INFORMATION SESSION

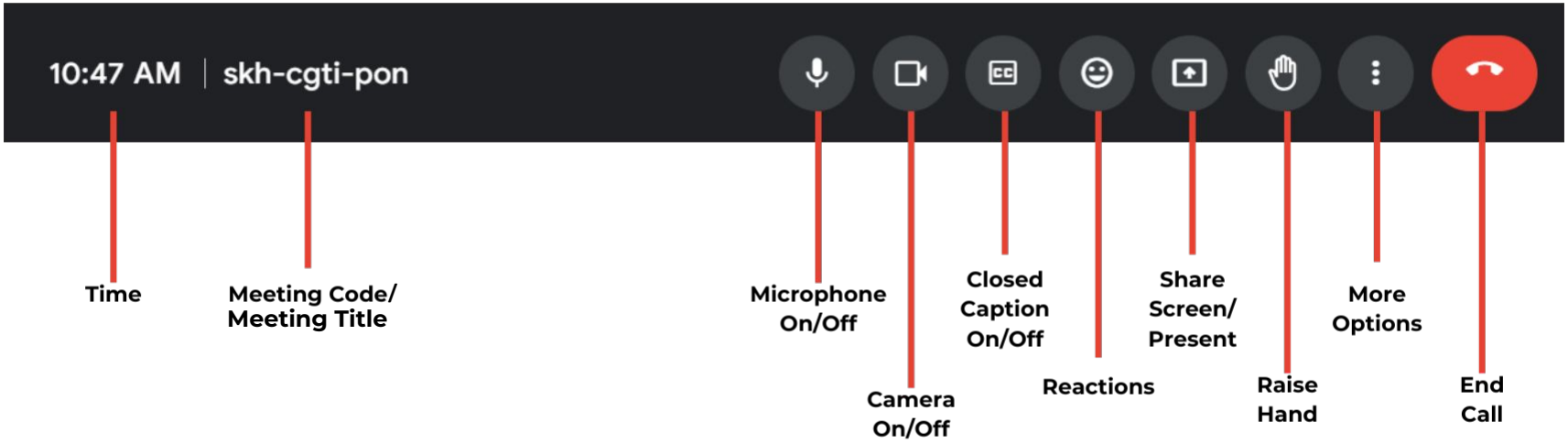
FY26 “How to Apply” - Creativity Grants for General Operating Support

Tuesday, July 8th at 12 Noon

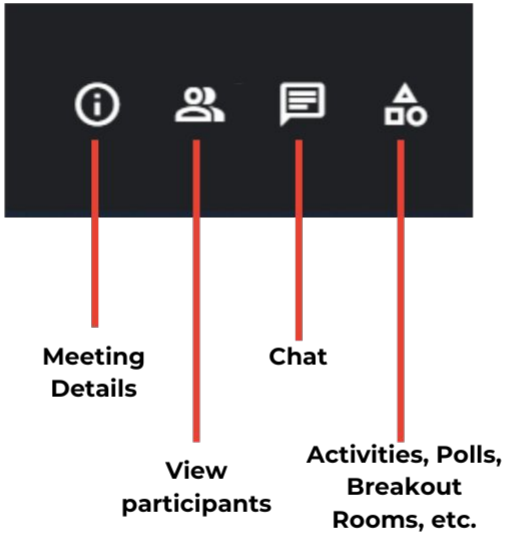
Presented by:
Emily Sollenberger & Laura Weiss
Program Directors, Arts Services

CREATIVITY
GRANT

Reference Shot of Features (1 of 2)



Reference Shot of Features (2 of 2)



