Major Cultural Institutions

Support to well-established arts organizations headquartered & chartered in Tennessee, with a history of significant year-round arts programming.

Organizations chartered in Tennessee that represent the highest level of quality programming and administration are eligible. Funding will depend upon an organization's rating in the review process and upon the total amount of funds available to the Commission for grant allocation. This grant program is competitive, and most grant requests are not fully funded.

Organizations may request 15% of their total cash operating expenses in their most recently completed fiscal year at the time they submit their application, up to but not exceeding the maximum grant of $200,000. Organizations meeting eligibility requirements for entry into the category are required to have sustained 3 consecutive years of annual operating revenue in excess of $1 million.

These projects are supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

First-time applicants to this category must:

1. contact their program director to discuss eligibility, and then
2. submit a letter requesting entry into the category by November 30. The letter should describe how the applicant meets the eligibility requirements and the evaluation criteria for the category. Include a staff list with current annual salaries and benefits and your most recent audit, IRS Form 990, or year-end financial statement. Because this is a request to receive restricted operational support, any or all activities of your organization may be examined before a decision is made on your request. Address this letter to: Ann Brown, Associate Director for Grants, and do not exceed three pages. This letter may be delivered as an email attachment to ann.brown@tn.gov. The Tennessee Arts Commission may contact you to discuss your request, funding potential in this category, and reserves the right to request additional information from the applicant prior to making a decision. No organization with a current fiscal deficit will be allowed to enter into this category. Applicants will be notified about their request to enter this category.
3. NEW: Organizations interested in entry into the MCI grant category must submit a "clean" audit demonstrating no financial findings in their most recently completed audit. Also note, if funded, first-time MCI grantees will not be eligible to receive more than 50% of their eligible maximum request amount in the first year of receiving MCI grant funding.

^ Description

The Major Cultural Institution (MCI) category provides operating support to well-established arts organizations (see glossary to define arts organizations) chartered in Tennessee that represent the highest level of quality programming and administration. Funding will depend upon an organization's application rating from the review process, circumstances that could affect services provided to the community and the total amount of funds available to the Commission for grant allocation. This category is competitive. Operating support through this grant is restricted to specific line item expenses as detailed below.

Organizations are required to have sustained 3 consecutive years of annual operating revenue in excess of $1 million. Organizations eligible to apply for Major Cultural Institution funds must maintain this operating revenue annually or forfeit inclusion in this category. Organizations will not be permitted to request re-entry (through a Letter of Intent) until they have sustained 3 consecutive years of annual operating revenue in excess of $1 million.

Organizations may request 15% of their total **annual cash operating expenses** in their most recently completed fiscal year at the time they submit their application up to, up to, but not exceeding the maximum grant of $200,000. The total annual cash operating expenses, verified by an audit submitted by the applicant, will be determined by the sum total of:

1. Salaries, Benefits & Taxes,
2. Professional Fee, Grant & Award,
3. Supplies, Telephone Postage & Shipping, Occupancy, Equipment Rental & Maintenance, Printing & Publications,
4. Travel, Conferences & Meetings, and
5. Other Non-Personnel

In determining a request, the following operating expenses are not allowed: capital expenses, endowment funds expenses, penalties payments, in-kind expenses, bank penalties, or furniture and fixture expenditures. Other expenses may be deemed unallowable by the Commission.

Applicant organizations must submit a complete application every year. Organizations are reviewed every three years by out-of-state evaluators. Probationary organizations, and organizations on heightened review status, may be required to submit to a review annually until the Commission determines that triennial reviews are appropriate. Commission staff will notify all current applicants of their review status and schedule if appropriate.

Operating support applicants (SUPS, SRPS, PS, MCI) may not submit an application for APS/RAPS in the same fiscal year. However, all operating support applicants may submit applications in the Arts Access and Arts Education categories, and SUPS and SRPS applicants may also submit an application in the Arts Build Communities category. These additional requests are based on eligibility, and applicants must provide proof that funds requested for AA, AE or ABC grants will not be used for Salaries, Benefits & Taxes and that the applicant can independently meet the cash matching requirements for each additional request without using the cash match or Commission funds requested from its operating support application.

NEW for Operating Support: Every effort should be made to complete spending and submit final evaluations by May 15th. For exceptions, please contact program director.

Affirmative Duty to Report Major Organizational Change
If funded, all grantees must promptly notify the Commission in writing of any significant changes in the organization's structure, leadership or financial circumstances that could affect services provided under the grant contract resulting from this application. See other **Grantee Reporting Requirements**.

^ Allowable Expenses

Salaries, benefits & taxes; professional fees; supplies, telephone, postage & shipping, occupancy, equipment Rental & maintenance, printing & publications; travel, conferences & meetings; and other non-personnel expenditures when allowable and accompanied by a detailed explanation of those expenses.

