

## Creative Howard Grant Program Guidelines

### FY27 Application Calendar

|                           |                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Grant period ends June 30 | Grant activities must take place within this grant period; projects are not funded retroactively, please plan ahead. See earliest start date below.                      |
| September 1               | Grant applications available online at <a href="https://hocoarts.submittable.com/submit">https://hocoarts.submittable.com/submit</a>                                     |
|                           | Rolling deadline based on funds available; applications due 60 days prior to proposed project start date.                                                                |
| November 1                | Earliest project start date for projects .                                                                                                                               |
|                           | Applications submitted by 11:59 PM EST on the first day of the month will be reviewed that month; applications received after that will be reviewed the following month. |
| April 1                   | Last deadline for FYE June 30.                                                                                                                                           |
|                           | Final Report Due within 15 business days of project completion.                                                                                                          |
|                           |                                                                                                                                                                          |

### Introduction

The Howard County Arts Council (HoCo Arts) is a private, nonprofit 501c3 organization established to enrich and serve our community by fostering the arts, artists, and arts organizations. HoCo Arts is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors whose members are elected to two terms.

To advance our mission, HoCo Arts provides a wide variety of programs and services to strengthen the vitality of the arts in our community and broaden opportunities for public engagement in the arts. The Creative Howard grant program was established to recognize and support the work of small nonprofit arts organizations and arts businesses with grants up to \$2,500.

### HoCo Arts Responsibilities

HoCo Arts is authorized by the Howard County government and the Maryland State Arts Council to administer public funds designated for the arts. As the designated arts council for Howard County, HoCo Arts is responsible for:

- Establishing criteria and procedures for submission and funding of applications.
- Developing and maintaining a grant process and reporting requirements in accordance with established criteria and procedures.
- Reviewing, evaluating and prioritizing applications for grants funds.
- Selecting recipients and determining grant award amounts.

The Arts Council staff is available to assist applicants with any questions about completing this application by emailing [grantsandprojects@hocoarts.org](mailto:grantsandprojects@hocoarts.org).

## **Creative Howard Overview**

The purpose of the Creative Howard grant program is to strengthen the vitality of the Howard County arts community and recognize the role of small nonprofit arts organizations and arts businesses in Howard County's creative eco-system.

The goals for Creative Howard are:

- To increase access to the process of requesting grants to arts organizations and support needs in the arts community that may fall outside of the eligibility requirements of HoCo Art's Community Arts Development grant program.
- To provide small non-profit 501c3- designated arts organizations with a foundation to apply for future Community Arts Development grants.

Creative Howard supports eligible activities of small arts organizations (both 501c3 nonprofit arts organizations and for- and nonprofit arts businesses) with grants up to \$2,500. There is no matching fund requirement for Creative Howard grants. Applicants may receive funding for only one application per fiscal year (July 1-June 30).

## **Deadline**

The deadline for Creative Howard is rolling. The deadline to submit the application is the first day of each month **at 11:59PM**. Applications will be reviewed monthly and Creative Howard grants will be awarded throughout the fiscal year until total funding allocated for the program is awarded.

HoCo Arts will begin accepting applications on September 1, 2026 for the FY27 application cycle. The grant period for FY27 ends June 30, 2027. Funded activities must occur within the grant period. HoCo Arts does not fund projects in progress or completed before the grant application deadline. Applications must be submitted at least 60 days before the proposed activities occur.

The application process will be closed once funding allocated for the program is fully awarded and will only be reopened should new funding become available.

## **Eligibility**

Nonprofit arts organizations and arts businesses (see definitions below) located and operating in Howard County for at least one year prior to the application's submission and throughout the funded project with an operating revenue of \$100,000 or less (see application process below) are eligible to apply.

Not eligible to apply are current FY27 HoCo Arts grant recipients, Howard County governmental agencies, and organizations that receive direct funding from Howard County, such as, Howard County Public Schools, Howard County Recreation and Parks, Howard Community College.  
Eligibility:

- Applicant must maintain their primary physical 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, website, and program materials submitted must show primary office is located in the County.