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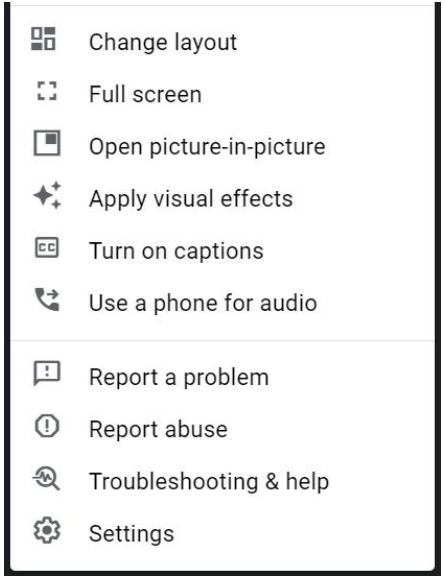


Land Acknowledgement Statement

We acknowledge the lands and waters now known as Maryland are the home of its first peoples: the Accohannock Indian Tribe, Assateague People's Tribe, Cedarville Band of Piscataway Indians, Choptico Band of Indians, Lenape Tribe, Nanticoke Tribe, Nause-Waiwash Band of Indians, Piscataway Conoy Tribe, Piscataway Indian Nation, Pocomoke Indian Nation, Susquehannock Indians, Youghiogheny River Band of Shawnee, and tribes in the Chesapeake watershed who have seemingly vanished since the coming of colonialism. We acknowledge that this land is now home to other tribal peoples living here in diaspora. We acknowledge the forced removal of many from the lands and waterways that nurtured them as kin. We acknowledge the degradation that continues to be wrought on the land and waters in pursuit of resources. We acknowledge the right of the land and waterways to heal so that they can continue to provide food and medicine for all. We acknowledge that it is our collective obligation to pursue policies and practices that respect the land and waters so that our reciprocal relationship with them can be fully restored.

Equity and Justice Statement

The arts celebrate our state's diversity, connect our shared humanity, and transform individuals and communities. The Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) is committed to advancing and modeling equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion in all aspects of our organization and across communities of our state.

MSAC and its grantees are committed to embracing equity and non-discrimination regardless of race, religious creed, color, age, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, class, language, and/or ability.

Vision

MSAC plays an essential role ensuring every person has access to the transformative power of the arts.

Mission

MSAC advances the arts in our state by providing leadership that champions creative expression, diverse programming, equitable access, lifelong learning, and the arts as a celebrated contributor to the quality of life for all the people of Maryland.

MSAC Strategic Plan - Pillars and Goals

Access

Bolster access to arts experiences and resources

Awareness

Amplify the stories of Maryland's arts sector and the value of public support

Connection

Foster networks within and beyond the arts sector

Equity

Cultivate a thriving arts ecosystem centered in equity

Leadership

Commit to a culture of care and innovation

Creative Meeting Actions

Celebrate being in the space with other creative people.
Engage with everyone's presence as a gift.
Acknowledge that together we know a lot.
Enter the conversation with curiosity and inquiry.
Share your idea and trust that it will be heard.
Use "I" statements.
Focus your language on the task at hand.
Hold one another accountable with care.
Honor all perspectives and build on shared ideas.
Balance speaking with listening.

Professional Development

- Info sessions
- Topic-specific sessions
- Coffee with the Council
- Office hours
- Maryland Arts Summit (visit mdarts.org)