^ Unallowable Expenses

The following operating expenses, though not exhaustive, are not allowed: capital expenses, endowment funds expenses, penalties payments, in-kind expenses, bank penalties, furniture and fixture expenditures, food & hospitality, fundraising expenses, including food & retail, and other expenses prohibited by 2 CFR 200 Subpart E or that may be deemed unallowable by the Commission.

^ Eligibility Requirements

Applicant must be either a **single-entity organization** responsible for its own programming and primarily dedicated to one art discipline, or an **arts council** which serves a broad population and interacts with local arts organizations**.** (Arts festivals, arts centers and presenting organizations are **not eligible** for this grant category.) Year-round public activity and arts programming that significantly impacts Tennesseans and their communities must be evident.

Applicant must have existed as an arts organization or arts council in Tennessee for a minimum of six (6) years prior to the date of application and have received a minimum of three (3) consecutive years of Commission funding in the Partnership Support Grant category.

An organization is eligible to apply for funding if the organization is legally chartered in Tennessee and has its headquarters and home season, or activities equivalent to a home season for non-producing organizations, in Tennessee, and meets either of the following qualifications: active IRS 501(c)3 status or public arts council that serves a broad population and interacts with local arts organizations. A significant amount of year-round public activity and programming must be evident that significantly impacts Tennesseans and their communities. Organization must have a board approved long-range plan covering at least the current and next fiscal years.

The existence of professional management, which is defined as employing a full-time paid administrative or artistic director, must be evident. Additionally, a commitment to compensating (in salaries, wages, fees, and/or benefits) the administrative, artistic, and technical/production personnel whose services contribute directly to the organization must be evident.

The organization must demonstrate ongoing fiscal responsibility through an audit conducted externally by a certified public accountant (CPA) for its **most recently completed fiscal year** at the time of application. Organizations in this category should use an accrual accounting system. **Note: Failure to submit a single entity audit of the most recently completed fiscal year will jeopardize eligibility and funding.**

Organizations must have a board approved long-range plan covering at least the current and next fiscal years.

Unique Entity ID (UEI): All applicants are required to have a Unique Entity ID. Information and application instructions can be found here.

Arts organizations that receive revenue directly from a "New Specialty Earmarked Plate" under T.C.A 55-4-301 (a)(1) are ineligible for Commission grant funding.

A freestanding academic institution, which has as its mission, training and accreditation in one or more arts disciplines, is not eligible in this category.

Debarment and Suspension. Grantees are required to sign contracts certifying to the best of its knowledge and belief, that it, its current and future principals, its current and future subcontractors and their principals are not presently debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, declared ineligible, or voluntarily excluded from covered transactions by any federal or state department or agency.

PLEASE NOTE: An organization should not apply in this grant category if at the time of application it cannot meet all of the above stated requirements.

The Tennessee Arts Commission reserves the right to deny any application or withhold funding in whole or in part, if the applicant organization programming and activities are outside of the scope or spirit of the Commission's mission, purpose, or this grant program.

^ Evaluation Criteria & Panel Review

It is recommended that the director, chief financial officer, and board chair/president represent the organization at the review meeting. Evaluators reviewing grant applications under this program use the following evaluation criteria (10 points each) citing evidence that the organization:

- Advances the organization's mission and artistic vision
- Demonstrates artistic, cultural, and/or educational value to the community being served
- Understands their role as an advocate for the public value of the arts in the community & promotes the Specialty License Plate program
- Understands and is responsive to the interests and needs of the community it serves
- Planning procedures are comprehensive and communicated
- Understands and demonstrates the value of public and private partnerships
- Demonstrates financial stability and a broad base of financial support
- Understands principles of documentation and evaluation, and results are used to guide future planning and programming
- Management demonstrates consistency and stability
- Application is well planned, addresses all questions and is correct and complete in all information

Additionally, evaluators may ask applicants to address other topics, including but not exclusive to:

- How the organization meets the evaluation criteria
- Specific information found in the grant application
- Community outreach activities
- Unique services offered by the organization
- Evidence of local, state, regional, or national recognition and impact
- Changes in organizational structure, leadership or financial circumstances that could affect services provided
- Arts advocacy and specialty license plate sale efforts in Tennessee
- Organizational long-range goals and objectives
- Detailed information about major productions, presentations or exhibitions in the recent past, present and next two years
- Preservation, conservation or restoration activities
- The space(s) in which your organization conducts its artistic and administrative activities
- Recent and anticipated major equipment acquisitions
- Program evaluation process
- Board and committee responsibilities
- Board/staff relationships
- Educational programming
- Salary information for administrative and artistic personnel
- Hiring practices and personnel policies
- Policy and procedures relevant to financial activities and sustainability, such as planning, fund-raising, internal controls, endowments, capital assets, strengths and weaknesses for major programmatic activities, potential for growth, special short-range issues, building maintenance and travel

^ Accessibility

All Commission sponsored programs, services and facilities are fully accessible to all Tennessee artists and citizens. Organizations are urged to consider contracting with diverse artists, artists living with disabilities, and/or artists representing Tennessee's diverse artistic and cultural heritage. No person on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, religion or sex shall be excluded from participation in, or be denied benefits of, or otherwise be subject to discrimination of services, programs and employment provided by the Commission and its contracting agencies. If an individual believes they have been subjected to discrimination, they should contact the Commission's Director of Arts Access, Kim Johnson (615) 532-9797.

