INFORMATION SESSION

FY28 “How to Apply” Webinar
Grants for Organizations (GFO)
Application & Next Steps

Recorded on October 15, 2026

GRANTS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

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

Today's Agenda

- Review of the Grants for Organizations (GFO) Program
- Eligibility guidelines
- Brief Revision Overview
- Full Application Process
- GFO Timeline/Next Steps
- Funding formula
- Smart Simple
- Q&A



Grants for Organizations (GFO) Overview

Grants for Organizations Overview

Note:

- This presentation is an overview of the GFO Full FY28 Application & Process today.
- If you are not already in the GFO program OR if your Intent to Apply application was not accepted, you would not be eligible to submit an FY28 application at this time

Grants for Organizations Overview

Purpose of program:

- Provides operating support that strengthens and sustains Maryland's arts infrastructure
- In FY27, MSAC awarded over $19 million in GFO funding to **341** organizations across the state.

Grants for Organizations Overview

*FY28 GFO Application Deadline: **Sunday, November 15, 2026** at 11:59pm in Smart Simple.

*Technical assistance will not be available after normal business hours of Monday - Friday, 8am - 4pm. We highly encourage you to submit a few days prior to the deadline, as there will be no assistance on Saturday, 11/14 or Sunday, 11/15

Grants for Organizations Overview

1. **Returning applicant** (received FY27 GFO award): you have already been accepted into the GFO program and did not need to complete an Intent to Apply → you'll move straight to the application due **November 15**.

2. **New applicant** (did not receive a FY27 GFO award): you were required to submit an Intent to Apply application due **September 15**, and accepted into the program to then apply for the full application **November 15**.

    - If you are a new organization that does not submit an Intent to Apply (or it wasn't approved), you will not be able to submit a Full Application for FY28 funding.

GFO Eligibility & Use of Funds

GFO - Who Can Apply?

Arts Organizations - General Operating Grant (GOG)

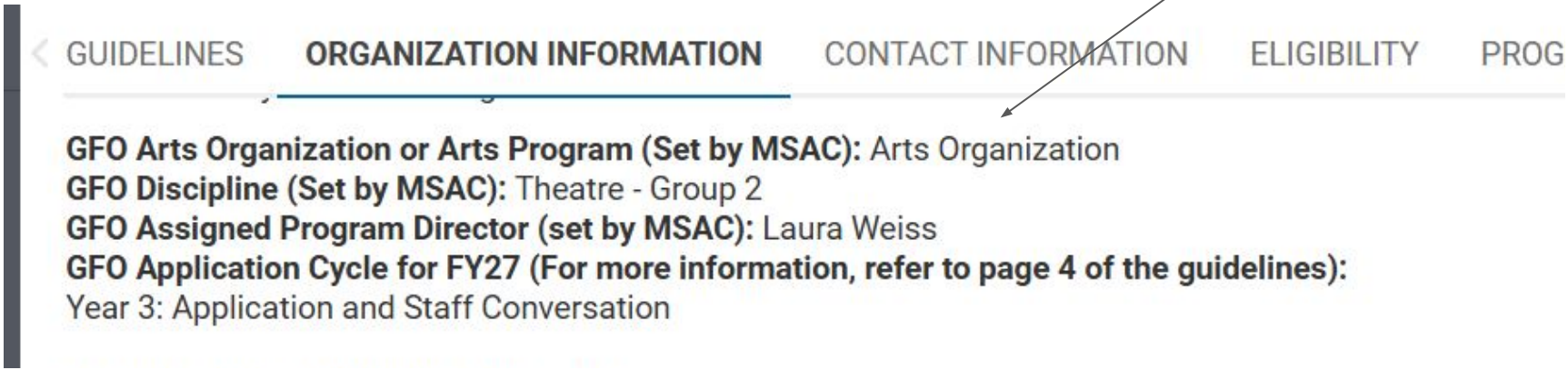
- Nonprofit organizations whose purpose is producing or presenting the arts through public programs or services. Applicants must be arts organizations, organizations whose mission/purpose is producing or presenting the arts through public programs or services, such as art museums, orchestras, galleries, theaters, arts centers, etc.

GFO - Who Can Apply?

