

## INFORMATION SESSION

# FY26 “How to Apply” - Creativity Grants for Project Support: Planning & Development

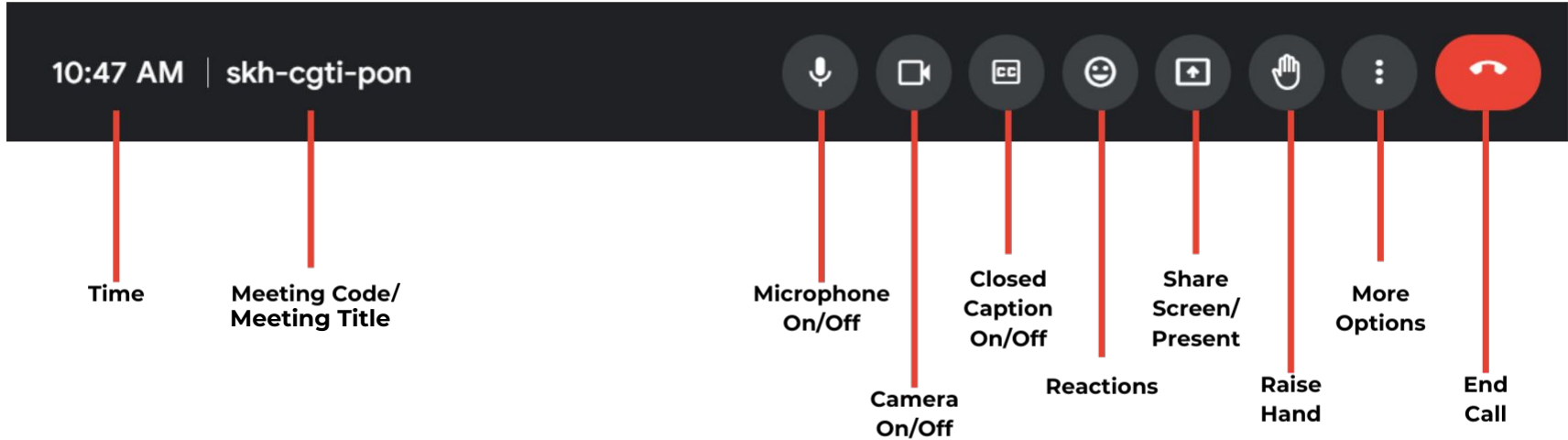
**Thursday, July 10th at 12 Noon**

**Presented by:**

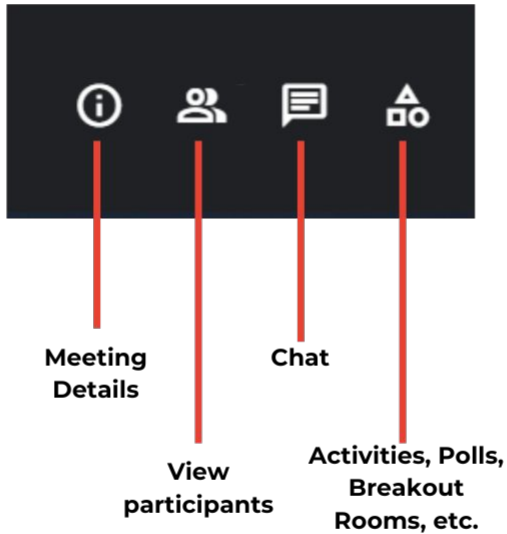
Emily Sollenberger & Laura Weiss  
Program Directors, Arts Services



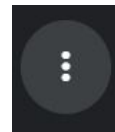
# Reference Shot of Features (1 of 2)









# Reference Shot of Features (2 of 2)







In "More Options"



-  Change layout
-  Full screen
-  Open picture-in-picture
-  Apply visual effects
-  Turn on captions
-  Use a phone for audio

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-  Report a problem
-  Report abuse
-  Troubleshooting & help
-  Settings

# 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](https://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](https://msac.org/about/ways-get-involved)
- Apply in SmartSimple
- Training and support
- Compensation provided for service



The screenshot shows the MSAC website's 'Ways to Get Involved' page. The header includes the MSAC logo, the Department of Commerce tagline 'Advancing the Arts Across Maryland', and navigation links for 'Smart Simple', 'News', 'Resource Bulletin', 'Contact', and 'My Profile'. A search icon is also present. Below the header is a navigation menu with 'ABOUT', 'PROGRAMS', 'OPPORTUNITIES', and 'RESOURCES'. A yellow button labeled 'EXPLORE THE ARTS IN MD' is positioned to the right. The main content area features a large image of colorful yarn and fabric arts. Below the image is a text block: 'Yarn and fabric arts created by master artist Gwen Handler (Carroll County) and apprentice artist Winnie Dreier (Baltimore County) during a 2021-22 Folklife Apprenticeship on wool work.' The page title is 'Ways to Get Involved', with a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > About > Ways to Get Involved'. The page lists 'Public Calls: Paid Opportunities' with expandable sections for 'Panelists' and 'Editors', each with a plus icon. Below this is 'Employment Opportunities' with a 'Current Openings' section, also featuring a plus icon. The footer contains social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, along with links for 'Privacy', 'Terms of Use', 'Accessibility', 'Careers', and 'Translate'. The MSAC logo and the text 'Maryland' are on the left, and the copyright notice '© 2023 Maryland State Arts Council' is on the right.

