



Culture, Equity, and the Arts Frequently Asked Questions June 2023

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What is Culture, Equity, and the Arts (CEA)?

Culture, Equity, and the Arts (CEA) aims to contribute to a more equitable arts and culture sector in Chicago by applying inclusive criteria and shifting power outside of philanthropic institutions, relying instead on the advice of community voices in recommending grants to Foundation leadership.

The objective is to observe a more equitable distribution of MacArthur’s Chicago Commitment resources across the city’s geographies and populations and greater diversity in the organizations that we support.

In August of 2019, we announced the end of MacArthur’s longstanding Arts and Culture in Chicago program and the launch of a new offering in its place called Culture, Equity, and the Arts. The design of the CEA program was informed by [conversations with arts leaders](#), the Chicago Commitment team’s participation in [Enrich Chicago](#), internal research indicating a [lack of grantees headquartered on the South and West sides](#), research and conversations with other funders regarding [participatory grantmaking](#), and by the values articulated in our Foundation-wide [Just Imperative](#).

The former Arts and Culture in Chicago program was described as a “civic contribution to Chicago”; grantmaking guidelines emphasized “high quality” and “professional level” art (assessed subjectively by

Staff); applications were accepted by invitation only; and grant amounts were determined by the size of the applicant organization's annual operating budget, with larger-budget organizations receiving larger awards.

By contrast, three elements define Culture, Equity, and the Arts:

- 1) *Participatory Grantmaking*: A panel of eight to twelve external actors make funding recommendations with guidance by an independent facilitator.
- 2) *Equity-focused Grantmaking Guidelines*: An independent facilitator worked with Staff to craft grantmaking criteria through a participatory process. Requests for funding are assessed against four organizational characteristics or "attributes": Collaboration, Demonstrated Commitment to Fostering Equity, Connectivity, and Relevance. These criteria are described below.
- 3) *Grant Award Amounts*: Participatory grantmakers recommend award amounts based on criteria described below.

What does the Culture, Equity, and the Arts program offer?

CEA offers multi-year, general operating support directly to Chicago-based organizations with budgets of \$1 million and above. Grant sizes range from \$50,000 to \$75,000 per year, typically for three years. These resources provide flexible funding that helps organizations maintain stability, plan ahead, pursue new ideas, and invest in new artistic directions.

Who is eligible to apply?

Grantseeking organizations must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Has an annual operating budget of \$1 million or greater as demonstrated by a final, independently audited financial statement indicating both revenues and expenses of \$1 million or above in the most recently completed fiscal year;
- Has a mission that aligns with the Chicago Commitment's [vision](#) and overarching goal;
- Is a nonprofit organization with 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service in good standing with the IRS and the Illinois Secretary of State; and
- Has a reasonable level of fiscal and organizational health.

In addition, the following eligibility criteria are applied:

Geographic Boundaries: Funding in the Culture, Equity, and the Arts program is offered to Chicago-based organizations. The CEA program prioritizes requests from organizations that are located within the city of Chicago and whose core mission is to serve Chicago audiences. We will, on occasion, consider requests from organizations that are in the suburbs if the applicant can make a compelling case that the organization reaches underserved audiences within the city of Chicago to a substantial degree.

Arts-Centered Organizations: Organizations with a core arts mission are eligible (e.g. theater companies, art museums, dance companies, etc.). In addition, eligible grantseekers include **arts-centered organizations** where art is integral to executing an organization's mission but may not be the primary stated activity (e.g. a human services organization in which arts programming is integral to its violence prevention work).

University-Affiliated Cultural Institutions: Organizations that are closely affiliated with larger institutions, such as universities and schools; receive significant financial or in-kind support from the larger institution; and are not independent nonprofits with self-governing boards and independent audits, are not eligible.

Project Grants: Funding in the Culture, Equity, and the Arts program is offered in the form of general operating support.

What if my budget is below \$1 million?

As part of Culture, Equity, and the Arts, MacArthur established a regranting partnership with the [Field Foundation](#) to offer general operating support to arts and cultural organizations in Chicago with annual budgets up to \$1 million.

This partnership is called A Road Together (ART), an initiative of the Field Foundation supported by the MacArthur Foundation. ART is designed specifically for organizations with a strong commitment to equity that are reflective and inclusive of Chicago's diverse and historically underserved communities.

