
FY2027 ArtsWave Circle Grant Guidelines



ArtsWave Circle Grants– 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 FY27, 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 FY2027 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 FY2027 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 Nick To at nick.to@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, 2026-August 31, 2027 and must not be completed before grant award notification.

This grant program is designed to provide both seed funding to support the development of a new project or an existing project that demonstrates an expansion of impact. A project is defined as a specific, connected set of activities with a start date, end date, and explicit goals and objectives. Projects with multiple components and/or event dates must show a cohesive theme that ties the entire project together.

For stronger FY2027 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

Projects may be funded partially or in full up to \$10,000. There is no match for the Circle grant. Up to 10% of the grant request may be allocated to general administration and overhead. The total project budget may not exceed 50% of the organization's total annual operating budget.

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 project answering who, what, where, when, why and how. (25-word limit)*
- Which pillar(s) of ArtsWave's Blueprint for Collective Action 2.0 does this project most directly support?*
- Please describe the project in more detail, including how the project aligns with the Blueprint for Collective Action selected. (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 FY2027*
- Total project budget *
- How and over what time period will the ArtsWave Circle grant funds be spent? (100-word limit)*
- ATTACHMENT: Most recent annual financial statement or 990 *
- Complete ArtsWave Circle Grant Budget Form*

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- 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 21, 2026. Late applications will not be accepted.**

Optional Grant Writing Resources

Grant Overview Session

ArtsWave will host a free, online webinar to go over the Grant Program Guidelines and the application process. The webinar will be held on Wednesday, August 19 from noon-1 p.m.

Please register [here](#).

Grant Writing Workshops

ArtsWave will also host two online Grant Writing Workshops. The first workshop will provide a comprehensive grant writing, financial documentation, and budget guide on Thursday, August 20 from noon-1 p.m.

Please register [here](#).

The second workshop will focus on goal setting and assessment on Thursday, September 10 from noon-1 p.m.

Please register [here](#).

Early Submission Feedback

Applicants may submit a draft of their application by September 9 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 21 deadline.

One-on-One meetings

Applicants may request support no later than one week before the grant deadline by contacting Nick To at nick.to@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, 2027. 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 19 2026*	August 20 & September 10, 2026**	September 9, 2026	September 21, 2026 5:00 pm***	October 28, 2026	August 31, 2027

* Attendance is not required to submit a grant application

**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 Nick To, Grant Programs Manager, at (513) 632-0123 or nick.to@artswave.org.

Appendix A: Blueprint for Collective Action 2.0

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

Overview

By investing in 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 embraced by the entire community. The 2026-2035 Blueprint for Collective Action confirms a bold vision for the region's future with the arts playing a vital, connected role in its growth.

The Blueprint is designed to do three things:

- Align with broader community objectives;
- Provide clarity and specificity around the kinds of activities and outcomes ArtsWave believes will advance these objectives; and
- Leverage more support from the community by demonstrating ever-greater relevance to the community.

Focus Areas

Arts Put Cincinnati on the Map:

To increase the region's competitive advantage in attracting talent, new business and cultural tourism by offering arts that are perceived as extraordinary and innovative.

Arts Deepen Roots:

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 increase understanding and appreciation of differences among us, contributing to our region's identity as welcoming and inclusive.

Arts Strengthen Neighborhoods:

To build vibrancy and well-being in neighborhoods, particularly those that are under-resourced or revitalizing, by increasing the availability and accessibility of arts organizations and opportunities.

Arts Fuel Creativity and Learning:

To unlock imagination and foster future-ready skills by ensuring that all youth in the region have access to multiple arts opportunities.

ARTS PUT CINCINNATI ON THE MAP

The Cincinnati Region's dynamic and innovative arts scene attracts employees, visitors, and businesses to the region, generating economic value and positive public perception.

GOAL: To increase the region's competitive advantage in the attraction of talent, new business and cultural tourism by offering arts that are perceived as extraordinary and innovative.

Roles for Arts Organizations:

- To design new or unexpected artistic collaborations
- To engage or employ artists at the forefront of their field
- To create arts experiences that are active, immersive, and social; and that stretch the boundaries of the art form
- To improve and employ digital capabilities and use of social media to reach and engage digitally oriented or remote audiences
- To act as laboratories, critics, conveners, and guardians in the evolution of AI
- To develop and share stories that distinguish the region through its arts
- To participate in collaborative efforts to increase earned media and leverage paid media/marketing opportunities
- To participate in collaborative efforts to share resources and decrease duplicative costs throughout the sector

ARTS DEEPEN ROOTS IN THE REGION

Residents who are engaged in the arts – whether as volunteers, artists, or audience members – are more likely to stay in the region because they have a stronger and more positive connection to the community.

GOAL: 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

Roles for Arts Organizations:

- To create arts experiences that are participatory, social, recurring, promote well-being, and/or encourage personal investment in the organization and/or community.

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- To engage young adults, including teens, college students, early career professionals and young families in arts experiences that inspire memories and future involvement.
 - To engage newcomers to the region in arts programs that are welcoming and inclusive.

ARTS BRIDGE DIVIDES

When the arts reflect and celebrate the diversity of our community, residents build a greater understanding and appreciation of cultural differences.

GOAL: To increase understanding and appreciation of differences among us, contributing to our region's identity as welcoming and inclusive.

Roles for Arts Organizations:

- To present works of art created by artists of all races and ethnicities
- To create arts experiences that include artists of all races and ethnicities
- To create and/or present art that tells the story(ies) of all races and ethnicities
- To create shared arts experiences for people of all races and ethnicities
- To identify and establish partnerships and collaborations that support equitable access to arts experiences for people of all races and ethnicities
- To involve at all levels of organizational decision-making people who reflect the broadest possible racial and ethnic diversity as well as other demographic differences
- To develop cross-cultural artistic partnerships and collaborations

ARTS STRENGTHEN NEIGHBORHOODS

Arts organizations and cultural facilities serve as vital hubs for neighborhood activity that supports local business, builds civic pride and cultivates personal and community health and well-being.

GOAL: To build vibrancy and well-being in neighborhoods, particularly those that are under-resourced or revitalizing, by increasing the availability and accessibility of arts organizations and opportunities.

Roles for Arts Organizations:

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- To establish partnerships and collaborations within the neighborhood in which the organization is physically located
 - To create an environment where all members of the organization's surrounding neighborhood feel welcome
 - To increase the variety and frequency of arts experiences embedded in or accessible to neighborhoods throughout the region
 - To improve the aesthetics of the region's neighborhoods
 - To enliven indoor and outdoor public spaces with arts experiences
 - To optimize the use of existing community resources to support equitable access to arts experiences
 - To improve and employ digital capabilities and use of social media to reach and engage neighborhoods
 - To maintain and enhance cultural facilities

ARTS FUEL CREATIVITY AND LEARNING

The arts have the power to transform education and outcomes for youth both by improving learning of core curriculum and teaching skills like creativity, collaboration, compassion, critical thinking and problem-solving.

GOAL: To unlock imagination and foster future-ready skills by ensuring that all youth in the region have access to multiple arts opportunities.

Roles for Arts Organizations:

- To provide meaningful arts education experiences, opportunities and arts-based content for youth at all grade levels, prioritizing gaps and underserved populations
- To provide professional development and enrichment opportunities for arts educators
- To develop curricula, materials, and training to support arts integration in all subjects and at all grade levels

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.