



# **LA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE ORGANIZATIONAL GRANT PROGRAM 2026-27 PANELIST HANDBOOK**

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## ABOUT THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE

The mission of the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture is to advance arts, culture, and creativity throughout LA County. We provide leadership, services, and support in areas including grants and technical assistance for nonprofit organizations, countywide arts education initiatives, commissioning and care for civic art collections, research and evaluation, access to creative pathways, professional development, free community programs, and cross sector creative strategies that address civic issues. All of this work is framed by our longstanding commitment to fostering access to the arts, and the County's Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative.

## ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONAL GRANT PROGRAM

The Organizational Grant Program (OGP) provides financial support to assist and strengthen nonprofit arts organizations who provide quality arts services that enrich the lives of Los Angeles County residents. The funding provided is through the support of the LA County Board of Supervisors who approve this funding annually. In FY 25/26, the Department of Arts and Culture distributed \$5,059,000 in grants to 261 nonprofit arts organizations through this program. Currently, 499 nonprofit arts organizations in over 46 cities receive general operating support through this fund.

The OGP supports organizations who work in a variety of disciplines including dance, literature, media, music, theatre, traditional and folk art, and visual art. The OGP also supports arts education, arts service and presenting organizations. Applications are accepted on an annual basis. See [OGP Guidelines](#) for more information.

## PANEL MEETING AND ORIENTATION INFORMATION

All panel and orientation meetings will take place virtually via the private Zoom link below. Panelist orientations are optional and meant to support the panelists in their work as a grant reviewer with the Department of Arts and Culture. It is highly **recommended that you participate in a panelist orientation if it is your first time** participating as a panelist or if you haven't served in a few years.

To attend one of the general orientations, simply select the best date and time for you below and use the Zoom link to join the meeting. The orientation sessions will be from **12:00-1:00 PM PST** starting on Wednesday, January 28, 2026. The first orientation will be recorded and available upon request for any panelists who are not able to join any of the scheduled orientations.

- Wednesday, January 28, 2026
- Wednesday, February 11, 2026
- Wednesday, February 25, 2026
- Wednesday, March 11, 2026

### [Link to Join Online OGP Panelist Orientation and Trainings](#)

Meeting ID: 423 771 2461

Passcode: grants

One tap mobile +16699006833,,4237712461#,,,\*492820#

## PANELIST MATERIALS FOR REVIEW AND COMPLETION

Prior to the panel meeting, please read and evaluate each of the applications that you have been assigned. Panelists must review each application packet including artistic documentation and attachments in advance of the meeting to ensure enough time to score and provide comments based on the review criteria.

**To ensure we are able to complete the panel review efficiently, panelists must complete scoring in the grant portal by one week prior to the day of the panel meeting.** All scores will be shared at the beginning of the panel meeting. No time will be provided for reading applications on the day of the panel meeting.

Note that each application will include links to artistic (work) samples and supplemental materials like letters of recommendation, audio, video and images. Artistic samples will not be reviewed on the day of the panel, so panelists must review the artistic samples during their initial review.

To get started, read through the OGP Review Criteria included in this panelist packet to facilitate scoring and initial assessment. All application and attached supplemental materials assigned to your panel are viewable in the list of OGP applications in your panelist dashboard on the SurveyMonkey Apply (SMA) system at (<https://www.apply-lacdac.smapply.io>). Simply click on each application to view the full application packet.

For easy access to each application, your notes and initial scores during the Zoom discussion it is recommended to download or print materials if the panelist will not have a reliable internet connection on the day of discussion. Downloading/printing materials are alternatives to accessing materials directly in the grant portal via Wi-Fi.

Panelists should have all materials available at the meeting either as PDFs or via the grant portal while using their personal laptop or other electronic device during the meeting.

An overview of the review process, panel preparation instructions, and panel meeting logistics is included in this document. Please take a few minutes to read through this *Panelist Handbook* and [Reviewer Guide](#) and contact staff if you have any questions. Important links and information for accessing the applications have been sent to you via the confirmation email with this handbook. The confirmation email includes instructions for logging in to the online grant portal to begin the review.

For convenience, instructional materials and required documents have been linked below in addition to the confirmation email.

Please note that items 1-8 are links for documents available on our OGP panelist webpage at: <https://www.lacountyarts.org/ogp-panelists>. *Item 9 is an attachment included in the confirmation email.*

**1, 2, 3. [Guidelines/Review Criteria \(pg. 18\)](#) and [Sample Application](#)** – These are the official application guidelines and criteria that were provided to applicants in order to complete the application along with a sample online application.

