



Institutional and Financial Stabilization Grants for Arts Organizations

Fiscal Year 2027 Grant Program Guidelines

This document is also available [in Spanish](#).

Application Deadline: July 30, 2026 at 12 p.m.



New Jersey Cultural Trust
NJ Department of State
P.O. Box 305
Trenton, New Jersey 08625
609-292-6403

<https://nj.gov/state/culturaltrust/>

New Jersey State Council on the Arts
NJ Department of State
P.O. Box 306
Trenton, New Jersey 08625
609-292-4435

<https://nj.gov/state/njsca/>

Key Dates for FY 2027 Cultural Trust Grants

June 8, 2026 at 12 p.m. (noon)	Online applications for qualification due
June 10, 2026	Grant application available in SAGE
July 15, 2026	Cultural Trust Board meeting to approve qualifications
July 30, 2026 at 12 p.m. (noon)	Grant applications due in SAGE
October-December 2026	Arts Council convenes independent review panels and crafts recommendations
January 2027	Cultural Trust takes action and announces grants
February 17, 2027 to February 28, 2028	Grant period for funded projects

THIS GRANT ROUND AT A GLANCE

Who Can Apply: For Fiscal Year 2027, the Arts Council is accepting applications from **arts organizations** for Institutional and Financial Stabilization (IFS) Grants to recommend to the Cultural Trust for funding. Organizations that received IFS Arts grants in both Fiscal Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2025 are not eligible to apply. For more information on applicant eligibility, see [page 3](#). **Note:** Organizations from all counties are eligible to apply; in keeping with the requirements of the Cultural Trust Act, at least 25 percent of grant funding will be allocated to organizations in South Jersey (Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Ocean, and Salem counties).

Eligible Projects: Applications will be accepted for projects that increase applicant organizations' financial and institutional stability and capacity. An eligible project must address a specific stability/capacity challenge and must fit primarily within one of the Cultural Trust's eligible project categories. For a full list of the project categories and more information on project eligibility, see [pages 3-8](#).

Award Amount: Organizations may apply for grant funds **up to \$40,000**. While there is no minimum award amount, requests typically range from \$10,000 to \$40,000. Please note that final grant awards are subject to and pending available funds.

Match and Financial Requirements: There is no matching requirement. However, if an organization's proposed project costs more than is being requested, the proposal must clearly demonstrate the organization's ability to provide the remaining necessary funds. Grant funds may not be used to match any other State of New Jersey grant.

Number of Applications: A qualified organization may submit only **one application** for Cultural Trust funding in this grant round. Each application must be for a single, discrete project within a single primary project category. For more information on the single discrete project requirement, see [page 7](#).

Grant Period: The grant period for successful projects is February 17, 2027 to February 28, 2028. All project activities must occur and all grant funds must be expended during the grant period. The Cultural Trust will not fund projects that have started prior to February 17, 2027.

How to Apply: Submit an online application for qualification by **June 8, 2026** (or verify that your organization's qualification status is valid through January 2027), then submit a grant application in SAGE by **July 30, 2026 at 12 p.m. (noon)**. For more information about qualification, see [page 3](#). For more information about the required application components, see [pages 8-10](#). For more information about how to submit your grant application, see [page 11](#).

How to Learn More: Read these grant guidelines in full, and follow the hyperlinks in this document for additional guidance. For information about technical assistance opportunities, see [page 13](#).

ABOUT THE CULTURAL TRUST

The New Jersey Cultural Trust is a public-private partnership established by law in July 2000 to develop a permanent source of additional funding for arts, history, and humanities organizations. The Trust seeks to help cultural organizations achieve greater financial and operational stability in order to improve their service to the public. To this end, the Cultural Trust awards grants to support capital projects and institutional and financial stabilization projects at qualified organizations. Cultural Trust funds are intended to be supplemental to the operating and program support provided by other State and county cultural agencies; while other agencies may provide ongoing annual support, the Cultural Trust is designed to make significant one-time investments in organizations' stability and capacity. The Cultural Trust Act directs the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the New Jersey Historical Commission, and the New Jersey Historic Trust to design and administer programs that recommend projects to the Cultural Trust for such grants.

