

FY 2027 Community Arts Development Grant Program - GUIDELINES

Operating Grant Funding Period: July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2027

Project Grant Funding Period: September 1, 2026 - August 31, 2027

Application Calendar

February 2026	Grant applications available online at hcac.gosmart.org
May 7, 2026	Deadline for applications. Applicants can submit up to 11:59 PM.
July 15, 2026	FY26 Final Report Due
September 2026	Earliest announcement of grant award or rejection
January 30, 2027	FY27 Interim Report Due
July 15, 2027	FY27 Final Report Due

General Information

The Howard County Arts Council (HoCo Arts) is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to serve the citizens of Howard County by fostering the arts, artists and arts organizations. HoCo Arts is governed by a board of directors who are elected to two-year terms.

To carry out its mission, HoCo Arts awards operating and special project grants to eligible organizations. HoCo Arts is committed to helping promote, improve, and strengthen the structure of community arts organizations by providing operating funds for established arts organizations and by supporting the development of small and mid-sized arts organizations through project-specific funds.

HoCo Arts is authorized by the Howard County government to administer grant programs for Howard County arts organizations, artists-in-education in Howard County schools, and key Baltimore City arts and cultural organizations. Organizations may be grouped for the purpose of specific projects, and may occupy more than one category of arts activities. HoCo Arts is available to provide technical assistance in completing grant applications. Call 410-313-2787.

HoCo Arts Responsibilities

- Develop and maintain a grant process in accordance with criteria established by the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) and set forth by Howard County Government.
- Develop procedures for submission and funding of proposals.
- Review and evaluate proposals for grants funds.
- Select recipients and award grants.

Purpose of the Grants Program

- To foster excellence, diversity, and vitality in arts offerings for Howard County residents.
- To broaden opportunities for Howard County audiences, artists and arts organizations.

- To increase the availability of arts activities in Howard County.
- To promote countywide awareness of arts resources and opportunities.

Qualifications of Applicant

- Applicant organizations must be incorporated as nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations, 501(C)(3), in good standing with both State and Federal governments.
- Applicant organizations must be in good standing with HoCo Arts.
- Applicant organizations must be soundly managed and financially accountable, and provide proof thereof. Their arts activities must be open to the general public. Arts facilities (e.g. museums, arts and/or cultural centers with public exhibits) must be regularly open and available to the general public, with or without an admission fee.
- Applicant organizations must maintain their primary office and conduct at least 50% of all business operations, programs and activities in Howard County (i.e.: 50% of rehearsals, 50% of Board and committee meetings, 50% of performances, workshops, etc.). Corporate papers, such as the 990 and Personal Property Tax forms, letterhead and program materials submitted must show primary office is located in the County.
- Each 501(c)3 organization may apply for no more than one grant through this program.
- Organizations must be governed by an independent, legally liable Board of Directors that represents its community and is acting under a mission statement and operating budget specific to the organization.
- Organizations must provide matching funds on a cash basis.
- Applicant must comply with Title VI, Section 601, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which states that no persons on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination related to the arts.
- Applicant must comply with Title IV, Section 1681, of the Education Amendments of 1972, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Section 6101, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of age or sex.
- Applicant must comply with section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 which states that no otherwise qualified person shall, solely by reason of his or her handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination related to the arts.
- Applicant organizations must hold their activities in spaces accessible to persons with disabilities. Additionally, to ensure program accessibility, *reasonable* accommodations (i.e.: sign language interpretation, assistive listening devices, large print programs, etc.) must be provided upon appropriate notification of need.
- Howard County Government agencies are ineligible to apply to HoCo Arts for grants.
- Arts & non-arts organizations that receive ongoing direct funding from the County are not eligible to receive Operating funds through HoCo Art's CAD grant program. They may be eligible to apply in the Project category, but should contact HoCo Arts prior to submitting a request in order to determine eligibility and restrictions.
- Diploma, degree, and certificate conferring schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions are not eligible to receive Operating funds through HoCo Art's CAD grant program. However, they may be eligible to apply to the CAD Project grant programs, but

should contact HoCo Arts staff prior to submitting a request in order to determine eligibility and restrictions.

- In addition to the above criteria, please be aware that use of copyright material in programs or promotional materials is strictly prohibited. Copyright law protects a work, in whatever medium, unless it has been placed in the public domain. Owners of copyrights hold exclusive right to the reproduction and distribution of their work; therefore, unauthorized use and distribution of copyrighted works is illegal.

