Grants for Organizations (GFO) FY2026 Guidelines

DEADLINE:
September 15, 2024: Intent to Apply Form *(new orgs only)*
November 15, 2024: On Year Application
December 15, 2024: Off Year Application

SUPPORT PERIOD: FY26 (July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026)

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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.

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 $50,000 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 $50,000 for their Arts Program to be eligible..

Artistic Categories

Eligible organizations may apply for one GFO grant per year in only 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. Contact the appropriate Program Director to discuss your organization's category.

GFO grants are awarded in the following artistic categories:

- Dance
- Folk and Traditional Arts
- Literary Arts
- Multi-Discipline A

- Multi-Discipline B
- Music
- Music C
- Theater

- Visual Arts/Media A
- Visual Arts/Media B
- Service*

*Those organizations that fall in the "Service" category will answer alternative questions noted within the application

Grant Cycle

Funding
MSAC uses a staggered, three-year application cycle to conduct panel reviews of the majority of GFO applications. Artistic categories are rotated on the cycle and are in an "On Year" every three years, and in "Off Years" the two years between. Applications are submitted annually by all organizations; but the "Off Year" is a simplified application.

Three-Year Application Cycle
Organizations that are recommended for the three-year application cycle, and are in good standing with all grant reporting requirements, will go through a full panel review of their application once every three years. In this "On Year" the organization will be required to submit a full application, and will receive the appropriate site visits from grant review panelists as designated by the organization's grant type for GOG and PRG. In the two "Off Years" that follow, organizations will be required to submit a simplified application and will not go through a panel review. Organizations that consistently receive favorable reviews during the panel review process and application evaluation are likely to continue to be recommended for this three-year application cycle.

One-Year Application Cycle
Organizations not eligible or recommended for inclusion in the three-year application cycle are instead required to be on the one-year application cycle. Organizations recommended for the one-year application cycle are in the "On Year" status and are required to submit a full application, receiving the appropriate site visits from grant review panelists, every year until they are recommended for the three-year application 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.

Any organization may request an "On Year" full panel review at any time, with the understanding that the most

recent panel score, whether it is lower or higher, will be used to determine the organization's grant amount.

To confirm your application status and deadlines, please contact your Program Director.

Check the **On and Off Year** schedule below or contact the appropriate MSAC program director for more information.

FY 2026

Applications: Support Period: July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026
 "On Year" Artistic Categories submitting a full GFO application.

Deadline will be on November 15, 2024:
- Dance
- Multi-Discipline A
- Music C
- New applicants, those not funded for FY2025, and grantees notified of one-year funding with FY2025 award notification

"Off Year" Application Deadline will be December 15, 2024 for all other disciplines not listed above.

FY2027
Applications: Support Period: July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027
"On Year" Artistic Categories submitting full GFO application.
Deadline will be on November 15, 2025 for:
- Service
- Folk and Traditional Arts
- Multi-Discipline B
- Theater*
- New applicants, those not funded for FY2026, and grantees notified of one-year funding with FY2026 award notification

"Off Year" Application Deadline will be on December 15, 2025 for all other disciplines not listed above.
*For FY27, Children's Theater organizations in the Theater category will be considered for the Cherry Adler Award, a monetary award given every three years in honor of a former MSAC councilor and funded through private donations. Additional information about the award will be shared with eligible organizations ahead of panel review of GFO applications.

FY2028
Applications: Support Period: July 1, 2027 through June 30, 2028
"On Year" Artistic Categories submitting full GFO application.

Deadline will be on November 15, 2026 for:
- Literary Arts
- Music
- Visual Arts/Media A and B

- New applicants, those not funded for FY2027, and grantees notified of one-year funding with FY2027 award notification

"Off Year" Application deadline will be on December 15, 2026 for all other disciplines not listed above.

Support Period
If awarded, funds must be spent or obligated between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2026. Obligation 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 operations. Please note the Allowable Income and Expenses, along with the Non-Allowable Income and Expenses listed below under Financial Requirements.

GFO funds may not be used for:
- Re-granting
- Activities that are principally recreational, therapeutic, or rehabilitative
- Travel outside Maryland to present or produce arts
- Projects chiefly for classroom use or in school activities
- Activities not open to the general public
- Scholarships awarded by the applicant organization for its own activities.
- Acquisition of capital assets
- 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
- Institutional indirect costs in excess of 10 percent of the total grant amount, for all MSAC grants not providing general operating support

Matching Requirements
All General Operating Grants and all Arts Program Grants must be matched at least three to one (3:1) in cash. 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.