Art Programs (PRG)

- Organizations whose primary purpose is other than producing or presenting the arts, but who provide ongoing public arts activities through public programs. The mission of these organizations is not specifically dedicated to the arts but they do have ongoing arts programming. These are considered non-arts organizations for MSAC purposes. Examples include: community centers, places of worship, non-art museums, libraries, universities, etc.

GFO - Who Can Apply?



Your designation as an Arts Organization OR an Arts Program can now be found in Smart Simple within the GFO application under the “Organization Information” tab

GFO - Who Can Apply?

- *Must be previously funded through GFO or be invited to complete the Full Application via the Intent to Apply process*
- Arts Organizations/Programs
  - Must be 501(c)3 nonprofit, unit of government, school
    - Can be fiscally sponsored under Model A agreement
  - Be incorporated in Maryland as a nonprofit or have significant physical presence in Maryland.
  - Have operated as an arts organization or arts program for one full fiscal year and be able to submit a financial statement for the most recently completed fiscal year at the time of application
  - **NEW as of FY27!** Have allowable income over $10,000 (previously $50K)

GFO - What can it support?

- General Operations!
  - This is not a project-specific grant program
  - Support of ongoing programming and operations of your organization
- Programming materials/supplies
- Marketing and Promotional activities
- Personnel and associated expenses
- Operations, such as rent, utilities, internet, etc.
- Professional development activities

Grants for Organizations- What can't it support?

- Re-granting, scholarships
- Capital improvements
- Activities that aren't open to the public
- Activities that are primarily therapeutic
- Travel outside of MD
- As with any MSAC grant, the funds cannot be used for political contributions
- Not sure? Ask!

Revision Process Refresher Implemented in FY27

GFO Editing Process

Arts Services Program Directors Emily Sollenberger and Laura Weiss have overseen the GFO program (and Creativity Grant) since 2019. Based on experience and feedback, Emily and Laura recommended a public editing process throughout FY25 to address overarching and persistent issues:

- Inherent nature of panelist subjectivity
- Variances in scoring (year to year, panel to panel, etc.)

- What is essential in the process to provide support to grantees?
- Substantial growth in the program/growing demand and needs for:
    - general operating support as other funding sources diminish
    - technical support for applying organizations
    - support and management of panelists

Topics we asked Editors to consider

1. What is *essential* in the GFO process to provide funding to arts organizations?
2. Should there be a role for the public (as a panelist or other reviewer role) in the process?
3. Building off of the last two discussions, is there a new GFO structure entirely to consider?

These questions drove our overall revision of the GFO program, resulting in the new process we'll share with you today.

What we heard from the Editors

Regarding the Application:

- General information (mission, vision, etc.) is important to know about an organization
- Significant application changes are needed for the On Year/Full Application
- Suggested Addition of including goals/benchmarks set by the organization within the Application
- Financials + Organizational attachments in the Application remain the same

Regarding the Public Role:

- Yes, there is a role for the public
- Concerns with consistency of the panelists and their reviews from year to year
- There is value in the public visits with organizations; and there's a connection to public dollars

Regarding Other Elements of the Process:

- Consider a Compliance model + Artistic Visits
- Remove panel meetings and scoring elements from the process
- Consider a new cycle structure to account for the number of organizations / visits

Goals of the Revised GFO Program

Increase equity and accessibility

- Removal of scoring helps eliminate bias which leads to inequitable reviews of applications
- More organizations will be eligible for funding through this new process

Simplify, Shorten, and Streamline!

- Simpler process overall
- Less Time on Application = More Time for Your Organization's Work!
- Increases equity and access

MSAC
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE maryland state arts council

GFO Full Application

GFO Full Application - Overview

- **Organizational Information**
  - Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) required - ensure it's active!
  - Fiscal Sponsorship information - if applicable
  - **NEW! Updates within Organizational Profile**
- **Eligibility Questions**
- **Program Details**
- **Financials**
- **Attachments**

GFO Full Application

- **Organizational Profile Information - *NEW as of FY27***
  - See the **"Edit Org Profile"** yellow button to make updates to your profile. That information, along with information MSAC will be tracking, will be pulled into the application.
    - Contact information
    - IRS Date
    - Mission, Vision, Goals, and Values

2027-40575

GUIDELINES | **ORGANIZATION INFORMATION** | CONTACT INFORMATION | ELIGIBILITY | PROGRAM DETAILS

Please note, some of the fields below are populated from your organization's profile. Please make sure that the *E
sections are completed by clicking on the "Edit Org Profile" button below.

