

---

# **FY2026**

# **Inspire Grants**

**for Individual Artists**

**Program Guidelines**



---

## ArtsWave's Inspire Grant

funded by the City of Cincinnati and other partners

### HIGHLIGHTS FOR FY26:

1. **Emerging Artists may apply for up to \$5,000 (maximum) for a project**
2. **Practicing Artists may apply for up to \$10,000 (maximum) for a project**
3. **Artists must propose a project that can be highlighted at Showcase in July 2026; however, social impact projects in the community will also be considered**
4. **Artists must participate in artist cohort, including attendance at scheduled meetings and adhering to deadlines throughout the grant period**
5. **Grant proposal submission deadline: October 27, 2025, at 5:00 pm**

### Purpose

ArtsWave's Inspire Grant for individual artists will provide resources for the creation of inspiring artwork and career development for under-represented artists in the Greater Cincinnati Region. Proposed artwork should authentically reflect the lived Black and Brown experience. Artists must present a project idea that can be highlighted at Showcase in July 2026 and participate in artist cohort activities throughout the development of their project. A limited number of social impact projects in the community may be considered depending on funding and number and strength of applications.

There are two categories of projects\*:

1. Emerging Artists: Apply for up to \$5,000 (Approximately 5 will be selected)
2. Practicing Artists: Apply for up to \$10,000

*\*Note: These are maximum amounts; You may apply for amounts "up to;" for example, \$4,000 or \$8,500, etc.*

All projects must be designed with the Showcase in mind to not only further artistic development but also to reflect the lived Black and Brown experience. So as not to limit artistic vision, projects selected should be prepared to highlight a representation of their work, particularly for visual art projects. Film and other live performances should plan on showcasing no more than 30 minutes of their work. Social impact projects that may not have a clear showcasing element but have impactful community engagement may also be considered.

There may be a limited number of projects selected based on funding, genre and Showcase capacity:

1. Visual Arts: Up to 10 projects selected
2. Film: Approximately 5-10 projects selected
3. Live performance, including literary projects: Approximately 5-10 projects.
4. Social Impact: A limited number of social impact projects within the community may be considered

Additionally, projects should align with ArtsWave's [Blueprint for Collective Action \(see Appendix A\)](#).

**NOTE: There are multiple sessions for assisting artists in completing an application. Please note the KEY DATES Section below.**

---

## **Who May Apply**

Applicants for an Inspire Grant are:

- An individual artist (either working as a sole proprietor or under an organized LLC as the sole member of the LLC), or teaching artist, working in any artistic discipline\*
- 18 years of age or older
- Full-time resident in one of the counties\*\* served by ArtsWave, prior to January 1, 2026 and at the time of the grant award;
- Have reported taxable income related to your work as an individual artist or teaching artist in your most recently filed tax return; and/or have a verifiable body of work through digital work samples or website.

**IMPORTANT:** Starting in the FY26 grant cycle, an artist may receive funding for two (2) consecutive years and then will be required to take one (1) year off before applying for another grant. For example, if you receive an Inspire Grant FY26 and 27, the next application cycle you would be eligible for would be the Inspire Grant FY2028.

*\*For the purpose of this program, artistic disciplines include Dance, Music, Opera/Musical Theatre, Theatre, Visual Arts, Design & Textile Arts, Crafts, Photography, Media Arts, Literature, Folk/Traditional Arts, Performing Arts, Spoken Word or Interdisciplinary Arts, Social Impact.*

*\*\*The 15 counties include 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.*

## **Proposal and Documentation Requirements:**

1. Application narrative including project description and how your proposed project relates to lived Black and Brown experience and aligns with Blueprint
2. Project Budget, including reasoning for applying for up to \$5,000 or \$10,000, and how funds will be used
3. A plan for showcasing your project or work in the community with impact
4. Artist Statement and artistic work samples (digital format)
5. Proof of residency (deed, lease, utility bill or other documentation)
6. Completed W9 and Vendor Survey
7. Agreement to participate in Artist Cohort, led by Michael Thompson
8. Optional: Completed Cincinnati Artist Census

## **Funding Amounts**

Grant awards will be made in one of two categories: Up to \$5,000 or up to \$10,000. Proposed projects may be funded in part or in whole, and the applicant should address in their narrative if partial funding is not feasible to complete the proposed project. Fifty percent (50%) of the award will be paid when grant is awarded; 25% will be paid upon completion of an interim report due March 2, 2026; the remaining 25% will be awarded when the project is fully prepared for Showcase.

## **Other Benefits Offered to Grant Recipients**

- A virtual grant overview will take place on October 2, 2025 at 12:00 p.m.

- 
- Early application review due by Friday, October 17, 2025 at 5:00 pm. Staff will review and allow edits of your application before the deadline on October 27, 2025.
  - Application drop-in sessions on October 13 and 23 at noon. Sign in briefly to ask a question about your application.
  - Monthly networking and progress meetings starting January 2026 with ArtsWave staff and consultants; there will be 5 REQUIRED meetings, each held the second Monday of each month (January-May).
  - Truth and Innovation Showcase in July 2026.

