assembly. FOR THE ARTS

CREATIVE IMPACT FUND

2026 Guidelines

Important Dates

- Applications open Wednesday, May 13, 2026.
- Application deadline is Friday, July 17, 2026, at 11:59 pm.
- Applications will be reviewed by panelists between August through October 2026.
- Applicants will be notified of panel decisions by email after review and deliberation has been completed (between mid-November and mid-December 2026).

Questions? Please reference the **Creative Impact Fund FAQs** on our website or contact grants@assemblycle.org.

About

Artists and creatives don't just enrich our region—they drive it forward. They spark joy, make space for healing, and build connections across differences. They also tell the truths that demand attention, exposing injustice, and pushing us toward a more equitable future. The Creative Impact Fund exists to back that power with unrestricted support—so you can invest in your creative practice on your own terms and keep making work that moves Greater Cleveland.

Assembly for the Arts is proud to relaunch the Creative Impact Fund (CIF) in 2026—because artists deserve real, flexible resources to grow their practice and expand their impact across our region. This year, the CIF will award **twenty-two (22)** forward-thinking artists and creatives with **$10,000 each** in unrestricted funds. The CIF is open to artists living in Cuyahoga County who have been creating impactful and inventive work in craft, dance, design, film, interdisciplinary work, media, music, theatre & performance, traditional arts, visual art, and writing/literary art.

Assembly for the Arts' Creative Impact Fund is supported by the residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture.

Awarded Artists Receive:

- $10,000 in unrestricted funds
- Promotion as a CIF grantee on Assembly's website, social media and other platforms
- A one-year Assembly for the Arts membership
- Business and professional development opportunities, including marketing, networking, connections to partners or potential collaborators
- Special access to opportunities as they arise throughout the year

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Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility

To be eligible for the Creative Impact Fund, applicants must:

- Satisfy the definition of artist or creative as defined in the *Artist & Creative Discipline Definitions* section below.
- Live and work in Cuyahoga County and provide proof of residency. Studio addresses (unless it's your place of residence) and P.O. Boxes are not accepted.
- Be able to complete a W-9 form with a valid Social Security Number (SSN) or Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN).
- Be 18 years of age or older

Ineligibility

Ineligible applicants include:

- Artists who have received Cuyahoga Arts & Culture funded artist grants from **any of the following programs within the last five years** (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 or 2025):
    - Assembly for the Arts: Creative Impact Fund
    - SPACES Urgent Art Fund
    - Karamu House: Room in the House Fellowship
    - Cleveland Public Theatre: Premiere Fellowship or Individual Artist Fund
    - Julia de Burgos (Unidos Por El Arte)
- Nonprofit organizations, businesses, or collectives. **Artists** who are part of organizations or businesses **must apply as individuals**
- Panelists or jury members for Assembly artist grant programs
- Current staff members, board members, or contractors of Assembly for the Arts or Cuyahoga Arts & Culture (CAC)
- Immediate family members, domestic or romantic partners, or household members of current staff, board or contractors of Assembly for the Arts or Cuyahoga Arts & Culture (CAC).

Assembly for the Arts reserves the right to determine that an applicant is ineligible where any actual, potential, or apparent conflict of interest or appearance of impropriety could reasonably compromise the fairness or integrity of the program.

NOTE: Eligible artists may apply for and receive Assembly's Creative Impact Fund and Boost Fund in the same year.

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How to Apply

Artists can submit an online application at www.assemblycle.org/cif. Artists will need to create a free Submittable account or use their existing account to submit their application. Paper applications will be accepted for accessibility reasons on a case-by-case basis. **If you have a disability and require assistance in applying for CIF**, please contact grants@assemblycle.org.

The CIF application will be available in English. Spanish-language versions and other translation support will be provided as needed—please contact us for assistance.