HOW CULTURAL TRUST GRANTS ARE FUNDED

Funding for Cultural Trust grants comes from interest earned on the Cultural Trust Fund, which is a permanent investment fund. The invested principal of the Cultural Trust Fund grows through annual

legislative appropriations, leveraged by private donations to the endowments of cultural nonprofits as well as by private donations directly to the fund. Each year, the State of New Jersey appropriates a dedicated portion of the revenue generated by the hotel/motel occupancy fee to the Cultural Trust Fund. To learn more about the Cultural Trust's funding, go to <https://nj.gov/state/culturaltrust/ct-trust-information.shtml>.

APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for funds in this grant round, an organization must:

- Be a New Jersey-based nonprofit organization that has been **qualified** by the New Jersey Cultural Trust (see details below).
- Be registered as a charity in New Jersey with the Division of Consumer Affairs and have a Charities Registration number.
- Have a primary **arts-focused** mission. (Organizations with a primary history- or humanities-focused mission are eligible to apply for Institutional and Financial Stabilization Grants for History & Humanities Organizations, which the Cultural Trust expects will next be offered in FY 2030.)
- Not have another *active* Institutional and Financial Stabilization grant from the Cultural Trust. **NOTE:** If an organization has an active Arts Council grant or Local Arts Program re-grant, the organization is still eligible to apply for a Cultural Trust grant. If an organization has an active Cultural Trust Capital Historic Preservation grant, that organization is also still eligible to apply.
- Not have received an IFS Arts grant in Fiscal Year 2023 and also an IFS Arts grant in Fiscal Year 2025.

Applicants with stewardship responsibility of historic properties are subject to additional eligibility restrictions. For more information, see [page 7](#).

QUALIFICATION

In order to be eligible to apply for funds from this program, organizations must first be designated qualified by the Cultural Trust. The online qualification application is available on the [Cultural Trust website](#). In order to become qualified, an organization must demonstrate that it:

- Is a New Jersey-based tax-exempt nonprofit organization (no colleges, universities, or units of government).
- Fulfills a primary arts, history, or humanities mission in New Jersey through active programs and services.
- Has been incorporated for a minimum of four years and has been in operation for a minimum of four years.
- Has a functioning board that provides financial oversight to the standards set by the Cultural Trust.
- Is current with Charities Registration and Division of Revenue filings.
- Is able to submit the required support material as described in the qualification application.

Organizations must be designated qualified at the time of the grant deadline in July 2026 and at the time that the Cultural Trust Board votes to approve awards in January 2027. Organizations that are not currently designated qualified or whose qualification status will expire before January 2027 must submit an online qualification application **no later than June 8, 2026 at 12 p.m. (noon)** in order to be eligible for this grant round. Please note that the Cultural Trust no longer accepts paper qualification applications; all qualification applications must be completed online.

If an organization is deemed ineligible through the Cultural Trust's qualification process, its grant application will not advance to the panel process.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS AND PROJECT CATEGORIES

The purpose of Cultural Trust funding is to provide financial support to assist qualified organizations in addressing the financial and institutional challenges that threaten their stability and to help build greater

operational capacity to manage and advance their work. Awards may support a wide variety of expenses, including immediate response activities, costs associated with planning or assessment, and investment strategies that reimagine work and build resiliency.

Institutional and financial stabilization (IFS) projects are limited to the seven categories listed below. Applicants must clearly identify a stabilization or capacity challenge and articulate a specific, appropriate strategy *primarily within one of the below categories* to address the challenge or issue. Applicants must explain how that strategy will produce significant and sustainable results.

For self-assessment resources to help you identify stability and capacity challenges that might be addressed through an IFS grant project, please see the [About Cultural Trust Grants page](#) of the Cultural Trust's website.

Institutional and Financial Stabilization Project Categories

Establishing or Growing a Working Capital Fund/Cash Reserve: A working capital fund or cash reserve increases an organization's financial stability by increasing its liquid, unrestricted capital. Both working capital funds and cash reserves are specific kinds of designated funds separate from an organization's operating budget. A working capital fund addresses cash flow issues, while a cash reserve addresses unplanned short-term expenses. Where an organization might otherwise address these challenges using bridge loans or external lines of credit, a working capital fund or cash reserve can help the organization avoid interest payments and even yield interest.

