Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission

# FY 2025 Local Arts Program Grant Guidelines

**Deadline for submission July 1, 2024**

**Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission ▪ McDade Administration Building
640 South Broad Street ▪ PO Box 8068 ▪Trenton, NJ 08650**

609-278-6672 Fax

www.mercercounty.org

The New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Mercer County Executive Dan Benson and the Board of County Commissioners make funds available for support of the arts through a State/County Block Grant/Partnership for County Arts Agencies from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. This three-year block grant provides essential support for the State arts community, particularly for local arts groups.

Applications are carefully evaluated to ensure that programs offered are of high quality, represent the County's ethnic diversity, and encourage community participation with maximum availability and accessibility to all county residents. This Local Arts Program Grant (LAP) is administered by the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Division and is intended to both promote the growth of and expand the public impact of community-based arts organizations and arts projects.

**County of Mercer**
The Honorable Dan Benson, *County Executive*

**Board of County Commissioners:**
John A. Cimino, Samuel T. Frisby, Cathleen M. Lewis, Kristin L. McLaughlin, Nina D. Melker, Terrance Stokes, Lucylle R.S. Walter

**Office of County Administrator**
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# Eligible Applicants

Mercer County-based nonprofit organizations, units of local government, libraries, and/or institutes of higher education that have been offering or presenting arts programming for at least the past two years are eligible to apply for Mercer County's LAP grant support. K-12 schools and school districts are not eligible, but may partner or collaborate with an eligible applicant group on a project.

At the time of application, an organization must be incorporated as a non-profit in the State of NJ and designated tax-exempt by determination of the Internal Revenue Service (in accordance with Sections 501(c) 3 or (c) 4). Organizations whose filings with the IRS for tax exempt status are in process and on schedule to be determined by October 2024, may be considered for a LAP grant if they identify a current 501(c)(3 or 4) New Jersey non-profit to serve as a fiscal agent. In sucha case, a letter of agreement from that fiscal agent mustbe included with this application, along with a copy of the agency's IRS determination letter.

# Funding Categories

### General Operating Support

General Operating Support grants are available only to non-profit organizations whose missions are exclusively devoted to the public presentation of, and/or education in, the arts. GOS funds provide support for the overall operations of these organizations for the calendar year. Although there are specific uses for GOS funds that are considered ineligible, GOS funds may be used for most activities that support the organization's arts mission.

### Special Project Support

This category is open to any organization that meets the basic eligibility requirements (see Eligible Applicants).

A special project is a public arts activity or event that occurs during the grant year with specific start and completion dates. The project may contain multiple events or activities, but these must be clearly related by discipline or theme. The special project MUST be separate from the regular programming of the applicant organization and should have its own mission and goals. It may be considered a permanent "additional project" within the sponsoring institution or it may be a one-time occurrence. The project should be wholly dedicated to the arts and the sponsoring organization should clearly demonstrate a commitment to support of the arts project through the allocation of resources and funds raised in the community.

Examples of a special project include a concert, an exhibition, an on-line painting demonstration, a mixed media presentation, a special run of a theatrical production, a festival, or workshops, lectures and demonstrations in one of the arts disciplines.

All events funded through Special Project grants must take place within Mercer County and must be open to the general public.

# Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

- capital improvements and acquisitions (including artwork)
- hospitality costs
- foreign travel
- deficits or replacement of funds normally budgeted for the activity
- fundraising events
- student-produced publications, scholarships or awards
- support for "The Nutcracker" OR any organization whose sole activity/season is based on "The Nutcracker"

# Arts Disciplines

Arts programs and projects should fall under any of the following disciplines:

- dance
- instrumental or vocal music
- theatre or musical theatre
- visual and media arts
- folk arts and crafts if they reflect authentic traditions practiced by master artists
- literary arts
- composition
- multi-disciplinary
- multi-media projects

# Funding Request Cap

For General Operating Support the maximum amount of grant funds an organization may request is 45% of the average of 2024 years total operating income.