Artist & Creative Discipline Definitions

To guide the administration of these funds, Assembly defines artists as independent professionals who derive income from **creating, performing, teaching**, or **supporting the development of work** in the following disciplines:

- **Craft** (ceramics, fiber, glass, jewelry, metals, textiles)
- **Dance & Choreography** (create or perform movement-based works)
- **Design** (fashion, graphic, industrial, object, all forms of architecture)
- **Film** (filmmakers, cinematography, directing, screenwriting, motion pictures, animation)
- **Interdisciplinary** (work creating intentional connections between multiple creative disciplines)
- **Media** (work at the intersection of technology, content creation, aesthetics, storytelling, and digital cultures)
- **Music** (composing, songwriting, performing, DJing, producing)
- **Theatre & Performance** (directing, playwriting, acting, comedy, puppetry, set design, lighting/installation, and performance art)
- **Traditional or Folk Arts** (work related to the continuity and evolution of a tradition and/or cultural heritage such as cultural dance, cultural music, oral expression and traditional crafts)
- **Visual Art** (painting, sculpture, photography, installation, performance art, sound art, video, printmaking, illustration, drawing)
- **Writing / Literary Arts** (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, spoken word, literature for children, criticism, graphic novels, journalism, arts writing)

Assembly understands that creative individuals exist in every industry. However, to prioritize and concentrate funding, **the following industry areas are not included in our definition of artists:**

- Cosmetology, Salon and Barber services

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- Culinary and Restaurant services
- Curators and Presenters of other artists' work

If you have questions about whether your creative discipline meets this definition, you may contact grants@assemblycle.org.

Application Content

Artists will be asked to submit the following in their CIF application:

- Confirmation of their eligibility
- Primary creative discipline
- Artist statement
- Between 5-8 work samples (images, video, audio, written work, online content)
- Narrative response to one (1) essay question related to artistic goals, philosophy and community engagement
- A statement of intent for the use of grant funds
- Optional demographic information
    - This information is collected for internal use only and will not be shared with the selection panel. This data helps Assembly ensure equitable access to funding opportunities and track gaps in outreach.

Work Sample Guidelines

Work samples will be a key evaluation point of your application. The samples you select should be a high-quality representation of your best artistic work in recent years.

Requirements:

- **Between 5 and 8 work sample files** – file types include images, video, audio, and written work.
    - The selection panel needs adequate material to evaluate each application. *Applications containing less than 5 work samples will be deemed ineligible.*

- ***All work samples must be anonymous to the best of your ability***. Panelists will review applications using a semi-anonymous review process. Applicants are encouraged—but not required—to remove identifying information from work samples when feasible. Applications will not be penalized if anonymization is impractical (e.g., in performance, video, or published works).

- Why are you requesting anonymous work samples?
  Removing applicant names helps reduce bias in the selection process by allowing reviewers to focus solely on the content and quality of the application, without being influenced by the artist's identity, background, or reputation.

- **Applicants may include up to eight (8) links to external online content / websites** in the dedicated Work Sample Website fields in the application.
  - **Each website represents one (1) work sample**. You may include a combination of website links and work sample files for a **maximum of 8 work samples.** *A single website cannot be used to represent multiple work samples.*
  - **Please do not** copy/paste links into a document and upload it to the application.
  - Strive to limit applicant identity in online content ***to the best of your ability***.
- Samples must indicate recent creative activity (within approximately the last 3-5 years). Older work samples are acceptable but must be accompanied by evidence of more recent work.
- Sketches and mock-ups for future projects are acceptable but must be accompanied by completed works.
- **Dates, medium, and work sample descriptions will be required for each sample included in the application.**

Supported file types:

- **Images:** .jpg, .jpeg, .png, ,pdf
- **Video:** .m4v, .mov, .mp4, .mpg, .wmv
- **Writing:** doc, .docx, .pdf
- **Audio:** .m4a, .mp3, .wav, .wma

Best practices

Artists may choose to include a range of work that illustrates their creative career or focuses on a specific project or body of work. Panelists will have access to all application materials. Consider the following to best position your application:

- Ensure your work stands out by selecting samples that are bold, unique, impactful, and create a cohesive portrait of you as an artist.
- **Ensure your work samples are *anonymous to the best of your ability***. Please remove your name from your work samples and online content.
- Align your work samples with the content in your narrative responses.
- Make sure your work is well-documented and professional.
- Include files that are high-resolution, easy to view, read, or listen to.