Timeline
Annual Application Deadlines
 Intent to Apply (new applicants only): September 15
 On Year Application: November 15
 Off Year Application: December 15

Panelist Review Period (On Year)
 Written Application Review: November - January
 Extension Assignments (Artistic Activity Visit, In-Depth Conversation) : February - March

Staff Reviews (On Year & Off Year)

Written Application & Financial Reviews: December - March
Updated Financial Statements Submitted (if applicable) - March 1

Panel Meetings - Virtual (On Year): late March-early April
Program Directors Finalize Formulas for Grant Recommendations: April - May
Council Reviews and Approvals: May - June
Notifications to Grantees: mid-late July

Annual Report Deadlines
Final Report: August 15

Note there may be more specific deadlines throughout each fiscal year that Program Directors will communicate directly.

**Note all dates are subject to change within a given fiscal year's guidelines*

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 $50,000 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 by clicking here.
- Except in the situation of certain accessibility requests, as described later in this document, applicants are required to complete and submit applications by electronic means, including the use of an electronic signature
- Technical support for SmartSimple is available during regular office hours
- Lost, misdirected, or late applications are the sole responsibility of the applicant
- Applicants must meet any revision deadlines requested after submission, as specified in writing, or the application will be withdrawn

Application Types
The GFO program has three different applications types:

1. Intent to Apply Application (New applicants only)
2. On Year Applications
3. Off Year applications

Intent to Apply Application - New Applicants
Applicants are considered "new" if they did not apply for, or did not receive a Fiscal Year 2025 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 Sunday, September 15, 2024, 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 a full "On Year" Application by November 15, 2024 at 11:59pm. See details below for the full "On Year" application process.

"On Year" Application - Returning and New Applicants
"On Year" Application: Deadline - Friday, November 15, 2024, 11:59pm
If your organization is on an "on year" because of its three-year cycle by discipline or if it was designated as participating in the one-year cycle this year, you must complete a full "On Year" application. All new organizations must complete an "on year" application. Submissions received after the deadline will not be considered for funding.

Preparing Your "On Year" Application
Please refer to the Review Criteria as you prepare your narrative and other required documents. All materials should tell the same story and represent your organization at its best. Panelists look for evidence of your commitment to your mission, vision, goals, and values, as well as sound governance, management and operations, based on your strategic planning. Grant review panelists look for evidence of your organization's understanding of, and responsiveness to, its community. During the panel meeting, panelists discuss and rate your application based on how your organization demonstrates that it meets the Review Criteria.

Resources for the "On Year" application are found on the MSAC website, which include the application questions, scoring rubric, and descriptions of the required documents that must be included for General Operating and Arts Program grant applicants.

"Off Year" Application - Returning Applicants Only
"Off Year" Application: Deadline - Sunday, December 15, 2024, 11:59pm
The Off Year Application has a simplified narrative section for indicating any changes in the organization, and noting accomplishments. There is no panel review or site visits in the "Off Year." Organizations submitting an "Off Year" application are required to attach the documents specified in the application found in Smart Simple.

The review of all GFO applications is based on the following four criteria from the lens of either the Arts Organization (General Operating: GOG) or Arts Program (Arts Program: PRG). Rubrics detailing these criteria can be found on our website under the "Application Process" section.

Why is the work of your organization important?

How does your organization design its programs?

How does your organization operate?

How does your organization evaluate what it does?

The complete scoring rubrics can be found on the program website here.

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, 2025**. 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 expenses that are prorated.

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.

Arts Programs can include indirect expenses up to 10%, anything beyond would be considered non-allowable.

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.
- In addition, **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.

*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.*

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 both the "On Year" applications and "Off Year" 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 or the application will be considered withdrawn.**

Panelist Service and Review
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 page here.

The GFO Panel is engaged to review and evaluate On Year applications only. Off Year applications do not receive a panel review as they are on a simplified schedule.

The panelists will meet formally as a group and are instructed to evaluate applications according to MSAC's review criteria. At the panel meeting, an evaluative discussion will occur for each application. Following the discussion, panelists rate the application based on how well it meets the Review Criteria.

