FY2027 Circle Grant

ArtsWave believes that arts and cultural expression create 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. For FY27, ArtsWave's Circle Grant Program requested proposals for projects that celebrate Black and African American arts in the Cincinnati region. Eligible organizations have a mission to provide programs or activities in areas directly concerned with arts or cultural heritage for the public and a majority (51%+) of annual expenditures dedicated to arts and cultural activities.

ArtsWave's Circle Grant review panel met on October 21, 2026 to review 24 applications for the distribution of Circle Grant funds for FY2027. The eight-member Circle Grant committee recommends awards for each of the following nine organizations and their proposed projects totaling $39,688.

Circle Grants FY2027

Organization	Request	Award	Project Title
ARTE	$10,000.00	**$5,000.00**	**Solid as a Rock**
Bader + Simon	$10,000.00	**$5,000.00**	**Drawn from History**
Black Lit Foundation	$10,000.00	**$5,000.00**	**Black Lit Fest 2027**
Cincinnati Opera Association	$5,800.00	**$2,900.00**	**Janai Brugger in Recital**
Mattie Legacy Project	$10,000.00	**$5,000.00**	**Discovering Mattie**
ProjectArt	$7,800.00	**$3,900.00**	**Family Furniture: Building Stories of Home**
Revolution Dance Theatre	$10,000.00	**$5,000.00**	**Hot Chocolate Academy**
Robert O'Neal Multicultural Arts Center (ROMAC)	$10,000.00	**$5,000.00**	**Regal Stories: ROMAC FAB**
Transforming Families Ministries	$9,000.00	**$2,888.00**	**Butler County Juneteenth Community Festival 2027**
Total	$82,600.00	**$39,688.00**	

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

ARTE
"Solid as a Rock" at Rockdale Elementary School

Founded and led by Cincinnati artist Brent Billingsley, ARTE brings an authentic African American artistic perspective to young people across the region. From January through May 2027, "Solid as a Rock" will work directly with about 60 students at Rockdale Elementary School to plan and create colorful, expressive murals for their school. Through student-led mural making and therapeutic art activities, students will explore the people, experiences, traditions, and artistic contributions that have shaped African American life in Greater Cincinnati. Students are not simply observers. They become artists, storytellers, and cultural contributors, using their own voices to shape the imagery displayed throughout their school. The finished murals will stand as lasting representations of Black history, achievement, resilience, and possibility, and will let young people see their culture and lived experiences reflected in the place where they learn every day.

Bader + Simon
Drawn from History: Five Illustrated Stories of Cincinnati's Diverse Artists and Activists

"Drawn from History" will bring the stories of Cincinnati's Black artists, activists, and cultural leaders into K-8 classrooms through a 36-page graphic novel and coloring book. Featured figures include Robert O'Neal, known as the "Mayor of Over-the-Rhine," who helped shape Black arts organizations in the city; Carolyn Mazloomi, the internationally recognized quilter and founder of the Women of Color Quilters Network; and Marian Spencer, Cincinnati's first Black female City Council member and Vice Mayor, who helped desegregate Coney Island. Bader + Simon staff will write each seven-page story in a graphic-novel format, and paid local artists, including Black artists Ke'Monte Figgs, Dai Williams, and Asha White, will illustrate them with pages students can color. Partners including the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Black Art Speaks, and Wave Pool will help verify research. About 3,500 copies will be distributed, connecting Cincinnati's artistic past to its present.

Black Lit Foundation
Black Lit Fest 2027

Black Lit Fest 2027 places Black literature at the center of a multidisciplinary, intergenerational celebration in August 2027. Day One is a reading retreat that gives participants intentional time to engage deeply with Black writing, alongside creative and cultural workshops. Day Two is a block-party-style festival bringing together Black authors, booksellers, visual artists, performers, and community organizations, with adult and children's books, art activities, performances, and vendors that show how literature connects with visual art, music, and movement. The festival also elevates

emerging voices: the Black Lit Foundation's Youth Ambassador Fellows will present original projects developed through their study of Black literature. Black Lit Fest offers Black residents an affirming space to encounter their own stories while inviting the broader community to experience the breadth of Black life and creativity, and gives Black creatives new opportunities for visibility, sales, and connection.

Cincinnati Opera Association
Janai Brugger in Recital: The Songs of Florence Price

Cincinnati Opera presents acclaimed soprano "Janai Brugger in a Recital" devoted to the songs of Florence Price. As a Black woman composer working in the early 20th century, Price created a substantial body of work despite persistent barriers and became an integral part of the Chicago Renaissance, yet her music remains an often-overlooked chapter of American classical music. Brugger's sustained engagement with Price's songs is a defining part of her own artistry, and during the recital she will speak about her journey as a Black artist, drawing a direct line between Price's experience generations ago and her own career today. By bringing Price's music to Cincinnati through Brugger's voice and perspective, the recital celebrates African American artistic achievement as a living tradition and opens conversation about the Black artists who have shaped American music and the stories we choose to tell.

