



Grants for Organizations (GFO) FY2028 Guidelines

DEADLINE:

September 15, 2026: Intent to Apply Form (*new orgs only*)

November 15, 2026: Application (*all orgs*)

SUPPORT PERIOD: FY2028 (July 1, 2027 - June 30, 2028)



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Program Overview

Purpose

The Grants for Organizations (GFO) program provides annual operating grants to organizations that produce or present the arts to the general public through public programs or services. The purpose of the GFO program is to strengthen the vitality and sustainability of Maryland's cultural organizations to maintain a strong and stable arts infrastructure in the State of Maryland. Eligible organizations may apply for a single GFO grant per year.

A resource to assist with understanding this document is the [MSAC Glossary](#), which provides an overview of terms commonly used in MSAC grant guidelines, on the website, and in other published materials.

Description

General Operating Grants (GOG)

GOG provides operating support to 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.

Organizations applying for General Operating Grants (GOG) must have allowable* operating income of more than \$10,000 to be eligible.

Arts Program Grants (PRG)

PRG provides arts program support to nonprofit 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, churches, non-art museums, libraries, universities, etc.

These organizations may apply for an Arts Program Grant for the costs of their ongoing arts activities produced or presented for general audiences through public programs. Units of local government, colleges, and universities are also eligible to apply. Curricular activities or activities required of students are not eligible to be covered by an Arts Program Grant.

E.g., A Library is a non-arts organization, but it has an annual concert series that has been in place for a number of years. The library may apply for an Arts Program Grant specifically for the costs of their concert series.

Organizations applying for Arts Program Grants (PRG) must have allowable* operating income of more than \$10,000 for their Arts Program to be eligible.

Artistic Categories

Eligible organizations may apply for one GFO grant per year in one of the artistic categories listed below.

Organizations should select the artistic category that most closely characterizes the predominant activities of their organization. Descriptions and definitions of the artistic categories are available in Appendix A.

Organizations within the Multi-Discipline, Music, Theater, and Visual Arts/Media discipline are then split up into two groups (alphabetically); contact the appropriate Program Director to discuss your organization's category and group.

- Dance
- Folk and Traditional Arts
- Literary Arts
- Multi-Discipline
- Music
- Service
- Theater
- Visual Arts/Media

Grant Cycle

Funding

Four-Year Application Cycle

As of FY27, MSAC uses a four-year application cycle. The four-year cycle is based on the organization's artistic discipline and category. Organizations that are recommended for the four-year application cycle, and are in good standing with all grant reporting requirements, will submit an application each year. In year one of the cycle, applicants will have an Artistic Activity Visit conducted by a public panelist. In year three of the cycle, applicants will have a Staff Conversation conducted by a MSAC Program Director. Organizations that consistently receive favorable reviews during the panel review process and application evaluation are likely to continue to be recommended for this four-year application cycle.

Four-year Cycle:

- Year 1: Application + Artistic Site Visit by Panelist
- Year 2: Application Only
- Year 3: Application + Staff Conversation with Program Director
- Year 4: Application Only

One-Year Application Cycle

Organizations not eligible or recommended for inclusion in the four-year application cycle are instead required to be on the one-year application cycle. Organizations recommended for the one-year application cycle are required to submit an application, and receive the appropriate Artistic Activity Visit from a panelist and Staff Conversation by the Program Director until recommended for the four-year cycle.

Scenarios in which an organization might be recommended for the one-year application cycle:

- First time applicants to the GFO Program.
- Applicants that did not receive funding in the previous grant cycle.
- Applicants that were recommended for a one-year application cycle in the previous fiscal year grant review, as noted in their grant award notification.
- Applicants with significant financial or organizational changes may be recommended for one-year funding.

The four-year cycle is based on the organization's artistic discipline and category. Check the **Four-Year Cycle** schedule below or contact the appropriate MSAC program director for more information.

FY2028

Support Period: July 1, 2027 through June 30, 2028

Application Deadline: November 15, 2026

- **Required to submit application + Artistic Site Visit:**
 - Multi-Discipline - Group 2
 - Music - Group 1
- **Required to submit application**
 - Dance
 - Folk/Traditions
 - Theatre - Group 1
 - Visual/Media - Group 1
- **Required to submit application + Staff Conversation**
 - Music - Group 2
 - Service
 - Visual/Media Group 2
- **Required to submit application**
 - Literary
 - Multi-Discipline - Group 1
 - Theatre - Group 2

FY2029

Support Period: July 1, 2028 through June 30, 2029

Application Deadline: November 15, 2027.

- **Required to submit application + Artistic Site Visit:**
 - Literary
 - Multi-Discipline - Group 1
 - Theatre - Group 2
- **Required to submit application**
 - Multi-Discipline - Group 2
 - Music - Group 1
- **Required to submit application + Staff Conversation**
 - Dance
 - Folk/Traditions
 - Theatre - Group 1
 - Visual/Media - Group 1
- **Required to submit application**
 - Music - Group 2
 - Service
 - Visual/Media Group 2

FY2030

Support Period: July 1, 2029 through June 30, 2030

Application Deadline: November 15, 2028.

- **Required to submit application + Artistic Site Visit:**
 - Music - Group 2
 - Service

- o Visual/Media Group 2
- **Required to submit application**
 - o Literary
 - o Multi-Discipline - Group 1
 - o Theatre - Group 2
- **Required to submit application + Staff Conversation**
 - o Multi-Discipline - Group 2
 - o Music - Group 1
- **Required to submit application**
 - o Dance
 - o Folk/Traditions
 - o Theatre - Group 1
 - o Visual/Media - Group 1

FY 2031

Support Period: July 1, 2030 through June 30, 2031

Application deadline: November 15, 2029.

