FY2027 ArtsWave Pride Project Grants

The ArtsWave Pride Grant Program provides funding for arts or cultural heritage projects that promote and/or celebrate the LGBTQIA+ community, advancing Cincinnati's reputation as a welcoming and inclusive community through the arts. The funding to support the FY2027 Pride Grant Program comes from donations restricted to Pride programming during the 2026 ArtsWave Campaign.

ArtsWave convened a review committee of nine volunteer community panelists on Friday, October 16, 2026 to review 20 applications received for the FY2027 ArtsWave Pride Project Grants. The panel recommended funding approval for twelve projects totaling $82,206.00. The ArtsWave Pride Project Grants are funded in part by ArtsWave's Pride affinity donors.

Organization	Request	Award	Project Title
Asianati	$10,000.00	**$10,000.00**	**Illuminating Intersectionality**
Cincinnati Camerata	$9,000.00	**$4,500.00**	**Considering Matthew Shepard**
Cincinnati Opera Association	$6,560.00	**$6,560.00**	**Opera is a Drag**
Cincinnati Pride, Inc.	$10,000.00	**$4,000.00**	**2027 Mx. Cincinnati Pride Pageant**
Cincinnati Shakespeare Company	$10,000.00	**$10,000.00**	**ShakesQueer**
Know Theatre of Cincinnati	$10,000.00	**$9,000.00**	**Cincy Fringe Comes Out**
LM-Creative	$10,000.00	**$5,000.00**	**Our Friend Sandy**
Queen City Freedom Band	$5,000.00	**$5,000.00**	**2026-27 Season Sponsor**
Revolution Dance Theatre	$10,000.00	**$10,000.00**	**Queerly the Culture**
SingOUT Cincy	$7,146.00	**$7,146.00**	**Festival Chorus – Fifth Anniversary**
Sorg Opera Revitalization Group	$10,000.00	**$5,000.00**	**Come As You Are: Pride at the Sorg**
The Ghostlight Stage Company	$10,000.00	**$6,000.00**	**72 Hour Arts Festival: Illumination**
Total	$107,706.00	**$82,206.00**	

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

Asian American Cultural Association of Cincinnati (Asianati)
Illuminating Intersectionality: AAPI LGBTQIA+ Voices & Celebrations at Asian Food Fest and Heritage Month 2027

Asianati, in partnership with Lotus Collective, Cincinnati's queer AAPI and SWANA group, will present a series of LGBTQIA+ arts and cultural programming in spring 2027. In late April, Asian Food Fest at Court Street Plaza, one of the region's largest public gatherings, will feature an expanded Sunday night mainstage drag showcase spotlighting local AAPI drag artists such as Princess Shehzadi, Glitz, and Bee Jade. At the Library Plaza, Asianati and the Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library will co-host a family-friendly Queer Literature Storytime, with local AAPI drag performers and community members reading books by LGBTQ+ Asian authors about self-love and diverse families. In late May, Asianati's first AAPI Heritage Month LGBTQIA+ event will bring together a panel on navigating queer and AAPI identity in the Midwest, followed by a family-style community dinner, celebrating queer AAPI voices that are often underrepresented in both mainstream arts and traditional queer spaces.

Cincinnati Camerata
Considering Matthew Shepard: Cincinnati Camerata with Jim Obergefell

Cincinnati Camerata will present Craig Hella Johnson's "Considering Matthew Shepard" on May 1, 2027, at Hyde Park Community United Methodist Church, with civil rights advocate Jim Obergefell as narrator. The evening-length oratorio draws on Matthew Shepard's journals, his parents' writings, and Lesléa Newman's poetry, moving through choral, country-western, folk, and gospel styles to tell the story of the 21-year-old gay university student murdered in 1998. The work presents Matthew as a person rather than a symbol and moves deliberately from violence toward compassion and shared humanity. The concert is paired with Obergefell's appearance in the church's speaker series. As lead plaintiff in Obergefell v. Hodges, a case that began here in Cincinnati, he connects Matthew's generation to today's. Admission is free, with donations welcome, so that cost is never the reason someone misses this powerful work about identity, community, and dignity.

