



Art Project Grants: Guidelines for Fiscal Year 2026

Effective July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026

Program Intent

The Art Project grant program provides nonprofit organizations with funding to stimulate and encourage the creation, performance, and appreciation of the arts in the region. Art Projects may include, but are not limited to:

- Music, dance, and theater productions by community groups
- Productions by professionals brought into the community
- Visual art exhibits
- Readings by authors
- Arts classes for community members of all ages (excluding projects in schools)
- Public art
- Arts festivals

In addition to project expenses, requests may include prorated operating expenses during the period of the grant. For example, an arts council's request for their yearly exhibit series may include a proportionate amount of rent, utilities, staff time, etc. No more than 40% of the requested grant funds can go towards general operating expenses. Organizations that are eligible to receive an Operating Support grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board (arts organizations with average annual expenses of \$174,000 or more) cannot include operating expenses in their requests. Non-arts organizations (those whose mission is not focused primarily on the arts) cannot include operating expenses in their requests.

(If your organization has been receiving SMAC operating support in 2024-2025, the project you are applying for must begin January 1, 2026 or later in order to include operating expenses in your request.)

Grant Award Amounts

Art Project grants are available for up to **\$10,000**.

The Art Project grant program is dependent on funding from the voters of Minnesota, thanks to MN State legislative appropriations from the arts and cultural heritage fund and the State’s general fund.

Organizations may be awarded a maximum of \$20,000 in SW MN Arts Council grants per fiscal year.

SW MN Arts Council Contact Info

Contact the SW MN Arts Council (SMAC) office with questions, for a draft review, or if you need accommodations while applying for this grant.

Email: info@swmnarts.org. Phone: 507-537-1471 or 800-622-5284. [Website](http://www.swmnarts.org) (www.swmnarts.org)

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Important Dates and Deadlines

Project Start and End Dates

The start date for a SMAC grant is defined as the point at which the project is set in motion (e.g. auditions, rehearsals, advertising and public notification, payment of fees, ordering and/or paying for supplies or printed material, etc.). No funds can be expended prior to the project start date. Funds spent before the project start date, such as a deposit on a contract, cannot be included in the grant project budget. No advertising by the applicant organization can take place before the start date, whether or not it will be paid for through the grant. However, posting basic information such as event dates is allowed.

Projects must be concluded no later than June 30, 2027.

Application Deadlines

Applications must be submitted by 4:00 pm on the deadline date.

ART PROJECT ROUND 1 DATES

- Request application draft review by July 9, 2025
- **Application Deadline: July 23, 2025**
- Panel Review: August 16, 2025
- Board Action: August 26, 2025
- Earliest Project Start Date: September 1, 2025

ART PROJECT ROUND 2 DATES

- Request application draft review by October 29, 2025
- **Application Deadline: November 12, 2025**
- Panel Review: December 6, 2025
- Board Action: December 16, 2025
- Earliest Project Start Date: January 1, 2026

ART PROJECT ROUND 3 DATES

- Request application draft review by March 4, 2026
- **Application Deadline: March 18, 2026**
- Panel Review: April 11, 2026
- Board Action: April 28, 2026
- Earliest Project Start Date: May 1, 2026

Who Can Apply

Geographic Area

Applicant organizations must be located within the SW MN Arts Council service region, consisting of eighteen counties (Big Stone, Chippewa, Cottonwood, Jackson, Kandiyohi, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, McLeod, Meeker, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, Renville, Rock, Swift, and Yellow Medicine counties) and two tribal nations (Pezihutazizi/Upper Sioux Community, Cansayapi/Lower Sioux Community). We acknowledge that the Southwest Minnesota region occupies the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of the Dakota people.

Types of Organizations

The Art Project grant program is open to nonprofit organizations as described in Section 501 (c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code with Articles of Incorporation on file with the State of Minnesota or official units of city, county, or state government of the State of Minnesota. Public schools may apply if they have a community project. (Otherwise, public schools should see the Arts in the Schools grants.)

Fiscal Sponsors

If your organization is not yet a registered nonprofit, you may apply using a fiscal sponsor. Some examples of organizations in this situation include one that has just recently been formed, with only a few board members

and a couple of activities completed so far. Or, an organization may have been in existence for years, but the scale of its activities and capacity of its volunteers haven't warranted filing for nonprofit status.

The fiscal sponsor organization must meet the requirements listed above under the types of eligible organizations. A signed agreement outlining the relationship between the applicant and the fiscal sponsor must be submitted with the application. A fiscal sponsor, if used, must sign the application and, if funded, sign the grant contract. The fiscal sponsor is legally responsible for the proper management of grant funds and for the completion of the project.