Operating and Project Grants Eligibility

- New applicants must schedule a brief introductory meeting with HoCo Arts staff to go over grant eligibility and procedures.
- New applicants, or applicants who have not received operating grants for each of the preceding two years, must apply under the project grants category for two consecutive years and successfully complete both of these project grants before being considered as eligible to apply in the operating grant category. All grant applications, interim reports, and final reports must be submitted on time, be complete, accurate and approved by HoCo Arts to qualify as complete.
- Projects must involve an artistic process or product.
- Eligible non-arts organizations may apply for project funding only, and only direct artistic costs will be considered for funding and organization's match. In order to qualify for a grant in this category, projects must involve an artistic process or product.
- Projects must take place in Howard County.
- Projects may take place no sooner than September 1. Projects will not be funded retroactively. For organizations who wish to hold activities in the summer (such as a summer concert or similar activity), the grant-giving period will be extended at the end of the fiscal year of the grant period. (For example, FY23 Project grant period would be extended through August 2023.) Final Reports for such projects will then be due August 31 as opposed to July 15.

To be eligible to apply in the operating category, the following conditions must also exist:

- Applicant organization must be incorporated as an arts or cultural organization with exhibition, presentation or production in the arts as its primary function, as documented within your articles of incorporation, and whose primary purpose is producing or presenting the arts through public programs and services.
- Organizations must have successfully completed two CAD project grants over the past two consecutive years, which includes completing the project as described in the grant application and submitting related interim and final reports on time. HoCo Arts must approve all reports and will notify applicants of any outstanding issues. Organizations should plan on applying in the project category for a minimum of three years.
- Organization must be in good standing with HoCo Arts (i.e. all required obligations from previous grants are met and all reports are submitted on time and are accurate, complete, and approved).

- Organizations must have at least a part-time paid executive director, CEO, managing director, or comparable position responsible for administering the grant funds and who reports directly to the organizations' board of directors. This position must be filled for no fewer than 6 of the 12 months prior to submitting the application.

Applications

- Applicants may submit one CAD application only, either a general operating grant or a project grant, not both.
- Applications must be submitted by **May 7, 2026 at 11:59PM.**
- Applicants may be asked to clarify or revise application.
- Late or incomplete applications will be rejected.
- All required attachments and supplemental information must be included.
- Please direct all questions regarding preparation of these forms to HoCo Arts at 410-313-2787.

Deadlines

The deadline to submit the application is **May 7, 2026 at 11:59PM.**

Review Process & Notification

HoCo Arts staff will check in the applications and review corporate papers and financial information for residency, board, staff, and financial requirements. Applicant may be asked to clarify and/or revise their application. Applicant must meet all revision deadlines after submission, as specified in writing, or the application will be withdrawn. The Artistic Review Panel will review applications and make its recommendation to the HoCo Arts Committee on Grants. The Committee on Grants then presents those recommendations for approval to the HoCo Arts Board of Directors. Organizations will be notified by mail to the disposition of the application after a final vote by the HoCo Arts Board of Directors. All decisions of the HoCo Arts Board of Directors are final. If approved for funding, the organization must submit the signed Letter of Agreement and any outstanding materials or final reports, if applicable, before the grant funds are released.

Conflict of Interest

To ensure that all 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. "Affiliations" applies to employment, board memberships, independent contractual relationships, substantial contributor relationships, or other relationships. In addition, panelists are required to disclose any past or current adversarial relationships with actual or potential applicants. HoCo Arts panel and board members are not permitted to participate in discussions or votes relating to any applicant with whom they have an affiliation.

Restrictions and Accountability

Grants may not be applied to capital improvements, purchase of land or real property, tuition assistance, refreshment costs, travel, fundraising, or pre-existing expenses, debts, or obligations incurred by the organization. HoCo Arts and/or the Howard County Government may request to examine or audit all pertinent books, records, and accounts of grant recipients. In addition, grant funds may not be used to make contributions to any persons who hold, or are candidates for, elected office; to any political party, organization, or action committee; or in connection with any political campaign or referendum, or lobbying activities.

Fraud and Misrepresentation

If awarded, the grant funds shall be used only for purposes outlined in grantee's grant application on file with HoCo Arts. Grantee certifies that all of the information and representations contained in the application are and remain true and complete in all material respects. Should it come to the attention of HoCo Arts that any materials submitted by the grantee are fraudulent or misrepresented in any manner, this agreement is null and void and the grantee acknowledges that any remaining grant funds not yet disbursed are forfeited and that the grantee is responsible for reimbursing HoCo Arts for funds already disbursed.

Reporting

At the end of the granting period, a detailed final report on the use of the approved funds for the project must be filed with the HoCo Arts. If your organization receives a grant of \$10,000 or more, you must provide the name and credentials of your bookkeeping or accounting service. HoCo Arts requires that your organization engage some professional bookkeeping or accounting service to maintain your monthly records and assist in preparing a monthly financial report for your board members. If your organization receives a grant of \$15,000 or more, a professional financial review must also be filed. If your organization receives a grant of \$15,000 or more and has an annual operating budget over \$500,000, a professional audit must be filed for the most recent fiscal year completed. If the audit expresses an ongoing concern, the organization may be deemed ineligible to receive a grant for that grant period. If this audit is not completed by the application's due date, the audit firm must submit a letter stating the estimated date when the audit will be completed. Additionally, please attach publicity materials.