^ Deadline and How to Apply

1. Register to use the Online Grants System as an individual or on behalf of an organization to receive a username and password. Individuals who represent organizations should get their own, individual accounts and not share or "pass down" the username or password among staff. **You are strongly advised to register well in advance to the application deadline.** Anyone registering close to the deadline date can expect delays in the processing of their grant application.
2. Log in to the Online Grants System to complete your "Organization" profile and begin an application for a Major Cultural Institution grant.
3. Use the "Organizations" tab on the left-hand menu to ensure that the profile is complete and accurate. This information is as important as the application itself. Incomplete or erroneous data will impact your chances for funding. To edit the profile, click the "Edit" button at the top of the Organization screen.
4. Update the Policy Statements in the organization's online grants system profile annually. Do this prior to submitting annual grant applications. With particular regard to past successes and future plans, address:
    1. the Arts Advocacy Statement, and
    2. the Specialty License Plate statement. Explain how the organization has met or exceeded, the contractual requirements for FY 2025. Reviewers will evaluate how an organization promotes, beyond contractual compliance, the Arts Specialty License Plate program.
5. Use the "People" tab on the left-hand menu to ensure that your "People" profile is complete and accurate. This information will also be used in the review of the application. To edit the profile, click the "Edit" button at the top of the screen.
6. When both your "Organization" and "People" profiles are complete and accurate, select the "Apply for Grants" tab again and choose the MCI grant application link.
7. Complete all of the application fields.
8. Create and upload required attachments.
9. Submit by **Monday, January 6, 2025, by 11:59 p.m. (CST).**

NOTE: The forms in this portal do not auto-save. Always click the "Save" button before navigating away from the form you are editing to save your work.

Beware—clicking the back navigation button on your web browser will exit you from the system and you will lose your work.

Association or connection to Multiple Organizations: If you are associated with more than one organization, the organization that you were originally associated with will prepopulate in the organization name field on any newly opened application. To change to another associated organization, simply delete the prepopulated name and type in the correct organization.

^ Required Documents

You will be prompted to create and upload the following documents in the Required Documents section of your Annual Application in the Online Grants System.

1. **Proof of Arts Advocacy.** Advocacy is educating and communicating to the public, including public officials, the importance of the arts and how public support of the arts can and has impacted your community. Examples of arts advocacy proof may include membership in Tennesseans for the Arts, copies of **recent** letters or emails (within the last 12 months) to state legislators and other state/local elected officials, photos of state/local elected officials at the applicant's arts events, newspaper articles or social media posts that create awareness about public support for the arts through the organization's activities (news articles that primarily market events are not acceptable), promoting the Specialty License Plate program and other pertinent print materials. **Proof of advocacy must be demonstrated by the applicant organization.** Applicants may **not** submit advocacy efforts conducted by contracted personnel. Multiple examples of arts advocacy will strengthen the application, but only one example that proves advocacy is required.
2. **Bios & Job Descriptions.** Short, biographical statements and job descriptions of administrative and artistic personnel including those contracted who are involved in the grant activities. Full resumes should only be included with the supplementary materials.
3. **Long-range Plan.** Plan should cover at least the current and next fiscal years.
4. **Organizational Flowchart**.
5. **Financial audit and management letter** (from an independent CPA). For the most recently completed fiscal year, at the time of application.
6. **Audit Response Form.** Locate the audit response form in the Document Library, located in the left hand menu after logging in to the online grant account. Fill out any information pertinent including appropriate signature, save, and upload into your application.
7. **Accessibility Checklist:** Complete, save, and upload the Accessibility Checklist form into your application.
8. **List of Board of Directors. Only nonprofit organizations with 501(c)3 status will be prompted to upload this document.** Note that Commission staff may request that grantees provide additional information about the board including but not limited to contact information and occupation during the grant period. The board list (at the time of application) must include only the following:
    - Full Name
    - Email address
    - Number of years on the board
    - Length of term(s)

    NOTE: Other biographical information about individual board members should not be included on this list. **Legal requirements state that Commission funds granted to an organization may not be used as a payment of any kind, for any purpose, to members of an organization's board.**

9. **Corporation Annual Report: Only nonprofit organizations with 501(c)3 status will be prompted to upload this document** (as required to be filed annually with the Secretary of State's Office). In lieu of the report, you may also submit a copy of the email verification issued by the Secretary of State's office or a copy of the online verification sheet maintained by the Secretary of State's Office found here. Entities of government do NOT submit.