Ineligible Activities

The following activities and organizations are NOT eligible for these grants:

- Applications that do not have an art focus.
- Activities of a for-profit project, organization, or business.
- Applications that are primarily for educational projects within a school system.
- Payment of costs for projects that will take place outside the geographic boundaries of the state of Minnesota or costs related to travel outside the state of Minnesota, including performer, artist, or consultant travel.
- Costs for relocating the applicant's legal address/residence outside the state of Minnesota.
- Projects for which artists are required to pay excessive entry or exhibition fees in order to exhibit or perform in the project for which funds are sought.
- Requests for new building construction, purchase of real estate, or endowment funds.
- Fundraising events. Grant funding should allow projects to break even, not make a profit.
- Activities which are not open to the public. Projects must be inclusive and accessible in their process and/or final product, considering economic, geographic, and physical accessibility, as well as the cultural, racial, ethnic, age, and gender make-up of the community.
- Activities essentially for the religious socialization of the participants or audience.
- Activities that attempt to influence any state or federal legislation or appropriation.
- Applications submitted for the purpose of regranting, lobbying, or scholarships.
- Projects that don't provide timely promotion of the project throughout the SMAC region with use of the proper funding credit line and logo.
- Requests for funds to account for deficits in projects or programs begun prior to the project earliest start date. In other words, payment of debts incurred before the grant activities begin or outside of the grant project scope of activity.
- Applications in which funds are to be used to match other SMAC grant projects.
- Budgets including prorated operating costs if the organization is already receiving SMAC operating support for the same time period.
- Budgets exceeding 90% of the total project's cash expenses in combined support from the Minnesota State Arts Board and SW MN Arts Council.
- Applicants with past due SMAC final (or other) reports.

Any state agency, public entity, or nonprofit organization that receives a legislative appropriation or legislatively mandated grant (allocated directly to the organization by the state legislature) from the State of Minnesota's arts and cultural heritage fund for FY 2026 is NOT eligible to receive a FY 2026 Art Project grant.

How to Apply

Application Assistance

Before beginning an application, applicants are encouraged to contact SW MN Arts Council to determine if this grant program is right for their project and that their activities and expenses are eligible. Other forms of assistance include grant support open office hours, info sessions and webinars, and conversations with staff. Visit the SMAC website for more details.

To request a review of your application prior to submission, contact staff at least two weeks prior to the deadline. A staff member will review the application, as time permits, for eligibility and completed requirements. Staff review does not imply that a grant request will be funded. Project quality, content, budget, and accuracy of an application are solely the responsibility of the applicant.

Accommodations

Applicants may fill out and submit their application in several ways:

- through our online grant system, accessed on our [website](http://www.swmnarts.org) (www.swmnarts.org)
- in a Word document, submitted by email along with required attachments to info@swmnarts.org. The document can be found on the webpage for this grant program.
- on paper with required attachments, submitted by mail (PO Box 55, Marshall, MN 56258) or contact us to arrange drop-off. Print out a questions document from our website or contact us to request a paper copy.

Contact the SW MN Arts Council office if other accommodations such as audio or video responses are needed.

Application Questions

In the application, you will describe your proposed project and answer questions related to the following criteria:

- the project's artistic quality and merit
- the impact on the participants and audience
- your efforts toward reaching the underserved through the project
- your organization's ability to accomplish the project

You will also be asked to provide some demographic and financial data, along with contacts for your organization (and fiscal sponsor organization, if applicable).

Materials Needed

You will need to provide the following materials:

- Artist resumes or bios
- Samples of artists' work (attachments or links)
- Evaluation tool (optional)
- Project budget
- List of board members
- Fiscal sponsor agreement, if applicable

Organization applicants must provide their EIN, which is used to prove their (or fiscal sponsor's) 501(c)(3) status.

Grant Review Process

Eligibility Check

SMAC staff reviews submitted applications for eligibility and completeness. If there are missing requirements or eligibility concerns, the applicant will have 48 hours to make corrections or provide additional information. Only eligible, complete applications will be forwarded to the grant review panel.

Grant Review Panel

A grant panel reviews all eligible applications based on the criteria for the grant program, outlined below. Panelists are chosen for their knowledge and expertise in the arts and nonprofit management and their ability to interpret the guidelines and review criteria equitably and fairly for each application. Geographic representation, ethnicity, and gender are also considered to ensure the panel reflects the diversity of the region. Board and panel members with a conflict of interest in regard to a specific applicant or project declare such and abstain from comment and scoring of that application.