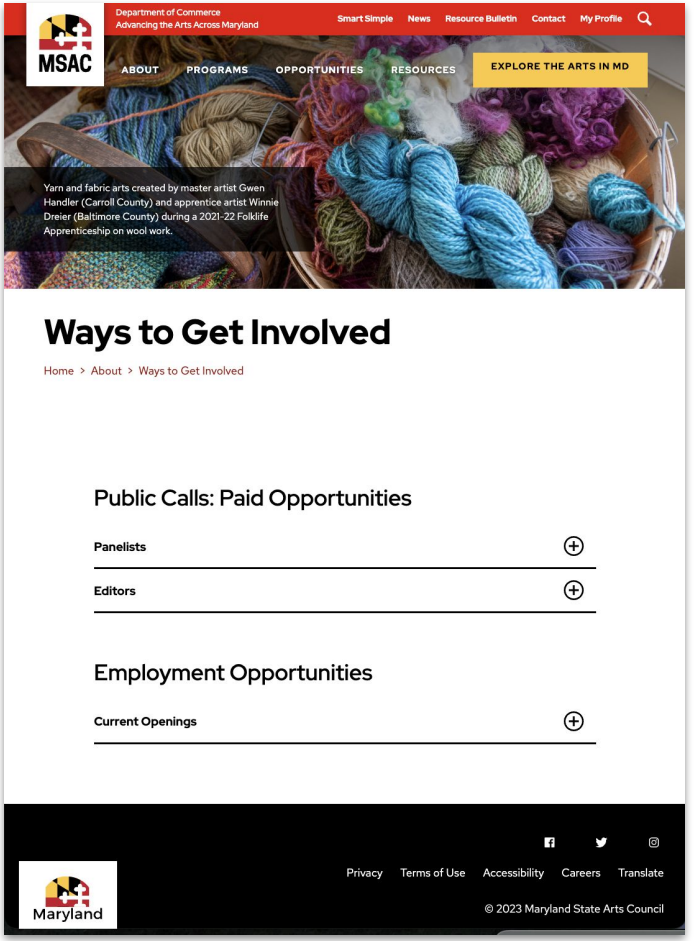
Share your ideas:
https://msac.org/contact

See upcoming sessions on Eventbrite:
https://tinyurl.com/pkw7pcrk

Ways to Get Involved

MSAC relies on a diverse array of constituents from across the state to give input in a variety of ways.

- Panelists review and score applications
- Editors give input on program policies
- Schedule of public calls and details at msac.org/about/ways-get-involved
- Apply in SmartSimple
- Training and support
- Compensation provided for service



Today's Agenda

- Review of Creativity Program & Guidelines
- Creativity Grant Application - General Operating
- Helpful Hints for Applications
- Monthly review process
- Smart Simple grant platform
- Q&A

CREATIVITY
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Creativity Grant Overview

Purpose of program:

- Supports activities/general operations for independent artists and organizations
    - Today we will focus specifically on the General Operating Support option.
- Strengthens the vitality and sustainability of artists and small organizations to maintain a strong and stable arts infrastructure in the State of Maryland
- Serves the growing needs of relevant arts projects and collaborations within Maryland communities

Creativity Grant Overview

- Available to Independent Artists & Organizations
- Project-Support OR General Operating (orgs only)
- Brief application
- Grant applications are accepted on a rolling basis and reviewed monthly
    - PLEASE NOTE: The General Operating option will only be available from July 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025 (more on this later)
- Eligible to receive one Creativity Grant per fiscal year

What's New for FY2026

- New options - introduced last year
  - General Operating Support *(Focus on this today!)*
  - Project - Planning & Development Grant
  - Project - Implementation Grant
- New funding amounts
  - General Operating Support: Up to $4,000 (New)
  - Project - Planning & Development: Up to $2,000
  - Project - Implementation: Up to $4,000

Creativity Grant - Who Can Apply (Gen Op)?

Independent Artists are not eligible for General Operating Support; Independent Artists must select one of the Project-specific options for the Creativity Grant.

Organizations must be one of the following:

- Nonprofit organization (an organization with an IRS-designated 501(c)3 status). Organizations must be incorporated in Maryland or have significant physical presence in Maryland.
- Model A Fiscal Sponsorship (comprehensive sponsorship, in which the assets, liabilities, and exempt activities collectively referred to as the project are housed within the fiscal sponsor).
- Unit of government (a unit of government [town, city, county, state] with the capacity to undertake an arts program)
- College or university (an established higher education institution in Maryland)
- School (a public or private school serving students in grades pre-Kindergarten through 12)

Creativity Grant - Who Can Apply (Gen Op)?