Click on the "Edit Org Profile" button below to insert and/or edit the information below

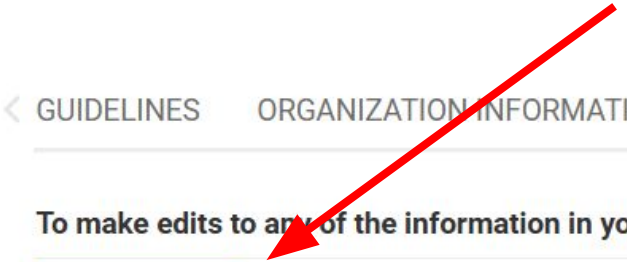
Edit Org Profile

Organization Name: THE EVERYMAN THEATRE INCORPORATED

Address:
315 W FAYETTE ST
BALTIMORE, MD
21201-3405

GFO Full Application

- **Contact Information**
  - See the **“Edit Profile”** yellow button to make updates to your profile. That information will be pulled into the application.
    - Contact information
    - Update if your primary contact has since changed!



GUIDELINES | ORGANIZATION INFORMATION | **CONTACT INFORMATION** | ELIGIBILITY | PROGRAM DETAILS

To make edits to any of the information in your profile, click the Edit button below.

Edit Profile

Grant Contact Name: Elliott Kashner
Phone: 443-615-7055
Email: ekashner@everymantheatre.org

Address: 315 W FAYETTE ST
City: BALTIMORE
State: MD
Zip Code: 21201-3405

GFO Full Application

Eligibility Section

- **Has your organization operated for one full fiscal year? Dropdown:** (Yes/No)
- **Is your organization incorporated in Maryland or have a significant physical presence in Maryland?** Dropdown: (Yes, Inc. in MD; Yes, Sig Presence in MD; No)
- **Does your organization have ongoing programs to produce or present the arts to the public?** Dropdown: (Yes/No)

GFO Full Application

Eligibility Section - Programming

Upload a list (no more than 2 pages) of all public programming in your organization's current fiscal year. In your response, include a brief description of each type of program/event (ie - Main Stage Season, Exhibition Series, Educational Programming) and who the program/event serves. If an activity is tuition/fee-based (such as summer camp, classes, etc.), describe how the activity is serving the community beyond those that are paying to participate.

GFO Full Application

Eligibility Section - Programming

- For **Arts Programs**, please include a list ALL programming that your organization offers (whether arts-based or not). Within this list, indicate what is an arts-based program with an asterisk (*).
- **Arts Programs:** What percentage of your current fiscal year's operating budget is allocated to your arts-based programming?

GFO Full Application

Eligibility Section - Programming

- **Do you anticipate any significant changes to the programming in the next fiscal year?** (Yes/No)
  - If Yes, provide a brief explanation of what significant changes you anticipate.

    Significant changes would include situations in which a type of programming is being added/eliminated or there will be a significant increase/decrease in budget allocation for a particular program

GFO Full Application

Eligibility Section

- **Tell us about your organizational structure - click on all the groups that apply to your organization:**
  - A board of directors with officers or another type of governing body
  - Paid staff members (full time, PT, and/or contractual)
  - Volunteers (as staff, committees, etc.)