- **Required to submit application + Artistic Site Visit:**
 - o Dance
 - o Folk/Traditions
 - o Theatre - Group 1
 - o Visual/Media - Group 1
- **Required to submit application**
 - o Music - Group 2
 - o Service
 - o Visual/Media Group 2
- **Required to submit application + Staff Conversation**
 - o Literary
 - o Multi-Discipline - Group 1
 - o Theatre - Group 2
- **Required to submit application**
 - o Multi-Discipline - Group 2
 - o Music - Group 1

Support Period

GFO funds support activities taking place during the fiscal year (FY) in which funds are awarded. MSAC's FY 2028 is July 1, 2027 to June 30, 2028.

Grantees agree to spend or obligate all funds by June 30, 2028. Obligation of funds means that awarded funds are expended, encumbered, or otherwise legally committed to be used, such that returning the unspent funds would cause the grantee legal harm.

Use of Funds

GFO funds may be used for an organization's (GOG or PRG) general operating expenses. Please refer to "Allowable Expenses under "Financial Requirements" for more details.

GFO funds may not be used for:

- Acquisition of capital assets

- Regranting to other individuals or entities
- Activities that are principally recreational, therapeutic, or rehabilitative
- Scholarships awarded by the applicant organization for its own activities
- Capital improvements or purchases of permanent equipment
- Activities for the exclusive benefit of an organization's members
- Contributions to any persons who hold, or are candidates for, elected office
- Contributions to any political party, organization, or action committee
- Activities in connection with any political campaign or referendum
- Lobbying activities
- Expenses for activities or projects already completed at the time of grant application
- Expenses for which the applicant was previously awarded funds through another MSAC grant program. (i.e., an applicant may only be awarded MSAC funds once for any individual project expense; contact MSAC staff with questions)
- Institutional indirect costs in excess of 15 percent (15%) of the total grant amount

Matching Requirements

All General Operating Grants and all Arts Program Grants must be matched. Funds or services from the State of Maryland are not allowed as part of the match. In-kind* contributions or donated services may not be used as part of the match.

- **Organizations who fall into Tiers 1 or 2** (under \$1.5 million in total allowable income) must match GFO funds at least 1:1 in cash
- **Organizations who fall into Tiers 3, 4, & 5** (\$1.5 million+ in total allowable income) must match GFO funds at least 3:1 in cash

For more details on Tiers, please refer to the Cap Allocation section on page 13.

Timeline

The grant timelines below are estimates and may change according to application volume, funding changes, constituent needs, staff capacity, or other factors. Subscribe to MSAC communications to be notified of any public information sessions and other program updates by completing [the signup form on our webpage](#)

- Applications
 - Intent to Apply:
 - Publication: early August 2026
 - Deadline: September 15, 2026, 11:59pm
 - Staff Review: Mid September - Early October 2026
 - Notifications: Early October 2026
 - Full Applications
 - Publication: Early October 2026
 - Deadline: November 15, 2026, 11:59pm
- Full Application Review
 - Panelist Review: January - April, 2027
 - Artistic Activity Visits (for those in designated cycle year): January - April, 2027
 - Staff Review
 - Application & Financial Reviews of all applications: December - April, 2027
 - Deadline to submit updated Financial Statements (if applicable): March 1, 2027
 - Staff Conversations (for those in designated cycle year): January - April, 2027
- Notification
 - Program Directors Finalize Formulas for Grant Recommendations: April - May 2027

- Council Reviews and Approvals: May - June 2027
- Notifications to Grantees: mid-late July 2027
- Reports
 - Deadline: August 15, 2028

**Note there may be more specific deadlines throughout the process that Program Directors will communicate directly.*

Eligibility

Arts organizations or arts programs must be one of the following:

- Nonprofit organization (i.e., an organization with an IRS-designated 501(c)3 status)
 - Organizations must be incorporated in Maryland or have significant physical presence in Maryland. Organizations that are not incorporated in Maryland but have a significant physical presence in Maryland may not be eligible for a General Operating Grant, but may be eligible as a PRG to support activities taking place in Maryland. For more information please contact the program director for the artistic category for which this scenario applies.
- Nonprofit, Maryland-based fiscal sponsor organization applying on behalf of a Maryland-based group, project, or artist(s) with whom it has a Model A fiscal sponsorship agreement in place (i.e., 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 (e.g., town, city, county, state, etc., with the capacity to undertake an arts program)
- College or university (i.e., an established higher education institution in Maryland)
- School (i.e., a public or private school serving students in grades pre-Kindergarten through 12)

Additional Eligibility Requirements:

- Organizations/programs must have a minimum total allowable income of \$10,000 in the most recently completed fiscal year
- Have 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.
- Establish that the majority of the arts activities it produces and/or presents take place in Maryland and that most of the arts organization's or the arts program's annual expenditures are devoted to activities that occur within the State of Maryland.
- Must be governed by a legally-liable board of directors acting under a mission statement and budget specific to the organization.
- Organizations/programs receiving funding through the Creativity, County Arts Development, or Arts & Entertainment District programs are not eligible for additional funding through the GFO program in the same fiscal year

The eligibility guidelines listed above provide an overview only. In some cases, MSAC staff might make eligibility determinations addressing situations not described here but in support of the mission of the agency and the Department of Commerce.