Cincinnati Opera Association
Opera is a Drag

"Opera is a Drag" celebrates LGBTQIA+ community, history, and artistic expression through the unexpected pairing of opera and drag. Presented in April 2027, the program features three opera artists, two drag performers, and an emcee, with four operatic selections from different eras and six lip-syncs to popular music. Between performances, the artists will share context about drag

as an art form and the long history of gender fluidity and queer expression in opera, showing that queerness has never been on the margins of the performing arts but central to their development. The event brings together artists and audiences from different generations to celebrate creativity and resilience in a joyful, welcoming setting. Admission is pay-what-you-wish, a signature cocktail sets a relaxed, social tone, and every attendee will receive a discount to Cincinnati Opera's annual Pride Night in July.

Cincinnati Pride, Inc.
2027 Mx. Cincinnati Pride Pageant

Cincinnati Pride is best known for its June Parade and Festival, but this all-volunteer organization produces events for the community year-round, including the "Mx. Cincinnati Pride Pageant," now in its fourth year. The pageant is intentionally gender-inclusive, welcoming contestants across gender identities, gender expressions, and drag aesthetics. Each year, about 8–10 performers share their artistry, personal stories, and perspectives on what Pride means to them. To remove financial barriers, Cincinnati Pride provides scholarships to the first eight registered contestants to help cover costumes, hair, makeup, and more. The title extends well beyond pageant night. The current titleholder, Johnny Justice, Mr. Cincinnati Pride 2026, has helped raise about $20,000 for organizations including GLSEN, League of Animal Welfare, Transform, and local Pride organizations, and his reign as a drag king broadens the public picture of who can represent the LGBTQIA+ community.

Cincinnati Shakespeare Company
ShakesQueer – A Bawdy, Bard-y Burlesque and Drag Cabaret

Now in its fifth year, "ShakesQueer "has grown from a grassroots event in the theater lobby into a Mainstage favorite at Cincinnati Shakespeare Company. Drawing on Shakespeare's rich history of gender exploration, where nearly one in five of his plays features a character in gender disguise, the show reimagines the Bard through contemporary drag, burlesque, live music, and cabaret. CSC produces ShakesQueer in collaboration with Cincinnati's Smoke & Queers troupe, whose artists remain central to the creative process, and has invited Queen City Cabaret back after audiences praised its musical numbers in 2026. Taking place in June 2027 at the Otto M. Budig Theater, this year's production will add more intentional lighting and sound, and CSC is exploring an afterparty partnership to keep the celebration going. Affordable tickets and sign language interpretation help ensure that all wild expressions of self, gender, identity, and sexuality are welcome.

Know Theatre of Cincinnati
Cincy Fringe Comes Out

Every night of the Cincinnati Fringe Festival ends with "Late Night at the Know," a free, interactive series that has long been a hub for festivalgoers. Some of its longest-running slots, like Sideshow Cabaret, hosted by Lady Phaedra, and The Gay Spelling Bee from Ben and Justin Presents, have always been queer in spirit. Cincy Fringe Comes Out makes it official. Know Theatre will partner with Queen City Queers, a theatre collective centering queer joy and talent, to co-curate Late Night programming, add new queer-themed offerings, and host a designated Pride Night on the festival's first Saturday at the Cabaret Stage in the Know Underground bar. Expect drag hosts, a queer DJ for Fringe-a-oke, and queer talent woven into Late Night staples. Prism Cincinnati will help reach LGBTQIA+ organizations and audiences. Programming runs June 4–19, 2027, and every performing group will be paid rather than relying on tips.

LM-Creative
Our Friend Sandy LGBTQIA+ Community Events

"Our Friend Sandy" is a feature documentary by Cincinnati filmmaker Louie Meisner, produced with Emmy Award winner Rachel Lyon, Haley Nunley, and David Meisner. The film examines the 1986 murder of Harold "Sandy" Cohen, a gay, Jewish public servant who disappeared from his Covington, Kentucky home on July 4. His body was found six days later by David Meisner, Sandy's close friend and the filmmaker's father. Although his killers were convicted, the trial was marked by anti-gay bias that sensationalized Sandy's sexuality and tarnished his legacy. Forty years later, the Meisners return to reclaim Sandy's story through the voices of those who searched for him and brought him home. From March through August 2027, eight screenings and panel discussions across Greater Cincinnati will bring LGBTQIA+ elders who lived through 1986 together with younger generations to honor Sandy, celebrate queer resilience, and preserve an overlooked chapter of local history.