For Special Project support, the maximum allowable request would be 45% or less of the total estimated expense budget for that specific project. Project costs would be separate from the estimated expense budget for the applicant organization.

Applicants are encouraged to request the maximum amount of grant funds for which they can demonstrate the required cash match. Grant awards are based on the number of applications received by MCC&HC and funds available for the LAP grant program.

# Grant Period

The Grant Period for all FY25 grants under this program runs January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025.

# Match Requirements

General Operating Support grants require a 1:1 cash match(an organization requesting $1,000, for example, must show at least a $1,000 cash match in their budget.)

Special Projects grants require a 1:1 match, however up to 50% of an SP grant match may be from in-kind goods and services. New Jersey Cultural Trust and other MCC&HC grant funds may not be used to meet the match requirements.

# Budget Documentation

Organizations applying for the first time for LAP grant funds must provide:

- copy of previous year's tax return to the IRS
- a letter from an accountant certifying the expenses for the previous year.

Organizations that received a grant in the previous year only need to supply the accountant's letter. You do not need to resubmit an IRS document unless there have been major changes during the past year in the organization's structure and/or financials.

# Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Division of Culture and Heritage along with the New Jersey State Council on the Arts are committed to the compliance of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and require **ALL APPLICATIONS** for **GOS** and **SP** LAP funds complete the ADA Project Checklist for Accessibility.

**GOS** Organization applicants may submit an ADA Plan in lieu of the ADA checklist. The ADA plan should be based on the comprehensive self-assessment survey tool developed by the New Jersey Arts Access Task Force. This survey is available on the NJSCA website at www.artscouncil.nj.gov.

Organizations will be required to submit an updated board-approved ADA plan with each grant application submitted as well as attend an ADA Technical Workshop.

# Evaluation Process

Grant applications are evaluated through a two-tier review process. The first evaluation is done by a Grant Review Panel comprised of experts from the regional arts community representing a variety of disciplines. The Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission members do a second assessment and their recommendations are forwarded to County administrators for the final determination.

# Evaluation Criteria

Review panels evaluate applications for:

- Administrative abilities and financial stability
- Reasonable budget, use of funds and ability to raise funds for a special project
- Planning and development, including long range planning strategies
- Cultural diversity of organization and audience
- Need, promise and potential of the organization or project, and capability of group to follow through
- Demonstrated ability to achieve artistic excellence, fulfill mission and meet needs of the community
- Evidence of ADA compliance or a clear and concise plan to address any non-compliance issues

# GENERAL SUGGESTIONS
# FOR YOUR NARRATIVE

The narrative is the heart of your application. It tells the story of your organization and the project you are proposing. Write as if the reader knew nothing about your group or the topic you'll be addressing – but also, be succinct.

1. Follow directions. Read through the entire Guidelines and Application before beginning your grant. As you develop your narrative, continue to refer back to the eligibility criteria to make certain that the grant falls within guidelines.

2. Identify specific planning goals. Discuss, in clearly written sentences, the goals and priorities of your project. Be sure to describe the evaluation criteria that will be used to measure the success of the project.

3. Be specific and include details. Do not assume that the reader knows anything about your organization. Describe your proposed project, any topic that you hope to address, any partner organization and own group's history fully.

4. Describe outreach and marketing efforts thoroughly. Discuss your marketing plans, and be sure to demonstrate how these efforts will increase accessibility of historical resources and programming to you community. Be sure to talk about any special efforts you plan to use for reaching out to diverse communities of any sort.

5. Be thoughtful and responsive to ADA issues. The Americans with Disabilities Act is a federal law that applies to all providers of public programs, regardless of whether you own the site or not. Grant reviewers are aware of special circumstances faced by programmers at historic sites, however applicants are still responsible for working to increase program accessibility in
whatever way possible (publications in large type format, assistive hearing devices, videotaping or simulcast of inaccessible portions of sites, etc.). Programming of this sort may be funded through this grant.

6. Refer to your support material. If you support materials are well organized, you can easily reference them in the narrative. This helps you further describe important details about your program or organization while staying within the page limits for the grant application.

