



**FY27 Operating Support
Grant Guidelines
for Small Organizations**

Deadline: April 7, 2026

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Introduction

As Fairfax County's designated local arts agency, ArtsFairfax invests in and amplifies the arts for all in Fairfax County. Through partnerships with arts organizations, individual artists, and other cultural and community groups, we support programs and activities that inspire, nurture, and reflect the diverse populations, voices, and traditions of Fairfax County.

Purpose

ArtsFairfax's Operating Support Grants advance the arts in Fairfax County by helping the county's arts organizations maintain and develop their programs, services, and facilities. ArtsFairfax embraces the county's One Fairfax racial and social equity policy. Arts organizations that receive ArtsFairfax grants must intentionally examine their operations, programs, and services to ensure that equity, diversity, access, and inclusion are taken into consideration with decision-making, development, and implementation.

ArtsFairfax dedicates the largest portion of county-allocated funds toward Operating Support Grants as a means to help maintain the stability of local arts organizations as well as generate recognition for a broad spectrum of cultural organizations.

Goals of the Operating Support Grant

Through these grants, ArtsFairfax seeks to:

1. Encourage wide participation in the arts by expanding exposure to and incorporating Fairfax County's diverse voices and traditions in cultural programming so that it is available to residents of Fairfax County.
2. Promote opportunities for arts organizations of all disciplines to create, present, and celebrate their artistic endeavors.
3. Provide financial and other means of support to both established and emerging nonprofit arts organizations.
4. Be a catalyst for increased resiliency, transformation, and expanded resources to support arts organizations through public and private funding.

Organizational Eligibility

All applicants must meet the following criteria to apply for an Operating Support Grant for Small Organizations. Staff reviews all grant applications for eligibility prior to the panel review process.

An organization is eligible to apply for these grants if:

1. It has as a core mission the creation, exhibition, presentation, production, or performance of and/or education in an arts discipline, and it operates as a stand-alone nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization with current or pending status.
2. It has regular activity in a minimum of four different months or 120 days in the year.
3. It presents at least 51% of public arts activities within the geographical boundaries of Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, or the City of Falls Church.
4. It has an address of record within the geographical boundaries of Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, or the City of Falls Church and satisfies ONE of the following three criteria for at least one year:
 - a) Meet, rehearse, exhibit, and operate within the geographical boundary of Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, or the City of Falls Church.
 - b) 51% of its board members work or reside in Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, or the City of Falls Church.
 - c) 51% of attendees at performances, exhibits, events, and activities reside in Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, or the City of Falls Church as evidenced through acceptable statistical data, including but not limited to ticket analysis, subscription data, box office surveys, and audience surveys.
5. Additional eligibility requirements
 - a) An organization must be in compliance with all local, state, and federal laws.
 - b) If an organization does not hold 501(c)(3) status in its own right, they may have a fiscal sponsor that holds 501(c)(3) status. The fiscal sponsor must manage all grant funds and ensure compliance with the terms of the grant if an award is made.
 - c) An organization must have independently prepared financial statements, such as an audit or a treasurer's report (audit required for organizations with two consecutive years of income of \$1,000,000 and above).
 - d) The applicant must have submitted all required final reports for any grants received from ArtsFairfax during the previous fiscal year.
 - e) The applicant must maintain an Arts Directory profile and list activities on the Events Calendar on the ArtsFairfax website.
 - f) The applicant must have expenses over \$5,000 and under \$100,000 from the most recently completed fiscal year. (Organizations with budgets over \$100,000 apply using the unique guidelines and application form for Medium and Large Organizations.)

The following are not eligible organizations:

- a) Arts divisions and organizations with an arts program within a larger nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization are not eligible for Operating Support. However, they may apply for Project Support and Ticket & Participation Subsidy Grants.
- b) Organizations that receive line-item funding from Fairfax County or the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- c) Departments of George Mason University and nonprofit organizations and foundations that support county agencies.