- **Create a Working Capital Fund:** A working capital fund is a revolving fund that is replenished regularly. It reduces operating risk and better secures an organization's other income and assets. For example, organizations may sometimes need to pay significant amounts of cash upfront for a year's expenses (such as licensing fees or subscriptions) while revenue comes in more incrementally throughout the year (such as tuition or ticket sales). In this case, organizations can use a working capital fund as an internal line of credit to support upfront costs, and replenish the fund with revenue as it is earned. Applicants must show that the board has instituted a policy and plan to replenish the fund to the level described and outlined the organization's policies for managing the fund.
- **Create a Cash Reserve:** Cash reserves are funds that are set aside to ensure stability when unplanned costs arise or revenue unexpectedly falls. A cash reserve may assist an organization with avoiding debt if unexpected circumstances arise. Reserves may also be established to address other specific challenges. A common reserve of this type is a facilities reserve, which can help an organization budget for expenses related to physical property and assets, such as repairing and replacing plumbing, A/C units, and roofs. In all cases, the money is typically placed in a separate account, designated as the cash reserve account. Applicants must show that the board has instituted a policy and plan to replenish the reserve to the level described and outlined the organization's policies for managing the fund.
- **Grow an Existing Working Capital Fund or Cash Reserve:** If an organization's working capital fund or cash reserve is not sufficiently capitalized to address the organization's needs, the organization may apply for funds to grow it. Applicants must detail the history of the fund/reserve's use and management, explain how a Cultural Trust grant would improve the efficacy of the fund/reserve and its impact on the organization, and outline the organization's plans to replenish the fund/reserve in the future, in accordance with the board's established policies for managing the fund.

Applicants should specify in their grant narrative whether their proposed fund will function as a working capital fund, a cash reserve, or both. While all are eligible, applicants must clearly articulate the intended purpose and uses of the fund.

NOTE: Any applicant receiving a grant in this category will be required to submit reports about the status of the fund to the Cultural Trust every year for four years after receiving the grant.

For more information about Cash Reserve/Working Capital Fund projects, please see the [Additional Guidance for Cash Reserve/Working Capital Fund and Recovery Capital Projects](#).

Recovery Capital: Cultural Trust funds may be used to help an organization recover financially from a crisis — a one-time event or specific, discrete challenge that damaged its capital base or created a financial cliff that threatens the organization’s stability. Eligible projects in this category include replenishing a depleted working capital fund/cash reserve and the reduction/elimination of a debt or deficit. The applicant must provide a detailed explanation of the specific circumstances that depleted its financial resources and (if applicable) caused it to take on debt. The applicant must provide a plan that explains the steps they have already taken to address the crisis that resulted in the need for recovery capital and the steps they will take in the future to avoid or prepare for its recurrence. Funds may NOT be used to address a recurring operating deficit. The repayment of government loans is NOT eligible.

For more information about Recovery Capital projects, please see the [Additional Guidance for Cash Reserve/Working Capital Fund and Recovery Capital Projects](#).

Strategic Planning/Assessment: Sound planning is a key step in building resiliency, and assessments can yield key information for decision-making and provide roadmaps for future planning. The Cultural Trust defines strategic planning broadly as an umbrella that covers a wide range of important planning activities.

Examples of eligible planning projects may include:

- General organizational strategic plans
- Marketing and communications plans, including rebranding
- DEAI plans
- Fundraising plans
- Board development plans
- Succession plans/executive transition planning
- Facilities plans
- Campus master plans
- Interpretive plans
- Membership and outreach plans
- Emergency preparedness, disaster, or continuity of operations plans
- Financial policies and procedures, including development of chart of accounts

Examples of eligible assessment projects may include:

- Technology assessments
- Accessibility assessments
- Climate vulnerability assessments
- Emergency preparedness assessments
- Feasibility studies for capital campaigns
- Market research
- Economic impact studies
- Facilities conditions assessments
- Studies exploring the feasibility of mergers

A successful planning and/or assessment project will outline a process, including: identification of any professionals or consultants who will be engaged, including their qualifications; who will be involved in the process; how public input will be obtained; the steps of the process and its timeline; and benchmarks for how and when the plan will be revisited and progress measured.

If a consultant is being engaged to lead the planning and/or assessment work, the consultant must already be identified by the applicant at the time of application.