Scoring Criteria

The review panel will use the following criteria to score each application:

- *Artistic Quality and Merit* (50% of total score)
 - The project's activities have high artistic merit, with the potential for participants and audience to develop knowledge, skills, and understanding of the arts.
 - The artist resumes or bios show an appropriate level of experience for the project, and work samples provide evidence of high artistic quality, including technical skill and artistic vision/voice.
- *Reaching the Underserved/Underrepresented* (14% of total score)
 - The applicant is able to identify the underserved and/or underrepresented groups in their community.
 - The applicant is attempting to reach one or more of the underserved/underrepresented groups to enable them to participate in the project.
 - The applicant is making an effort in regard to ADA accessibility.
- *Impact on Participants and Audience* (22% of total score)

- The applicant demonstrates the importance of the project to their community. The project meets the artistic needs of the community, organization, and involved artists.
- The project shows growth for the organization and/or for the community, building on the organization's mission and previous programming.
- The applicant has identified specific proposed changes to take place as a result of their project and a plan to measure or prove whether those changes have taken place. Providing a sample evaluation tool is optional.
- *Ability to Accomplish the Project* (14% of total score)
 - Any key non-artist personnel have experience suited to the proposed project.
 - The application illustrates a clear plan with reasonable timelines.
 - The marketing and publicity plans are appropriate for the project, organization, and community.
 - There is community involvement and support for the project, including evidence of collaborations, financial support, or in-kind contributions.
 - The budget is clearly itemized, responsible, and meets the needs of the project.
 - The information provided about the organization's role and board demonstrates ability to accomplish the project.

Observation

The date and time of the panel meeting will be posted on the [SMAC calendar](http://www.swmnarts.org/calendar/) (www.swmnarts.org/calendar/). SMAC operates in the spirit of the State of Minnesota open meeting guidelines, so applicants are allowed to observe grant review panel proceedings. They must notify SMAC staff at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting time if they plan to observe. Applicants will then receive a link if the meeting is virtual. Applicants cannot interact with the panel. If attending virtually, applicants must turn off their microphones and cameras.

Grant applicants may not discuss their application with SMAC panelists or board members following the grant deadline, until after the board has acted on the application. Communication regarding an application with SMAC board or panelists during this time will result in the application being ineligible for funding consideration.

Priority Points

After panel scoring, applicants will be awarded three (3) additional percentage point for each of the following conditions they meet, to address SMAC's funding priorities:

- First time SMAC applicant
- Applicant organization led by or primarily serving people from an underserved/underrepresented community
 - People who are Black, Indigenous, or other people of color (BIPOC). In the SW MN region, this could include those who are Black, Dakota/Lakota, Hispanic/Latinx, Hmong, Karen, Micronesian, Somali, etc.
 - People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, or two-spirit (LBGTQIA2S+).

- People with disabilities
- Applicant from a county that has received three or fewer SMAC grants in the last fiscal year

A maximum of nine (9) percentage points can be added to the applicant's score.

SMAC Board

The recommendations of the panel are submitted to the SMAC Board of Directors for final approval. Grants are awarded in ranked order to applications meeting the criteria, to the extent of funds available.

Notification

All applicants will receive email notification of acceptance or denial after the SMAC Board's final funding decisions. If an application receives partial funding, a revised project description and budget must be submitted within 30 days of notification.

Appeals Policy

Any applicant who can show cause that established grant review procedures were not followed, or can show that the policies of the program are not equitable to all applicants, may file an appeal in writing within ten (10) days of notification of the Board's decision on that application. There is no right of appeal to dispute decisions in regard to each program's respective criteria. Contact SMAC at 800-622-5284 or info@swmnarts.org for more details about the appeal process.

Grant Contract and Distribution of Funds

All awarded grantees must sign an electronic contractual agreement within 30 days of notification. Grantees who are individuals must provide a completed W-9 form before a grant check can be issued. Failure to provide any required documents within the prescribed time can result in the cancellation of a grant commitment. A check for 100% of the grant award will be sent to the grantee upon receipt of the signed contract and within thirty days of the project start date.

Acknowledgement of Financial Assistance

Funding for this grant program comes from the voters of Minnesota, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund and an appropriation from the MN State Legislature with money from the State's general fund.

SMAC's financial assistance must be acknowledged on all publicity and promotional materials through the credit line included in your grant contract. The grant contract will direct you to the specific credit line to use and if the Legacy Logo (shown here) should be used in promotion of the project.



A complete listing of all funding credit lines, logos, and posters is located on the SMAC website. [Grant Credit Lines and Logos](https://swmnarts.org/grant-credit-lines/) (<https://swmnarts.org/grant-credit-lines/>)

Reporting

Interim Report

You may be asked for an interim report if you have multiple outstanding grants from the SW MN Arts Council.

Final Report

A final report must be completed within 60 days after the project end date. The report form can be accessed within SMAC's online grant system. The report requires information on the actual costs of the project, participants and audiences, and project outcomes. Grant awards may be reduced if actual expenses are significantly less than projected expenses. Failure to submit a final report within 60 days of the end of the project without a prior request for an extension will result in a 20% penalty on the applicant's next application. If a final report is not submitted within a period of six months after the report deadline, SMAC's [Misuse of Funds policy and procedures](#) will be followed.