GFO Full Application

Eligibility Section - NEW for FY28

- **If awarded a grant, will the organization be in compliance and/or be able to comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?** (Yes/No)
- **Please provide the full name and title of the designated Accessibility Point of Contact.**
    - The Accessibility Point of Contact is a designated individual or representative serving as the primary liaison for public accommodation requests and whose contact information is published publicly. They also manage the organization's accessibility compliance and formally log accessibility grievances.
    - Webinar: **Tues., October 20** from **12 - 1:30pm** *(Recording available afterwards)*

GFO Full Application

Program Details Section - Updates and Highlights

- Share up to **5 significant updates and/or highlights** about the organization from the past fiscal year. These should include significant changes to mission/vision/goals of the organization, staffing/leadership, operations, programming or other artistic activities, finances, etc. Within your response, include steps the organization has taken to address these changes, and any additional details to why these changes occurred.
- Please note: You must include <u>at least one</u> update, but may include up to five total. If you are a new organization, consider including at least three updates.
- Reminder: If you shared an update in the above section regarding your mission/vision/goals, please update your Organizational Profile with the updated mission/vision/goals

GFO Full Application

Program Details Section

- Optional - **Are there any challenges that you'd like MSAC to be aware of, or ways we can support your organization in ways beyond your grant award?**

GFO Full Application

Program Details Section - Goals and Priorities

- List up to **5 goals/priorities of the organization** over the next 5 years.
  - Keep in mind indicators of success, ways to measure goals, and/or how you would implement
  - Tell us about the timeframe for completion. These can be short term or long term goals.

    For example: "Complete by end of FY27", "By April 2027", "Start in Jan 2027, complete by Dec 2027", etc.
  - Goals/priorities may include activities associated with capacity building, finances, board/staff development, programmatic development, audiences/community engagement, new initiatives, etc.
- If sharing a goal that was included in a previous GFO application, please share updates or progress on that particular goal.
- Please note: You must include at least one organizational goal, but may include up to five total.

GFO Full Application

Program Details Section

- The stated goals/priorities will later connect to the Final Report of the application
  - You'll be asked for updates in the report
    - Goals don't necessarily need to be completed - but you'll be asked for details on progress
  - The FY28 GFO Final Report will be due on August 15, 2028
    - Keep this in mind when selecting the goals you share

GFO Full Application

Financials Section

In the Financial Table, enter the income and expenses for your arts organization's or arts program's most recently completed Fiscal Year (FY26 or CY25).

- For more information on allowable and non-allowable income/expenses, please refer to the FY28 GFO Guidelines

Financial Table

- Should you need a spreadsheet template of the Financial Table, you can access a copy from a Program Director, and one will be added to the website as a resource in the upcoming weeks.

GFO Full Application

Financials Section

- Are there any significant changes within your financial statement from the previous year?
  - Please share if you've had a 20% surplus/deficit change, significant changes in income sources, or unexpected expenses, etc.

GFO Full Application

Attachments

- Signed Form w-9
- IRS Letter of tax determination
- Most recently completed fiscal year Financial Statement (FY26/CY25)
  - Under $750K Allowable Income - signed Profit & Loss or similar statement.
  - Over $750K Allowable Income - audited financial statements
  - Arts Program - an additional Arts Program statement required

Electronic Signature

GFO Full Application

Financial Statement Attachments

Organizations with Allowable Income **<u>below</u> $750,000:**

- Submit your most recently completed fiscal year statement, signed by a professional accountant or the organization's fiscal officer.
- This should be a statement showing a full year of income and expenses, such as a Profit & Loss statement.
- NOTE- a Form 990 statement will not be accepted.

GFO Full Application

Financial Statement Attachments

Organizations with Allowable Income **over $750,000:**

- Submit your most recently completed fiscal year Independent Audit, prepared by a CPA firm.
- If your most recently completed fiscal year audit is not finalized at the time of the application deadline, contact your Program Director prior to the deadline to discuss the option of submitting your audit after the deadline, which must be received by the Program Director on or before **March 1, 2027**. If this is not possible, the organization would be required to submit the previous year's completed audit as part of the application.

GFO Full Application

Financial Statement Attachments

Arts Programs must submit a full organizational statement from the organization or parent organization, along with an Arts Program statement.

- Arts Program Financial Statement should be from the most recent fiscal year - including income/expenses directly connected to your arts programming only, and not the full organization financials.

GFO Next Steps

Grants for Organizations - Full Application

As of FY27, all GFO applicants will complete the SAME application every year *(previously there were "On" and "Off Year" applications that varied from year to year).*

→ All GFO applications will be due on **November 15th** of each year.