**4. [Implicit Bias, Cultural Competency, Cultural Equity and Inclusion Resources and Articles](#)** – A list of helpful resources including links to articles that address grantmaking through the lens of cultural equity and inclusion.

**5. [County Vendor Registration Instructions for Payment](#)** – To receive an honorarium of \$500, panelists are required to register for an L.A. County Vendor number. You will need the vendor number in order to fill out the required Memorandum of Understanding.

**6, 7, 8. [Memorandum of Understanding and Conflict of Interest Form](#)** – Please e-sign and submit these forms using this Adobe Sign link **prior to the panel**. If you determine that there is a conflict with more than two applications, please contact Rosalyn as soon as possible to try to switch to a different panel. If you are with an organization that has submitted an OGP application this cycle, you are

ineligible to serve as a panelist – also contact Rosalyn as soon as possible so that a replacement may be found.

**9. Applicant Roster** – Includes the names of all the organizations in your panel pool, in the order in which they will be discussed on the day of panel. *This list was sent via email as an attachment.*

## **PANEL PREPARATION AND OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS OF REVIEW**

We require that you enter scores and comments in order of review criteria for each application directly on the scoresheets in the [SurveyMonkey Apply](#) grant portal.

### **IMPORTANT REMINDER**

**At least one week prior to the day of the panel, please be sure to:**

- Complete the Panelist Invoice, Memorandum of Understanding and Conflict-of-Interest Form
- Complete the review, comments and scores in the online panel scoresheets

**On the day of the panel, please be sure to be ready with:**

- A laptop, tablet or iPad with access to each application along with the OGP Funder Report, scores and comments in the grant review portal
- If internet is not accessible, a copy of each application packet plus scores and comments from the submitted scoresheets

**As you review applications please keep in mind:**

- Awards are made on the basis of **merit**, not need.
- Grants must be matched at least dollar-for-dollar by the applicant organization.
- Activities must take place between July 1, 2026 and June 30, 2028.

Please read, evaluate and score **all** of the applications you have been assigned. Panelists are expected to be familiar with the contents of each application, including the *OGP Funder Report* and any supplemental attachments like arts education materials, reviews and letters of recommendation.

It is required that panelists review the applicants' artistic documentation in advance of the meeting. These materials will not be reviewed during the panel meeting. You should plan to allocate approximately **30-40 minutes for reading each application** and making initial assessments. This includes review of the materials submitted with the application.

Be sure to download and have these scores and notes with you on the day of the panel. Please note that the 100-point scoring system assigns a greater maximum point value to artistic quality than to the other criteria as the Department of Arts and Culture believes artistic quality to be a fundamental consideration. If you have questions about an application, please request clarification from grants staff rather than contacting the applicant organization directly.

### **RECOMMENDED STEPS FOR GETTING STARTED WITH THE REVIEW**

1. Read the full application
2. Review artistic samples
3. Review supplemental materials (*OGP Funder Report*, critical reviews, and/or letters of recommendation)
4. Assess the merit of each application based on the information in the application, review criteria and your knowledge of the discipline and/or nonprofit arts sector
5. Provide comments, notes, or questions and a score for every review criterion

6. Complete and submit your preliminary score by the deadline.

## **PANEL MEETING COMMENTS**

It is part of the Department of Arts and Culture's mandate to advance excellence in the arts in the County of Los Angeles. Therefore, the Department views the peer panel process as not only a means to allocate grant funds but also to collaborate on the administrative and artistic growth of the organizations through helpful feedback about their management and programs. **Comments and feedback given by a panel of peers carries tremendous weight with the applicants.**

Panelists read, assess, and score grant applications. Panelists' assessments and scores become the basis for applicant rankings and recommendations to the Arts Commissioners. Panelists **do not** recommend funding amounts or set the cut-off scores to determine funding decisions.

The Department of Arts and Culture encourages panel comments that are balanced, acknowledge strengths, and identify weaknesses of the application, offer constructive suggestions for improvement, and always convey respect. Panelists should consider each application on its own merits and in context of the social impact made in the field as well as with and in the communities where the programs are happening.

Below, we have provided a link to the 2025/26 Commission Panel Binder which demonstrates comments and scores from last year's panelists as an example of the type of constructive critique we seek from reviewers.

[LINK HERE](#)

Department of Arts and Culture staff will confirm scores and take notes during the panel meeting. The panel note-taker will create a summary which is a combination of comments in the grant management system and the final meeting discussion to share with applicants. Applicants may request a high-level summary of these comments which will be provided via phone call with grants staff after the award decision has been sent. Comments are not attributed to specific panelists.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE OGP APPLICATION AND MATERIALS**

The OGP application consists of 12 parts that include general information such as location of the organization, staff bios, board of directors and financial information. Additionally, the applicants are required to submit information about their organizational history, leadership, and programming as well as information about their proposed projects and their commitment to cultural equity and inclusion.