Application, Review, and Award

Application and Review

SmartSimple

Applications are submitted via the secure, online grants management system, SmartSimple. Log in or create a free account on the [SmartSimple registration page](#).

- Applicants are required to complete and submit applications by electronic means, including the use of an electronic signature. To make an accessibility request for an alternative submission method, please contact the program director listed in the Contact Information section.
- Technical support for SmartSimple is available during regular office hours
- Applicants must meet any revision deadlines requested after submission, as specified in writing, or the application will be considered withdrawn
- By submitting an application to MSAC, whether via electronic means or otherwise, applicant agrees to allow MSAC to retain records per state and federal document retention laws and policies. Applicant is also agreeing to the Terms and Privacy Policy of SmartSimple as applicable to MSAC

Application form and review criteria

The grant application is a digital form available in SmartSimple and consisting of prompts requiring dropdown menu selections, fill-in answers, and external file uploads.

Application Types

The GFO program has two different applications types:

1. Intent to Apply Application (New applicants only)
2. Annual Application

Intent to Apply Application - New Applicants

Applicants are considered “new” if they did not apply for, or did not receive a Fiscal Year 2027 GFO grant award. All new applicants are required to complete and submit the **Intent to Apply Form** along with the required additional documents.

If a new nonprofit has been formed out of an existing GFO-supported organization, and the former nonprofit is no longer being supported through the GFO program, the newly formed organization may not be considered “new” within the GFO program. Through consultation with a GFO Program Director and with approval from the Executive Director, the newly formed nonprofit may use financials and programming from the last fiscal year of the former organization in the first year of its GFO application process. An Intent to Apply Form may be required of the newly formed nonprofit, along with the completion of an ‘On Year’ full application. The former and new organization should contact the assigned Program Director well in advance of the intent to apply deadline to discuss.

Intent to Apply Form - REQUIRED: Deadline Tuesday, September 15, 2026, 11:59pm

The Intent to Apply form and additional documents will be reviewed by the appropriate GFO program director to determine eligibility to apply for the GFO program. You may contact the appropriate program director if you have questions. The Intent to Apply form must be submitted via Smart Simple by the deadline noted above.

New applicants who attempt to submit a full application without first verifying their eligibility by submitting an Intent to Apply form will be deemed ineligible.

You will be notified of your eligibility based on the review of the Intent to Apply application. If the organization is deemed eligible for the GFO program, it must submit an Application by November 15, 2026 at 11:59pm. See details below for the application process.

Application - Returning and New Applicants

Application: Deadline - Sunday, November 15, 2026, 11:59pm

All organizations that received GFO funding in the previous year and wish to apply for FY2028 funding must submit a completed application by November 15. New organizations that have been approved to submit a full application must also submit their completed application by this deadline. Submissions received after the deadline will not be considered for funding.

Please note: As of FY27, there are no longer different “On” and “Off” Year applications in the GFO program. All applicants will complete the same application. All applications are due on November 15, 2026 for FY2028 funding.

Preparing Your Application

The application is focused on a simplified narrative section indicating any significant changes in the organization, establishing organizational goals, and noting accomplishments.

As of FY27, there is no longer a scoring component to the application process, and therefore, there is no scoring rubric to be used.

Resources for the GFO application are found on the [Grants for Organizations](#) webpage, which include the application questions and descriptions of the required documents that must be included for General Operating and Arts Program grant applicants.

Financial Requirements

Financial information is an essential part of your application. All applicants must submit a signed financial statement or independent external audited financial statements* for your last completed and finalized fiscal year at the time of application submission.

NOTE - Organizations (GOG or PRG) with an allowable income of \$750,000 or more are required to submit an independent external audit at the time of the application deadline. 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 application 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 financial statement as part of the application.

If a financial statement meeting this criteria is not provided, the application will be considered incomplete, and deemed ineligible.

Allowable expenses and income include but are not limited to artist fees, salaries, technical fees, marketing, exhibition materials, theater sets, musical scores, rentals on space and objects necessary to production and administration, educational fees, supplies for classes and productions and other costs to maintain an arts organizations or arts program. Revenues may include but are not limited to ticket sales, tuition, donations, foundation support, corporate support, public support, gift shop sales, fundraisers, income released from restriction, etc.

Arts Programs should include direct costs of the arts program as well as indirect administrative expenses that are prorated, up to 15% of the arts program's total expenses. Any indirect costs beyond 15% would be considered non-allowable.

Non-allowable Income or Expenses are those deemed by MSAC to be non-permissible in figuring total operating expenses and operating income when calculating a grant amount. Non-allowable as operating expenses include but are not limited to re-granting, accessions, acquisition of capital assets, allocations to cash reserves, capital improvements, depreciation, deficits, loan principal payments, contributions to endowments or

scholarships awarded by the applicant organization for its own activities. Non-allowable as operating income include but are not limited to are loans, carryover, debt forgiveness, support from the parent organization (see *note*),* transfer of funds earned in prior years, revenue raised for capital or endowment funds or funds intended for the purpose of re-granting, unrealized gains/losses; prorated salaries, rent, or utilities, temporarily restricted income; or other prorated expenses. Other items may be deemed non-allowable. These items may be included in your financial statement or budgets but will not be used to determine your “total allowable income” when calculating your organization’s grant amount.