- Organizations with an allowable income of $50,000 or less OR organizations with an allowable income of more than $50,000 that have not received MSAC general operating funding programs *(Grants for Organizations, County Arts Development, A&E District, Folklife Network)* in the current fiscal year.
  - If you have received general operating support through another MSAC program, you are NOT eligible for a Creativity Grant (Gen Op OR Project) in the same year
  - If you are not currently supported through another general operating program (GFO, CAD, A&E, Folklife Network) in FY26, then you could apply for support instead through the Creativity Grant in FY26.

Creativity Grant - Who Can Apply (Gen Op)?

- Only one application per project or program will be considered for funding.
- The organization must produce or present ongoing arts programs, services or projects that are relevant to its community and are available to the public.
- The organization has operated as an arts organization or arts program for one full fiscal year and be able to submit a financial statement for their most recently completed fiscal year at the time of application.
    - If an organization is new (within first year), Project-specific support would be an option to consider.
    - If your organization in primarily a non-arts organization that offers regular arts programming, reach out to us to ensure it's a good fit for Gen Op.

Not sure if your organization is eligible for support? Reach out so we can discuss further!

Creativity Grant - What can it support?

- Can support expenses directly related to the proposed arts activity including (but not limited to):
  - Artist fees/stipends
  - Consultant fees
  - Marketing/Promotions
  - Artistic materials & supplies
  - Space/venue
  - Equipment (connected to activities/non-capital)
  - *For Gen Op, this will include most of your day-to-day organizational expenses*

Creativity Grant - What can't it support?

- Re-granting, scholarships
- Capital improvements & permanent equipment
- Activities that aren't open to the public
- Activities that are primarily therapeutic
- Travel outside of MD
- Day-to-day expenses associated with the running of a for-profit business, including but not limited to LLC, C-Corp, S-Corp, etc.
- As with any MSAC grant, the funds cannot be used for political contributions, lobbying activities
- ***Not sure? Ask!***

Creativity Grant - Application (Gen Op)

- Choose your application:
  - Project-support - Planning & Development or Implementation (Artists, Orgs)
  - **General Operating (Orgs only)**
- 3 Narrative Questions
  - Generally the same questions for all application options
  - Project -based support focuses on one specific project/program/event proposal; whereas general operating would focus on full year of operations.
- Organizations must also upload a financial statement *(not needed for independent artists)*

Application - General Operating

Creativity Grant - Application (Gen Op)

1. Describe the primary arts activities/programming and geographic area that your organization will serve in the fiscal year. Within your response, include the mission of the organization, and address the intended community engagement and impact of the organization's mission and arts activities/programming.

An Excellent to Outstanding response includes a clear, specific, and thorough explanation of the organization's mission and primary arts activities/programming for the fiscal year, which includes clear and thorough evidence of intended community engagement and impact; including intention, timeliness, and/or inspiration in relation to the defined community's needs.

Creativity Grant - Application (Overview)

Helpful Hints!

For Gen Op support, describe the org as a whole (mission, programming, etc.). Don't forget the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY.

Approach your narrative as if the reader knows nothing about your organization, its mission, or its programming. Give them the full picture of what you do and what your plans are for the year.

A useful exercise is having a trusted friend/family member/colleague/etc who knows nothing about your proposal read your draft application and have them "poke holes" in it - fill in the blanks where they were unclear before submitting

Creativity Grant - Application (Gen Op)

2. Describe the timeline of your organization's entire season or fiscal year. Within your response, include a detailed schedule for the year, including specific timing as it relates to steps of planning, promotional efforts, implementation and execution of events/activities, and evaluation.

An Excellent to Outstanding response includes clear, specific and realistic timeline for the entire season/fiscal year, including specific timing as it relates to planning, promotional efforts, implementation & execution of events/activities, and evaluation.

Creativity Grant - Application (Timeline)

Helpful Hints!