Queen City Freedom Band
Queen City Freedom Band 2026-27 Season Sponsor

The Queen City Freedom Band, made up entirely of volunteer LGBTQ+ musicians, will present a free concert series open to the public during its 2026–27 season. The season opens November 7, 2026, at Christ Church Cathedral, where nearly 80 musicians will perform classic wind band repertoire for an audience of up to 400. The concert will be professionally recorded so the band can apply to perform for statewide and regional audiences such as the Ohio Music Educators Association and the Midwest Band Clinic. The second program, "Hope Springs Eternal," is a collaboration with Cincinnati Men's Chorus celebrating the resilience of queer people everywhere, and the season closes with a Pride-themed concert. As Artistic Director Dr. Jon Noworyta puts it, the band's concerts give voice to communities that have been targeted, and in doing so, they create visible, welcoming space for queer expression across the region.

Revolution Dance Theatre
Queerly the Culture: A Celebration of Us

"Queerly the Culture: A Celebration of Us" is a three-part arts and dining series at 3604, Revolution Dance Theatre's creative campus in Evanston. Each evening explores how LGBTQIA+ people see themselves, tell their stories, and make themselves heard through a different art form, paired with food and facilitated community conversation. SCREEN uses RDT's films, including Unspoken, shOUT, and The House That Joy Built, shown on 3604's LED wall, to spark conversation about representation and identity. STAGE features Cincinnati actor and theater artist Phillip Latham in an intimate evening about the stories we tell and the characters we inhabit. SOUND features Cincinnati artist Siri Imani exploring music as a vehicle for identity, resistance, joy, and belonging. Taking place outside of the traditional Pride season, from February through April 2027, the series makes queer art not an add-on to the evening, but the reason everyone comes together.

SingOUT Cincy
SingOUT Cincy Festival Chorus – Fifth Anniversary

SingOUT Cincy hosts Cincinnati's only mixed-voice, LGBTQIA+ choral ensembles. Each June, its Festival Chorus brings together an intergenerational, audition-free and cost-free choir of queer-identifying singers and allies, from rising 9th graders with no upper age limit, for four rehearsals and a performance open to all. To celebrate the Festival Chorus's fifth anniversary in 2027, SingOUT Cincy is commissioning LGBTQIA+ composer Sherry Blevins to write an original choral work about the LGBTQIA+ experience in Greater Cincinnati. Blevins will gather the thoughts, joys, and struggles of local community members in late 2026 and use their own words as lyrics. The piece will premiere in June 2027, and Blevins will work with the singers on her creative process. Once published, the work will carry the words of Cincinnati's LGBTQIA+ community to choirs around the world.

Sorg Opera Revitalization Group
Come As You Are: Pride at the Sorg

"Come As You Are: Pride at the Sorg" is a summer arts series at the historic Sorg Opera House in downtown Middletown, beginning during Pride Month in June 2027 and continuing through August. The series opens with an LGBTQIA+-themed stage production, which may be a play, musical, staged reading, or concert, followed by up to two films or documentaries later in the summer. Artist introductions, talkbacks, and facilitated conversations will give audiences a chance to engage with the stories beyond the stage and screen. Through a complementary Community Stories Project, LGBTQIA+ artists will lead local residents in creating short reflections, monologues, poems, or recorded stories about identity, family, joy, and belonging, with selected pieces shared publicly.

Tickets will remain affordable, with complimentary tickets distributed through community partners, bringing affirming arts experiences closer to home for LGBTQIA+ residents of Butler County.

The Ghostlight Stage Company
72 Hour Arts Festival: Illumination: Finding Authentic Expression in a World Afraid to Stand Out

The 72-Hour Arts Festival, "Illumination: Finding Authentic Expression in a World Afraid to Stand Out," takes place March 4–7, 2027, at the Carnegie Center of Columbia Tusculum. In its second year, the festival brings about 33 artists together, with a goal of at least 80% identifying as LGBTQIA+, to create an entirely new body of work in just 72 hours. Working in small groups of visual and performing artists, they create in four-hour blocks, each piece building on what came before. On Saturday evening, Art Prom invites the community to dance, enjoy live performances and a DJ, and add their own contributions to the artwork, which become a permanent part of the finished pieces. On Sunday, an open gallery showcases the results with performances throughout the afternoon and a documentary of the creation process. The festival celebrates LGBTQIA+ joy and the courage to be seen, any time of year.