



Howard County Arts Council
2026 Individual Artist Merit & Creativity Award Program
Request for Applications and Guidelines

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The Howard County Arts Council is accepting applications for the 2026 Individual Artist Merit and Creativity (IAM Creativity) Award for the following disciplines:

- **Literary Arts:** This discipline includes, but is not limited to, original creative writing, poetry, fiction, graphic novels, screen writing, spoken word, and creative nonfiction with a strong narrative voice, such as memoir or personal essay. Critical, analytical, translations, and academic or scholarly work are not eligible.
- **Theatre:** This discipline includes, but is not limited to, dramatic and musical theatre performances, either improvised or scripted. Includes the work of actors, designers (costume, lighting, set, and sound), and directors. Also includes interdisciplinary or experimental work with drama or musical theatre as the central expressive component.

Award Period: 2026 (July 1, 2026-June 30, 2027)

Artists will apply online at: hocoarts.submittable.com

Deadline

Submit completed award applications by 11:59 p.m. (EST) on December 17, 2025.

If the deadline falls on a weekend or holiday, the deadline will be 11:59pm EST on the next business day.

Applicants who need assistance completing an application should contact HoCo Arts staff well in advance of the deadline.

If you have any questions about this program or the application, please contact Michelle Grazio, IAM Creativity Grant Administrator at iamcreativity@hocoarts.org or contact us by phone Monday – Friday from 9:30 am – 4:30 pm at 410.313.ARTS (27827).

Applicants should read through this Request for Applications and Guidelines in its entirety before applying. Submission of an application constitutes an understanding of and agreement with the conditions set forth in these guidelines.

Individual Artist Merit and Creativity Award Guidelines

I. Individual Artist Merit and Creativity Overview

The purpose of the Individual Artist Merit and Creativity (IAM Creativity) award program is to recognize the role of individual artists in Howard County's creative eco-system and strengthen the diversity and vitality of the Howard County arts community.

The IAM Creativity program provides unrestricted funds to support the creative work of Howard County artists and to recognize excellence in dance, film, folk and traditional arts, literary arts, music, theatre, and visual arts disciplines.

The goals for the IAM Creativity award program are to:

- Recognize and support the creative work of individual artists;
- Foster excellence, diversity, and vitality in the arts;
- Expand public understanding of the impact that individual artists have on our local communities and economy; and
- Acknowledge the many hours and personal resources artists dedicate to the pursuit of excellence and creativity in their artforms.

Over a four-year period, the IAM Creativity program will provide awards in seven different artistic disciplines, accepting applications for two disciplines each year. A

maximum of four (4) awards, including one (1) \$5,000 and three (3) \$1,000 awards, will be awarded in each discipline. The awards provide recipients with unrestricted funds to support their artistic practice, develop innovative ideas, and/or complete projects already underway. At the end of the award period, recipients must submit a statement describing the impact of the award.

The IAM Creativity program is generously supported through a grant from the Maryland State Arts Council.

II. Eligibility and Qualifications

Individual artists living in Howard County for at least one year prior to the application due date and remaining throughout the award period are eligible to apply. In addition, IAM Creativity award applicants must:

- Provide work samples of completed work that has been created within five (5) years of the application deadline, which demonstrate:
 - artistic merit;
 - a history of performing or producing original artwork; and
 - proficiency in their discipline.

Note: Only completed work may be submitted. Work in progress and work created outside of the 5-year limit will not be reviewed.

- Be the primary creative force behind the work. The work samples submitted must be created by the applicant, as an individual artist. If the work samples include work performed or created by an ensemble or group, the applicant must be the featured artist for at least 50% of the time.
- Submit only one application in each art discipline in the same award period.
Note: applicant cannot submit the same artwork and/or work samples for applications in two different disciplines in the same award period. To apply for more than one award in the same year/cycle, applicant must submit completely different artwork and/or work samples for each application; different excerpts from the same piece do not constitute separate work.
- Provide proof of established residence in Howard County for a minimum of twelve consecutive months prior to the application due date. Accepted forms include, but are not limited to, government-issued identification (such as a Maryland driver's license or tax returns), residential homeowner's or renter's insurance, or utility bill with applicant's name and address which establishes proof of residency for the twelve months. Post office boxes may not be used as a permanent address. *[Note: Awards will be made in two (2) payments. If selected for an award, applicant must be a current resident of Howard County at the time that award funds are awarded and must maintain Howard County residency during the entire award period, or the remaining portion of the award will be forfeited.]*

- Be at least eighteen years of age and not be enrolled in high school or an undergraduate degree, graduate degree, or certificate-granting program in an arts discipline or an arts-related subject area at the time of application. Applications will not be accepted before a degree or certification in any such program has been awarded.