Grant Restrictions**All Operating Support Grants must:**

- a) Support activities, programs, or projects occurring within Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, or the City of Falls Church.
- b) Have qualified artistic or scholarly, administrative, and management leadership (either professional or volunteer) capable of completing any grant-supported activities, programs, or projects.
- c) Occur within the dates of July 1, 2026 and June 30, 2027.

Operating Support Grant funds cannot be used for:

- a) Fundraising activities, such as capital campaigns or endowment campaigns;
- b) Construction or renovation projects;
- c) Political advocacy costs;
- d) Activities that are not open to the general public;
- e) Debt retirement;
- f) Pre-grant costs;
- g) Proselytizing and faith-based activities; or
- h) Re-granting.

Budget Levels

Organizations fall within one of five budget levels within the Operating Support Grant.* Operating Support Grants for Small Organizations are for budgets between \$5,000 and \$100,000 (Levels 1 and 2). Organizations with budgets over \$100,000 must apply with the guidelines and application for Medium and Large Organizations. Organizations may only submit one Operating Support Grant application per grant period. Applicants using a fiscal sponsor must contact ArtsFairfax grant staff for additional instructions and should use the applicant organization's budget, not the fiscal sponsor's budget in determining which form to use.

For the Operating Support Grant, your budget size is determined by the "Total Expenses" from your most recently completed fiscal year. Do not include in-kind expenses in the budget level calculation.

Level 1 \$5,000-\$50,000
Level 2 \$50,000-\$100,000
Level 3 \$100,000-\$250,000*
Level 4 \$250,000-\$500,000*
Level 5 over \$500,000*

*Level 3 (\$100,000-\$250,000), Level 4 (\$250,000-\$500,000), and Level 5 (over \$500,000) organizations refer to guidelines and application for Medium and Large Organizations.

Pass-through money—money that is collected by the organization and then immediately dispersed—should not appear in an organization’s budget as income. If the organization collects a portion or percentage of that money, then only that portion can be included as income.

Examples of pass-through money include:

- Funds collected by an organization that sells art on behalf of an artist and then distributes that money to the individual artist.
- Organizations that collect costume fees from individual participants, and then immediately purchase costumes for individual participants.
- Money that is collected from individuals for travel purposes, which is then spent on travel.
- Some monies spent for fundraising purposes are considered pass-through money. If an organization sells an item for fundraising purposes (for example, wreaths or ornaments), the purchase cost and sales proceeds for those fundraising items cannot be included in the organization’s income and expenses. Only the profits from the fundraiser should be included in the income category.

Review Process

Following the grant application deadline, ArtsFairfax staff determines whether an applicant is eligible and whether an application is complete. Staff may contact applicants for additional information needed to determine eligibility. If an applicant is determined to be ineligible, the application will be rejected without evaluation. Also, incomplete applications are subject to rejection without evaluation. If an application is rejected, the applicant will be notified by email.

All eligible and complete applications are evaluated by panel review. Review panels are comprised of approximately four to six professionals who have no conflicts of interest. They review and evaluate each eligible application on its own merits. ArtsFairfax selects panel members for their diverse backgrounds, expertise in a particular arts discipline, knowledge of grant practice, and/or knowledge of the community.

ArtsFairfax will notify applicants of the schedule for the panel meeting. Panel meetings will be livestreamed and open for observation by applicants. Staff will provide applicants with notes summarizing the panel discussion and comments.

The ArtsFairfax Board of Directors makes the final funding decisions based on the evaluations by the panels, available funds, and the overall goals of the Operating Support Grant and of ArtsFairfax.