Technology Upgrade: Effective use of technology can increase an organization’s capacity and enable it to connect its programs and services to the public, leading to greater financial and operational stability. Examples of eligible technology upgrade projects may include:

- Creating a new or upgraded website, including enhancements for accessibility

- Purchasing and implementing software, such as customer relationship management or donor management (CRM) software, point of sale systems, online payment systems, and accounting programs
- Upgrading or building databases
- Purchasing computers, tablets, servers, phones, or other hardware for organizational use
- Search engine optimization
- Installation of cybersecurity systems and protocols, including incident response planning
- Technology to enhance accessibility (e.g., hearing loops, captioning, etc.)

Related costs, such as technology needs assessments by IT professionals or staff training on new software, may be included within this project category. Costs for software are eligible only if they are in addition to funds originally and normally budgeted for, such as the cost of new subscription-based CRM software. The applicant must provide a plan for how such recurring software costs will be sustained beyond the grant period. Professional services for setup and configuration are eligible, but installation costs are NOT eligible — see [page 7](#) for details.

Capital Equipment Purchase: Capital equipment purchases can also stabilize an organization and increase its capacity. Eligible projects in this category are non-routine purchases of durable goods that are capitalized and depreciated on an organization's balance sheet. Construction projects are NOT eligible. Installation costs for equipment are also NOT eligible — see [page 7](#) for details.

Staff/Board Development: Board members and/or staff may require a new skill in order to perform essential or new business functions. This idea may extend to business systems and services as well as skills that help organizations reduce costs, improve accountability, or increase productivity. Examples of eligible staff/board development projects may include:

- DEAI training
- Executive coaching
- Technical skills training
- Board education
- Leadership training programs
- Engagement of a recruitment firm

New Staff Position: While support for staff resources is possible under this program, Cultural Trust funds will only support a *new* staff position. To be eligible, a new staff position must directly address the operational or financial challenge identified by the applicant and must be a long-term, permanent addition to the organization's team. Most importantly, the applicant must provide a detailed, specific plan for fully sustaining the cost of the position beyond the grant period.

Converting an existing unpaid, volunteer position to a permanent paid position is eligible. Maintaining or expanding an existing paid staff position is NOT eligible. Filling an existing vacancy is NOT eligible. Only one, individual staff position may be supported with this grant. The new staff position must be based in New Jersey.

A detailed job description and a resume of the candidate (if identified) must accompany applications seeking support for a new staff position. *The new role must be scheduled to start after the grant period begins.* The applicant may request funds to cover one-time ancillary costs related to onboarding the new staff member, such as training or technology purchases. These costs may not exceed 10% of the total project costs.

NOTE: Applicants receiving funding for a new staff position will be required to submit reports about the status of the position to the Cultural Trust every year for four years after receiving the grant.

Single Discrete Project Requirement

In order to be eligible, an application must propose a *single, discrete project*. In order to be considered a single, discrete project, a project must be a targeted, cohesive set of activities that provide a solution to a specific stability/capacity challenge. Even if all project activities are within a single project category, the project may not be considered a single, discrete project. Please contact Cultural Trust or Arts Council staff if you are unsure whether your proposal meets this requirement.

Eligibility of Training Costs

While staff/board development is listed as a separate category, training may also be an element of projects that fall primarily into other categories. For example, a technology upgrade project that proposes onboarding a new customer relationship management system might include training for staff on the new system; or, a strategic planning project for a development plan may include training for board or staff on how to execute the plan. These training costs are eligible expenses in any category as long as they are closely related to the other project activities.

INELIGIBLE PROJECTS AND EXPENSES

Institutional and Financial Stabilization grants are intended to make projects and activities possible that otherwise would not be feasible at this time. They may not replace other funds and must be *in addition to* funds originally and normally budgeted for or associated with the routine operations of an organization. The following types of projects and expenses are NOT eligible:

- General operating expenses, including indirect costs
- Salaries, costs, and time of *existing* staff and board members dedicated to the project
- Applying for support for more than one discrete project
- Capital construction projects
- Costs for equipment/technology installation that affects the structure of the building
- Fundraising events (e.g., galas, receptions, etc.)
- Scholarships, fellowships, and internships
- Contributions to endowments
- Education in a matriculating course of study
- Acquisition of collections
- International travel
- Ongoing or new public programs, projects, and services
- Catering and hospitality
- Projects involving a consultant or contractor for which a specific consultant or contractor has not been identified