View ART funding guidelines and application information here:

<https://fieldfoundation.org/generalguidelines/art>

The Field Foundation maintains independent control and supervision the ART program. Grant decisions in the ART program are made at the discretion of the Field Foundation.

How do grantseekers apply to Culture, Equity, and the Arts?

After carefully reviewing the [grantmaking guidelines](#), all organizations interested in applying must submit a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) through the "[Submit a New Idea](#)" feature on the Foundation's website.

This requirement applies to organizations that are seeking renewed awards as well as organizations that are seeking general operating support in the Culture, Equity, and the Arts program for the first time.

Each year, LOIs are accepted between January 1 and April 30.

What are the selection criteria?

Requests that meet the eligibility criteria noted above are then considered according to the following selection criteria.

Organizational Attributes:

Demonstrated Commitment to Fostering Equity—the organization recognizes the existence of societal advantages and barriers and strives to ensure access to opportunities and resources for historically underserved communities within its creative practice(s), program(s), and internal organizational structure.

Collaboration—the organization actively works with external entities to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

Connectivity—the organization uses its arts and cultural practices/programming to build empathy and individual empowerment, bridge divides between people, and/or connect to other familiar or unfamiliar perspectives.

Relevance—the organization’s creative work and the organization itself are in dialogue around timely, present-day issues.

How are award amounts determined?

Award amounts are recommended by participatory grantmakers based on the following criteria:

- The mission is focused on serving African, Latino/a/x, Asian, Arab and Native American (ALAANA) communities and/or people from historically underrepresented groups.
- Lead Staff and Board demographics are representative of the city’s diverse population.
- Internal accountability metrics are in place to monitor progress on self-defined diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

What is the participatory grantmaking process?

Full applications that are invited by Staff are reviewed by a participatory grantmaking panel with eight to twelve members. The panel applies the grantmaking criteria noted above to make funding recommendations with guidance by an independent facilitator. Participatory grantmakers are community members who represent a wide diversity of demographic backgrounds, life experiences, areas of expertise. The panel decides whether requests meet the criteria outlined above. Staff then present a slate of awards for consideration by MacArthur’s President and Board of Directors, which retain final approval authority.

How are LOIs reviewed by Staff?

Staff review LOIs against the criteria described above. The capacity of the participatory grantmaking panel to review applications is limited. Organizations that are invited to submit a full application continue to the participatory grantmaking process. The full application asks for demographic information of Board and Staff and invites organizations to reflect on the attributes outlined above (Demonstrated Commitment to Fostering Equity, Collaboration, Connectivity, Relevance).

What if my organization received support in the past?

There is no presumption that past support, either directly or via MacArthur’s previous funding partners, will result in a new award. Grantseekers are advised to approach the CEA program as they would any new funding prospect, regardless of previous MacArthur support.

What is the history of MacArthur’s approach to funding the arts and culture sector in Chicago?

In 2003, the Foundation launched regranting partnerships with two foundations, the MacArthur Fund at the Prince Charitable Trusts and the MacArthur Fund at the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, offering general operating support to strengthen and sustain small and mid-sized arts and culture organizations.

Historically, three portfolios were organized by grantee budget size:

- 1) The MacArthur Fund at the Driehaus Foundation regranting MacArthur funds to small organizations with annual budgets below \$500,000;
- 2) The MacArthur Fund at Prince regranting MacArthur funds to mid-sized organizations with budgets between \$500,000 and \$2 million; and
- 3) MacArthur offered general operating support directly to organizations with annual operating budgets of \$2 million and above.

Between 2003 and 2022, MacArthur awarded a total of \$65.6 million to 565 small and mid-sized organizations via these historic partnerships. MacArthur, Prince, and Driehaus mutually and amicably agreed not continue the funding partnerships beyond the end of 2022. The historic MacArthur funds at Prince and Driehaus ended December 31st, 2022.

How can I learn more?

We encourage you to read the following articles on our website:

[Culture, Equity, and the Arts: Accepting the Invitation to Change](#)

[A Work in Progress: Participatory Grantmaking in the Arts](#)

[Listening to and Seeking Guidance from Local Advisors](#)

[Sharing and Shifting Power: Lessons from Participatory Grantmaking](#)

[Building a More Equitable Arts Ecosystem from the Ground Up](#)

[Change for More Equitable Arts in Chicago](#)

For more questions, please contact cea@macfound.org.