



California

Cultural

Districts

CULTURAL DISTRICTS

2025 Grant Guidelines

Deadline: August 7, 2025

The mission of the California Arts Council, a state agency, is to strengthen arts, culture, and creative expression as the tools to cultivate a better California for all.

Learn more at www.arts.ca.gov

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CULTURAL DISTRICTS

DEADLINE: August 7, 11:59 PM

Grant Request Amount: \$10,000

Grant Activity Period: January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2027

Designation Period: January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2030

Apply at: calartscouncil.smartsimple.com

Please refer to the California Arts Council [Grants Manual](#) for all policies, procedures, and resources for applicants and grantees.

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Program Timeline

Application Opens	May 27, 2025
Application Deadline	August 7, 2025
Round 1 Panel Review	Approx. August-September 2025
Semi-Finalist Site Visits	Approx. October-November 2025
Round 2 Panel Review	Approx. November 2025
Funding Decision	Approx. December 2025
Funding Notification	Approx. December 2025
Grant Activity Start	January 1, 2026
Estimated Arrival of Funds	Approx. March – May 2026
Grant Activity End	December 31, 2027
Interim Report Deadline	January 31, 2027
Final Report Deadline	January 31, 2028

Eligibility

Only organizational partnerships are eligible to apply.

- At a minimum, the partnership must include three organizations: an arts and/or cultural nonprofit or collective; a local business, business association, and/or a community development corporation; and the branch of local government that oversees land use for the proposed district.
- The majority of organizations in the partnership must be located in the district.

Lead applicants eligible to apply include:

1. Nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3), California organizations
2. Units of municipal, county or Tribal governments
3. Fiscally sponsored organizations

Non-eligible applicants include:

1. Organizations that are registered and primarily operate as for-profit corporations/entities, even if they have a fiscal sponsor.
 - a. This includes LLCs and any for-profit entities (including ‘charitable arms or branches’).
2. Individuals
3. State agencies
4. Federal agencies
5. Elementary and Secondary Schools (Public, Private, Charter)
6. School districts
7. County Offices of Education
8. Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs)
9. Booster Clubs

Eligibility Requirements

Applicant organizations and fiscal sponsors must meet the requirements below:

1. Have a principal place of business in California and a California address.
2. Have a minimum two-year history of consistent arts programming and/or services **prior** to the application deadline.
3. Demonstrate proof of nonprofit status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or section 23701d of the California Revenue and Taxation Code.
 - Eligible applicant organizations without nonprofit status, please see *Fiscal Sponsor Requirements* in the 2025 Grants Manual.
4. Have “active status” with the California Secretary of State (SOS) showing evidence of “good standing” at the time of application.
 - All applicants must upload their California SOS certificate noting good standing at time of application.
 - Unincorporated Nonprofit Associations (UNAs) must supply an Entity Status Letter from the California Franchise Tax Board (FTB).

Eligible Request Amounts

- Applicant organizations can request up to \$10,000 for a two-year grant period.

Funding Restrictions

- For applicant organizations or fiscal sponsors with total revenue **below** \$250,000, the sum of requests during the same year of funding cannot exceed the total revenue from the most recently completed fiscal year.
- For applicant organizations or fiscal sponsors with total revenue **above** \$250,000, the sum of requests during the same year of funding cannot exceed **50%** of the total revenue from the most recently completed fiscal year.

Matching Funds

- A one-to-one match is required for this grant. See the [2025 Grants Manual](#) for clarification on eligible match sources.

Background & Purpose

Enacted in 2015, the California Cultural Districts program created a new tool for the development, support, and preservation of California's extensive and diverse cultural assets. In 2017, the initial group of 14 statewide Cultural Districts was designated after an open and competitive application process to identify a well-rounded group of communities diverse in make-up, geography, and purpose.