Ineligible Installation Costs

For technology upgrade and capital equipment purchase projects, installation costs are not eligible for Cultural Trust funding. This includes anything affecting the structure of the building, including but not limited to rewiring, plumbing, and wall mounting. Costs for technology and equipment setup that does not affect the structure of the building are eligible for Cultural Trust funding. Such eligible costs include costs for shipping and delivery, professional services and materials to hook up new equipment or technology to existing infrastructure, and professional services to install and set up software on new devices. If you have any questions about whether specific expenses are eligible, please contact Cultural Trust or Arts Council staff.

HISTORIC PROPERTY ELIGIBILITY RESTRICTIONS

For organizations with properties on the New Jersey and/or National Register of Historic Places: **Projects that relate to or propose alterations that will affect the historic integrity of the structure or property are NOT eligible and will not proceed to panel review.** These may include (but are not limited to) capital equipment purchases, technology upgrades, capital campaign feasibility studies, reuse feasibility studies, accessibility plans, historic structure/landscape reports, facilities plans, and conditions assessments. This restriction also applies to installation activities for capital equipment purchases and technology upgrades that would be covered by non-Cultural Trust funds.

- If you are unsure whether your project will address the physical structure or property, please contact Cultural Trust staff to inquire about project eligibility (contact information is on [page 13](#) in the “Application Assistance Available” section).
- To determine your property’s register status, visit <https://dep.nj.gov/hpo/tools/lucy/> and contact the State Historic Preservation Office by phone (609-940-4312) or email njhpo@dep.nj.gov.

For more information on other funding opportunities for historic properties, go to <https://www.nj.gov/dca/njht/>.

HOW TO INITIATE AN APPLICATION IN SAGE

In order to access and submit the application form, an applicant must first be registered in the [System for Administering Grants Electronically \(SAGE\)](#), the State of New Jersey's grant management system. *Be sure to access SAGE using the link in this document or the link on the Cultural Trust website to ensure that you are using the correct version of SAGE.*

SAGE requires authorization for access. If you do not have a username and password, please click the New User link to request access to the site. Please note: Registration is not automatic. You must wait for an email message confirming your account has been validated before you can log in to SAGE. This may take up to 5 business days.

How to access the application: Once you’re logged into SAGE, go to the “View Available Opportunities” section. Click “View Opportunities.” Under the Cultural Trust section, you will find the IFS application, called “Cultural Trust IFS Arts 2027.”

You may contact Cultural Trust staff for SAGE technical assistance at cultural.trust@sos.nj.gov or 609-292-6403.

APPLICATION COMPONENTS

SAGE Forms

The following items must be completed in SAGE:

- **Organizational Profile Form:** This form provides the essential information about the organization, including contact information.
- **Project Summary:** This form provides basic information about the project:
 - Project Type: Select one of the project categories listed above; the project must fall within a single primary project category.
 - Total project costs and total grant funds requested.
 - Estimated project start date and end date.
 - Purpose of Funding statement: A statement limited to 300 characters. It will be used in press releases and for other public inquiries. It should contain the basic “who, what, where, and when” information. It should begin with, “This Cultural Trust grant will...”

Sample Statement: “This Cultural Trust grant will support the creation of a cash reserve for Sample Theatre, which will ensure the continuity of operations in the case of emergencies that place unexpected strains on the theatre’s finances.”

- **Grant Narratives:** This form includes two parts:
 - Organization Impact Summary: This statement is limited to 3,000 characters. It should include a brief summary of the organization’s mission, major programs and services, and audience.
 - Project Narrative: The narrative includes responses to each of the four Narrative Topics, which are listed on [page 11](#). Please note the character limit for each Narrative Topic response. The narrative should clearly and concisely communicate your project to the panel, and provide context for the other materials in the application. When responding to each of the Narrative

Topics, keep in mind the Evaluation Criteria for each topic. The Evaluation Criteria are listed on [page 12](#). It is a good idea to craft the narrative responses in a Word document and then copy and paste them into the text boxes in the SAGE narrative screen.