Include a full timeline/schedule of the entirety of the activities from beginning to end. Outline the entire fiscal year/season/etc

Consider a weekly or monthly listing (or other time increment) with specific dates/timeframes that share all steps of the process. Include all steps of planning, implementation, execution, and evaluation of the project

Include programming schedule, but also don't forget administrative schedules (i.e. board meetings, fundraising campaigns, etc.)

Creativity Grant - Application (Gen Op)

3. What is the organization's overall budget for this fiscal year? Include a clear list of all projected income and expenses.

An Excellent to Outstanding response includes clear, detailed, and realistic financial plan for income and expenses tied to the general operations of the organization.

Creativity Grant - Application (Budget)

Helpful Hints!

Gen Op: This should be your entire budget for the year (FY26/CY25)!

Include a clear list that shows specific line items for all planned income and expenses - and a description to how you got to the total, when necessary

(ie - Artist Fee = $500: Hourly rate of $25/hr for 20 hours)

The response must be within the context of the narrative; additional attachments will not be considered in the review process

Creativity Grant - Application

- Attachments include w-9, Electronic Signature
- Financial Statement (orgs only) - such as Profit & Loss statement.
  - This should be a statement from your last completed fiscal year, different from what you enter in the budget section of the application.

The full application & scoring rubric can be found on msac.org

Creativity Grant Application Scoring Rubric - Project Support

Describe your proposed arts activity/event/project and the geographic area the project will serve. Within your response, include a detailed description of the proposed project, including planned community engagement and intended impact of the arts activity.				
Includes a clear, specific, and thorough explanation of the artist's proposed arts activity/event/project, which includes clear and thorough evidence of intended community impact; including engagement, intention, timeliness, and/or inspiration in relation to the defined community's needs	Includes a clear explanation of the artist's proposed arts activity/event/project, which includes clear evidence of intended community impact; including engagement, intention, timeliness, and/or inspiration in relation to the defined community's needs	Includes an overview of the artist's proposed arts activity/event/project, which includes some evidence of intended community impact; including engagement, intention, timeliness, and/or inspiration in relation to the defined community's needs	Includes an unclear explanation of the artist's proposed arts activity/event/project, which includes minimal evidence of intended community impact; including engagement, intention, timeliness, and/or inspiration in relation to the defined community's needs	
Excellent to Outstanding	**Good to Very Good**	**Satisfactory**	**Marginal to Fair**	**No Evidence**
34-36 Points	**25-27 Points**	**16-18 Points**	**7-9 Points**	**0 Points**

Review Process and What's Ahead

Creativity Grant - Grant Amount (Gen Op)

- Available up to $4,000 (different from last year)
- One grant per fiscal year (July 1 - June 30)
- Creativity Grants are an “all or none” grant
  - If awarded, you will receive the requested amount
  - We do not offer a percentage or portion of requested amount

Monthly Application Review Process

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, reviewed and awarded monthly. FY26 General Operating Support applications are available from **July 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025**.

Creativity Grant applications submitted by the last day of the month will be reviewed by the panel in the following month, with notifications to follow early the following month

For example: Applications received in August (8/1-8/31) will be reviewed in September; notifications will be sent by early October.

Monthly Application Review Process

All applications are reviewed by public panelists

- There is a dedicated group of public panelists, who are reviewing Gen Op applications only; another group of panelists will be dedicated to Project applications only.
    - Members from the public apply to be panelists and receive specific training about the program, implicit bias in grantmaking, scoring rubrics, etc.
- Staff do not score applications, but provide support throughout the process

Notifications

If you're awarded - congratulations!

- Your organization is only eligible for one Creativity Grant per fiscal year
  - Once awarded an FY26 Creativity Grant, you are not eligible to apply again for operating support until the next fiscal year.
  - Note - we are planning some shift with this program going into FY27 (more on this in a bit…)
- You must sign and return your Grant Agreement Form via Smart Simple
- Payment takes approximately 6-8 weeks from the date of receipt of a fully execute Grant Agreement Form

Notifications

Final Reports

- Gen Op Applications submitted between July 2025 and December 2025 will have a Final Report deadline of August 15, 2026.
- Grantee agrees to spend or obligate all funds by their assigned Final Report date. This means that the funds are expended, encumbered, or otherwise legally committed to be used, such that returning the unspent funds would cause the grantee legal harm.