***parent support** - *Support from a parent organization to an Arts Organization or Arts Program means income derived from or given by an organization or entity that (1) legally owns and/or operates the Arts Organization or Arts Program, (2) manages, administers, or otherwise controls the Arts Organization or Arts Program, or (3) otherwise houses or contains the Arts Organization or Arts Program within its organization. This may include income from college/university sources to support an Arts Program, larger institutional support of a local branch or chapter organization, pass through of funds from one entity to another to support a shared mission, and other specific scenarios where income may be coming from other non-allowable sources to support an arts organization or arts program from another entity.*

Please note other special Non-Allowable Income scenarios:

- Any income associated with MSAC’s **Arts Relief Funding** - General Operating Support (Round 1 and 2) and **Special Request** program, or income provided through the **Preservation of Cultural Arts (POCA)** Fund, is considered non-allowable income and should be noted as such in financials for any GFO applications or reports.
- **State budget line items** and **appropriations** that are accepted by an applicant organization and support general operations (as defined in MSAC’s glossary) or arts programming - whether the line items are enacted through statute or budget language - are considered non-allowable income and should be noted as such in financials for any GFO applications or reports. These sources of income will not be included in calculating an organization’s GFO grant.
 - In addition, to the extent permitted by law, State budget line items and appropriations of \$50K or more than are accepted by the applicant organization will be deducted from the organization’s MSAC general operating grant amount (as calculated by funding formulas of the GFO, County Arts Development, Arts and Entertainment or Folklife Network grant programs) on the following schedule:
 - FY27: 10% of the line item/appropriation
 - FY28: 10% of the line item/appropriation
 - FY29 and beyond: to be determined by the MSAC Council

For organizations that receive more than one grant from the above-named general operating programs, the deduction will apply to the largest grant.

If you are unclear about any of the information/terms above, please visit the [MSAC glossary](#) and/or be in touch with your Program Director for further clarity.

All applicants are required to submit a current signed **W-9 Form** upon application submission. The address on the W-9 Form must match the address of the applicant information entered in SmartSimple. If awarded, grant funds will be made payable to the person/entity and address indicated on the W9.

Review Process

Staff Review

After applications are received electronically they are reviewed by staff for completeness and adherence to GFO guidelines. Applicants will be notified if their application is incomplete and if additional information or

corrections are necessary; applicants will be given a specific deadline in writing to provide any revisions and/or other necessary information. **Applicants must meet all of these specified deadlines for completing/providing revisions and information of the application will be considered withdrawn.**

Panelist Service

MSAC convenes panelists, representing a range of arts expertise statewide, to evaluate applications electronically. Panelists are selected via public application process based on relevant experience and/or expertise. Opportunities to serve as panelists for various grant programs are posted throughout the year; individuals interested in panel service are encouraged to learn more and apply on MSAC's [Ways to Get Involved](#) webpage

The GFO Panel is engaged only to conduct Artistic Activity Visits, in connection to the respective applications from those organizations. Applications are not scored; they are reviewed for completeness and compliance by MSAC staff only. Panelists will conduct Artistic Activity Visits 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.

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. 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. Artistic quality or excellence is not evaluated during this Visit.

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. The meeting may occur by phone or digitally (via Google Meet, Zoom, etc.). Applicants will be given instructions by Program Directors on how and when to schedule these meetings. Meetings will occur between January and April of each year.

Note - All applicants in a one-year cycle, including New Applicants, will be required to complete both the Artistic Activity Visit and Staff Conversation as part of their application process.

Funding Amounts

GFO Grant award amounts are calculated by using a formula.

As of FY27, the GFO program has eliminated scoring as a part of the review process and, therefore, has removed scoring from the Funding Formula. GFO Grant award amounts are calculated by using a formula that considers the organization's allowable income and a percentage cap allocation.

The removal of the score from the Funding Formula will take place in a phased approach, using the final application scores determined in the FY26 review process.

- All applications that had a score of 90% and higher during the FY26 review period had their score eliminated (or "100%") in the FY27 funding formula. This will then maintain in future years of the GFO funding formula.
- All applications that had a score of 80% to 89% during the FY26 review period had their score moved to 90% in the FY27 funding formula. The panel % will then be eliminated (or "100%") in the FY28 funding formula. This will then maintain in future years of the GFO funding formula.

- All applications that had a score of 70% to 79% during the FY26 review had their score moved to 80% in the FY27 funding formula. This will then be moved to 90% during the FY28 funding formula. And finally, the panel % will be eliminated (or “100%”) in the FY29 funding formula. This will then maintain in future years of the GFO funding formula.
- **See Appendix B for a visual table of this information.**

Cap Allocation

The budget of MSAC changes each year and is approved by the Governor and the General Assembly. On September 9, 2021, the Maryland State Arts Council voted to adopt a new funding formula for the GFO program in an effort to more equitably distribute state appropriated funds to arts organizations across the state. The change will be implemented over a five-year phase-in period beginning in FY2024 through FY2028. The new formula groups organizations into five budget tiers, providing a larger percentage of the GFO budget as a maximum grant award to smaller budget organizations, and a smaller percentage to larger organizations that have greater access and connections to non-governmental funding sources, professional fundraising staff, and other resources.

In FY28, we will be in year 5 of the 5 year “phase in” process of the new funding formula. Over 5 years (starting with FY24 funding), the formula’s cap allocations will adjust so that they align philosophically with the explanation above.