Artistic Activity Visits and In-Depth Conversations are conducted by panelists as a required part of the evaluation process for General Operating and Arts Program Grants submitting an "On Year" Application. Each GOG and PRG applicant submitting an "On Year" application is required to receive these visits by assigned panelists prior to the panel meeting:

1. Artistic Activity Visit– a panelist will attend or view a form of performance, exhibit or other event that is an example of artistic programming from the organization
2. In Depth Conversation – a panelist will speak with organizational personnel and/or project directors to develop an informed opinion about how the proposed activities in the grant application meet the criteria.

Grant review panel meetings are open to the public for observation only, not for open participation. Representatives from your organization are encouraged to attend and hear the panel's comments about your application. If you are interested in observing a panel meeting discussion, please visit www.msac.org for updated information about dates, times and locations and/or call for details on the appropriate meeting.

Funding Amounts
GFO Grant award amounts are calculated by using a formula looking at an organization's allowable income, its application's score received from the grant review panels, and a percentage cap allocation.

Application Score
Grant Review Panels submit scores for each "On Year" GFO Application they evaluate. This percentage score is calculated directly into the Grant Award Amount. The score determined during an "On Year" review carries forward during subsequent "Off Years" until the next "On Year" review period.

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.

There will be a 5 year "phase in" process of the new funding formula. Over 5 years (starting with FY24 funding), the formula's target cap allocations will adjust so that they align philosophically with the explanation above. *Approximate cap allocation* percentages by Tier level for FY28, when the funding formula will be fully implemented, are offered below for reference:

Tier 1: (Organization is budgets between $50K - $500K) - 15% (cap allocation) over 5 year transition

Tier 2: ($500K - $1.5M) - 10% (cap allocation) over 5 year transition

Tier 3: ($1.5M - $5M) - 6% (cap allocation) over 5 year transition

Tier 4: ($5M - $10M) - 4.5% (cap allocation) over 5 year transition

Tier 5: ($10M+) - 4% (cap allocation) over 5 year transition

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 % X Cap Allocation % = Grant Award

The funding amount for applicants submitting an "On Year" GFO Application is determined by MSAC's review processes. For applicants in the three-year grant cycle, funding for the second and third years ("Off Years", when submitting the abbreviated application) will take into account the funding percentage and the organization's total allowable income* for the given fiscal year, provided the level and scope of the organization's activities remain consistent.

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 FY2026 GFO program will receive notification of their grant award or denial after July 1, 2025. The notification will include information on accessing the grant agreement* form; this must be signed and the grant recipient must meet all reporting requirements before grant funds are disbursed.

The individual listed as the primary contact in the application will receive all notifications; for organizational applicants, 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 a notification has not arrived to your inbox.

Payment
The payment process begins when the Grant Agreement Form (GAF) has been fully executed. The grantee will receive notification of full execution from SmartSimple. This notification will include a PDF copy of the fully executed GAF, which will also be accessible in the grantee's SmartSimple profile.

(New in FY26) 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 payment approximately 6 to 8 weeks from the date of receipt of a fully executed Grant Agreement Form and the approval of the previous year's Final Report (if applicable) due August 15, 2025. More information on MSAC's payment processing timeline can be found by clicking here.

Grantees are encouraged to sign up to receive payment via Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). Those with existing State vendor profiles (typically, those that have received prior MSAC grants) can sign up for EFT payments by completing the relevant forms found on the Comptroller's site here.

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 payments.

Payment Status

Grantees are encouraged to deposit grant payment checks immediately. If the grantee has not received payment within eight weeks of notification of a fully executed GAF and approval of necessary reports, the grantee should contact MSAC to inquire about payment status. The grantee is responsible for following up with MSAC staff if payment is not received within the fiscal year in which it was awarded. If the payment was lost in transit, the State of Maryland is able to re-issue payment. However, MSAC is unable to guarantee that funds will be available for re-issue after the end of the fiscal year in which a grant was awarded.

If the grantee owes any Maryland State taxes or other state liabilities, General Accounting Division (GAD) might intercept grant payments and hold them until the liability is resolved. In such cases, GAD will send written notice of interception directly to the grantee via mail. MSAC is not provided with further information on interception, as it is confidential. Grantees may find more information and discuss options with the Central Collections Unit at 410-767-1220 or 888-248-0345.

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 member to inform them of such changes before proceeding. Staff will help ensure that any proposed changes remain in alignment with the GAF and program guidelines.

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.

FY2026 Final Reports for the GFO program are due on August 15, 2026.