Notifications

If you're not awarded - try again!

- This is a very popular and competitive program - don't give up!
- Program Directors can gather feedback from the panelists who reviewed your application, and send their feedback and recommendations, which are connected to the review criteria
  - To request this, complete the link sent in your Decline notification email
  - Please allow for at least 6-8 weeks for processing

Creativity Grant - FAQs (Gen Op)

Can my organization apply for a general operating AND project-based Creativity Grant in one year?

No - you are eligible for one Creativity Grant per fiscal year (pick Gen Op OR Project). Talk to a Program Director to help determine which one may be the best fit for your organization and activities.

I receive Gen Op support through the Grants for Organizations (GFO) program. Can I apply for project-support through Creativity?

No - if you receive support through the GFO program, you are not eligible for Creativity support, too (either project or gen op).

Creativity Grant - FAQs

How can I share work samples/letters of support/reviews/etc.?

External documents are not considered as part of the review of the Creativity Grant application. Panelists will only review the three narrative questions per the scoring criteria. Do not include important information in links or other documents, as they will not be considered.

Helpful Hint - Apply early!

While you are eligible to apply any time while applications are open for the Creativity Grant, we encourage you to apply early, whenever possible.

Payment is processed outside of the MSAC offices. If awarded, payment will take approximately 6-8 weeks to be received. Take this into consideration when determining when to apply.

Helpful Hint - Application Draft Feedback

Before submitting your application, Emily/Laura are available to review your draft application and offer feedback.

- We can only provide feedback once per application (we can't review multiple drafts)
- Please be courteous in your requests; we have MANY people we are trying to help. If you've received funding in the past or if your last application scored very highly (but was declined), consider allowing others access to our assistance.

Email your Program Director to request feedback on your draft. Allow for **several weeks (6-8 weeks)** to receive written feedback. At certain times throughout the year, it could take longer.

FYI - Upcoming Changes

The Creativity Grant for General Operating Support option will be permanently closing after the final FY26 deadline of December 31, 2025. (The Creativity Grant for Project Support will remain open!)

The Grants for Organizations (GFO) program - *our primary grant program for operational support* - will be debuting a significantly changed application process in Fall 2025 for FY27 support. This new streamlined GFO process will allow those who previously applied/received Creativity Grant for General Operating Support in past to move under the GFO funding umbrella.

Our primary goal with this change is to make the process easier, more accessible, and more equitable.

What this means for your organization

For FY26 funding (now!):

If your organization has been receiving Creativity Grant funding for Gen Op support or is interested in this funding for the first time, you should apply for FY26 funding through the Creativity Grant between July 1, 2025 and December 31, 2025.

- Keep in mind that the application is not available the entire fiscal year and will close permanently on December 31.

For FY27 funding (looking ahead!):

To apply for Gen Op support in FY27, your organization should first complete the GFO Intent to Apply application to enter the GFO program. This will be available in August 2025 and will be due on **September 15, 2025**. *Keep in mind, you may complete this process simultaneously with the FY26 Creativity application!*

Upcoming Webinars

We will hold several webinars to specifically talk about the Intent to Apply application and what the new GFO process will look like:

- **Thursday, August 14th from 11am to 12:30pm**
- **Tuesday, August 26th from 4pm to 6pm**