# Today's Agenda

- Review of Creativity Program & Guidelines
- Creativity Grant Application - Project / Planning & Development
- Helpful Hints for Applications
- Monthly review process
- Smart Simple grant platform
- Q&A



# Creativity Grant Overview

## Purpose of program:

- Supports activities/general operations for independent artists and organizations
  - *Today we will focus specifically on the Project-based Support - Planning & Development Grant.*
- 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
  - FY26 applications are available July 1, 2025 - March 31, 2026
  - NEW: Application will close at end of March this cycle, (*not April as we've done in the past!*)
- Eligible to receive one Creativity Grant per fiscal year

# What's New for FY2026

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

# Creativity Grant - Who Can Apply (Project)?

Organizations and Independent artists are eligible for Project-based support

**Organizations** must be one of the following:

- 501(c)3 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 (Project)?

- 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 (Project)?

- 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.

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

# Creativity Grant - Who Can Apply (Project)?

- Independent Artists
  - Without affiliation to an organization
  - Must be a Maryland resident, 18+ years of age
  - Cannot be enrolled in high school, undergraduate or graduate degree programs
  - Proposed project/activities must take place in Maryland
  - Only one app per project will be considered

# 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)
  - Travel outside of MD (***Planning & Development Grant only!***)

# 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
- 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 (Project)

- 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*)

# Creativity Grant - Application (Project)

Determining if your proposal is better suited for a **Planning & Development Grant vs an Implementation Grant**, consider some of the following:

- Where are you at in the Creative Process?
  - If in early phases, might be better suited in Planning & Development; If in later phases, might be better suited for Implementation. Consider the scope and timeline of the overall project
- Does the current proposal include a “final product” that will be seen/experienced by the public?
  - If yes, this would be suited for the Implementation Grant
- Does the current proposal focus specifically on the beginning steps or phases of a larger project?
  - If yes, this would likely be better suited for the Planning & Development Grant
- Does the current proposal include plans for research and/or development of a project that might not be seen/experienced by the public until a later phase in the project?
  - If yes, this would likely be better suited for the Planning & Development Grant

# Creativity Grant - Application (Project)

## Examples of Planning & Development Grants may include:

- Research and development for a project
  - May include travel outside of Maryland for research/planning purposes
- Artist time/stipend for developing/creating a work that doesn't necessarily have a concrete plan for future exhibition/showing (i.e. time to write, paint, compose, etc.)
- Creating a proof of concept, workshop, demo, etc for a larger project

## Examples of Implementation Grants may include:

- A proposal that includes a final product experienced by an audience/the public
- Exhibitions, shows, concerts, productions, album recordings, publishing, etc.

# Creativity Grant - Application (Project)

A project does not need to receive both a Planning & Development Grant and an Implementation Grant

- It may receive one or the other
  - A project may receive a Planning & Development Grant in one fiscal year and an Implementation Grant in another fiscal year
- If a Planning & Development Grant is received, there is no expectation of then also applying for an Implementation Grant later
- There are no benefits either way - each grant type has a separate scoring rubric, and would have different sets of panelists reviewing from one year to the next.
  - Your Implementation application isn't consider "stronger" because it received Planning & Development funding previously



# Application - Project-based Support Planning & Development

# Creativity Grant - Application (Planning & Development)

1. Describe your Planning and/or Development process as it relates to your proposed Arts Activity/Program/Event. Within your response include:

- Overarching goals or intentions for the future of the proposed project
- Details of your creative process and how this planning phase fits into the larger scope of the project
- Goals for future community engagement and intended impact with the finalized product

*An Excellent to Outstanding response includes:*

*A clear, specific, and thorough explanation of the artist's planning/development phase of a larger proposed arts activity/event/project, which includes clear and thorough evidence of larger goals and community engagement/impact, and how the planning fits within the larger scope*

# Creativity Grant - Application (Overview)

## Helpful Hints!

- Describe the planning activities with specific details of WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY within your first narrative.
  - Don't forget to include details about yourself! Share details about your artistic background/practice as it relates to the proposal
- Approach your narrative as if the reader has no idea what you're proposing! Give them the full picture of what you're planning/development goals are and how they would support a larger goal/project.
- 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 (Planning)

2. Provide a detailed timeline with specific activities/tasks for the planning/development process described in Question 1. (It is not necessary to include a timeline for the implementation phase of your overall project)

*An Excellent to Outstanding response includes:*

*A clear, specific and realistic timeline for the planning/development phase of the project demonstrating a realistic schedule, including specific timing/dates as it relates to expenditure of funds, and activities associated with the planning/development)*

# Creativity Grant - Application (Timeline)

## Helpful Hints!

- Include a full timeline/schedule of the entirety of the planning/development phase from beginning to end.
- Consider a weekly or monthly listing (or other time increment) with specific dates/timeframes that share all steps of the process.

