

Important Dates

- Applications open Friday, May 14, 2025
- Application deadline is Friday, July 18, 2025, at 11:59 pm.
- Applications will be reviewed by panelists between August through October 2025.
- All applicants will be notified of panel decisions by email after review and deliberation has been completed.
- Grantee final reports due no later than 30 days after the end of the 12-month grant year.

Questions? Please reference the **Creative Impact Fund FAQs** on our website [[link when available](#)] or contact grants@assemblycle.org.

About

Artists and creatives positively affect our lives and region every day. Their work has the power to promote healing, to transcend barriers and unite people, and to highlight social injustices leading to just and equitable change.

Assembly for the Arts is proud to continue the Creative Impact Fund (CIF) in 2025. This unrestricted grant is designed to support the growth of an artist's creative practice and advance their impact on our region. In 2025, the CIF will award **thirty (30)** forward-thinking artists and creatives, in 2025 including **15 Early Career artists at \$5,000 each** and **15 Mid-Late Career artists at \$10,000 each**. The CIF is open to artists living in Cuyahoga County who have been **creating impactful and inventive artistic work** in the disciplines of craft, dance, design, film, interdisciplinary work, media, music, theatre & performance, traditional arts, visual art, and writing/literary art. Please see the [Artist & Creative Discipline Definitions](#) and [Artist Career Stage Definitions](#) sections below for details.

Assembly for the Arts is supported by the residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from [Cuyahoga Arts & Culture](#).

Awarded Artists Receive:

- \$5,000 (Early Career Artists) or \$10,000 (Mid-Late Career Artists) 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

Eligibility Requirements

Applicants are **eligible** if they are:

- Artists according to Assembly's definition below
- 18 years of age or older
- Residents of Cuyahoga County. Applicants must provide a verifiable residential address. *Studio addresses (unless it's the primary place of residence) and P.O. Boxes are not accepted.*

Applicants are **ineligible** if they:

- **Received a grant through any of the following programs in 2023 or 2024**
 - Creative Impact Fund (Assembly for the Arts)
 - Premiere Fellowship (Cleveland Public Theatre)
 - Individual Artist Fellowship (Cleveland Public Theatre)
 - Unidos por el Arte (Julia de Burgos Cultural Arts Center)
 - Room in the House Fellowship (Karamu House)
 - Urgent Art Fund (SPACES)
- Are applying as a nonprofit organization, business or collective
- Are staff or board of Assembly for the Arts or Cuyahoga Arts & Culture
- Are selection panelists for any Assembly artist program

How to Apply

Artists can submit an online application found on the **Creative Impact Fund web page**. 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
- 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.

Artist Career Stage Definitions

Artists require different types of support depending on where they are in their career. The CIF is designed to support **Early Career** and **Mid-Late Career Artists** with two different funding levels.

Why are there two tiers of funding in the 2025 CIF?

Feedback from our [Artist Advisory Committee](#) highlighted the need for two different grant sizes to better support artists at different stages in their careers. This tiered approach allows less-experienced artists to be evaluated alongside one another, rather than being compared against more established artists with longer careers and more artistic experience.

Defining an artist's career stage depends on many variables and is largely subjective. For the purposes of the CIF, Assembly defines artist career stages using the following elements:

- **Number of years in professional creative practice**, which is defined as deriving income from creating, performing, teaching, publicly presenting or supporting the development of creative and artistic work.
- **Number of public presentations** of your creative work **featuring you as the primary artist**. This includes solo exhibitions or installations of public artworks, a headlined music show, publications of literary works, productions of theatrical works that you have created,

leading roles as an actor, principal dancer or musician, or community arts initiatives that you have developed and led.

Early Career Artists

- Have been **professionally practicing for 5 years or less**
- Have had **3 or fewer feature presentations of their work**

Mid-Late Career Artists

- Have been **professionally practicing for 6 or more years.**
- Have had **more than 3 feature presentations of their work**
- Must meet both criteria to be considered a Mid-Late Career artist

Applicants will be asked to answer qualifying questions in their application to determine their career stage. Every application will be auto-labeled Early Career or Mid-Late Career, which will be taken into consideration during the panel review process.

If you have questions about your career stage, please 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 8-15 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
 - Optional demographic 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 8 and 15 work sample files** – file types include images, video, audio, written work.

- The selection panel needs adequate material to evaluate each application.
Applications containing less than 8 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. However, 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 8 links to external online content** in the dedicated fields in the application. 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 to the best of your ability.
- 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.
- Panelists will review many applications. Keep your content succinct – don’t include excessively long videos, audio or writing.

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 with representation from a wide range of creative disciplines.

- The panel will review and score applications between August and October 2025 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. 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.

Review panelists will also have access to each artist's career stage determined through their answers to qualifying application questions (as defined in the Artist Career Stage section above). Each artist's career stage will be taken into consideration during panel review and evaluation, scoring and final deliberation.

The 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
- Engage in one (1) studio visit with Assembly staff within the 12-month grant period.
- 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. Artist 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 (not limited to)

- Studio costs (upkeep, 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



assembly. 2025 Creative Impact Fund Guidelines

FOR THE ARTS

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