### **Eligible Expenses**

Expenses must be directly associated with the funded activity and include:

- Artist Fee (self-compensation)
- Fees paid to other artists or collaborative partners as part of this project
- Materials/Supplies
- Online tools/services
- cultural facilities
- Marketing /Advertising
- Professional learning to advance the project
- Other expenses directly associated with the funded activity

### **Ineligible Expenses:**

- Travel
- Refinance or repayment of existing debt
- Expenses related to gambling or gaming activities
- Expenses related to the purveyance of "adult" materials (i.e., pornographic, lewd, prurient, obscene, etc.)
- Activities, services, products or materials involving nude or semi-nude performances or the sale of sexual aids or devices
- Real estate investment business expenses
- Religious-affiliated organization expenses
- Any expenses that give rise to or support any other activity constituting a nuisance
- Capital purchases
- Any expenses supporting any illegal activity

### **Criteria for Evaluating Proposals**

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

- Project must reflect the lived Black and Brown experiences
- Projects must align with ArtsWave's Blueprint for Collective Action
- Track record of artistic work shows skill and potential
- Project will advance artist's work and career in the arts
- Project budget and timeline are reasonable and sufficient to execute the project
- Artist will be an active participant in the artist cohort

### **Application Instructions**

---

All application materials must be submitted via Submittable, ArtsWave's online grantmaking system. 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. **Additionally, you will have the opportunity to submit a draft proposal by October 17, 2025 to be reviewed by staff in advance of the deadline.**

While completing your application, remember these tips:

- Take advantage of ArtsWave grant writing resources: overview, feedback, drop ins
- Be brief, clear and direct, focusing on what is most important.
- Review panelists may have little or no prior knowledge of your work. Create a stronger application by:
  - not assuming reviewers have extensive knowledge of all artistic disciplines;
  - explaining acronyms; and
  - explaining the social change you want to see.
- We recommend that you prepare your responses offline in a word processing program and then copy and paste them into the appropriate sections of the online application.
- Limit the use of bullets and other formatting in text fields.

The application can be accessed using the following direct link:

<https://artswave.submittable.com/submit>

### **Important Information for Grant Recipients**

- Grant awards are competitive and contingent on available funds and the range of proposals received
- Not all projects need to be large, particularly for artists early in their careers; select the budget category that is best suited for your project and artistic growth
- This funding opportunity does not require a match
- Groups/ensembles/partnerships must identify a lead applicant. If awarded, the lead applicant will be responsible for entering into an agreement and receiving the funds to disperse to the other members
- Applicants must complete a W9 with data reflecting the appropriate individual/entity for tax purposes. Please consult with your accountant or a tax advisor to determine if the grant is taxable income in your specific situation.
- If an artist has established their artistic practice as an LLC or other business entity and the artist is the sole owner/proprietor of the business, then the artist may choose to enter their business entity into an agreement with ArtsWave.
- Grant awards will be paid in three parts: 50% of award payable upon execution of contract between ArtsWave and Artist; 25% of award payable upon receipt of an interim report due March 2, 2026, and 25% when project is completed for Showcase.
- Grantees are required to acknowledge, with name and logos, grant support provided by ArtsWave and the City of Cincinnati and any other funding partners in connection with the project. This may include, but is not limited to, acknowledgment on promotional or press materials (print and digital/online), at the physical installation site, and/or at public engagement events. This also includes submitting event information to Cincy A&E (online and apps arts calendar).

- 
- This grant does not constitute a purchase agreement for any artwork produced. The artist retains ownership of work produced with the support of ArtsWave.

### **Key Dates**

- Applications Open **October 1, 2025**
- Grant Information Session **October 2, 2025** (Zoom)  
**REGISTER:** [FY2026 Inspire Artist Grant Overview](#)
- Drop-in Support Session 1 **October 13, 2025** at 12:00 pm  
[See artswave.org/apply](#) for login link
- Drop-in Support Session 2 **October 23, 2025** at 12:00 pm  
[See artswave.org/apply](#) for login link
- **Application Review** Submit your application by **October 17, 2025** at 5:00 pm for review, so you can edit before the deadline (OPTIONAL)
- **Application DEADLINE** **October 27, 2025 at 5:00 pm**
- Award Announcement No earlier than December 5, 2025
- Monthly Meetings 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of each month TBD\*
- Interim Report DUE March 2, 2026 at 5:00 pm
- Projects must be completed June 1, 2026
- Showcase July 2026 [dates to be confirmed]

### **\*Monthly Meeting Schedule (all in-person at ArtsWave offices):**

- January 12, 2026, at 4:00 pm (All artists)
- February 9, 2026, at 4:00 pm (Emerging artists)
- March 9, 2026, at 4:00 pm (All artists)
- April 13, 2026, at 4:00 pm (Emerging artists)
- May 11, 2026, at 4:00 pm (All artists)

### **Contact ArtsWave**

---

Additional application questions may be directed to Ray Gargano, VP of Community Investments, at [ray.gargano@artswave.org](mailto:ray.gargano@artswave.org), or Lori Burkhardt, Grant Programs Manager, at [lori.burkhardt@artswave.org](mailto: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 promote cross cultural understanding by increasing the availability and accessibility of arts experiences that include and represent all races and ethnicities.

#### 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.