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- Panelists will review many applications. Keep your content succinct – don't include excessively long videos, audio or writing. **Recommended duration/length:**
    - Video and audio: 3-5 minutes
    - Written content: 10-12 pages

Review Process

The CIF will use a semi-anonymous review process, meaning applicant names will be withheld from the selection panel to reduce bias. The panel will be comprised of artists, arts administrators, and community leaders from outside of Greater Cleveland with representation from as many creative disciplines as possible.

- The panel will review and score applications between August and October 2026 using the selection criteria in the next section.
- Assembly will email applicants about the status of their grant application approximately 6 weeks after the application deadline.
- Panelist comments and feedback may be available upon request after review and selection is complete.

Selection Criteria

The CIF is an unrestricted (flexible) grant designed to support the growth of an artist's creative practice. Unrestricted grants are not tied to a specific project and are meant to provide you with the flexibility and financial means to engage in whatever artistic endeavors you wish to pursue. Applicants are encouraged to share their artistic vision, creative philosophy, and ability to create impactful and meaningful work. The review panel will score eligible applications based on the following criteria:

- Evidence that you have been actively creating for at least the last three years.
- Demonstrated innovation in your creative practice including originating new work, experimenting with new ideas, taking risks, and pushing boundaries in your field.
- Completeness and quality of your application.
- Work that creatively impacts your neighborhood or community, or looks at new ways to address social, personal, political, community and/or global themes.
- Thoughtful and well-executed work (it's clear that you spend significant time thinking about and creating your work).
- Inventive and thought-provoking engagement with viewers, audiences, and participants.

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Assembly for the Arts CIF selection panel does not make funding decisions on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, religion, disability, or any characteristic protected by law.

Funds Disbursement

- Grant funds will be disbursed to the individual artist submitting the application.
- Grantees will receive 90% of their full grant amount within approximately 30 days after final funding decisions have been made and upon receipt of required paperwork (see below for details). The remaining 10% will be disbursed to grantees upon completion of final grantee reporting requirements.

Grantee Requirements

All CIF grantees are required to:

- Complete and sign a CIF Artist Grant Agreement
- Submit a W-9 for tax purposes
- Have a bank account and submit account information through a third-party payor for direct deposit of grant funds
- Provide a recent bio, headshot and link to website or social media
- Help Assembly tell their story – by sharing public events and highlights with us to re-share and celebrate their work with the community
- Complete and submit a final report at the end of the **12-month grant period**. Artists will be asked to provide evidence of the work they have created over the year and a summary of their grant spending. Artists will be responsible for expending their grant funds within the 12-month grant period
- Add an artist profile to www.ClevelandArtsEvents.com
- Credit Assembly in relevant promotional materials during the grant period

Eligible and Ineligible Uses of Funds

The CIF provides artists with unrestricted funds to empower them with the flexibility and financial means to invest in their creative practice and engage in the artistic endeavors they wish to pursue.

Eligible Expenses (including, but not limited to)

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- Studio costs (maintenance, rent, utilities)
- Domestic travel expenses related to your artistic endeavors
- Supplies and materials
- Technology
- Contract services
- Personal artist fees
- Marketing and communications
- Research and development
- Space or venue rental
- Other operating expenses related to your artistic endeavors as approved in the artist CIF agreement.

Grantees with questions regarding eligible expenses should contact Assembly.

Ineligible Expenses

- Illegal activity
- Political campaign endorsement
- Gambling activity
- Alcohol
- Travel outside of the U.S.
- Debt repayment
- Fundraising expenses
- Contributions or donations to external causes or organizations