to submit*

E. **Statement of Assurances** – An authorizing official will certify that s/he is authorized to submit the application on behalf of the organization and that the information submitted in the application is true and correct to the best of his/her knowledge. *

All application materials must be submitted through the online grantmaking system by **5:00 pm EST on September 22, 2025. Late applications will not be accepted.**

Optional Grant Writing Resources

Grant Overview Session

ArtsWave will host a free, online webinar to go over the Pride Grant Program Guidelines and the application process. The webinar will be held on Tuesday, August 12 from noon-1 p.m. To register for the webinar, please go to [FY2026 ArtsWave Affinity Grant Programs Grant Overview](#).

Grant Writing Workshops

ArtsWave will also host two online Grant Writing Workshops. The first workshop will provide a comprehensive grant writing guide on Thursday, August 14 from noon-1 p.m. Please register at [ArtsWave Grant Writing Workshop](#).

The second workshop will focus on financial documentation and budgets on Wednesday, August 20 from noon-1 p.m. Please register at [ArtsWave Grant Writing Workshop: Financial Documentation and Budgets](#).

Early Submission Feedback

Applicants may submit a draft of their application by September 3 to receive feedback from ArtsWave staff. Complete the draft in [submittable.com](#) and click "SUBMIT". Applicants must make edits and re-submit by the September 22 deadline.

One-on-One meetings

Applicants may request support no later than one week before the grant deadline by contacting Lori Burkhardt at lori.burkhardt@artswave.org.

Determination of Grant Amount

Applications will be reviewed by a panel consisting of community volunteers and awarded by the ArtsWave Board of Directors using the following criteria totaling 100 points:

- Project is well-planned with clear outcomes and assessment. (15 pts)
- Programming aligns with the Blueprint for Collective Action. (15 pts)
- Programming celebrates African American arts within our region. (15 pts)
- Organization demonstrates the capacity to complete the project. (15 pts)
- Organization has a history of arts programming. (10 pts)
- Programming can be achieved in the proposed timeline. (15 pts)
- The proposed grant amount requested is appropriate, and the project budget is sufficient to execute the project. (15 pts)

Requests may be funded in full or in part unless otherwise indicated.

Grant Requirements

Upon notification of award, grant recipients must submit a grant acceptance form. If the recommended award is less than the project request, ArtsWave may ask you to complete an updated budget form as a part of the acceptance materials. A single grant payment will be issued once the grant acceptance form has been received.

Final Reports will be assigned once award distribution is made to provide immediate access for the grantee and to streamline internal administrative processes. All final reports are due upon completion of the project but no later than August 31, 2026. All requirements must be submitted through Submittable. *Applicants will be ineligible to apply for funding if a previous final report for any grant program is outstanding.*

Any organization receiving ArtsWave funding must fulfill all grant requirements outlined in the grantee handbook for the duration of the grant period and accurately represent its organization and its activities in all documents submitted to ArtsWave.

Key Dates

Grant Overview Session	Grant Writing Workshops	Early Submission Feedback	Application Deadline	Funding Decision	Final Report Due
August 12, 2025*	August 14 & August 20, 2025**	September 3, 2025	September 22, 2025 5:00 pm***	October 22, 2025	August 31, 2026

* Attendance is not required to submit a grant application; **To register for the overview session: [FY2026 ArtsWave Affinity Grant Programs Grant Overview](#)**

**Attendance is not required to submit a grant application; however, these workshops can be an important resource in submitting a quality application that has greater potential for funding

***Application closes at 5 p.m. on the deadline date; **late applications will not be accepted**

Contact ArtsWave

Additional application questions may be directed to Lori Burkhardt, Grant Programs Manager, at (513) 632-0123 or lori.burkhardt@artswave.org.

Appendix A: Blueprint for Collective Action

Our Vision – A more vibrant regional economy and more connected community for all.

Overview

By supporting a wide variety of art forms and providing strategic leadership for the arts sector in the broader community, ArtsWave creates an environment where the growing impact of the arts is felt and celebrated by the entire community. By focusing the ArtWave's investment strategy, the Blueprint is intended to stake a bold vision for the region for enhanced impact through the arts.

The Blueprint for Collective Action provides a focus for ArtsWave's community investments and strategic initiatives. The Blueprint is designed to achieve three things:

- Align with broader community objectives;
- Provide more clarity and specificity around the kinds of activities and outcomes ArtsWave desires; and
- Leverage more support from the community by demonstrating relevance to the community.

Blueprint Building Blocks

Arts Put Cincinnati on the Map:

To be a more competitive region for talent attraction by leveraging arts that are perceived as extraordinary.

Arts Deepen Roots in the Region:

To deepen feelings of engagement and connection to the community by widening participation in arts experiences, especially those that resonate with adults age 40 and under.

Arts Bridge Divides:

To be a more competitive region for talent attraction by leveraging arts that are perceived as extraordinary.

Arts Enliven Neighborhoods:

To enhance the vibrancy of neighborhoods, particularly those that are underserved and/or revitalizing, by increasing the availability and accessibility of arts organizations and opportunities

Arts Fuel Creativity and Learning:

To promote the development of 21st century skills by ensuring that all children in the region, particularly those that are underserved, have access to multiple arts opportunities.

Appendix B: Grant Application Glossary

501(c)3 Status

A nonprofit organization that has been approved by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt, charitable organization.

Nonprofit in Nature

An organization, group or individual artist whose programming is organized for purposes other than generating profit (such as to benefit a community or communities) but are without a 501(c)3 status.

Fiscal Agent

A fiscal agent is a non-profit organization that holds the tax-exempt status as granted by the Internal Revenue Service under code 501(c)3 and that agrees to act on behalf of an individual or organization that does not yet have tax exemption for the purposes of this grant process.

Cincinnati-Middletown, OH-KY-IN MSA

The Cincinnati-Middletown, OH-KY-IN MSA includes the following counties: Brown, Butler, Clermont, Hamilton, and Warren Counties in Ohio; Boone, Bracken, Campbell, Gallatin, Grant, Kenton, and Pendleton Counties in Kentucky; and Dearborn, Franklin, and Ohio Counties in Indiana.

Project

A project is defined as a specific, connected set of activities with a start date, end date, and explicit objectives and outcomes. Projects with multiple components and/or event dates must show a cohesive theme that ties the entire project together.

Projected number of participants to be served

The estimated number of persons that will be reached through this project. This may include both in-person and digital engagements (if a virtual program).

Objective

An objective defines the specific, measurable actions your organization must take to achieve successful outcomes. *What is the change you want to see from your project?*

Annual Operating Budget

The annual operating budget should be based on a realistic projection of income for the current year. This should reflect an organization's entire operations, not just the project budget.

Financial Summary

A financial document (called: profit and loss, statement of activities, or income and expense statement) from your organization's most recently completed fiscal year.