Future applications will not be considered unless a final report is submitted and approved by HoCo Arts

Attribution

If a general operating grant is awarded, all programs and publicity, including brochures, news releases, programs and other materials must give credit to the Howard County Arts Council, the Howard County Government and the Maryland State Arts Council. Use HoCo Arts and Howard County Government logos when appropriate. When no printed information is used, oral credit must be given. If a project grant is awarded, credit must be given on materials related to the project.

Changes

Grant recipients must notify the HoCo Arts in writing if a significant change is made in any HoCo Arts funded program or project. HoCo Arts reserves the right, at the discretion of the Committee on Grants and the Board of Directors, to alter the amount or disbursement dates of a grant award if a significant change is made to the operations or project of an organization once a grant has been awarded. Unused project funds must be returned to HoCo Arts.

Budget Size and Matching Requirements

HoCo Art's grant program is a competitive process. Receipt of a grant award does not imply or guarantee future awards will be made or the amount of the future awards. Capital funds, in-kind contributions, earned revenue from County government or other direct grants or appropriations from the County, and other HoCo Arts grants or appropriations may not be used as matching funds in the budget.

HoCo Arts funds cannot be used to fund budget deficits, capital expenditures, travel, capital improvements, depreciation, loans, debt, retirement, political advocacy, unrealized gains or losses, endowments, re-granting, purchases of permanent equipment, scholarships or tuition assistance, refreshments, promotional merchandise such as T-shirts, non-cash expenses, or projects whose primary function is not artistic, such as fundraising events.

The applicant must provide a cash match using the ratio in the table below to determining the amount of the grant request and the required match:

Grant Award	Match required for each grant dollar
\$0 - \$10,000	1:1
\$10,001 - \$20,000	2:1
\$20,001 - \$30,000	3:1
\$30,001 - \$40,000	4:1
\$40,001 - \$50,000	5:1
\$50,001 - \$60,000	6:1
\$60,001 - \$70,000	7:1
\$70,001 - \$80,000	8:1
\$80,001 and above	9:1

Match must be on a cash basis. In-kind donations may not be used by any organization in meeting the required match, although in-kind donations should be detailed in the appropriate section of the application. See other restrictions listed herein.

Operating Grants

- **Applicants may not use other HoCo Arts grants as a match for CAD (e.g.: JRT Subsidy funds, Organizational Development funds, etc.)**

- No grant may exceed half of the total cash budget of the applicant's actual proposal or 25% of the total available HoCo Arts Community Arts Development grant funds.
- Previous operating grant recipients whose award was \$40,001 or above are eligible to apply for up to a 10% increase from the prior year's HoCo Arts grant award.
- Previous operating grant recipients whose award was \$40,000 or below are eligible to apply for up to a 25% increase from the prior year's HoCo Arts grant award.
- General Operating budget pages must be based on total actual cash expenses, excluding in-kind donations, minus non-eligible costs above.
- First time operating grant applicants are eligible to apply for up to 10% of their previous year's ACTUAL operating budget based on expenses.
- For first time operating grant applicants, grant request must be calculated on actual cash expenses for the most recent completed year, NOT on the current year.

Project Grants

- All applicants and non-arts organizations are eligible to apply for up to \$6,000, not to exceed 50% of the project costs.

In determining the amount of the grant request and the required match:

Project Grants must use only cash expenses budgeted for the project.

Non-arts organizations must apply for only direct artistic costs. See other restrictions herein.

Artistic Review Panel

A peer group, made up of artists and academics, is appointed to assist the Arts Council in its decision-making. Its function is to review applications, make funding recommendations to the HoCo Arts Board of Directors, and offer policy recommendations.

Review Criteria

The review of grants is based on the following criteria:

- Artistic Merit.
- Service to the community.
- Ability of applicant to carry out the project based on evidence of sound fiscal and administrative management.

During the review process, the Artistic Review Panel will consider questions such as those below. This information is included to assist the applicant organizations in preparing the application.

I. Artistic Merit

1. What is the artistic product?
2. What are the qualifications of the individual artists?
3. What are the long-range artistic objectives of the applicant organization?

4. How are the stated artistic objectives to be achieved?
5. What indications are there that this project will have a level of quality appropriate to the objectives of the organization?
6. What indications are there that the funding will further the artistic objectives of the organization?
7. How is the application appropriate to the purpose of the Howard County Arts Council grant program?