III. Restrictions

Prior \$5,000 IAM Creativity recipients are not eligible to apply in the same discipline category again.

Prior \$1,000 IAM Creativity recipients:

- Are eligible to apply in the same, or any other, discipline category.
- Cannot submit work samples, or excerpts from previous work samples, used as the basis for receiving a past IAM Creativity award in any future applications in any discipline category.
- Cannot apply unless all past-due impact statements for previous HoCo Arts awards have been submitted.

Ineligible applicants:

- HoCo Arts Board and staff, and their spouses and immediate relatives.
- Organizations, collectives, sole proprietorships, LLCs, or other entities applying with an EIN number.
- Applicants seeking project-specific funding.
- Applicants who use or require fiscal agents.

Late or incomplete applications or applications that do not follow the instructions and guidelines may be deemed ineligible for review. Submission of an application constitutes an understanding of, and agreement with, the conditions set forth in this request for applications and guidelines.

HoCo Arts reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to revise, withdraw, and/or reissue this award opportunity at any time and for any reason, which includes, but is not limited to, the right to extend the deadline and timeline, reject any or all submission entries, revise and/or not award funds, and/or solicit additional or different award applications.

IV. Review Criteria

IAM Creativity awards are competitive. Artists are encouraged to apply when they have a cohesive body of work that they are prepared to present in a professional manner. The applicant must be the primary artistic force behind the work.

Applications are evaluated by an independent panel of artists and/or arts professionals with expertise and perspectives in the discipline being considered. The role of each panelist is to review and score each eligible application based on the materials submitted and the established criteria cited below:

Concept

The application and work samples demonstrate the applicant's creative and original theories, ideas, interpretations and/or perceptions. (Up to 30 points)

Cohesion

The application and work samples demonstrate a clear and cohesive body of work. (Up to 20 points).

Demonstrated Command of Form

The application and work samples demonstrate the applicant's exemplary technical capabilities within the chosen discipline. (Up to 20 points)

Impact 1

The application and work samples demonstrate the applicant's creative practice has both sustained resonance, impact or value. (Up to 15 points)

Impact 2

The application shows the potential to strengthen the diversity and vitality of Howard County's arts ecosystem. (Up to 15 points)

V. Work Samples

Work samples are critical to each application and are carefully considered during application review. Applicants should pay close attention to the content of work sample submissions and how they are labeled. The guidelines on work sample submissions depend on the discipline (see below). Applicants should adhere to these work sample instructions or risk ineligibility for consideration of an award.

Please note: This is an anonymous review process. Applicants should take reasonable steps to remove names and identifying details from their work samples.

Work samples for all disciplines:

- Work samples must have been completed within five (5) years of the application deadline. *NOTE: Work in progress and work created outside of the 5-year limit will not be reviewed.*
- If work samples include a group or ensemble, the applicant must be an equal partner and/or the featured artist for at least 50% of the time (for performance-

based work, work sample must be cued to the applicant's performance) and include descriptive information on the Work Sample list so that it is clear to the panel what the applicant's role in the work is.

The 2026 IAM Creativity program disciplines being reviewed are Literary and Theatre Arts.

Required Materials

Literary Arts:

- **Writing Samples:** Submit pdf document files of up to 10 single works or excerpts typewritten in English in Times, Helvetica, or equivalent font, no smaller than 12 point in size and formatted with at least 1" margins on all sides. The maximum total page length of all samples combined should be 20 pages. Additional pages will not be reviewed. Copies from journals or books will not be accepted.

Label each work sample using this format: "Work Sample 1" _ "Title" and so on. If non-English literary works are submitted, the applicant must also provide an English translation of each work, along with information identifying the translator, and upload as one work sample.