Grants for Organizations - Revised Panelist Role

In the past, Panelists were asked to review and score all written applications. Panelists also conducted “Extension Assignments,” which included Artistic Activity Visits and In-Depth Conversations with applicants. Their work culminated in a Panel Meeting, where the final score of each applicant was discussed and determined.

Panelists are involved in the review process, but in a different way since FY27:

- Panelists review (not score) written applications and complete Artistic Activity Visits
- MSAC Staff review (not score) written applications and complete In-Depth Staff Conversations

Grants for Organizations - New Panelist Role

Artistic Activity Visit– a panelist will attend or view a form of public programming, such as a performance, exhibit or other event that is an example of artistic programming from the organization, once every four years or as determined by MSAC staff if an organization is put into a one-year application cycle.

- The Artistic Activity Visit is not scored.
- It is intended to show evidence of programming that is open to the public and aligns with the written application and the organization's mission/vision/goals.
- Just as in the previous GFO program, artistic quality or excellence is not evaluated during this Visit.
- More details to come on this later in the year.

Grants for Organizations - New Panelist Role

Staff Conversation - MSAC Program Directors for Arts Services will conduct In-Depth Conversations as a required part of the application review process once every four years, or as determined by MSAC staff if an organization is put into a one-year application cycle.

- MSAC staff will speak with organizational personnel, such as staff leadership, board members, etc, to discuss organizational and programmatic development, goals, etc.
- This conversation will last 30 minutes and will be scheduled by MSAC staff. More details to come on this later in the year.

Grants for Organizations - New Review Cycle

The Artistic Activity Visit and Staff Conversation elements of the review process occur once every four years on a rotating schedule. An example of the review schedule would include:

- **Year 1: Application + Artistic Activity Visit**
- **Year 2: Application Only**
- **Year 3: Application + Staff Conversation**
- **Year 4: Application Only**

Your organization will be assigned to a certain year in the cycle depending on your Artistic Discipline

All NEW organizations (completing the GFO application following the Intent to Apply application) will also complete BOTH the Artistic Activity Visit AND Staff Conversation in their first review cycle. Following that, if approved, they will fall into schedule per Artistic Discipline

Grants for Organizations - New Review Cycle

FY28 Cycle Schedule - By Discipline

→ **(A) Required to submit application + Artistic Site Visit**:

- o Multi-Discipline - Group 2
- o Music - Group 1

→ **(B) Required to submit application only**

- o Dance
- o Folk/Traditions
- o Theatre - Group 1
- o Visual/Media - Group 1

→ **(C) Required to submit application + Staff Conversation**

- o Music - Group 2
- o Service
- o Visual/Media Group 2

→ **(D) Required to submit application only**

- o Literary
- o Multi-Discipline - Group 1
- o Theatre - Group 2

**More information in FY28 GFO Grant Guidelines starting on page 4.*

Grants for Organizations - New Review Cycle

Your organization's Artistic Discipline/Group is auto-populated into your GFO application now! (See Organizational Information Tab)

We will share separate recordings later this fall concerning the Artistic Activity Visits and In-Depth Conversation requirements

- We will discuss timing, scheduling, etc at that time

Reminder: All new organizations will complete BOTH an Artistic Activity Visit and In-Depth Conversation in their first review cycle. Any organization can also have one or both of these elements added to their review process, as determined by the Program Director.

Grants for Organizations - Timeline

October 5: FY28 GFO Application opened within Smart Simple; Intent to Apply notifications were sent

November 15 at 11:59pm: GFO Application due

December - April: MSAC staff reviews your application and financials. Panelists and Staff complete assigned Site Visits and In-Depth Conversations

May/June: Recommendations for funding are made to the Council by staff; grant amounts are determined based on MSAC's budget

After July 1: Notifications of all FY28 GFO grants are sent via Smart Simple

August 15: (FY27) Final Report due; Final Report from the previous fiscal year has to be approved before FY28 disbursement can be processed

Ongoing: MSAC staff are available to answer questions, provide support, meet with staff/board, attend programs and events, etc.