10. **Specialty License Plate Program promotion:** Attach materials to the document section of the application that show efforts that the applicant organization has met and gone above and beyond the minimum requirements for the Specialty License Plate Program promotion. Multiple examples will strengthen the application, but only one example is required. The Grantee is strongly encouraged to incorporate elements from the Specialty License Plate Communications toolkit in agency communications including print advertising, websites, e-letters, social media, press releases, talking points and/or other mechanisms as may be determined effective by the Grantee. The toolkit can be found at **http://tnspecialtyplates.org/partners/arts-plates/**. If needed, the login password is tnspecialtyplates.

Note during the grant closeout process, each Major Cultural Institution (MCI) grantee organization that receives public operating support is required to implement a structured promotional campaign for the Specialty License Plate Program during the fiscal year within its ongoing communications program that includes ***four of the five elements below****. Failure of any MCI grantee to complete this requirement in a satisfactory manner, as determined exclusively by the Grantor, may, at the Grantor's sole discretion; result in a reduction of 10% of the authorized grant award.*

1. **Coordinator**. Provide the name, title and contact information for grantee organization staff person who coordinates specialty license plate promotions and will be agency liaison with TN Arts Commission Director of Marketing and Development.
    - Documentation for Closeout – Input in Grantee Organization Profile in the TN Arts Commission online grants management system
2. **Website**. Specialty license plate program information on the grantee organization website
    - Documentation for Closeout – Screen shot of page on website labeled "website promo"
3. **Social Media.** Feature specialty license plate promotional content in grantee's social media at least 6 times/year
    - Documentation for Closeout – Six screen shots with dates of social media posts named "social promo 1", "social promo 2" etc.
4. **Newsletters**. Place banner ad on e-newsletters or other viral marketing, **or Printed Program.** Place half page ad in printed program book for at least six different performances or for the duration of one season
    - Documentation for Closeout – Image of six newsletters distributed over past year OR scan of six programs. Label file either "Newsletters promo", OR "Program book promo"
5. **Agency Specific Opportunity.** Identify a promotional activity specific to grantee organization. Examples: run video spot before movie or performance starts; offer special parking for patron cars with arts license plates; hold contest to get 100% staff/board ownership of plates
    - Documentation for Closeout – Description of custom promotion and documentation as available. Label as "Custom Promo"

^ Additional Documents

You will **NOT** be prompted to upload these documents in the system, but these documents may be required based on your applicant type.

Optional Materials. These include proof of advocacy, project examples. These documents can be uploaded in the **"Documents"** section below the **"Required Documents"** section of your application.

Accepted file types include .pdf, .jpg, or .png. For video and audio samples, provides links to projects in the section labeled "Optional Material Link(s)" below the "Documents" section.

Recent Bylaws. All Nonprofit, 501(c)3 applicants must upload the most recent copy of their bylaws to their online organization profile during registration, prior to submitting their application.

For Operations Occurring

FY2026: July 1, 2025-May 15, 2026

NEW for Operating Support: Every effort should be made to complete spending and submit final evaluations by May 15th. For exceptions, please contact program director.

Application Dates & Deadlines

Application Opens 11/15/2024

Application Deadline 1/6/2025

Eligible Applicants

501(c)3 arts organizations headquartered & chartered in Tennessee

Must have a minimum three-year history in Partnership Support

Must have three consecutive years of audited revenues in excess of $1 million

Requires a complete financial audit by a licensed CPA each year

Requires at least one full-time, paid administrator

No organization with a current fiscal deficit will be allowed to enter into this category.

Requires a formal request for entry to the Associate Director for Grants by November 30

Funding Requests

15% of the organization's total annual cash operating expenses not to exceed $200,000. This grant requires a dollar-for-dollar match. Note, if awarded, the organization will have to pay for expenses up front and get reimbursed after completing reporting requirements.

Grantee Reporting Requirements

Manage Annual Grants

Important Dates & Grant Management Instructions: As of FY25, Operating Support (MCI, PS, SUPS, SRPS) grantees are no longer required to upload examples of their Specialty License Plate Program promotion ... Continue reading

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Archived FY25 MCI Guidelines

Current grantees may need to reference the **FY25 MCI grant guidelines**.

Address: 401 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Nashville, TN 37243
Phone: 615-741-1701

For accessibility accommodation requests including alternate digital formats, captioning, ASL, and assistive technologies please contact Kim Johnson, Director of Arts Access, 615-532-9797.

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