"State-designated cultural district" is defined as a geographical area with a concentration of cultural facilities, creative enterprises, or arts venues that accomplishes one or more of the following outcomes:

- (1) Attracts artists, creative entrepreneurs, and cultural enterprises.
- (2) Encourages economic development and supports entrepreneurship in the creative community.
- (3) Encourages the preservation and reuse of historic buildings and other artistic and culturally significant structures.
- (4) Fosters local cultural development.
- (5) Provides a focal point for celebrating and strengthening the unique cultural identity of the community.
- (6) Promotes opportunity without generating displacement or expanding inequality.

Program Goals

The CAC's California Cultural Districts program aims to cultivate authentic and sustainable cultural districts that reflect the breadth and diversity of California's extensive cultural assets. A cultural district is generally understood as a well-defined geographic area with a high concentration of cultural resources and activities. The California program seeks to identify, support, and connect centers of arts and cultural activity through the designation and certification process.

The CAC will designate a cohort of up to 10 emerging Cultural Districts to expand the original cohort of statewide cultural districts that was designated in 2017. For the purposes of this program, "emerging" districts are those new to statewide designation. The CAC recognizes that emerging districts may already be locally designated and may have long histories of community-based arts and cultural activity. Designation will take place through an open application process. Selected districts will receive a host of benefits including:

- Official state certification
- California Cultural Districts branding materials
- Technical assistance
- Joint marketing support
- Stipend of \$10,000 two-year grant to support Cultural District activities

Designated statewide cultural districts collectively represent rural, urban, and suburban districts and will include a focus on both cultural production and cultural heritage. Districts will be asked to identify according to these broad typologies during the application process. (A glossary of terms is available at this link: <https://www.caculturaldistricts.org/glossary>.) For

example, a district might be rural and focused on cultural heritage. At each stage of the process, applicants will be grouped and reviewed separately by distinct district types based on the following:

1. CONTEXT

- urban
- suburban
- rural

2. FOCUS

- cultural heritage
- cultural production
- cultural heritage and cultural production

Urban, Suburban, and Rural geographic boundaries are described as such:

- **Urban and suburban** cultural districts are generally expected to be a contiguous geographic area.
- **Rural** districts do not need to be contiguous but will need to make the case for how the participating areas/entities are complementary and synergistic.

Districts will be selected for designation based on the strength with which they demonstrate the following:

- Diversity, capacity, and commitment of participating partners
- Authentic community engagement from diverse stakeholders
- A strong understanding and concentration of the cultural assets present
- Clarity and thoroughness of vision, goals and objectives, and budget
- Clearly defined leadership
- Anticipated impact of the cultural district designation
- Expected contribution to cohort

Grant Application Questions, Review Criteria, & Designation Process

Application questions and required documents pertaining to each review criterion are included below. The CAC highly recommends drafting responses in a Word or other text-based document prior to entering them into the online portal. This will allow you to utilize spell- and grammar-check functions and to track word count.

Please note that all narrative questions have a maximum 300-word response limit.

Detailed instructions are available at calartscouncil.smartsimple.com.

Centering Equity and Accessibility

The application must demonstrate your organization's experience, capacity, and ongoing commitment to engaging and uplifting historically and systemically under-resourced, excluded,

and erased artists, communities, and cultural practices. This experience, capacity, and ongoing commitment should be reflected throughout the proposal.

The application must also demonstrate that the programs, services, information, and facilities where funded activities are to take place, including online spaces, will be accessible for individuals with disabilities, including but not limited to individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf-Blind, have difficulty speaking, have a physical disability, visual disability, developmental disability, learning disability, mental illness, or chronic illness.

Application Questions and Required Documents

1. Describe your organization's equity and accessibility goals.
2. What does your organization do to achieve these goals?
3. How does your organization determine progress in achieving these goals?
4. Describe your organization's approach to ensuring that people with disabilities are able to fully participate in all programs and services.

Partnerships

The application must demonstrate significant diversity, capacity, and commitment of all participating partners.