- **Work Sample List:** Submit a list of the writing samples and corresponding file names (see the format above) as a PDF file. For each sample include details such as: title, year of completion, and indicate if the work is fiction or nonfiction. If the work is an excerpt, briefly describe how/where the excerpt fits into the whole work. If it is collaborative describe what your role is and if any other clarification is necessary for the panel to understand what they are reading or hearing, add a **brief description** of no more than 5 descriptive lines per work sample for context. Label the PDF "Work Sample List."
- **Spoken Word Submissions:** In addition to the writing samples, submit up to 5 minutes of the applicant performing one of the written samples submitted in a mov, wmv, avi, m4a, mpg, mp4 or wav file or provide a YouTube or Vimeo link. The spoken word performance must have taken place within the past 3 years include the date and location of the performance in the work sample list description. Total files cannot exceed 400 MB. Label the video file: "Spoken Word Sample" or submit digital file with "Spoken Work Sample" written in the document and followed by the link.

NOTE: If you submit a video that is an excerpt of a longer piece, provide precise cues in the work sample list description above. Reviewers will only review 5 minutes of video; without instructions they will view the first 5 minutes of the work sample.

Theatre:

- **Video Files:** Submit up to 10 mov, wmv, avi, m4a, mpg, mp4 or wav files, or provide links to YouTube or Vimeo, of up to a TOTAL of 10 minutes of

videos of work completed within the last 5 years. Total files cannot exceed 400 MB. Label each video file using this format: "Work Sample 1"_"Title" or submit a PDF file with "Work Sample 1" written out on the document followed by the link, and so on.

- **Work Sample List:** Submit a list of uploaded and/or linked videos with corresponding file names as a PDF file using this format: "Work Sample 1"_"Title", and so on. For each Work Sample include cue points and other performance details, such as title, year of completion, duration of the total piece, playwright, director, other principal actors, dramaturge, (other than applicant), total number of actors, and special film, custom, lighting, and set design, and musical score, composer and choreography. Indicate if the work is collaborative and describe applicant's role. If any other clarification is necessary for the panel to understand what they are seeing or hearing, add a **brief description** of no more than 5 descriptive lines per work sample for context. Label the PDF "Work Sample List."

Cues: In the work sample description, provide precise cue instructions if the work sample is an excerpt of a longer piece. Reviewers will only review 10 minutes of video; without instructions they will view 10 minutes of work samples in order of submission.

- **Directors:** In addition to the video files, submit a 1-3 page written concept statement describing one of the plays submitted as a work sample as a PDF file and label it: "Concept Statement".
- **Costume, Lighting, and Set Designers:** Submit up to 3 still images and up to 3 concept designs that best showcase your work in the work samples submitted and combine them into one PDF file and label it: "Design Sample".
- **Sound Designers:** Submit a 1-3 page written concept statement describing one of the sound designs submitted as a work sample as a PDF file and label it: "Concept Statement".

During the full panel review meeting, work samples will be reviewed in the numerical order submitted.

REMINDER: Applicant's name must **NOT** appear anywhere on work samples, block out any areas on the work samples, the work sample list, and/or video files where your name appears.

VI. Review Process

Only complete applications successfully submitted online at hocoarts.submittable.com will be accepted and reviewed. Once the application deadline passes, no alterations or

additions may be made to the application, unless clarification is requested in writing by HoCo Arts staff. Applicants must meet all revision deadlines, as specified in writing, or the application will be withdrawn.

The IAM Creativity award program has a 3-step review process:

Step 1: HoCo Arts Staff Review

- Initial review of applications for compliance with eligibility and submission requirements is made by HoCo Arts staff. If staff detects issues, they may call upon applicants to clarify information, to furnish proof of eligibility, etc. Should an applicant be asked to clarify and/or revise their application, the applicant must meet all revision deadlines, as specified by staff, or the application will be withdrawn.

Step 2: Artistic Review Panel

- Each panelist reviews the applications and work samples on their own via hocoarts.submittable.com through an anonymous review process in advance of the full panel meeting.
- The full panel meets together via video conference or in a hybrid in-person-video conference configuration to discuss, score, and finalize award recipients.

Panels are strongly encouraged to score each application and recommend awards but reserve the right to decline to score and/or decline to make an award recommendation if they feel that an application, or the entire pool of applicants, does not warrant an award.

To ensure that HoCo Arts review panels are free from conflicts of interest and the appearance of such conflicts, panelists are required to disclose any current or prospective affiliations they or their immediate family members have with an actual or potential applicant. In addition, panelists are required to disclose any past or current adversarial relationships with applicants. Panelists are not permitted to participate in discussions or scoring of any applicant with whom they have an affiliation or conflict.