- **Staff Chart:** This chart identifies the organization’s key staff and volunteers.
 - Include paid staff, volunteers, and independent contractors.
 - The total staff costs in this chart should correspond to your organizational expenses chart.
- **Organizational Budget Charts:** These forms are the Operating Expenses and Operating Income charts.
 - You must provide income and expenses for the most recently completed fiscal year, the current fiscal year, and the next fiscal year. The charts should be completed according to the applicant’s own fiscal year, and each column should include the actual or projected expenses for the entire fiscal year.
 - Your organization’s income and expenses must be entered according to the line items in the forms, which may differ from the line items your organization uses internally. [A non-fillable PDF version of the charts](#) is available for your reference and advance preparation.
 - Use the Next Fiscal Year Notes (Optional) section to explain where you are in your organization’s process and timeline for planning for the next fiscal year, in order to provide context to the panel about the numbers in the Next FY column of the budget charts.
 - Use the Budget Notes section to explain significant changes in income and expenses from year to year, and to detail line items in the budget charts as needed. The panel expects accompanying notes to provide clear information about the organization’s financial picture.
- **Project Budget Charts:** Use the Project Expense Chart and Project Funding Chart to list all of your project expenses and funding sources.
 - Use the Budget Notes section to detail line items.
 - Please include all related project costs, not only those for which you are requesting Cultural Trust funds.
- **Support Materials:** Use the Support Materials form to upload Required Support Materials and Optional Support Materials; please see details below.

Required Support Materials

Support materials play a significant part in the evaluation process by reinforcing what is presented in the narrative. They are important tools that provide the panel with a complete picture and basis for evaluation. The maximum file size is 13 MB.

- Link to the organization’s website.
- Organization’s **two** most recently completed audits/Form 990s.
 - Please provide two separate audit or 990 documents.
 - The two documents should be of the same type (NOT one audit and one 990).
 - NOTE: Documents must be from FY 2023 or later to satisfy the requirement.
 - **IMPORTANT:** For organizations uploading 990Ns (also known as 990 postcards), also upload an internal balance sheet for each year corresponding to the 990s. A balance sheet, or statement of financial position, summarizes the organization’s assets and liabilities. Profit and loss statements (P&Ls) will NOT fulfill this requirement.
- Organization board chart. List *all* members of the organization’s board. For each board member, please include the following information:
 - Name.
 - Years of service on the board.
 - Current term of service (e.g., 2018-2026).
 - Executive office held (if any).
 - County and state of residence.
 - Any relevant skills or expertise (limit to one sentence).

- Brief biographies or resumes of the key individuals (staff/board) participating in the project, not to exceed 1 page per person. Be sure to include information relevant to their roles in the project.
- Brief background on all outside organizations, agencies, or institutions that are projected to provide services in support of this project (if applicable).
- **For projects requesting funds for a consultant:** Credentials and copy of the actual proposal of any consultant including detailed costs, timelines, action steps and deliverables. It is important to include the Request for Proposal and/or the process used to select any consultants so that the panel fully understands the process and/or the decision for selection of a proposed consultant.
- **For projects requesting funds for technology/equipment:** Vendor quotes and documentation of all proposed expenses. PDFs of online retail listings will also be accepted.
- **For projects requesting funds for training:** If applicable, documentation of enrollment costs and training curriculum. If a consultant is being engaged to conduct staff/board development, the requirements for consultants apply (see above).
- **For projects requesting funds for a staff position:** Detailed job description for the proposed position and resume of candidate (if available), as well as documentation supporting the plan to sustain the position after the single year of Cultural Trust funding.
- **For projects requesting funds for a working capital fund/cash reserve:** Board-adopted organizational policies for managing and replenishing the fund/reserve.
- **For projects requesting recovery capital funds:** Documentation supporting the organization's efforts to address the crisis that resulted in the need for recovery capital, and to prevent or prepare for the recurrence of a similar crisis.

Optional Support Materials

The following materials are not required. Applicants are strongly encouraged to provide additional materials that will help panelists fully understand their organization and their proposed project. The maximum file size is 13 MB.

- A copy of the organization's current strategic plan.
- Up to three additional optional support materials: In addition to the strategic plan, applicants may provide up to three further items of support material. Support material should strengthen the application by further illustrating the organization's stabilization/capacity challenge and/or proposed solution. Examples of support material include cash flow projections, assessments, planning documents, requests for proposals (RFPs) for vendors/contractors/consultants, and letters of support. Each document counts as one piece of support material.