7. Submit a well-constructed budget. Your budget must accurately reflect the project and numbers that are described in your grant narrative; be sure that the numbers match up. **Ideally, income and expenses should match up in a balanced budget**. [NOTE: you do not have to have a figure on each line of your budget.]

8. Give clear details in your financial narrative. Explain specifically how you arrived at each cost shown on the line items of your budget. If you hope to hire a speaker or a consultant, for example, explain how you arrived at your estimated cost. Briefly describe how you determined costs of printing, postage, supplies, advertising, etc. Be sure to explain you major projected income sources.

9. **CLEARLY EXPLAIN HOW YOUR ORGANIZATION PLANS TO USE THE REQUESTED FUNDS!**

## Priorities for Funding

In addition to the evaluation criteria, importance is placed on:

- Innovation in programming or projects
- Collaborations or partnerships, especially between culturally diverse organizations and artists
- Demonstration of benefits to culturally diverse or underserved populations
- Inclusion of and service to artists who are disabled
- Demonstrated efforts to expand outreach efforts and programming in order to attract new audiences

## Narrative

Use the narrative section to give more details about your organization, its background, programs, services, goals,plans, and benefits to the community. This is the vehicle to explain and describe any unusual or unique circumstances not addressed in the application form.

The narrative and support materials should contain all relevant information necessary for a person unfamiliar with your organization or project to fully understand:

who the organization serves, the artistic vision, and how artistic decisions are made.  Qualifications of persons responsible for making decisions and examples of recent work and accomplishments.  How organization is managed and operates.

The narrative should:

- Have a mission statement and a brief history of the organization; the arts component of non-arts-based organization; or the activities and goals relevant to the special project.
- **Provide a clear, detailed explanation of how the LAPgrant funds would be used.**
- Describe in detail the Project or Programs to be funded. How will they be carried out? Specify the art forms involved, and include a schedule or calendar of activities. Include a brief explanation of how the project will improve the organization's outreach efforts. Explain how the project will be evaluated.
- Explain the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy of the applicant organization. Describe

progress the organization has made in making programming more accessible and inclusive. Discuss any barriers that still exist and outline goals and specific steps to address and remove barriers in a detailed timeline, with assignment of responsibility and consideration of costs necessary to implement each goal. Include attention to facilities, marketing, programmatic access, employment, and sensitivity awareness, and identification of the access committee, ADA coordinator, and a grievance procedure.

- List and explain partnerships or collaborations with other cultural, ethnic or historical groups.
- Discuss your publicity plan for grant-funded activity or project and your efforts to target audiences. Identify your audience and its potential size. Be as concise as possible and include methods employed such as cable or network community shows, newspapers, mailings etc.

## Support Materials

Support materials for both GOS and SP grant requests should demonstrate the quality and illustrate the kinds of arts programming of the applicant organization and the project to be funded. It is only necessary to send one set of support materials, which will be made available to the review panel members at their request. Types of support materials might include a resume of artist, brochure, flyer, poster, program booklet, CD, or DVD, photographs, published book, catalog or article.

## Long Range Planning

Long range organizational or program planning is essential to the continued success of any organization. All GOS and SP applicants must submit a long-range plan for the operation or the program. The plan should include statement of goals and strategic steps to realize those goals, assign responsibility for implementation of tasks, consider the resources needed to realize goals, and be placed on a realistic implementation timeline.

The plan should cover all essential areas of the organization such as artistic vision, governance, human resources, audiences and all forms of public participation including artists and volunteers, fundraising, marketing and outreach, advocacy, educational activities, etc.

Absent a formal long-range plan, or if organization is in between plans, the narrative should include information detailing the process for developing the long range plan, include a timeline for that process and its current status. The strength of an applicant's long-range planning is considered in the evaluation process.

## County and State Funding

Organizations may not apply to or receive grants from both the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts within the same funding cycle. In advance of submitting a Notice of Intent to Apply with the NJSCA applicants should discuss their situation with NJSCA staff to determine eligibility.