Tier levels are determined by the organization’s allowable income:

Tier 1: \$10K - \$500K

Tier 2: \$500K - \$1.5M

Tier 3: \$1.5M - \$5M

Tier 4: \$5M - \$10M

Tier 5: \$10M+

See Appendix C for history of cap allocation % from FY24 - FY27

During this 5 year process, a grant amount maximum will also be put implemented, as follows:

Year 1 (FY24): \$1.4M maximum grant

Year 2 (FY25): \$1.3M maximum grant

Year 3 (FY26): \$1.2M maximum grant

Year 4 (FY27): \$1.1M maximum grant

Year 5 (FY28): \$1M maximum grant

Note - the cap allocations will vary based on the MSAC funding allocation each year for the GFO program, along with the other variables, including number of organizations in the GFO program, and each organization’s allowable income year to year, and panel score.

The funding formula is the following:

Total Allowable Income \$ X Panel Score % (phased out through FY29, as described above) X Cap Allocation % = Grant Award

The Allowable Income used in the Funding Formula comes from the Financial Table within the application, and verified by the attached financial statement provided by the applicant in the application.

If your organization is identified as having experienced a significant change in income from the previous fiscal year, the total allowable income will be adjusted in the following way to account for the significant change:

Final Total Allowable Income = (Previous Fiscal Year Allowable Income + 50% of Current Fiscal Year Income)

“Significant increase” is defined as a 50% or more growth in allowable income from the previous fiscal year. Additionally, “significant decrease” is defined as a 50% or more decrease in allowable income from the previous year.

Award

Notification

After the staff and panel reviews (if applicable) are completed, recommendations are presented to the Council’s Grants Committee, a committee composed of Councilors appointed by the Council Chairperson. Following this review, the Grants Committee presents the funding recommendations for each category to the full Maryland State Arts Council. The Council meets in June to review the recommendations and reach funding decisions. The Council’s decisions are forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce (or their designee) for final approval.

All applicants to the FY2028 GFO program will receive notification of their grant award or denial mid-late July 2027. If the application is approved, the applicant will receive instructions to access a Grant Agreement Form (GAF) to review and sign electronically via SmartSimple.

The individual listed as the primary contact in the application will receive all notifications; for organizations, notifications are sent to the primary contact and any other contacts on the organization’s account. Automated notifications from SmartSimple will be sent from noreply@smartsimple.com. Please adjust email notification and security settings to ensure receipt of these notifications. Check your spam folder if an application submission confirmation notification has not arrived to your inbox.

Disbursement

The grant funds are provided in a disbursement, which is a distribution from a dedicated fund for the specific purposes outlined in your application. The disbursement process begins when the GAF is fully executed, meaning that both the grantee and MSAC staff have signed the agreement. The grantee receives notification when the agreement is fully executed from SmartSimple. This notification includes instructions on how to access a copy of the fully executed GAF in the grantee’s SmartSimple profile.

Unless otherwise notified by the Program Directors, funds are distributed in one installment – 100% will be processed after the full execution of the Grant Agreement Form and if applicable, final reports from the previous FY are submitted and approved. Please note that at the discretion of the Program Directors, grantees experiencing significant organizational change or transition may be required to submit additional reports with funding distributed on an adjusted schedule, after each required report is submitted and approved. Grantees in such situations will be notified directly by the Program Directors.

The grantee will receive the grant disbursement approximately 6 to 8 weeks from the date of receipt of a fully executed GAF and the approval of the previous year’s Final Report (if applicable) due August 15, 2027. More information on MSAC’s disbursement processing timeline can be found on the [Payment Process](#) web page.

Grantees are encouraged to sign up to receive disbursement electronically via Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). Those with existing state vendor profiles can sign up for EFT disbursements by completing the relevant forms on

the [Comptroller's EFT for Vendors site](#). Typically, those who have previously received MSAC grants have an existing state vendor profile.

New grant recipients will receive grant funds via check made payable to the name and address indicated on the grantee's W-9. They will be able to sign up for EFT for any subsequent disbursements.

Disbursement Status

Grantees are encouraged to deposit grant checks immediately. If the grantee does not receive grant funds within eight weeks of notification of a fully executed GAF, the grantee must contact MSAC staff to inquire about disbursement status. If the disbursement was lost in transit, the State of Maryland is able to re-issue disbursement. However, the grantee must contact MSAC staff within the fiscal year in which the grant was awarded. MSAC cannot guarantee that funds will be available for re-issue after the end of the fiscal year in which a grant was awarded.

If a grantee owes any Maryland state taxes or other state liabilities, GAD may intercept grant disbursements and hold them until the liability is resolved. GAD will send written notice directly to the grantee via mail. MSAC is not provided further information, as it is confidential. Grantees can find more information and discuss options with the Central Collections Unit at (410) 767-1642. Additionally, information on held disbursements can be found by creating an account on [GAD's Online Service Center](#) site.

Changes in Funded Activities

If there are significant changes to the proposed activities for which a grant has been awarded, the grantee is responsible for contacting the relevant staff; any proposed changes must be shared and approved in writing before proceeding. Staff will help ensure that any proposed changes remain in alignment with the program guidelines; however there is no guarantee that proposed changes will be approved. Any approved changes that result in timeline extensions that affect the final report deadline will be reflected in SmartSimple.

Reporting

All grantees must file a final report in SmartSimple. The report will be added to the grantee's SmartSimple profile as soon as the GAF is fully executed.

FY2028 Final Reports for the GFO program are due on **August 15, 2028**.

The final report form collects information about the grantee and grant activities, including optional demographic information, data for the National Endowment for the Arts, summary of activities and use of grant funds, and other program-specific information and documents, as relevant.