Important Notes

- ALL proposed project costs must be supported by documentation. For cash reserve/working capital fund and recovery capital projects, this requirement does not apply.
- Be sure to include ALL relevant and required information about your organization and project in your application materials in SAGE. Reviewers will NOT see any other documents previously submitted to the Cultural Trust or to the Arts Council, including your qualification application.
- Please make sure that you do not upload password-protected, corrupted, or otherwise inaccessible files. Do not use special characters when naming your files, as they are not functional in SAGE. Applications with materials that are missing and/or inaccessible will be deemed ineligible and will not move to the panel process.

NARRATIVE TOPICS

The Narrative Topics correspond with the Evaluation Criteria on [page 12](#). Successful responses to the Narrative Topics are clear, convincing, and supported by budgets and other application materials. Compose responses that will allow a panelist who does not know your organization to understand it in relation to the Evaluation Criteria. [A rubric showing the narrative topics alongside their corresponding evaluation criteria](#) is available on the Cultural Trust’s website.

1. Detail the major challenge to the organization’s institutional or financial stability or future operational capacity that this application addresses. Explain the self-assessment and/or strategic planning involved in identifying the challenge and determining that its resolution is a high priority for your organization. (Character limit: 4,000)
2. Fully articulate the proposed stabilization/capacity project, identifying all of the major expenditures and the human resources that will be used to execute the project. Explain how and why consultants, vendors, and purchases were selected. If the overall project will cost more than the funds requested or requires activities not directly covered by this grant, such as installation, explain how and when the additional resources will be obtained. (Character limit: 3,500)
3. Explain how the project will improve the organization’s stability/capacity by addressing the challenge identified in #1, and discuss why it is the best available solution to the challenge. Outline the anticipated short-term and long-term outcomes of the project and how its gains will be sustained beyond the grant period, independent of future Cultural Trust funds. (Character limit: 3,500)
 - If the project is the creation or growth of a cash reserve, explain specifically how the fund will be replenished after use over time.
 - If the project is a request for recovery capital, explain specifically how the organization will address the crisis that resulted in the need for recovery capital and the steps the organization will take in the future to avoid or prepare for the recurrence of a similar crisis.
 - If the project is the creation of a new staff position, explain specifically how the position will be sustained after the grant period.
 - If the project is a technology upgrade that involves the purchase of software, explain specifically how the costs of the software will be supported after the grant period.
4. Explain why the Cultural Trust’s support will significantly benefit the quality and/or outcome of the project, or why this project would be difficult to execute without Cultural Trust support. (Character limit: 3,000)

APPLICATION CERTIFICATION

After completing all required forms and uploading all required support materials, the application must be certified by both an organization official (e.g., executive director) and a member of the organization’s board or governing body. Certification involves entering the individuals’ names and titles into the Application Certification form in SAGE, with their consent. The authorizing official and board member must be two different people.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION

The application must be submitted by the deadline by changing the application’s status in SAGE to “Application Submitted.” You will receive an e-mail confirmation from SAGE when your Cultural Trust application is successfully submitted.

APPLICATION DEADLINE

The application deadline is **July 30, 2026 at 12:00 p.m. (noon)**. Late submissions will not be accepted for any reason, including technical/human error. Applicants are strongly urged to submit applications well before the deadline.

APPLICATION REVIEW AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

All complete applications by eligible applicants for eligible projects will be evaluated according to the published criteria for evaluation by independent panels of experts. The consensus of the panel will be further reviewed by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts to form funding recommendations. **Incomplete applications, applications for ineligible projects, and applications from ineligible organizations will not advance to the panel process.**

Evaluation Criteria

Review and reference the Evaluation Criteria before and during the preparation of your application. Independent review panels evaluate applications in accordance with the following uniform criteria:

1. Stability/Capacity Challenge:
 - The applicant articulates a specific, real, and significant challenge to the organization's stability/capacity.
 - The organization demonstrates thoughtful strategic and financial planning in identifying the challenge and prioritizing its resolution.
2. Project Plan:
 - The project plan is clear, detailed, and specific, demonstrating a firm understanding of the mechanics of the project.
 - The proposed project budget and activities are realistic, reasonable, and appropriate to execute the project.
 - For projects involving consultants: The identified consultant is qualified, and the consultant's proposal is realistic and reasonable to execute the project.
 - For projects involving equipment/technology purchase: The specific expenditures (hardware and/or software) are realistic, reasonable, and appropriate to execute the project.
 - For projects requesting support for training: The training curriculum is appropriate and the trainer is qualified to execute the project. If applicable, the enrollment costs are realistic and reasonable.
 - For projects creating a new staff position: The job description and salary are realistic, reasonable, and appropriate.
 - For projects requesting cash reserve/working capital funds: The proposed size of the cash reserve/working capital fund (including but not limited to the Cultural Trust funds request) is realistic and reasonable. The board policies for management and replenishment of the fund are realistic, reasonable, and appropriate.
 - For projects requesting recovery capital: The amount of funding (including but not limited to the Cultural Trust funds request) is realistic and reasonable to address the challenge.
 - The applicant has the necessary infrastructure, capacity, and organizational commitment in place to support the project or provides a reasonable plan for obtaining the needed resources.
3. Project Impact and Sustainability:
 - The proposed project has a high likelihood of improving the organization's stability/capacity by resolving the identified challenge.
 - The applicant demonstrates that the project's benefit will be long-term and, if applicable, that the organization has a sufficient plan to sustain the gains from the project independent of future Cultural Trust support.
4. Cultural Trust Support:
 - The Cultural Trust's support will significantly benefit the quality and/or outcome of the project.

GRANT DISBURSEMENT, MANAGEMENT, AND REPORTING

The grant period for this round is February 17, 2027 to February 28, 2028. All grant project activities must occur during this period, and all expenses must be incurred and paid during this timeframe, unless you have received an extension.

Cultural Trust grants are distributed on a partial reimbursement basis. Grantees will receive 75 percent of their grant award upon signing the grant contract, and 25 percent as a reimbursement after all the project costs have been incurred and the final grant report has been submitted and approved.

There is no written interim report required for this grant. Rather, Cultural Trust staff will arrange an Interim Conversation with each grantee to learn about their progress. These will be held in the summer of 2027. Minimal preparation will be required.

A final written report is required. Required components include audience numbers for the organization as a whole, a written narrative reflecting on the project activities and outcomes, photographs documenting project activities or the organization as a whole, a financial report documenting the actual expenses as compared to the approved project budget, and copies of all invoices and cancelled checks for expenses related to the grant-funded project. Final reports are due within 30 days of the close of the grant period or completion of the grant project.

As stated above, recipients of grants supporting working capital funds/cash reserves and new staff positions will be required to submit reports on the status of the fund or staff position for four years following the receipt of the grant.

Unallowable Scope Changes

Proposed grant projects are evaluated by the independent review panel based on the specific details provided in the application. Please be aware that changes to project details after a grant has been awarded — including but not limited to changes to specific items among equipment and technology purchases proposed, specific consultants and contractors identified, job duties for new staff positions, and cash reserve/working capital fund policies — must be reviewed by the Cultural Trust and Arts Council to determine whether the project remains substantially similar to the original project that was evaluated by the reviewers. Substantial changes may result in grant funding being rescinded. If details of the project are uncertain at the time of application, before applying, applicants are encouraged to consider that changes made after the time of application may not be possible.

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

The following assistance is available. Prior to contacting Cultural Trust or Arts Council staff, applicants should read the guidelines thoroughly.

1. **Staff Support:** Cultural Trust staff ([Isabel Kasdin and Avery Wehrs](#)) and Arts Council staff ([Tammy Herman](#)) are available to help with questions specific to your application by telephone and email. You may also schedule an appointment for in-depth questions. Applicants seeking assistance are advised to do so well in advance of the application deadline.
2. **ZOOM Office Hours:** Applicants can participate in a Cultural Trust Office Hours session to ask questions pertaining to the application. Participation is free; however, registration is required. Please check the Cultural Trust website for dates and times.
3. **Webinars:** Recorded technical assistance webinars are available on the Cultural Trust website.
 - a. Short mini-webinars detail various aspects of the application process on the [Current and Recent Grant Opportunities](#) page.
 - b. Self-assessment resources to help organizations identify stability and capacity challenges that might be addressed through an IFS grant project are on the [About Cultural Trust Grants](#) page.