### **THE OGP FUNDER REPORT**

Applicants to the Organizational Grant Program are required to submit an *OGP Funder Report* as an essential part of their grant application. This report which is downloaded from [SMU DataArts](#) provides details on the organization's quantifiable financial and programmatic data, from audience attendance numbers to the organization's most recent budget to board giving, to name a few examples.

Panelists will find each organization's *OGP Funder Report* attached with the applications they will review in the "Financials" portion of the application. Applicants have been instructed to explain variances of 10% or more in the application to ensure clarity and consistency.

To supplement the *OGP Funder Report*, all applicants have also submitted federal 990 tax forms. Those with budget sizes of \$2,000,000 or more have additionally submitted their most recent financial audits. All financial documentation must be consistent and reflect information for the same fiscal year.

## BUDGET CATEGORIES & OGP REQUESTS

The Department of Arts and Culture defines budget size as total operating revenue less in-kind for the most recently completed fiscal year. This number can be found on Page 1 of the applicant's OGP Funder Report (in red font). Budget size does not include any revenue dedicated to a cash reserve, endowment and/or capital project. See [OGP Guidelines](#) for more information.

Grant Budget Category	Budget Size
OGP 1	Up to \$199,999
OGP 2	\$200,000 - \$999,999
OGP 3	\$1,000,000 - \$14,999,999
OGP 4	\$15,000,000+

## PROJECT CATEGORIES

OGP 1, OGP 2 and OGP 3 applicants may request support for any one of the project categories described below. Organizations whose project request fits into more than one project category should select the one category that best describes the request, as demonstrated by the project budget. OGP 4 applicants must request funds for accessibility projects.

### SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability requests support existing artistic and/or administrative projects that advance the goals of the organization. Competitive applicants should clearly define the organization's mission and goals and articulate how the requested project will sustain these goals.

### ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Organizational Capacity requests support new projects that increase the organizational capacity and infrastructure of arts organizations. Competitive applicants should assess the challenges facing their organization and determine a sustainable plan of action to address one or more of these challenges.

### ARTISTIC CAPACITY

Artistic Capacity requests support new projects that increase the artistic capacity of arts organizations. Competitive applicants should assess the artistic needs of their organization and determine a sustainable plan of action for achieving the organization's aesthetic aspirations.

### ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility requests support new or existing projects that provide public access to arts activities and programs. This category enables organizations to make productions, exhibitions, workshops, performances, residencies and/or other arts activities easily accessible to the public.

## ARTS EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS & ARTS EDUCATION REQUESTS

An arts education peer review panel will assess all OGP applicants that designate themselves as an arts education organization or are requesting support for an arts education related program or project.

Arts education panelists will evaluate applications on the basis of the OGP review criteria attached with the panelist materials. The artistic quality [criterion 1 of the OGP review criteria] for arts education organizations or for arts education projects is defined in terms of the *quality of the instruction* provided to children and youth. Please note that depending on the type of arts education project, the applicant may or may not include a curriculum with their support materials.

To support the vision to ensure that every public-school student in Los Angeles County will receive a high-quality K-12 education of which the arts are an intrinsic part of the core curriculum, **the**



**Department of Arts and Culture requires applicants to meet the following guidelines regarding arts education:**

1. All organizations that designate themselves as an arts education organization or are requesting support for an arts education-related program or project must demonstrate quality teaching and learning.
2. **If the arts education programming in the request is a school-based program**, the applicant must provide a sample copy of a curriculum. Acceptable curriculum materials will reflect the full scope of the program and may include lesson plans, teacher guides and/or student study guides. Regardless of the format, the sample must address the connections to the Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools.

Though “community-based and out-of-school arts education” applications must still meet requirement number one above, they no longer are required to provide a sample curriculum. Curriculum samples are optional specifically for these type of arts education programs.

**ARTS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

Arts service organizations provide specialized services to the arts and cultural community. These organizations can be discipline, geographical, or culture-based, or can serve the entire arts community. Services offered can include, but are not limited to, professional development and technical assistance such as marketing, legal and financial assistance, networking opportunities, educational forums and workshops, and printed/online materials including calendars, newsletters, and other resources.

Artistic quality [criterion 1] for arts service organizations is defined in terms of the *quality of service the applicant offers to each group of its stakeholders*, which may encompass one or more of the following:

- Arts organizations,
- Individual artists and/or
- Members of the public.