Evaluation Criteria

Panelists will evaluate each grant request based on their self-awareness and intentionality in addressing the following five evaluation criteria:

- 1. Organization Profile** *(History, Mission, Values, Vision, Goals, Relevance)*
 - a) Does the applicant provide clear, specific, and thorough evidence of vision, mission, goals, and evolution over time?
 - b) Does the applicant use demographic data to describe their service area, leadership, and audience/participants as well as how the community informs their identity, mission, and programs?
- 2. Programs and Services** *(Ability to create quality, mission-driven work that engages and inspires its community, including aesthetic attributes of risk-taking, resourcefulness, sensory experiences, sustained resonance, impact, and value)*
 - a) Do the programs and services effectively fulfill the applicant's mission and goals?
 - b) Does the applicant offer public art activities that reflect the diversity of the population of Fairfax County?
- 3. Community Engagement** *(An organization's ability to meaningfully engage with its community to achieve its mission)*
 - a) Are programs and engagement activities accessible for all residents of Fairfax County, especially underserved populations (includes, but is not limited to, populations underserved because of geographic location, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, race or ethnicity, ability, or age), and those in underserved areas?
 - b) Is there evidence of effective marketing of the organization's programs?
- 4. Organizational Effectiveness** *(Ability to successfully manage resources)*
 - a) Is the organization's management (staff, artistic leadership, board, volunteers, partners) successful in carrying out the mission, goals, and/or strategic plan?
- 5. Financials**
 - a) Is the applicant financially stable?
 - b) Does the applicant utilize sound financial controls and reporting procedures?
 - c) Does the applicant maintain a diversity of funding sources, including earned and contributed income?
 - d) Does the applicant employ fundraising strategies appropriate for the size of the organization and the community served to ensure sustainability?

NOTE: Each of the five evaluation criteria is equally weighted in the review process.

Terms and Conditions of the Grant

Grant Recipients must agree to comply with the following terms and conditions of the Operation Support Grant.

Grant Period

The grant period supports activities taking place between July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027.

Organizational Eligibility

Grant recipients must continue to meet all eligibility requirements during the grant period. Grant recipients are required to notify ArtsFairfax staff in writing of any major financial, leadership, or programmatic changes to their organization.

Grant recipients must keep their tax-exempt status as a recognized Section 501(c)(3) and Section 509(a) organization current throughout the grant period and must comply with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations that govern the use of funds from private foundations to the Grantee organization. This includes but is not limited to the prohibition against activities described in Section 4945(d) of the IRS Code and limiting the use of the grant funds to the appropriate taxable purposes as described in IRS Code section 170(c)(2)(b).

Grant Amount

Small Organization Operating Support Grants range from \$1,000 to \$15,000. Applicants can request no more than 25 percent of their actual expenses, with a maximum request of \$15,000. Requests should reflect the expenses included in the applicant's financials for the most recently completed fiscal year. Based on available funds and panel scores, ArtsFairfax may award an applicant with an amount that is less than requested.

Addendum

If an applicant experiences substantive changes in the organization's programming, staffing, and funding after the application has been submitted but at least one week before the panel review, then the applicant must submit an addendum that explains these accomplishments and/or challenges and how they impact their application. All applicants will be sent a link to the online form through Submittable.

Use of Funds

Operating Support Grants may be used for a broad range of activities. Grant funds may not be used for fundraising activities, such as capital campaigns or endowment campaigns, construction or renovation projects, political advocacy costs, activities that are not open to the general public, debt retirement, pre-grant costs, faith-based activities, or re-granting. All listed expenses must be incurred during the grant period.

Required Acknowledgement of ArtsFairfax Funding

ArtsFairfax Grantees are required to acknowledge funding throughout the grant period. To raise the visibility of your organization as well as that of the arts and nonprofit cultural organizations in Fairfax County, ArtsFairfax requires the following:

1. Credit ArtsFairfax as a donor on your website and all printed materials through the use of the ArtsFairfax logo and the statement, “[Organization Name] is funded in part by ArtsFairfax.”
2. Follow the [Funding Acknowledgement](#) instructions and send samples of materials that are distributed to the public to ArtsFairfax.
3. Acknowledge ArtsFairfax funding on at least one social media platform—tag @artsfairfax on their social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram) and follow ArtsFairfax and use #ArtsFairfax. Refer to the [Funding Acknowledgement](#) for sample posts and usable artwork.