Members of HoCo Art's Committee on Grants and staff will be present during the full panel review to observe the process and/or answer any questions from the panel about the award process; however, they do not participate in the panel discussions.

Step 3: HoCo Arts Board Approval

- The final panel scores are reviewed by the HoCo Arts Committee on Grants and presented to the HoCo Arts Board of Directors; approval of awards rests with the HoCo Arts Board of Directors. All award decisions of the HoCo Arts Board of Directors are final.

VII. Notification and Disbursement

HoCo Arts notifies applicants regarding the results of their application and the award disbursement process via:

- (1) letter of intent to award and letter of agreement;
- (2) letter of ineligibility; or
- (3) letter of denial.

These notifications are sent via the applicant's email as it appears in

hocoarts.submittable.com.

If approved for funding, applicant must submit the signed Letter of Agreement, signed IRS W-9 Form, and any outstanding materials or past-due final reports for this, or other HCAC grants and awards programs, if applicable, before award funds are released. The address on the IRS Form W-9 must match the address in the application and the proof of residency and other award materials submitted. Post office boxes are prohibited as an address.

Award payments will be disbursed in two payments. The awardee will receive 75% of the award 2-4 weeks from the date of receipt of a fully executed Award Agreement and receipt of the W-9 and 25% upon receipt and acceptance of the Impact Statement.

VIII. Conditions of Funding, Reporting, and Cancellations

The following conditions apply:

- HoCo Arts award programs are competitive. Submission of an application, or receipt of a previous award, does not guarantee funding at any level, even if all submission criteria have been met.
- HoCo Arts reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to revise, withdraw, and/or reissue this award opportunity at any time and for any reason, which includes, but is not limited to, the right to extend the deadline and timeline, reject all submission entries, revise and/or not award funds, and/or solicit additional or different award applications.
- The number and value of awards is contingent on available funding; HoCo Arts reserves the right to increase or decrease either the amount or the number of awards granted in any given year.
- If an award is granted, any public acknowledgements or publicity, including brochures, news releases, public statements and other materials must give credit

to the Howard County Arts Council and the Maryland State Arts Council. In printed materials, Howard County Arts Council and Maryland State Arts Council must be listed and when appropriate, logos must be used. When no printed information is used or published, oral credit must still be given.

- Awards are considered taxable to the extent that is applicable by law. HoCo Arts is unable to provide tax advice, awardees should consult and follow the advice of a tax professional about tax liability regarding any Ho Co Arts award.
- HoCo Arts reserves the right to use any materials submitted as part of a funded award application for educational and promotional purposes. This includes any text, images, photographs, audio, or video submitted as part of a funded award application for limited non-commercial educational or promotional use in publications or other media produced, used, or contracted by HoCo Arts including, but not limited to, brochures, invitations, newsletters, postcards, websites, social media, etc.
- Award recipients are required to submit an Impact Statement describing the extent to which the award advanced their artistry, creative work, and/or profession throughout the award period. Impact Statements must be submitted by the published deadline; recipients will not be able to apply for another HoCo Arts award if their final report is overdue or incomplete.
- HoCo Arts reserves the right to rescind any award, and ask for award repayment, for non-compliance with HoCo Arts award policies, guidelines, terms, regulations, and/or reporting and monitoring requirements at any time. Award recipients with unmet reporting and monitoring obligations regarding any HoCo Arts award program are ineligible to receive additional or future awards from HoCo Arts.

IX. Appeal Process

HoCo Arts takes care during the awards review process to be thorough and fair. An applicant may request reconsideration of a decision on their application if the applicant can demonstrate that HoCo Arts failed to follow published request for application, guidelines, and review procedures. Dissatisfaction with the results of a review does not constitute grounds for reconsideration.

If there is a legitimate reason for reconsideration and the applicant wishes to pursue an appeal, the applicant must submit a formal letter of appeal to HoCo Art's Executive Director, in writing, within 15 business days of HoCo Art's notification to the applicant of its decision. The Committee on Grants will review the submitted appeal and make a recommendation. Based on that recommendation, the Board of Directors will make a final decision. The applicant will receive written notification of the Board's decision within 45 days of the receipt of the letter of appeal.

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact Michelle Grazio, IAM Creativity Grant Administrator at iamcreativity@hocoarts.org or contact us by phone Monday – Friday from 9:30 am – 4:30 pm at 410.313.ARTS (27827).

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