

Small Rural Partnership Support

Home > Grants > Small Rural Partnership Support

Support for qualified arts organizations chartered in one of Tennessee's Rural Counties.

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 40% 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 \$50,000.

First-time applicants to this category must contact their program director to discuss eligibility.

Tennessee Rural Counties

Bedford	Decatur	Hardin	Lincoln	Roane
Benton	DeKalb	Hawkins	Loudon	Robertson
Bledsoe	Dickson	Haywood	Macon	Scott
Campbell	Dyer	Henderson	Marion	Sequatchie
Cannon	Fayette	Henry	Marshall	Stewart
Carroll	Fentress	Hickman	McMinn	Pickett
Carter	Franklin	Houston	McNairy	Smith
Cheatham	Gibson	Humphreys	Meigs	Tipton
Chester	Giles	Jackson	Monroe	Trousdale
Claiborne	Grainger	Jefferson	Moore	Unicoi
Clay	Greene	Johnson	Morgan	Union
Cocke	Grundy	Lake	Obion	Van Buren
Coffee	Hamblen	Lauderdale	Overton	Warren
Crockett	Hancock	Lawrence	Perry	Wayne
Cumberland	Hardeman	Lewis	Polk	Weakley
			Rhea	White

Description

Small Rural Partnership Support (SRPS) provides restricted operating support for qualified arts organizations chartered in one of Tennessee's rural counties (see list above). See [Glossary to define arts organizations](#). Funding will depend upon an organization's rating in the review process and upon the total amount of funds available to the Tennessee Arts Commission for grant allocation. This category is competitive. Applicant organization must have a minimum budget of \$30,000. Operating support through this grant is restricted to specific line item expenses as detailed below.

Organizations may request **no more than 40%** 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 request of **\$50,000**. The Small Rural Partnership Support grant requires a one-to-one dollar match.

The total cash operating expenses, verified by a 990 submitted to the IRS within 12 months from the application date and provided by the applicant, will be determined by the sum total of:

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

The following are not allowed as operating expenses: capital expenses, endowment funds, penalties payments, in-kind expenses, bank penalties, or furniture and fixture expenditures. Additional financial details and/or documents may be requested.

Applicant organizations are reviewed once every three years by a peer advisory panel (updated February 2025), although organizations must submit a complete application every year. Those organizations new to the SRPS category must be reviewed for two consecutive years prior to beginning the once every three years review rotation process. Commission staff will contact all current SRPS recipients and inform them of their review status and, if appropriate, schedule.

Every organization that receives public operating support will be required to implement a structured promotional campaign for the Arts Specialty License Plates within its ongoing communications program.

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.

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.

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](#).

Eligibility Requirements

An organization must be legally chartered in Tennessee and have its headquarters and home season, or activities equivalent to a home season for non-producing organizations, in Tennessee, and meet 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.

National or regional 501(c)3 organizations, chartered and headquartered in Tennessee, and serving as an umbrella organization applying for funds for another group are restricted to **only one** application per fiscal year (see below).

Applicant must have demonstrated history of funding from the TN Arts Commission. A minimum of three years of Commission funding during the last five years in the following grant categories: Partnership Support, Arts Access, Arts Project Support, Rural Arts Project Support, Creative Placemaking, Arts Education Community Learning, Arts Education Teacher Training, Arts Pathways for Youth Success, or Arts Build Communities. At least one of those years, must include funding directly from the Tennessee Arts Commission (non-Arts Build Communities funding).

Proposed applications must involve one or more Commission recognized art forms, including: visual arts, craft, media, design, music, theater, dance, folk and ethnic, or literary arts. Please see [Legal Requirements](#) for further details.

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

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.