Application Questions and Required Documents

1. Explain the background, role, and resources contributed to the district by the non-profit arts organization.
2. What was the Total Revenue of the nonprofit arts organization in its most recently completed fiscal year?
3. How many staff are employed by the nonprofit arts organization?
4. Explain the background, role, and resources contributed to the district by the local government partner.
5. Explain the background, role, and resources contributed to the district by the local business association or community development corporation.
6. What was the Total Revenue of the local business association or community development corporation?
7. How many staff are employed by the local business association or community development corporation?
8. List any anticipated district community members beyond the core partners and how you intend to collaborate with each.
9. Identify the personnel who will be dedicated (full or part-time) to district operations and planning. Provide the name, affiliation, experience, and role of each individual.
10. Complete a two-year budget snapshot table. Provide revenue and expense amounts. Address any significant changes in line items from one year to the next.
11. Letters of agreement signed by lead applicant and partner organizations

Community Engagement and Social Impact

The application must demonstrate authentic community engagement from diverse stakeholders and anticipated positive impact of the cultural district designation.

Application Questions and Required Documents

1. Cultural District Type: Urban/Suburban/Rural; Cultural Production/Cultural Heritage/Both
2. Provide a Cultural Asset Inventory for your proposed district as an xls. file using the template provided: <https://www.caculturaldistricts.org/s/Cultural-Asset-Inventory-Instructions-Resource.pdf>
3. Provide a District Boundary Map for your proposed district as a PDF. Please consult the instructions and example maps provided: <https://www.caculturaldistricts.org/s/District-Boundary-Map-Instructions-Resource.pdf>
4. Three letters of support from individual community members or artists located in the proposed district.
5. Provide information on any district overlap with other local, regional or federal designations.
6. Describe the types of space for artists, arts organizations, and cultural activities currently present in the district. Include the facilities, activities, events, and history that make the district distinct.
7. Describe the ways in which the community is currently engaged in the district and its activities.

District Vision and Planning

The application demonstrates clarity and thoroughness of vision, goals and objectives, and budget.

Application Questions and Required Documents

1. Identify the key issues and opportunities facing the district and how the cultural district designation will address them.
2. Describe how the community's existing residents will benefit from district designation.
3. Describe vision for the next five years for the district and how designation would support the realization of that vision.
4. Complete a project budget, including all expenses relevant to the stated project activities. Consult the [What We Do Not Fund](#) resource.
5. Complete a matching funds table. Indicate the source type, identify the source, enter the amount, and indicate the status of matching funds (Committed, Pending, or Projected).

Expected Contribution to Cultural District Cohort

[NOT INCLUDED IN INITIAL SCORE]

This criterion will be assessed by the panel as a group during the second round of the panel review meeting. The panel will evaluate the top-ranking applications in each context group (urban/rural; cultural heritage/cultural production) – considering additional factors of district focus and overall geographic reach. This criterion will be utilized to ensure the cohort collectively represents a diversity of districts.

Once applications have been submitted, the adjudication process will take place as follows:

- **Round 1-Panel Adjudication:** An external panel of field experts will independently review and rank all eligible applications in accordance with the published review criteria and identify semi-finalists.
- **Site Visits by Agency Staff:** CAC staff will conduct site visits for all semi-finalist applicants according to a standard site visit protocol and will complete formal reports for panel review.
- **Round 2-Panel Recommendations:** The review panel will reconvene in person in Sacramento to hear reports from staff on site visits and determine a cohort of up to ten new Cultural Districts to recommend for state designation, in alignment with the program goals.
- **Vote by Council on 2025 Cultural District Designations:** Council will vote on designation of the slate of new districts.

Staff Assistance

If staff assistance is still required for guidance or clarification, email is the best way to contact Program Specialists. **We recommend that you contact staff well in advance of the deadline to ensure you can be accommodated.** People who identify as Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf-Blind, or have difficulty speaking may dial 711 to reach the California Relay Service (CRS). Large print is available upon request. Translation services are also available upon request.

Organizations seeking technical assistance should contact:

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