Program Directors review the final reports, including a most recent financial statement showing budget numbers and actual numbers for the recently completed fiscal year. In that review, a check for the required match in non-state income sources will also be conducted.

Grant funds may not be used to offset grantees' state liabilities. Grantees whose funds were intercepted by GAD are not exempt from submitting required reports. Grantees must either return the funds to MSAC or follow through with their proposed grant activities and submit reports accordingly.

Failure to submit reports may jeopardize current MSAC grants, eligibility for future MSAC grants, and may result in the required return of grant funds. Before any funds are distributed, grantees are also required to submit any outstanding reports or satisfy obligations for any other MSAC grants received.

Prior to the Final Report deadline, a randomly selected list representing 5% of the total number of GFO-funded organizations will be asked to provide documentation to their respective Program Director showing the following from the most recently completed year:

- a. Allowable income that makes up the required match of the grant for which they are submitting their Final Report. Documentation may include bank statements, grant award notification letters, sales reports, donation reports, or other similar documents
- b. Allowable expenses that make up the total of their grant amount (how the grant was spent). Documentation may include receipts, invoices, payroll documentation, or other similar documents

Further instructions will be provided directly to the randomly selected organizations who are required to complete this step by June 15, 2028.

Ineligible and Declined Applications

Applications that do not receive funding generally fall into one of two categories: ineligible or declined.

An application is marked ineligible if it is not complete or does not comply with the eligibility requirements of a particular grant program. An application can be marked ineligible at any time during the review process.

After an application is considered eligible, it may be declined for several reasons. An application may be declined due to funding allocation limitations at the time, or for the following reasons:

- Required information is incomplete or insufficient to make an award determination
- There are material inconsistencies between the application and the organization's actual operations
- There are significant operational, financial, or other circumstances that reasonably suggest the applicant is, or may become, unable to use the grant funds in alignment with the grant guidelines and agreement.

Application Feedback

Applicants may request feedback on their applications—whether ineligible, declined, or approved for funding—by submitting a feedback request form. A link to this form will be provided in grant notification emails.

Contact Information

MSAC staff offer technical assistance when feasible throughout the application process. This includes professional development related to grant writing and program requirements; one-on-one conversations; and tailored feedback.

For more information on the GFO application process, contact:

- Emily Sollenberger, Program Director, Arts Services (Visual/Media Arts, Multi-Discipline, Folk/Traditional Arts, Service)
 - emily.sollenberger@maryland.gov
 - (443)326-5637
- Laura Weiss, Program Director, Arts Services (Theatre, Music, Dance, Literary Arts)

- laura.weiss@maryland.gov
 - (443)326-5564
- Grants logistics and technological assistance
 - Catherine Teixeira, Grants Director
 - catherine.teixeira@maryland.gov
 - (443)799-7256
 - Tammy Oppel, Grants Management Associate
 - tammy.oppel@maryland.gov
 - (443)326-5555
 - Kirk Amaral Snow, Grants Management Associate
 - kirk.amaralsnow@maryland.gov
 - (410)767-8865

MSAC Overview

Description

MSAC is an appointed body of 17 Maryland citizens, 13 of whom are named by the Governor to three-year terms that may be renewed once. Two private citizens and two legislators are appointed by the President of the Senate and by the Speaker of the House. All councilors serve without salary.

To carry out its mission, MSAC awards grants to nonprofit arts organizations, arts programs, and individual artists, and provides application assistance, professional development, and other resources to individuals and groups. MSAC reserves the right to prioritize grant awards.

MSAC receives its funds from an annual appropriation from the State of Maryland; grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency; and, on occasion, contributions from private, non-governmental sources.

Authority

MSAC is an agency of the State of Maryland under the authority of the Department of Commerce, Division of Tourism, Film and the Arts.

Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lieutenant Governor
Harry Coker, Jr., Secretary of Commerce
Steven Skerritt-Davis, Executive Director, MSAC

Staff

MSAC maintains professional staff to administer its programs. For staff listing, visit the [MSAC staff page](#).

Meetings

Council and panelist meetings are open to the public in accordance with the Open Meetings Act set forth in Title 3 of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland. The dates, times, and locations of Council and panelist meetings may be obtained on the [Meeting Notices page](#), or by contacting MSAC at msac.commerce@maryland.gov or (410) 767-6555.

Mission and Goals

MSAC's mission is to advance 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's strategic plan outlines five pillars and goals:

1. Access: Bolster access to arts experiences and resources
2. Awareness: Amplify the stories of Maryland's arts sector and the value of public support
3. Connection: Foster networks within and beyond the arts sector
4. Equity: Cultivate a thriving arts ecosystem centered in equity
5. Leadership: Commit to a culture of care and innovation

Read [MSAC's full strategic plan](#) to learn more about implementation actions.

Equity and Justice Statement

The arts celebrate our state's diversity, connect our shared humanity, and transform individuals and communities. MSAC and its supporting collaborators are committed to advancing and modeling equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion in all aspects of our organizations 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.

The driving goals of MSAC's grant processes are:

- To yield a greater variety of funded projects
- To eliminate biases that may be found in any part of the granting process (e.g., applications, panelist procedures, adjudication systems)
- To acknowledge positions of privilege while questioning practices, shifting paradigms of status quo arts activities, and taking more risks
- To expand deliberations to include criteria beyond current conventions or Western traditions

Accessibility

MSAC is committed to ensuring access to its programs and services. Everyone is welcome, and all events and activities sponsored by or operated within MSAC are accessible both physically and programmatically. MSAC is committed to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, ensuring equal opportunity, accessibility, and non-discrimination for individuals with disabilities. See the "Grantee Requirements" section below for more information on the accessibility-related expectations of all grantees.