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 is aware they 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

Advisory panels reviewing grant applications under this program use the following evaluation criteria citing evidence that the:

- proposed programs/projects demonstrate artistic, cultural and/or educational value to the community being served (10 points)
 - proposed programs/projects advance the organization's mission and artistic vision (10 points)
 - proposed programs/projects support the work of artists through payment of fees, services or appropriate benefits (10 points)
 - organization understands their role as an advocate for the public value of the arts in the community & promotes the Specialty License Plate program (10 points)
 - organization understands and is responsive to the interests and needs of the community it serves (10 points)
 - planning procedures are comprehensive and communicated (10 points)
 - organization understands principles of documentation and evaluation and results are used to guide future planning and programming (10 points)
 - organization understands and demonstrates the value of public and private partnerships (5 points)
 - organization demonstrates financial stability and a broad base of financial support (5 points)
 - organization's ability to carry out proposed programs/projects based on history of TAC funding (10 points)
 - organization's application is well planned, addresses all questions, and is correct and complete in all information provided (10 points)
- 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 & How to Apply**
- Organizations new to the Small Rural Partnership Support grant category must submit a formal request to enter the grant program by email to your program director prior to applying for Small Rural Partnership Support. The email should outline how the organization meets the grant eligibility requirements.
 - [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.
 - Log in to the Online Grants System to complete your "Organization" profile and begin an application for a Small Rural Partnership Support grant.
 - 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.
 - 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:
 - the Arts Advocacy Statement. Reviewers will evaluate how an organization addresses advocacy beyond the minimum requirement, and
 - the Specialty License Plate statement. Explain how the organization has met, or exceeded, the contractual requirements. Reviewers will evaluate how an organization promotes, beyond contractual compliance, the Arts Specialty License Plate program.
 - 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.
 - When both your "Organization" and "People" profiles are complete and accurate, select the "Apply for Grants" tab again and choose the SRPS grant application link.
 - Complete all of the application fields.
 - Create and upload required attachments.
 - 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 that 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- Accessibility Checklist:** Complete, save, and upload the [Accessibility Checklist](#) form into your application.
- List of Board of Directors. Only nonprofit organizations with 501(c)3 status must upload this document.** The board list (at the time of application) must include the following:
 - Full Name
 - Email address
 - Number of years on the board
 - Length of term(s)**NOTE:** Double check your board list to make sure it has all 4 pieces of the required information. If your organization's bylaws do not require term limits, include a statement on the Board List indicating this. **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.**
- Corporation Annual Report: Nonprofit organizations with 501(c)3 status must 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.
- 990 Return of Organization Exempt Form Income Tax: Nonprofit organizations with 501(c)3 status must upload this document.** Tax-exempt organizations, nonexempt charitable trusts, and section 527 political organizations file this form to provide the IRS with the information required by section 6033. This form should not be dated more than 12 months from the submission of the SRPS grant application. Organizations with budgets under \$50,000 may not have a 990 form. For organizations with budgets under \$50,000, to prove minimum of \$30,000+ budget, submit Profit & Loss Statement with signature assuring accuracy and authority for signature.
- 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://tmspecialtyplates.org/partners/arts-plates/>. If needed, the login password is tnspecialtyplates.

*Note during the grant closeout process, each Small Rural Partnership Support (SRPS) 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 SRPS 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.*

- 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
- Website.** Specialty license plate program information on the grantee organization website
 - Documentation for Closeout – Screen shot of page on website labeled "website promo"
- 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.
- Newsletters.** Place banner ad on e-newsletters or other viral marketing, **or Printed Performance.** 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"
- 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 chartered in one of Tennessee's Rural Counties

Must have a minimum three-year Tennessee Arts Commission funding history in the last five years

Minimum annual budget of \$30,000 verified by IRS Form 990 (orgs with budgets \$50,000+) or signed Profit & Loss Statement (orgs with budgets \$30,000-\$50,000)

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

Requires an approved formal request for entry by email to Program Director

Funding Requests

40% of verified annual cash operating expenses, not to exceed \$50,000. 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

Tennessee Arts Commission

Archived FY25 SRPS Guidelines

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