II. Service to the Community

1. Expand opportunities in the arts

- Do the applicant organization's programs and activities broaden opportunities in the arts?

2. Audience Development

- Who is the intended audience?
- What is the projected size of the audience? How did the applicant organization arrive at this number?
- What will be done to attract an audience to the project?
- If applicable, how many persons attended similar artistic efforts by the applicant organization?
- What proportion of the endeavor will be carried out in Howard County, and how does the project serve a Howard County audience? Specifically where and when in Howard County will this endeavor be carried out?

3. Diversity

- What attempt has the applicant organization made to encourage organizational diversity in all areas, including audience development, board participation, artists, programs, and administrative management? By diversity, we mean the inclusion of people of different ages, gender, race, culture, economic status and abilities.
- Does the organization address accessibility issues?

III. Ability of the applicant to carry out the project

1. Technical Merit of Proposal

- Is the application complete?
- Does the narrative clarify goals?
- Is the budget correct?
- Is the writing clear and concise? Grammatically correct?
- Is the application appropriate to one of the grant categories?

2. Organizational Strength/Implementation

- Does the organization have a clearly stated mission statement?
- To what degree do regular programs and services meet the mission?
- Does the actual performance of the organization over the past year, as described in the grant application, reflect well-thought out and well-executed programs?
- Does the record of the applicant demonstrate that the project will be completed during the grant period with the funds specified in the award?
- Does the record of the applicant demonstrate that the project and the grant funds will be managed successfully?
- Does the organization have a Board of Directors or Trustees that meet regularly (at least 2-3 times per year)?
- Who comprises the administrative staff and what are their skills and qualifications?
- If applicable, what effort is being made to have a paid staff?
- Could the applicant organization continue the endeavor should it lose an administrative principal?
- Does the organization have an effective, efficient and resourceful strategy for implementing upcoming arts programs?
- Does at least 50% of activities and programming take place in Howard County?
- Is the organization in good standing with the State of Maryland?

3. Finance

- Does the budget reflect a stable organization?
- Does the budget clearly allocate resources efficiently and effectively to accomplish the proposed project and that specifically demonstrates how HCAC monies will contribute to the project?
- Are costs realistic and are the funds requested sufficient to complete the proposed project or activities?
- Is the addition/subtraction correct?
- Is requested financing within the guidelines for the percentage of total budget?
- Although donated in-kind goods and services do not qualify towards matching funds, are they specified in the grant application?
- Does the applicant's previous grant record demonstrate that the requested funds will be used as intended?
- Are the financial records of the applicant organization complete and understandable for the last two years?
- Does the application indicate sound financial planning and management?
- Has the application adequately documented the estimated costs of the project?
- If appropriate, was the applicant organization realistic in projecting costs and revenues in the preceding two years?
- What proportion of the organization's total expenses is to be met from HCAC funding?
- What other sources of income are specified in the application? Does the applicant maintain diverse funding sources?

- During the preceding two years, what total funds were obtained from other sources?
- What other sources of funding are being solicited to support this application?
- Is the previous year's final report to HoCo Arts filed and complete?

Disclosure

As a private 501(c)3 that receives public funding, HoCo Arts is committed to providing equal opportunity in all facets of its operation without regard to race, sex, age, creed, religion, national origin, age, occupation, personal appearance, political opinion, sexual orientation, marital status, physical or mental disability, familial status, source of income, or gender identity. HoCo Arts complies with all county, state, and federal equal protection statutes and regulations, including Title VI, Section 601, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX, Section 1681, of the Education Amendments of 1972; Section 6101 of the Age Discrimination Act of 1975; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Appeals Process

The Howard County Arts Council takes care during the entire grants review process to be as thorough as possible to ensure fair and equitable distribution of grant monies. Therefore, simple dissatisfaction with the denial of an award or with the amount of the award is not sufficient reason for appeal. Reconsideration of a grant award will take place only if there has been a procedural impropriety or error. This means one of the following:

- A decision based on review criteria other than those stated in the guidelines.
- A decision based on a recommendation of a panelist with undisclosed conflict of interest.
- A decision based on material provided to panelists and/or HoCo Arts Board members that was substantially incorrect, inaccurate, or incomplete despite the applicant having provided the staff with correct, accurate, and complete application information by the application due date.
- Dissatisfaction with the denial of an award or with the amount of the award is not sufficient reason for appeal.

Given this information, should an applicant feel there is legitimate reason for appeal, the applicant must write a letter to the HoCo Arts Executive Director stating the grounds for appeal within fifteen (15) days of the postmark date of the grant award notification. The Committee on Grants will review the appeal and make a recommendation. Based on that recommendation, the Board of Directors will make a final decision. The applicant will receive written notification on the determination of the appeal within 45 days of the receipt of the letter of appeal.