Accessibility Web Page

MSAC has a dedicated [accessibility page](#) available on our website. It includes contact information for the accessibility coordinator, federal and state regulations, the organization's equity and justice statement, access resources, accommodations requests, and complaint procedures.

Language Access

MSAC offers language accessibility services. Services include making translations of grant materials, remote American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, subtitles, braille translation, translation into languages other than English, and more.

En Español/Spanish: MSAC pone a disposición servicios de traducción y accesibilidad de idiomas. Contacte msac.commerce@maryland.gov para más información.

中文普通话/Mandarin Chinese: 马里兰州艺术委员会(MSAC)提供翻译和语言无障碍服务。请联系 msac.commerce@maryland.gov 了解更多信息。

한국어/Korean: MSAC 는 한국어 지원을 돕고 있습니다. 자세한 문의사항은 msac.commerce@maryland.gov 로 연락 주시기 바랍니다.

For all other languages, please contact MSAC at msac.commerce@maryland.gov for more information.

Feedback

If constituents would like to provide general feedback about the accessibility of programs funded or produced by MSAC, contact MSAC at msac.commerce@maryland.gov or (410) 767-6555.

Complaints

For programs or services provided by MSAC:

For inquiries related to MSAC operated programs or services, individuals may first reach out to the [Office of EEO and Fair Practices at the Department of Commerce](#) for an informal discussion. Other related inquiries may include failure of MSAC to accommodate individuals with disabilities, harassment, bullying, and failure to provide accommodations to individuals with Limited English Proficiency.

While the informal process is designed to facilitate a sincere and prompt resolution, it is not a substitution for a filed complaint of discrimination. Individuals opting to initiate a formal complaint may proceed directly to the formal process if preferred. Participants may also choose to transition from the informal process to the formal complaint process at any time.

- **For an Informal Discussion:** Contact Elaine McNeil, Director of EEO, ADA and Fair Practices at (410) 767-6470 or ofp.commerce@maryland.gov.
- **To File a Formal Complaint of Unfair and/or Unlawful Treatment with the Department of Commerce/MSAC:** See the information on [Commerce's EEO and Fair Practices Page](#) regarding the complaint procedures and submit your complaint to ofp.commerce@maryland.gov.

For programs or services that are not provided by, but are funded, by MSAC:

MSAC encourages individuals who believe they experience discrimination in programs and services provided by organizations funded by MSAC to reach out to the sponsoring organization first with their complaint. The individual may also reach out to MSAC's Accessibility Coordinator and Grants Director to inform MSAC of the complaint of discrimination. MSAC notifies organizations that receive funding through MSAC that they must comply with all applicable federal and State non-discrimination laws and regulations. Submitting a complaint with MSAC regarding an organization receiving funding from MSAC is not a replacement or a prerequisite to filing a complaint with the appropriate governmental agency or a court.

Complaints may be submitted to the following external agencies:

- Complaints against MSAC-funded organizations and programs, file with [Maryland Commission on Civil Rights](#) (MCCR)
- Complaints against arts organizations and cultural organizations receiving federal funding, filed with the [National Endowment for the Arts' Office of Civil Rights](#).
- Complaints against places of public accommodation, such as private cultural organizations, may be filed with the [Department of Justice](#).

Participation in a complaint process is protected from retaliation under all circumstances, and MSAC complies with all applicable federal and State laws prohibiting retaliation against a person because the person complained about discrimination, filed a charge of discrimination, or participated in an employment discrimination investigation or lawsuit.

Grantmaking

Review Panels

To assist MSAC in its decision-making, Maryland residents with expertise in the arts are selected to serve on a variety of grant application review panels. The function of panels is to evaluate applications from organizations and individuals. Each year, MSAC publishes several open calls, and approximately 150 individuals serve as panelists for MSAC grant programs, including Grants for Organizations, Arts in Education, Independent Artist Awards, Public Art Across Maryland, Creativity Grants, Presenting and Touring, Professional Development Opportunity, Folklife Network, Folklife Apprenticeships, Heritage Awards, Capacity Building, Arts Capital, and County Arts Development. In addition, MSAC occasionally releases calls for residents to serve as program editors evaluating grantmaking policies and procedures, and jurors or judges for various arts activities supported by MSAC. Anyone wishing to serve is encouraged to visit MSAC's [Ways to Get Involved](#) webpage for detailed information and links to application forms for any open calls.

Constituents may also get involved with MSAC by creating a profile on the [Arts Directory](#), an online resource for raising the profile of Maryland artists and arts organizations; or by attending regularly scheduled virtual and in-person professional development sessions posted on [MSAC's Eventbrite page](#).

Appeals

MSAC strives to ensure fair and equitable distribution of grant monies based on stated criteria. Therefore, dissatisfaction with the denial or amount of an award is not sufficient reason for an appeal. However, an application may be reconsidered if a procedural impropriety or error has affected its review.