Required Arts Directory Profile and Events Calendar Listings

Grantees are required to create an Arts Directory profile on the [ArtsFairfax website](#). Grantees are required to list their programs and events on the Events Calendar throughout the grant period.

Announcement of Award

ArtsFairfax will not release information about the status of an application until all applications have been reviewed and all award decision-making has concluded. For the current grant year (FY27), ArtsFairfax will notify applicants of final decisions in August 2026.

Payment and Reporting Procedures

Grant recipients will receive 70 percent of the award amount at the time of the grant announcement. Grantees are required to submit a final report at the end of the grant period (due August 1, 2027). Upon approval of the final report, ArtsFairfax will disburse the remaining 30 percent of the award amount to the grant recipient. Grantees must submit their final report via Submittable and include copies of all materials distributed to the public, such as catalogues, programs, brochures, flyers, press releases, and other publicity materials. The materials may be scanned and attached to the final report or sent to ArtsFairfax before the end of the grant period.

Record Keeping

Grantees shall maintain an accurate record of the grant received and all expenses incurred under this grant and retain such books and records for at least four years after completion of the grant period.

Cancellation

ArtsFairfax reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to discontinue funding if it is not satisfied with the progress of the Grantee or the content of any required written report. In the event of discontinuation, any unexpended funds shall immediately be returned to ArtsFairfax, except where ArtsFairfax has agreed in writing to an alternative use of the unused funds.

Required Participation in Research

During the grant period, ArtsFairfax may request that Grantees participate in local, regional, or national arts studies. The studies may be related to, but are not limited to: audience spending, organizational management, or facility usage and planning. Grantees are required to assist ArtsFairfax in evaluating the impact of funding by contributing to these studies, if requested.

Advocacy Requirements

Grantees are required to send acknowledgement letters to both the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors and the Supervisor for your organization's magisterial district (if applicable) to thank them for appropriating the grant funds. The letters should provide information about how the grant funds will be used to support your organization and its community impact. Grantees should also invite their District Supervisor to attend funded programs.

Appeals Process

Unless there are grounds for an appeal, all funding decisions of ArtsFairfax are final.

ArtsFairfax funding decisions may be appealed only upon the following grounds:

- The applicant's grant application was denied based on criteria other than those set forth in the applicable guidelines, where the application of such improper criteria was open and obvious and there was also no legitimate basis for denial under the applicable guidelines.
- The applicant's grant application was denied based on the grant panel's failure to apply the applicable guidelines, where such failure is open and obvious and not merely a subjective evaluation of the merits of the application.
- The applicant's grant application was denied based on the grant panel's failure to consider relevant evidence presented in support of the grant application, where such failure was both open and obvious and not merely the result of the applicant's failure to properly identify or present such evidence.
- The applicant's grant application was denied as the direct result of an undisclosed conflict of interest between the applicant and a member of the grant panel, where, but for such conflict, the applicant's grant application would not have been denied.

Other than the grounds listed above, there are no other grounds for an appeal, including, but not limited to, general dissatisfaction with the process, dissatisfaction with the amount awarded, dissatisfaction with the qualifications of the members of the grant panel,

disagreement with an opinion of a member of the grant panel, or the applicant's desire to submit additional evidence.

To file an appeal, an applicant must submit a written appeal request directly to ArtsFairfax. Such an appeal must be received by ArtsFairfax within 30 calendar days of the date of the applicant's notification letter from ArtsFairfax describing the funding decision that is being appealed. An appeal must state the grounds for the appeal and provide clear and convincing evidence in support of such grounds. No evidence or supporting materials which could have been provided as part of the applicant's original grant application will be considered.