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 3:1 match in non-state income sources will also be conducted.

Grant funds may not be used to offset grantees' State liabilities; as such, grantees whose grant payments were intercepted by GAD due to Maryland state taxes or other state liabilities (as outlined in the Payments section) are not exempt from submitting required report(s). Grantees must either return the funds to MSAC or follow through with their proposed grant activities and submit report(s) accordingly.

Failure to submit reports may jeopardize current or future MSAC grants and may result in the required return of grant funds to the State of Maryland. Before any funds are distributed, grantees are also required to submit any outstanding reports or address requirements for any other MSAC grants they have 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 3:1 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, 2025.

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. A rating of ineligible is typically made by staff early in the review process. However, an application can be marked ineligible at any time during the review process.

An application is declined if it is eligible and reviewed according to the review criteria but did not meet the grant program's requirement for funding (for example, minimum panel score, panel recommendation, etc.). The level of MSAC's funding does not allow for the funding of all eligible applications.

Application Feedback

Applicants may request feedback on their applications—whether ineligible, declined, or approved for funding—by submitting a feedback request form, which can be accessed by clicking here.

Contact Information

MSAC staff offer technical assistance 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

- ■ 410.326.5555
- ○ 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
Kevin Anderson, Secretary of Commerce
Signe Pringle, Deputy Secretary of Commerce
Steven Skerritt-Davis, Executive Director, MSAC

Staff
MSAC maintains a professional staff to administer its programs. For staff listing, visit the MSAC website by clicking here.

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 from the MSAC website by clicking here, 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 goals:
1. Increase Participation: Broaden MSAC's constituency, providing avenues designed to increase pathways to engagement
2. Provide Intentional Support: Embrace thoughtful and targeted approaches to serving known and yet to be known MSAC constituents
3. Build Capacity: Work strategically to further build organizational and governance capacity to ensure that MSAC is capable of vigorously delivering on its mission

4. Leverage Connections: Further enhance current relationships and involve additional collaborators, and constituents who will benefit from and advance the work of MSAC
5. Bolster Maryland Arts: Showcase the high caliber, diverse and relevant work of Maryland's artists and arts organizations; their contributions to community vitality and MSAC's role as a catalyst

Click here to read MSAC's full strategic plan and 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, class, language, and/or ability.

The driving goals of MSAC's granting 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 making sure all Marylanders can access its programs and services. Everyone is welcome, and all MSAC events and activities must be fully accessible both physically and programmatically. MSAC complies with all applicable disability-related statutes and regulations and seeks to ensure meaningful participation by all Marylanders, regardless of need or ability. 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 by clicking here. It includes contact information for the accessibility coordinator, federal and state regulations, the organization's equity and justice statement, grievance procedures, an emergency preparedness plan, accommodation policies, other accessibility resources for artists and arts organizations, and Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) images.

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. Please contact MSAC at msac.commerce@maryland.gov or (410) 767-6555 for more information.

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.

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.

Grievances

For programs or services provided by MSAC:

> If a program or service operated by MSAC, facilities operated by MSAC, or public meetings conducted by MSAC are inaccessible to persons with a disability, or is illegally discriminatory, and a constituent wishes to file a grievance, see the following steps.
> - For questions or discussion prior to filing a grievance, contact MSAC at msac.commerce@maryland.gov or (410) 767-6555
> - To file a formal grievance, contact Dan Leonard, Director of EEO & Fair Practices and ADA Coordinator for the Department of Commerce, at daniel.leonard@maryland.gov

For programs or services that are not provided by, but are funded, by MSAC:
- Communicate the grievance to the sponsoring organization
- For situations in which a constituent feels a grievance was not handled appropriately by the sponsoring organization, or if a response from the organization has not been provided within 30 days, file a formal grievance by contacting MSAC at msac.commerce@maryland.gov or (410) 767-6555

MSAC will work with constituents to provide assistance as appropriate.

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, Special Requests, 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 click here 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, by clicking here; or by attending regularly scheduled virtual and in-person professional development sessions by clicking here.

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, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Section 6101-6107, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex or age
- Maintain complete and accurate records of all activities connected with the grant
- Give credit to MSAC in accordance with published recognition guidelines, available by clicking here, 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 the Department of Commerce, MSAC's parent agency, 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 Program Director: Laura Weiss, 410-767-6545; laura.weiss@maryland.gov

Music C: Grants in this category support organizations that 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 Weissi, 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