Grounds for such reconsideration are:

- A decision based on review criteria other than those stated in these guidelines
- A decision based on material provided to panelists or Councilors that was substantially incorrect, inaccurate, or incomplete, despite the applicant having provided the staff with correct, accurate, and complete application information

Based on the above, if an applicant believes there is legitimate reason for an appeal, the following steps must be taken:

- The applicant must discuss the problem with the program director who handled the application
- To pursue an appeal, the applicant must write a letter to the MSAC Executive Director within 60 days following receipt of the grant award or denial notification; the letter should (1) request a reconsideration of the decision, (2) state the grounds for the request, and (3) certify that the applicant first discussed the problem with the program director and provide the date and time the discussion occurred.

The applicant will receive written notification on the determination of the appeal within 90 days of the receipt of the written request for reconsideration.

Grantee requirements

All MSAC grantees must:

- Comply with Title VI, Section 601, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which states that no persons, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination related to, the arts
- Comply with Title IX, Section 1681 et seq. of the Education Amendments of 1972
- Comply with the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Section 6101-6107

- Comply with relevant State and federal laws
- Maintain complete and accurate records of all activities connected with the grant
- Give credit to MSAC in accordance with published [recognition guidelines](#), whenever and wherever credit is being given
- Notify the appropriate MSAC staff person in writing if a significant change is made in any MSAC-funded program or project

In addition to the requirements above, all MSAC grantees must ensure that any programming remains accessible to all and, if needed, conduct programs in accessible venues other than their own organization in order to meet accessibility requirements. Grantees are required to:

- Comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991, as amended
- Prohibit discrimination on the basis of: (a) political or religious opinion or affiliation, marital status, race, color, creed, sexual orientation, or national origin; of (b) gender expression, sex, or age, except when age or sex constitute a bona fide occupational qualification; or (c) the physical or mental disability of a qualified individual with a disability
- Designate an Accessibility Point of Contact to ensure compliance, receive accommodation requests, and document grievances, as well as publish direct contact information for the Point of Contact to the public
- Create and publicly share a grievance procedure to allow stakeholders to address any events or programs that are inaccessible
- Upon request, submit documentation of operations and compliance with the above

Disclosure of personal information

Certain personal information requested by MSAC's parent agency, the Department of Commerce, is necessary in determining eligibility for grants. Failure to disclose this information may result in the denial of one or all benefits or services, including funding, provided by MSAC. Availability of this information for public inspection is governed by the provisions of the Maryland Public Information Act, Title 4 of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland. This information will be disclosed to appropriate staff of the Department, or to public officials, for purposes directly connected with administration of the program for which its use is intended. Such information may be shared with state, federal, and local governments if legally required.

Appendix A - GFO Artistic Categories and Program Directors

Service: Grants in this category support organizations that support organizations and/or independent artists as entrepreneurs that produce and present arts and arts education programs. Program Director: Emily Sollenberger 410-767-6484; emily.sollenberger@maryland.gov

Dance: Grants in this category support organizations that produce or present dance. Program Director: Laura Weiss, 410-767-6545; laura.weiss@maryland.gov

Folk and Traditional Arts: Grants in this category support organizations that primarily document, produce, and/or present folk and traditional arts. Program Director: Emily Sollenberger, 410-767-6484; emily.sollenberger@maryland.gov

Literary Arts: Grants in this category support organizations that present, publish, or disseminate all literary forms. Program Director: Laura Weiss, 410-767-6545; laura.weiss@maryland.gov

Multi-Discipline* A: Grants in this category support organizations that produce or present arts events in two or more artistic disciplines, none of which predominate, and interdisciplinary arts activities that combine two or more artistic disciplines. Those with a predominant discipline should apply in that discipline. Program Director: Program Director: Emily Sollenberger, 410-767-6484; emily.sollenberger@maryland.gov

Multi-Discipline* B: Grants in this category support arts festivals, and units of local government or government agencies that produce or present arts events in two or more artistic disciplines, none of which predominate, and interdisciplinary arts activities that combine two or more artistic disciplines. Those with a predominant discipline should apply in that discipline. Program Director: Emily Sollenberger, 410-767-6484; emily.sollenberger@maryland.gov

Music: Grants in this category support organizations that self-produce music or present music programs. Program Director: Laura Weiss, 410-767-6545; laura.weiss@maryland.gov

Theater: Grants in this category support organizations that produce or present theater Program Director: Laura Weiss, 410-767-6545; laura.weiss@maryland.gov

Visual Arts/Media A: Grants in this category support arts organizations that produce or present visual/media arts. Program Director: Emily Sollenberger, 410-767-6484; emily.sollenberger@maryland.gov

Visual Arts/Media B: Grants in this category support non-arts organizations that produce or present visual/media arts. Program Director: Emily Sollenberger, 410-767-6484; emily.sollenbergere@maryland.gov

Appendix B - GFO Scoring % Phase Out Schedule

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

Appendix C - GFO Cap Allocation % from FY24 - FY26

This is shared for reference purposes only; the figures shared here do not guarantee cap allocation numbers for FY27 and beyond. The cap allocations will vary based on the MSAC funding allocation each year for the GFO program, along with the other variables, including number of organizations in the GFO program, and each organization's allowable income year to year.

Tiers	FY24 Cap %	FY25 Cap %	FY26 Cap %
Tier 1 (\$50K-\$500K) * will be 10K-500K starting FY27	8.3705%	10%	9.625%
Tier 2: (\$500K - \$1.5M)	7.7%	8.694%	8.32%
Tier 3: (\$1.5M - \$5M)	6.7%	6.5%	6.075%
Tier 4: (\$5M - \$10M)	6.1%	5.1%	4.425%
Tier 5: (\$10M+)	5.75%	4.8%	3.875%