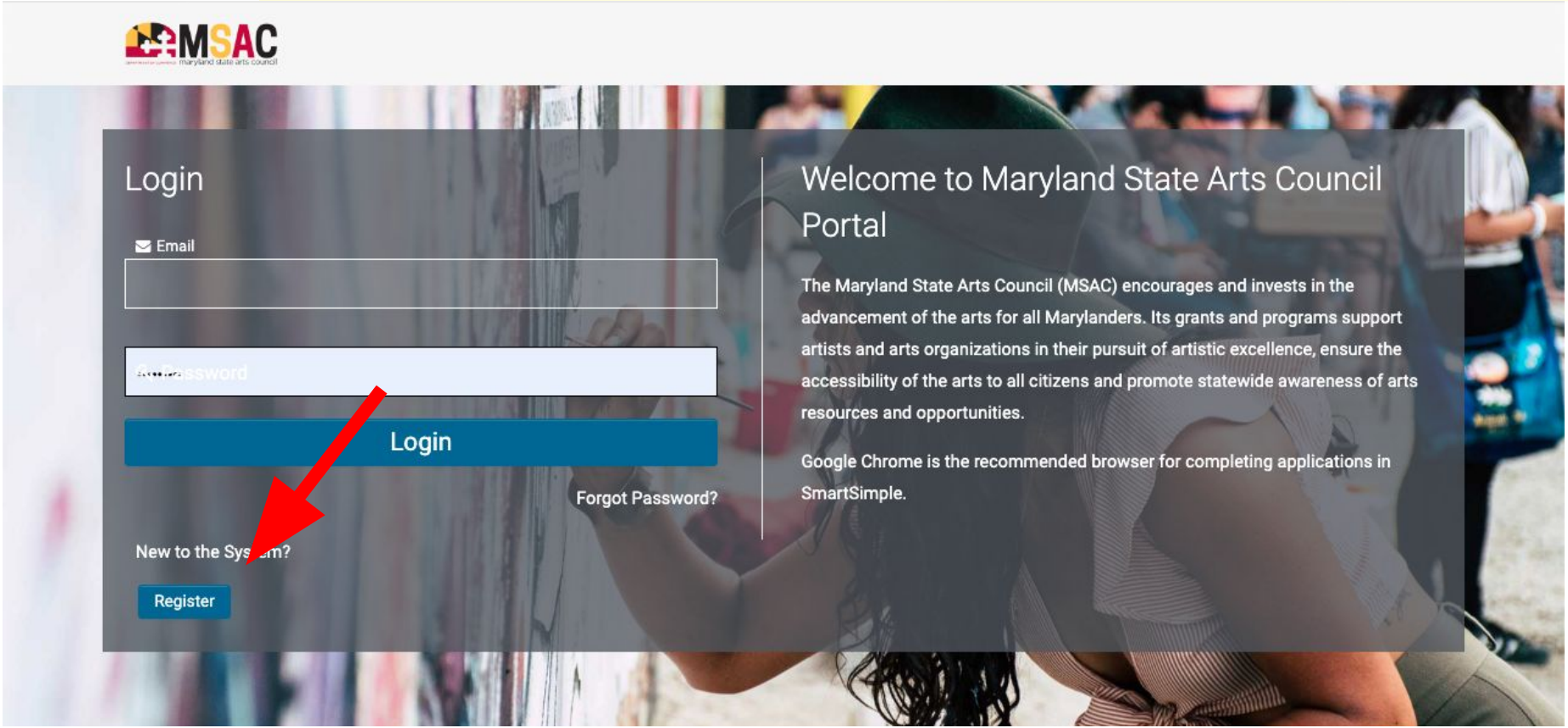
Sessions will also be recorded and shared on our website as a resource.

We encourage you to register for a session (MSAC EventBrite) and/or watch the recording for further details on the new GFO process and essential next steps for your organization.