- Applicant must have one fully completed and documented fiscal year of operations as of the date of the application submission.
- Applicant must produce or present arts programs, services or projects that are accessible to the public and relevant to its community (demonstrate need).
- Applicant may receive funding for one Creative Howard grant per fiscal year; the program may consist of a one-time activity or a series of related activities.
- A program is eligible for funding through Creative Howard if it supports an arts and/or cultural activity that is presented at a location in Howard County.
- Program activities must be open to the public with or without an admission fee, virtual programming is eligible.
- Program activities may include, but are not limited to, dance, design, folk and traditional arts, history exhibit or historic reenactment, lectures or seminars, literature, media arts, music, theater, visual arts, and workshops. This list is not exhaustive and applicants are encouraged to think creatively about their programs.
- Program budget must be based on cash income and expense only.
- Program expenses must be directly related to the artistic activities described in the application.

Submission of an application constitutes an understanding and agreement of the conditions set forth in these guidelines.

In addition, eligible applicants must fit one of the following definitions:

**Definitions:**

**Nonprofit Arts Organizations:**

A nonprofit arts organization is defined as an organization:

- Designated by the IRS as a 501 c 3 tax-exempt nonprofit that has the presentation production, or preservation of arts or culture as its primary mission, purpose, or function and is incorporated in Maryland,
- Governed by an independent, legally liable Board of Directors acting under a mission statement, by-laws, and operating budget specific to the organization,
- That conducts business for the benefit of the general public without shareholders and without a profit motive,
- That produces, creates or presents arts or cultural programs that are open to the public.

**Arts Businesses:**

An arts-focused business is defined as a nonprofit or for-profit business that:

- Is an arts-focused business incorporated in Maryland,
- Has the sale, production, or display of the arts or provides arts-related services, such as framing, theatrical or music productions, or arts classes, as its primary mission, purpose, or function and can demonstrate that 50% of its business is arts-related,
- Sells, produces, or displays original artist-made artwork or limited signed, numbered editions (not reproductions or mass-produced objects),

## **Examples of Allowable Expenses**

Creative Howard grants may be used for:

- Arts programs (support to produce or present new, established, or ongoing arts programs to the general public through public programs).
- Arts services (support for new, established, or ongoing services for artists, arts organizations, or the arts community).
- Collaborative projects (support for new, established or ongoing collaborations with artists and other organizations for public programs), only one application per project or program will be considered for funding. For collaborative projects that involve current HoCo Arts grantees, funding may only be used for applicant's direct costs of collaborative project.

In addition, grant funds may be used for expenses directly associated with the proposed eligible arts activities, including but not limited to artist fees/stipends, consultant or contractual services, artistic materials and supplies, space/venue/equipment, marketing materials, professional documentation, and program enhancements that are integral to the activity. Examples of program enhancements include interpretive material, program accommodations (i.e.: sign language interpretation, audio description), brochures or publications, lecture-demonstrations, pre- or post-event talks, or workshops relevant to the proposed program.

## **Review Criteria**

Application demonstrates:

1. Merit, quality and relevance of arts activities.  
Application provides clear, specific, and thorough description of the proposed project including the qualifications of the artists and project staff. Be detailed. Describe the artistic and creative elements of the proposed project. Upload work samples that demonstrate the artistic merit of participating artists' work.
2. Service to one or more Howard County communities.  
Application demonstrates community relevance and engagement. Be detailed. Describe the community needs the proposed project will address, how these needs were determined, and by what means the project activities will be made available to the public. Describe the potential of the project to engage the community and how the project will be promoted and evaluated.
3. Ability of applicant to carry out project.  
Application demonstrates evidence of sound fiscal management, budget is realistic for successful project implementation, clear breakdown of expenses, and financial information is clearly tied to the proposed arts activity and shows how HoCo Arts funding will be used. Application demonstrates sound project planning and management, skill levels and qualifications of staff are appropriate for the scope of the program, and adequate resources are in place to carry out the project. Application provides clear, specific, and realistic timeline and goals and shows how the project will be delivered to the public.

NOTE: Professional fees for activities led by outside professional artists, curators, performers or lecturers are preferable (and will be given more “weight” in the evaluation process) to existing salaries of applicant’s arts or non-arts staff.

### **Application Review Process**

HoCo Arts staff will review application for eligibility and completeness. Eligible applications for grant requests of \$501-\$2,500 will be forwarded to HoCo Art’s Committee on Grants, a standing committee of the HoCo Arts Board of Directors, for review, evaluation and approval on a monthly basis; the staff will evaluate and approve applications for grant requests of \$500 or less. HoCo Arts reserves the right to assign additional individuals to serve as grant reviewers from HoCo Art’s Board of Directors and the general public, as needed.