Arts service panelists will evaluate applications with a focus on the organization’s mission in relation to its programming and **look for evidence that the organization effectively connects its members/stakeholders to resources and creates opportunities that demonstrably advance member organizations and individuals.**

**WHAT’S NEW WITH THE OGP**

The 2026-27 Organizational Grant Program application, guidelines and requirements included some updates. We have provided a summary of these changes below for panelists to understand how these changes affect the application process.

**Updates for all applicants:**

- The OGP allocation this year is anticipated to be \$5,059,000. More information about the budget is available [here](#).
- Applicants are now required to upload a screenshot from the California Secretary of State showing active status or attach a certificate of good standing with their application.
- Organizations must now affirm that their project funding will be used for activities and programs that take place in Los Angeles County and provide an explanation in their application. Cultural equity and inclusion requirements have been updated for organizations in the OGP 3 budget category. Moving forward the minimum requirement is a board adopted policy and proof of adoption. Though policy and plan are encouraged, we no longer require a

plan for OGP 3.

- Starting with the guidelines for this 2026-27 cycle, organizations that have experienced an operational deficit over the last two years will not be disqualified. Applicants will still be required to provide an explanation in the application about ongoing deficits in order for staff to continue to track this data.
- Applicants are required to complete an additional online form (“Agent Contribution Declaration Form”) as a task in the SurveyMonkey Apply portal to comply with new state law SB1439, also known as the Levine Act.

#### **Updates specifically for arts education applicants:**

- Several questions required of organizations applying under the “Arts Education” discipline have been removed to streamline the application.
- Schools or districts are no longer required to make a financial investment for arts education applicants applying for funding for school-based programs to better align with the county’s cultural equity and inclusion values.

### **THE CULTURAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION INITIATIVE (CEII) AND THE OGP**

Applicants to the OGP Program are required to submit board-adopted cultural equity and inclusion statements, policies or plans that outline their commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and access as part of their applications.

To assist applicants with preparing for this new requirement, the Department of Arts and Culture offers free workshops designed to help applicants either clarify and begin outlining applicant organization’s relationship to cultural equity and inclusion, or to deepen the policies already in place. [Click here](#) to learn more about this requirement.

Panelists will not review these materials, however. **They have been reviewed by staff for completion and compliance purposes.** Additional and updated questions in the application will allow applicants to provide information about how the organization is currently addressing and taking steps to integrate and reflect the values of cultural equity and inclusion in their work.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY**

It is presumed that panelists will have knowledge of, and connections to, applicant organizations and their representatives. Your qualification to advise the Department of Arts and Culture rests, in part, on your familiarity with the local arts community.

The Department of Arts and Culture defines conflict of interest as a current or recent affiliation with an applicant from which you have derived or will derive material benefit. A panelist must not score or otherwise vote on a grant application if he or she stands to gain personally from a positive or negative review of a given applicant. For example:

- An immediate family member or “significant other” is currently employed by the organization or is a board member.
- You have served on the organization’s board of directors within the past year.
- You have received fees for services from an organization within the past year.
- You have a contractual disagreement with an organization or its management.
- You are an unpaid volunteer who serves as or holds a formal position with the organization.

In advance of the panel session, please complete the Conflict-of-Interest Form through the link above. **Please contact the Department of Arts and Culture in advance of your panel meeting if you have questions about this policy.**



## HONORARIUM

In appreciation of the time and energy panelists dedicate to the panel review process, panelists receive an honorarium of \$500. Required panelist forms including the *Memorandum of Understanding* must be submitted prior to the panel meeting to avoid delayed payment. The honorarium check will be mailed to the address specified on the form within 4-6 weeks of submission of final scores. Please note that an L.A. County vendor number is required for payment, **panelists must register as a vendor as soon as possible**. Instructions for registering as a vendor can be found on our website. [Click here to review the instructions](#).

## OGP TIMELINE

### September - October

The Department of Arts and Culture conducts Organizational Grant Program workshops throughout Los Angeles County. New, recently disqualified or declined applicants are required to attend a virtual or on-site workshop or alternatively, review the online application webinar.

### October

Application deadline

### November - December

Department of Arts and Culture staff review applications for completeness and contacts applicants for missing materials.

### February - March

Peer panels meet and score applications by discipline.

### April

Department of Arts and Culture staff summarizes panelists' comments for each application. Applicants are ranked by OGP category in order of their score.

A representative from each grant panel appears before the Arts Commissioners to present a panel report communicating their perceptions of the panel and answers Commissioners' questions. Arts Commissioners review scores and comment summaries.

### May

Arts Commissioners approve OGP scores and establish cut off levels.