GFO Funding Formula & FAQs

GFO - Revised Funding Formula - as of FY27

Total Allowable Income x Panel % *(when applicable)* **x Cap Allocation % = Grant Award**

- Total Allowable Income: provided by organization within the annual application, based on updated statements
- Cap Allocation %: determined by MSAC GFO budget and organization Tier each year

Currently phasing out the Panel % for current organizations, and will ultimately leave two variables to determine awards each year

GFO - Equitable Funding Formula

Grant = Allowable Income x Panel % *(when applicable)* x **Cap Allocation %**

Cap Allocation %s are based on budget size, with organizations divided into five budget Tiers.

Tier 1: (**$10K*** - $500K) **previously $50K-$500K*
Tier 2: ($500K - $1.5M)
Tier 3: ($1.5M - $5M)
Tier 4: ($5M - $10M)
Tier 5: ($10M+)

****moving into year 5 of 5 year transition that started in FY24***

GFO - Equitable Funding Formula

Grant = Allowable Income x Panel % *(when applicable) x* **Cap Allocation %**

Grant Amount Cap:
Year 1: $1.4M; Year 2: $1.3M; Year 3: $1.2M; Year 4: $1.1M; **Year 5: $1M**

Transition Priorities (over 5 year transition in alignment with program allocation):

- Tier 1 increases at a faster rate during the 5 year transition.
- Tier 2 increases steadily over the 5 year transition.
- Tier 3 remains stable during the transition.
- Tiers 4 & 5 do not decrease at a rate greater than 1.5% annually.

GFO Scoring % Phase Out Schedule

In an effort to support the budget and funding stability of GFO organizations over 3 years.

Fiscal Year	**FY26 Scores of 90%+**	**FY26 Scores of 80% to 89%**	**FY26 Scores of 70% to 79%**
FY27 - complete	Rounded up to 100% (score removed from formula)	Rounded up to 90% in funding formula	Rounded up to 80% in funding formula
FY28	***Score removed from formula***	**Rounded up to 100% (score removed from formula)**	**Rounded up to 90% in funding formula**
FY29	*Score removed from formula*	*Score removed from formula*	Rounded up to 100% (score removed from formula)

Larger organizations (Tiers 4 and 5 - $5 million+) who join the GFO program as **New Organizations** in FY27 - FY29 would also have a “phased in” process to the funding formula to ensure budget stability within the program.

Fiscal Year	**Grant Amount**
FY27	Would be eligible for 70% of total grant amount
FY28	**Would be eligible for 80% of total grant amount**
FY29	Would be eligible for 90% of total grant amount
FY30	New orgs could be eligible for 100% of total grant amount (end “phase in” process)

Match Requirements

Prior to FY27, all GFO grants had a required 3:1 match in cash (excludes funds or services from the State and in-kind contributions). This match is checked by Program Directors in the Final Report.

Current Match Requirement is based on the organization's Tier in the GFO program

- Tier 1 and Tier 2 organizations (less than $1.5 million in total allowable income) must match GFO funds at least **1:1 in cash**
- Tier 3, 4, & 5 organizations (allowable income $1.5 million+) must match GFO funds at least **3:1 in cash**
- Funds or services from the State of Maryland, In-kind contributions, or donated services may not be used as part of the match