MCC&HC will not accept applications or award grant funds to organizations applying to or receiving grants from other county arts councils or county cultural and heritage commissions.

## Required Documentation

Resumes of key staff and board members, as well as for artists/experts being hired for a Special Project, must be included. All **NEW applicants** must include a copy of the organization's Articles of Incorporation bearing the Date of Filing and IRS Notification of Tax-Exempt Status; or proof that these two filings are in the process at the time of submission of the grant application. Units of government must include a copy of an authorized resolution from the governing body. Chapters of national organizations must include documents from the national headquarters showing the location and current officers of the local chapter, and a copy of the national organization's IRS letter of determination.

## On-site Evaluation

Organizations receiving grant funds must furnish one ticket for at least one event/production to the MCC&HC. The Commission must also be sent all publicity announcements for any events occurring within the grantee organizations' grant period. [Site visits and program audits are done by Division staff to ensure that LAP grant-funded programs and projects are produced as represented in grant applications and that grantee organizations are in compliance with ADA requirements.]

## MCC&HC E-blasts and Online Promotional Opportunity

MCC&HC uses Monthly E-blasts to promote regional art, history & cultural events. These E-blasts are sent throughout the region, although they are primarily targeted to Mercer County residents and organizations. The Division also maintains an active Facebook and Instagram page. These outreach tools are used by the Division to help publicize events and activities with no cost to our grantee organizations.

The Division's E-blasts and social media platforms highlight Mercer County-based organizations and programming throughout the seasons. Any organization producing a cultural, historical, arts, ethnic or heritage-based event or activity or providing a service for the Mercer County arts and culture community may submit information to the office of Culture & Heritage at C&HNewsletter@mercercounty.org. Be sure to include a relevant image and any necessary links when sending information about an event.

## Application Deadlines

The deadline to apply for an MCC&HC LAP Grant in GOS or SP category is **Monday, July 1, 2024**.

*NOTE: If your organization experiences any **significant** changes in staffing, programming or finances after submitting your LAP grant application but before grants are announced, <mark>you must immediately notify MCC&HC in writing of those changes.</mark> Failure to do so could result in disqualification of the grant application.*

## LAP Grant Application Assistance

The following assistance is available to applicants:

- Grant Writing workshops

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Workshops

- Individual appointments with staff (following workshops or schedule an appointment)

- Applicants may make an appointment to discuss any questions or concerns that might arise during the course of completing the application; as well as at any other time during the grant cycle.

- Staff members are available by email to answer questions. (see Division staff contact information, page 1 of these Guidelines.) When emailing, include your question/s, a preferred phone number and good times to reach you.

## Appeal Process

Organizations may appeal adverse grant decisions if they can demonstrate that their application was substantively misunderstood or misinterpreted, based on summary Review Panel comments (available upon request). Appeals must be in writing, addressed to the Division Chief. Appeals will be reviewed by a three-member panel of the Cultural & Heritage Commission. Their ruling will be forwarded to County administrative staff and a written report on that ruling will be sent to the applicant.

## Mercer County Legislative & Congressional Districts

| Town | NJ Legislative District |
|---|---|
| East Windsor Township | 14 |
| Ewing Township | 15 |
| Hamilton Township | 14 |
| Hightstown Borough | 14 |
| Hopewell Borough | 15 |
| Hopewell Township | 15 |
| Lawrence Township | 15 |
| Pennington Borough | 15 |
| Princeton | 16 |
| Robbinsville Township | 14 |
| Trenton City | 15 |
| West Windsor Township | 15 |

| Town | U.S. Congressional District |
|---|---|
| East Windsor Township | 12 |
| Ewing Township | 12 |
| Hamilton Township | 4 |
| Hightstown Borough | 12 |
| Hopewell Borough | 12 |
| Hopewell Township | 12 |
| Lawrence Township | 12 |
| Pennington Borough | 12 |
| Princeton | 12 |
| Robbinsville Township | 4 |
| Trenton City | 12 |
| West Windsor Township | 12 |