Mattie Legacy Project
Discovering Mattie: A Granddaughter's Journey Through Archives, Memory & Legacy

"Discovering Mattie" transforms an overlooked Black Cincinnati story into new creative work through documentary film, oral history, spoken word, original music, and visual design. Over more than ten years of research, Laura Kinney-Porter has uncovered the story of her grandmother, Mattie: a mother, civil rights advocate, youth mentor, community leader, and breast cancer survivor. Cincinnati filmmaker Ingrid Woode will shape archival photographs, newspaper coverage, oral histories, and present-day footage into a documentary with an original score. Spoken-word artist Zinnia Stewart will create and perform a new work inspired by Mattie's archives, and a commissioned designer will create two reusable educational panels. Interviews with community members, including former Cincinnati Mayor Dwight Tillery, will preserve firsthand voices connected to Mattie's life. The project will culminate in a public program sharing Mattie's legacy with Cincinnati audiences.

ProjectArt
Family Furniture: Building Stories of Home

"Family Furniture: Building Stories of Home" centers the practice and knowledge of Shanae Brooks, an African American, Ohio-based wood, acrylic, and resin artist with a background in carpentry and engineering. Brooks founded her own building and design company, has led construction teams in building entire structures, and, as a

first-generation college student, is deeply committed to passing knowledge back to her community. In 2027, she will lead families at ProjectArt's three Cincinnati library branches, in the West End, Bond Hill, and Avondale, in designing and building a chair together. Along the way, families will reflect on stories of family, identity, and home, including what has been passed down, shared, or repurposed, and build those stories into functional furniture they take home. Skills move from artist to student to family to community, creating a cycle of creative expression grounded in African American experience and everyday life.

Revolution Dance Theatre
Hot Chocolate Academy

"Hot Chocolate Academy" develops Cincinnati's next generation of Black artists by investing not only in what audiences see onstage, but in the artists who create it. Young and developing artists receive sustained training in ballet, modern dance, company repertoire, choreography, performance, and professional development while working directly with established Black artists. The Academy is led by Revolution Dance Theatre (RDT) alum and choreographer Asya Little-Graves, who joined RDT as a young dancer and has grown into a choreographer, teaching artist, and creative leader. Guest artists, including musical theatre professional Jazzman McMullen, show participants the many directions their training can take them. The Academy culminates in Hot Chocolate, RDT's annual African American holiday production on December 4–5, 2026, where participants take the stage alongside professional artists, celebrating African American arts as a living continuum of Black artists learning from, creating with, and teaching one another.

Robert O'Neal Multicultural Arts Center (ROMAC)
Regal Stories: ROMAC Film, Art & Book Festival (FAB)

"Regal Stories: ROMAC Film, Art & Book Festival (FAB)" is an inaugural festival launching around Juneteenth 2027 in Cincinnati's historic West End. Inspired by events like the Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival, it will showcase local, regional, and national Black filmmakers, authors, screenwriters, and playwrights through screenings, workshops, and conversations. The festival is anchored in the legacy of the historic Regal Theater, a cornerstone of Black cultural life in the West End, with "Remember When" nostalgic screenings and local history programming. "Youth Voices" showcases and workshops in screenwriting, directing, and publishing will connect young Black artists with established professionals. An independent author marketplace, page-to-screen panels, and fireside chats on representation round out the experience. By creating a dedicated space for Black expression, Regal Stories honors Cincinnati's African American heritage while helping the next generation of storytellers expand it.

Transforming Families Ministries

Butler County Juneteenth Community Festival 2027: Celebrating Freedom and African American Culture in West Chester & Liberty Township

Transforming Families Ministries will host two Juneteenth celebrations in Butler County in June 2027, in West Chester and Liberty Township, placing African American arts, artists, and cultural traditions at the center of the community experience. African American musicians, singers, dancers, spoken-word artists, and other performers from Butler County and Greater Cincinnati will share work that tells the story of African American history, resilience, creativity, and achievement. Alongside the performances, educational and cultural activities will explain the meaning of Juneteenth and connect its history to the present, while families and young people experience African American culture through music, dance, storytelling, food, and direct interaction with artists and community leaders. Butler County is home to more than 42,000 Black residents, and these celebrations create visible, accessible spaces where they can see their culture celebrated, and where neighbors of all backgrounds can come together across generations.