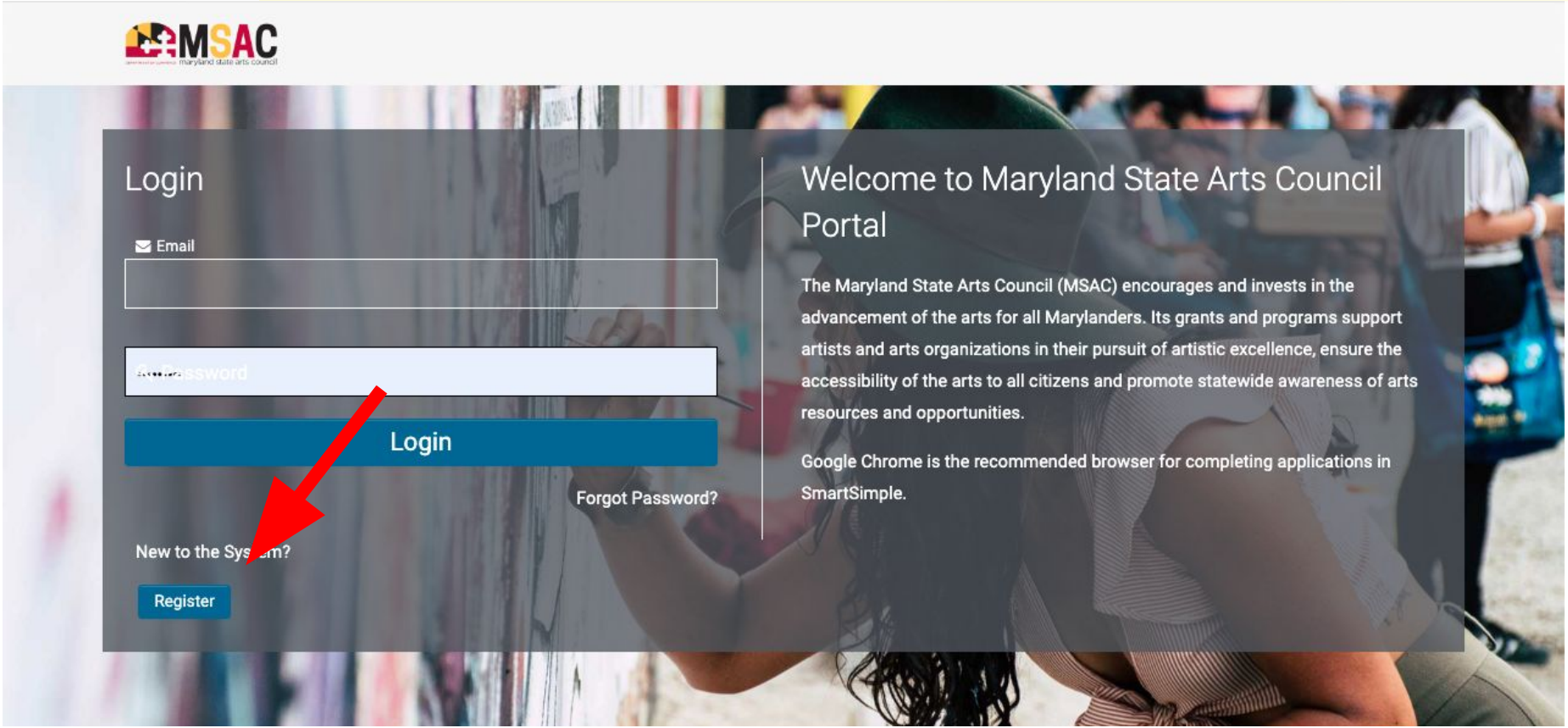
Smart Simple & Questions

Smart Simple

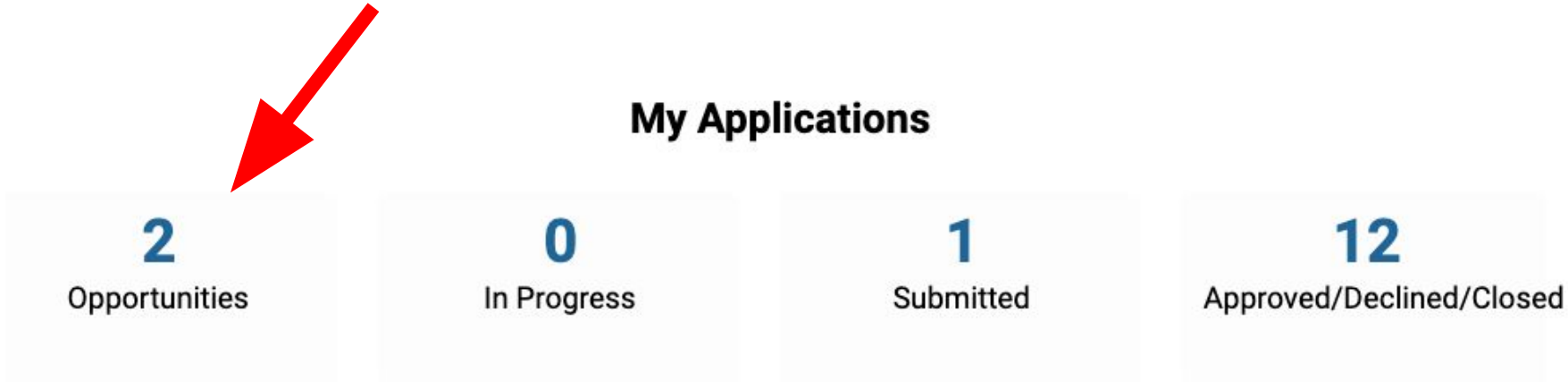
All applications must be submitted through Smart Simple (marylandarts.smartsimple.com)

As an applicant, you will need to register with Smart Simple to apply.