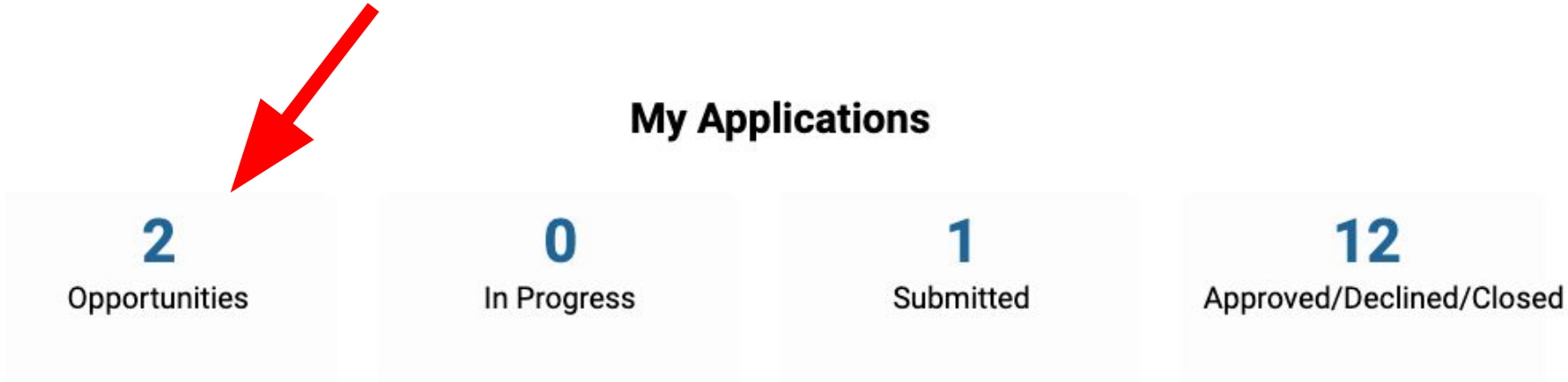
Smart Simple

All applications must be submitted through Smart Simple (marylandarts.smartsimple.com)

As an applicant, you will need to register (if you're not already) with Smart Simple to apply.



Go to marylandarts.smartsimple.com to register and/or log-in



Click on “Opportunities” on your Smart Simple dashboard

Opportunity Details	
Arts in Education Grant	Apply Now
Arts in Education Teaching Artist Roster Application	Apply Now
Creativity Grant	Apply Now
Emergency Grant	Apply Now
Presenting and Touring Roster Application	Apply Now
Professional Development Opportunity Grant	Apply Now
Public Call	Apply Now

Click the **“Apply Now”** button to open the application

1. Click "Save Draft" at the bottom of this screen to begin the application. Please note, you will not be able to begin work on the application until you click “Save Draft.”
2. Click "Save Draft" after completing each tab in order to save your work.
3. To navigate between tabs, click on the desired tab or use your browser's back button.
4. Click on the MSAC logo in the top left corner to go back to your profile. Be sure to click "Save Draft" at the bottom of the application prior to returning to your profile page.

Please note: To return to a saved draft application, click “In Progress” from the Grantee Home dashboard. From there, select the draft application to be edited and/or submitted. Do not return to the Funding Opportunities area to search for the grant application again, as this will result in creating multiple applications.

Starting September 1, 2022, the Unique Entity ID (UEI) field will be a REQUIRED field for all organizations (including nonprofit organizations, government entities, and schools/universities) applying for funding from MSAC. This will take the place of a DUNS number, which will no longer appear on organizational profiles. After 9/1, an organization without a UEI may be considered ineligible for funding. Independent Artists do not need to obtain a UEI.
Webinar Video (~57 min): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLCuPo2cQ4U
Quick Start Guide: https://msac.org/media/570/download?inline

CONTACT INFORMATION | PROGRAM DETAILS | FINANCIAL INFORMATION | ATTACHMENTS | ELECT | SIGNATURES

Grant Contact Name:

NEXT >

Save Draft | ✔ Submit

You have to click **“Save Draft”** to begin any application!

Questions

We are here to help!

Emily: emily.sollenberger@maryland.gov

Laura: laura.weiss@maryland.gov

MSAC
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE maryland state arts council

Thank You!

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To learn about similar topics, news & to keep in touch, please join our mailing list at tinyurl.com/MSACsMailingList