Only complete applications successfully submitted on line will be reviewed. Incomplete or hard copy applications will NOT be reviewed.

- Applicant may submit one application only.
- Applicant is required to complete and submit application by electronic means on the cloud-based Submittable platform, including the use of an electronic signature, a minimum of 60-days prior to the start of the proposed arts activities. (Example: If the proposed start date of an activity is December 1, the Creative Howard grant application must be received by HoCo Arts no later than October 1.)
- Applicant must submit a copy of the tax form from their last completed operating year demonstrating allowable, gross income/revenue of \$100,000 or less.
  - For the purposes of this grant, non-allowable sources of revenue include: loans, carryover, debt forgiveness, transfer of funds earned in prior years, revenue raised for capital or endowment funds intended for the purpose of re-granting, and unrealized gains/losses. [These items may be included in financial statements but should be subtracted to determine applicant’s eligibility and explained in application budget notes.]
- Late or incomplete applications will be rejected. All required attachments and supplemental information must be included.
- Lost or misdirected applications are the sole responsibility of the applicant.
- 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.
- Application must be submitted by **the first day of the month at 11:59PM.**
- Before any grant funds are distributed, Creative Howard grantees are also required to submit any outstanding HoCo Arts grant reports/requirements.
- Project must be completed by June 30, 2027.

Creative Howard grant applications submitted by **11:59PM** on the first day of the month will be reviewed within the same month. Applications received after the first day of the month will be reviewed the following month. After the monthly grant review, applicants will be notified of the grant status by mail or email as soon as possible.

All decisions of the HoCo Arts Committee on Grants and staff assigned to the Creative Howard program are final. If approved for funding, applicant must submit the signed Letter of Agreement and any outstanding materials or final reports for this, or any other HoCo Arts program, if applicable, before grant funds are released.

### **Restrictions and Accountability**

Grant funded programs and activities must take place in Howard County. Current HoCo Arts grant recipients and Howard County funded agencies are not eligible to apply (see Eligibility section above for more information).

Grant funds may not be used for: re-granting; cash prizes; scholarships; capital improvements or purchases of permanent equipment; acquisition of capital assets; activities for the exclusive benefit of an organization's members; activities that are principally recreational, therapeutic, or rehabilitative; projects chiefly for K-12 classroom use or in school activities; activities not open to the general public; tuition assistance; refreshment costs; travel; fundraising; gifts; permanent equipment over \$250; merchandise/items for sale (i.e. t-shirts and posters); or pre-existing expenses, debts, deficits or obligations incurred by the organization. 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. HoCo Arts and/or the Howard County Government may request to examine or audit all pertinent books, records, and accounts of grant recipients.

### **Reporting Requirements**

If awarded a Creative Howard grant, applicant must file a final report online no more than 15 business days after the funded project occurred. For projects ending at the close of the fiscal year (June 30), the final report is due on or before July 15. Failure to submit the final report may jeopardize current and/or future HoCo Arts grants and may result in repayment of grant funds back to HoCo Arts.

### **Attribution**

If a grant is awarded, all public materials, including brochures, media and press releases, programs and other materials must give credit to the Howard County Arts Council, Howard County Government, and the Maryland State Arts Council. Use HoCo Arts, Howard County Government, and Maryland State Arts Council logos where appropriate. When no printed information is used, oral credit must be given.

### **Changes**

Grant recipients must notify HoCo Arts in writing if a significant change is made in the use of approved funds. 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 once a grant has been awarded. **Unused grant funds must be returned to HoCo Arts.**

### **Fraud and Misrepresentation**

If awarded, grant funds shall be used only for purposes outlined in applicant's grant application on file with HoCo Arts. Applicant 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 applicant are fraudulent or misrepresentative in any manner, any agreement based on the application is null and void and the applicant acknowledges that any remaining grant funds not yet disbursed are forfeited and that the applicant is responsible for reimbursing HoCo Arts for funds already disbursed.

### **Disclosure**

As a private 501(c)3 that receives public funds, HoCo Arts is committed to provide equal opportunity in all facets of its operation without regard to race, sex, 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; 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**

HoCo Arts takes care during the entire grants review process to be as thorough as possible to ensure fair and equitable distribution of grant moneys. Therefore, simple dissatisfaction with the denial of an award or 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 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 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.

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