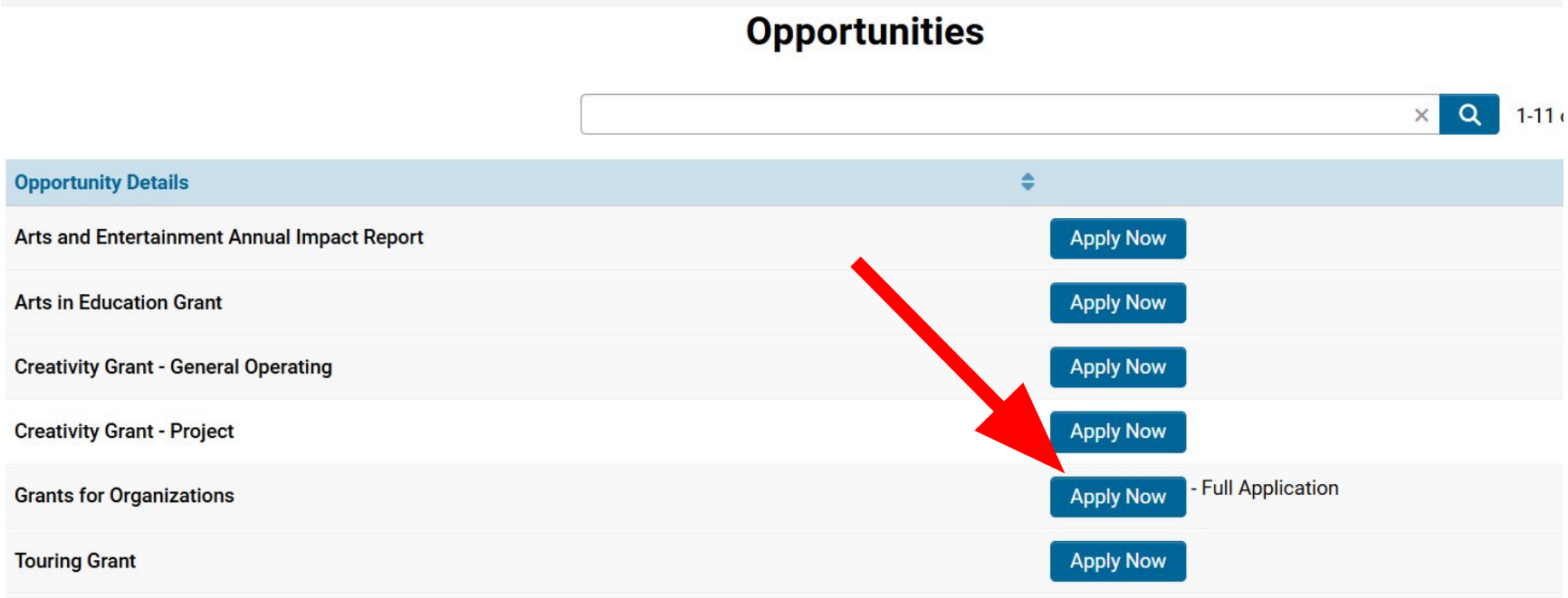
- Your organization should already have an account if applying to GFO funding at this point.



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



Click on “Opportunities” on your Smart Simple dashboard



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!

Upcoming GFO Office Hours

Friday, October 30, 12pm to 1pm *(Google Meet link)*

Friday, November 13, 12pm to 1pm *(Google Meet link)*

Join Program Directors us in an informal space to gather and address any questions that come up along the way regarding the GFO application process. These sessions will not be recorded. Registration is not required - just use the links (which were also emailed to you).

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!

GRANTS FOR
ORGANIZATIONS

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