All appeal requests will be reviewed by the Grants Committee of ArtsFairfax's Board of Directors. Appeals will be reviewed within 60 calendar days from the date the written appeal request was received by ArtsFairfax. If the Grants Committee determines that there are grounds for an appeal, the Grants Committee will re-evaluate the application. If the Grants Committee determines that there are no grounds for an appeal, then the original decision of the grant panel shall become final without further recourse or reconsideration. All decisions of the Grants Committee regarding appeal requests are final without further recourse or reconsideration.

Submitting Your Application

All Operating Support Grant applications must be submitted via the online application system no later than **April 7, 2026 at 7:00 PM ET**. Late applications will not be accepted. Hard copies of Work Samples or Supplemental Materials will not be accepted.

Uploads

Required Documents

1. Organization Profile for Grant Applicants (PDF)
2. IRS Letter of Determination for your organization and/or your parent organization.
3. Most recent IRS Form 990 submission (do not include schedules).
4. VA Form 102/100
5. List of current board members that includes profession, work address, and place of residence for each member. Please highlight members who work or live in Fairfax County.
6. Treasurer's Report or Audit for the most recently completed fiscal year. An audit is required if the applicant's income exceeds \$1,000,000 for the two previous consecutive fiscal years.
7. Brief biographies (one paragraph each) of board officers and staff members
8. Work Samples and Supplemental Materials

Work Samples:

Applicants are required to submit three samples of their work, such as performances, lectures, lesson plans, exhibition installation shots, and publications. The samples should reflect the best quality work of the organization and technical quality, i.e., good sound and video presentation. The panel's judgment of artistic merit will be based upon the quality of the work submitted.

Submit **three** recent examples of original work with the following considerations:

- Samples may be excerpts or complete works.
- Work produced in the last two years is preferable.
- Samples may be uploaded to this application or hosted publicly online. **Please ensure links are live and samples can be viewed without an email, account, or subscription.**
- Panelists will view a combined maximum of 5 total minutes of recordings/videos per application. Specify start and end times for listening or viewing.

Supplemental Materials:

Submit **one to three** Supplemental Materials that describe recent activities (within the last two years).

- Supplemental Materials may include but are not limited to programs, brochures, catalogs, posters, newsletters, other promotional materials, press reviews or articles, testimonials, letters of support, or awards. Video/Audio recordings are acceptable but should not be additional work samples.

- Samples should support and illustrate how your programs and services engage diverse County residents, organizational effectiveness in terms of planning and evaluation, and critical response to performances/exhibitions/activities.
- Panelists will review a combined maximum of 5 total minutes of recordings/videos per application. Specify start and end times for listening or viewing.

Grant Preparation Assistance

ArtsFairfax will conduct free information sessions to instruct prospective applicants on how to complete an Operating Support Grant application on January 27 and 28, 2026 via Zoom. To register, visit the ArtsFairfax website ([Operating Support Grants](#)). ArtsFairfax strongly encourages attendance/viewing by all potential applicants. An applicant's attendance at the session will not impact the evaluation of the application.

The Operating Support Grant information session recording, including presentation materials, will be posted on the ArtsFairfax website. **If you have questions, please contact Nicole Powlison, Grants Manager by email at npowlison@artsfairfax.org or by telephone at 571-395-4618.**

Grant Writing Tips

- Write clearly and concisely. Keep responses within the suggested word count limits.
- Do not use jargon.
- Spell out acronyms with first reference.
- Do not assume the people who are reading your application know your organization and programs. When a reader has finished reviewing your grant application, they should be able to understand your organization, mission, and programs. Clarify goals by including specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound details.
- Check narrative and other text for grammar and spelling errors.
- Do not repeat information in different narrative sections.
- Keep in mind that ArtsFairfax staff does not participate in panel discussions. The application must stand on its own merits.
- Verify that all contact information in your application is correct, including email addresses and phone numbers.
- Financial information referred to in the narrative should match the numbers on the Financials Table.
- Use the resources on the ArtsFairfax website, including the Word version of the application, Excel versions of the tables, financial webinar recording, and highly rated responses from previous applications.
- Save your application often. Log out of your account when you are not actively working on the application.