## Creativity Grant - Application (Planning)

3. Provide a detailed budget, including all planned expenses and anticipated income beyond the MSAC request applicable to the planning/development process outlined in Question 1. (It is not necessary to include a budget for the implementation phase of your overall project)

*An Excellent to Outstanding response includes:*

*Clear, detailed, and realistic financial plan for income and expenses as it relates to the planning/development activities described throughout the application*

# Creativity Grant - Application (Budget)

## Helpful Hints!

- 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.
  - *(ie - Artist Fee = \$500: Hourly rate of \$25/hr for 20 hours)*
- The response must be within the context of the narrative; attachments of other budgets/financials will not be considered for Project-specific applications

# Creativity Grant - Application

- Attachments include w-9, Electronic Signature
- Financial Statement (orgs only)

The full application & scoring rubric can be found on [msac.org](http://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	
<b>Excellent to Outstanding</b>	<b>Good to Very Good</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Marginal to Fair</b>	<b>No Evidence</b>
<b>34-36 Points</b>	<b>25-27 Points</b>	<b>16-18 Points</b>	<b>7-9 Points</b>	<b>0 Points</b>



# Review Process and What's Ahead

## Creativity Grant - Grant Amount (Planning & Development)

- Available up to \$2,000
- One Creativity Grant (Planning & Development OR Implementation) 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 applications are open and available from **July 1, 2025 - March 31, 2026**.

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 Project-based applications only; another group of panelists will be dedicated to General Operating 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!

- You are only eligible for one Creativity Grant per fiscal year
  - Once awarded an FY26 Creativity Grant, you are not eligible to apply again until the FY27 cycle opens
- 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

- Applications submitted between July 2025 and December 2025 will have a Final Report deadline of August 15, 2026. Applications submitted between January 2026 and March 2026 will have a Final Report deadline of December 31, 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

**My project is still in the early planning stage. Can I still apply?**

Yes! We recommend reviewing the application types and rubric carefully. Much of the scoring is based on specific details and thorough descriptions. If details are still in the early stages, you may consider applying for the Planning & Development Grant. Connect with a Program Director to discuss further.

**I'm looking for funding to support living expenses and I don't have a specific project in mind. Can I apply for a Creativity Grant?** No. A Creativity Grant is intended for project-specific support. An application must contain details associated with a specific project to be eligible. Artists looking for support for day-to-day expenses should consider the Grants for Artists program instead.



# Creativity Grant - FAQs

**My project has received previous Creativity funding. Can I apply again in a new fiscal year?**

It depends - a project can only be funded once. However, if there are different “phases” or iterations of the project, future funding may be possible if the grant would clearly support different expenses and fall into either Planning or Implementation. Talk with your Program Director to verify eligibility.

**I’m eligible and applying for another MSAC grant, can I also apply for Creativity in the same month?**

Yes! You can apply and receive multiple grants in the same fiscal year – and the same month. Each grant program has different goals and purposes to support different needs. Check the eligibility criteria for each of the program guidelines.

# Creativity Grant - FAQs

**My project is already complete. Can I submit for reimbursement of expenses?**

No - we cannot reimburse for previously completed projects. You must submit an application before the completion of a project to be considered eligible.

**I would like the grant to cover expenses associated with bringing a non-Maryland artist to Maryland. Is this allowed?**

Possibly. If the grant funding would support a non-MD artist, it is recommended that you share a clear description as to why this particular artist would bring significant value to your project and to Maryland audiences. Check in with PDs if you have any questions about eligibility.

# 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 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.

# Smart Simple

All applications must be submitted through Smart Simple  
([marylandarts.smartsimple.com](http://marylandarts.smartsimple.com))

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

## Login

✉ Email

🔒 Password

Login

[Forgot Password?](#)

New to the System?

Register

## Welcome to Maryland State Arts Council Portal

The Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) encourages and invests in the advancement of the arts for all Marylanders. Its grants and programs support artists and arts organizations in their pursuit of artistic excellence, ensure the accessibility of the arts to all citizens and promote statewide awareness of arts resources and opportunities.

Google Chrome is the recommended browser for completing applications in SmartSimple.

Go to [marylandarts.smartsimple.com](http://marylandarts.smartsimple.com) to register and/or log-in

## My Applications

**2**

Opportunities

**0**

In Progress

**1**

Submitted

**12**

Approved/Declined/Closed

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 ELECTRONIC 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](mailto:emily.sollenberger@maryland.gov)

**Laura:** [laura.weiss@maryland.gov](mailto:laura.weiss@maryland.gov)

# Thank You!



To learn about similar topics, news & to keep in touch, please join our mailing list at [tinyurl.com/MSACsMailingList](https://tinyurl.com/MSACsMailingList)