### June

Grant award recommendations are presented to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

### July

The Department of Arts and Culture sends award notification letters and contracts to grantees.

## PANEL REVIEW DISCUSSION

Grants and Professional Development staff will facilitate the panel meeting beginning with a short orientation, introduction and a quick ice breaker. The order of the discussion will go as follows:

- At the beginning of the discussion, panelists will view the preliminary scores for all applicants.
- All applications with a wide range of scores will be discussed as a group for a maximum of 15 minutes per application.

- Panelists may request discussion of an application that may not have a wide range of scores, those applications will be discussed as well.
- Following discussion, panelists may change the score for any applicant in any review criterion in the grant portal as well as verbally in the meeting.
- Panelists will be asked to provide a final updated score for the applications discussed.
- After the panelists have given all updated/submitted scores, staff calculates the final average score for each applicant and provides a summary to panelists with scores ranked from highest to lowest.
- Panelists review their final scores for each applicant for accuracy and personal consistency.
- The panel as a body may choose to increase or decrease the score of an applicant.
- Once final scores are approved by the panel, staff will record the scores and comments and submit the information for final approval by the Arts Commission in April.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### PANELIST REQUIREMENTS

- Q:** I need to submit my *Memorandum of Understanding* but I do not have a vendor number. Can I still submit it and send the number via email later?
- A:** Yes, you may submit your vendor number separately via email.
- Q:** My address has changed since I last served on a panel, how do I ensure my payment will be sent to the correct address?
- A:** Panelists must review and update their vendor account information by searching for their account on the L.A. County Vendor website and submitting newer information via the portal. Use this [link to review your vendor account information](#).

### APPLICATION REVIEW

- Q:** **The applicant does not plan to use the funds to conduct any on-site or in-person programming during the grant cycle, does that pose a problem?**
- A:** No, OGP funds are meant to support capacity through general operating support. The organization is not required to use the funds to implement a new or ongoing program, project or activity. In light of closures due to the pandemic, many organizations may be using the funds for virtual programming or rather using the funds to pay staff salaries, both are acceptable uses for the funding.
- Q:** **This arts organization spends much of its time performing/exhibiting outside Los Angeles County. Shouldn't County funds be focused on organizations that perform exclusively within the County?**
- A:** No. Engagements outside of Los Angeles County provide crucial earned income for arts organizations and also contribute to the County's reputation as a culturally vibrant region.
- Q:** **Based on the narrative, I really feel that the organization has asked for the wrong project. They really should be working on this other area. Is it okay to score them lower?**
- A:** Yes. If you feel that the proposed project will not address the priority needs identified by the organization, you may reduce its score.
- Q:** **This applicant really needs/doesn't need this money. May I factor this into my score?**
- A:** No, you may not. Assess applications according to merit, not perceived need. All nonprofit arts organizations need funds.

**Q: Can I deduct a standard number of points for applications with misspellings, poor grammar, etc.?**

**A:** While a poorly presented application does impact scoring insofar as it fails to convey vital information, do not make any point deductions based on “looks” alone.

**Q: Can I deduct a standard number of points for applications with missing or incomplete information like budgets, board and staff bios, etc?**

**A:** If the applicant fails to convey vital information for the project, you may use the review criteria to address whether or not this missing information makes an impact on the overall application, however, do not make any point deductions on the basis of “looks” alone.

#### **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

**Q: I know the executive director and a few of the board members. Is there a conflict of interest?**

**A:** If you feel capable of objectively assessing the organization and you have not materially benefited from your association with the executive director/board members for the past 12 months, there is no conflict of interest.

**Q: I’ve been in discussions with the organization’s staff members about a joint project a few months from now. Do I need to excuse myself from the discussion?**

**A:** Yes. If it is possible that you may derive future material benefit from an upcoming collaboration, you may not vote on the organization’s application.

#### **EMERGENCIES**

**Q: It is the morning of the panel. I or my child or another family member is severely ill. What do I do?**

**A:** Please make every effort to honor your commitment to serve on the grants panel. While it is important to have all panelists present at the session, if you can’t attend, you can’t. Please email [grants@arts.lacounty.gov](mailto:grants@arts.lacounty.gov) and/or leave a voicemail message for the Grants Manager, Rosalyn Escobar at (323) 447-4749 in advance of the session if you will not be able to attend because of an emergency or illness or due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If you submitted your scores and notes at least seven days prior to the panel date, the scores will be shared with the panel and you will still be eligible to receive the honorarium.

**Thank you for your service – feel free to email us with any questions, concerns or suggestions as you are going through this process! We are here to support you!**