The Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) is a mayoral agency charged with the administration of city funds in support of arts and culture throughout the five boroughs of New York City. The Cultural Development Fund (CDF) is DCLA's competitive, peer-evaluated grant process that supports a broad, multidisciplinary group of diverse NYC -based nonprofit organizations for their arts and cultural services and is managed by the agency's Program Services Unit under the supervision of the Commissioner.

For questions or requests regarding accessibility or accommodations, please contact Claire Hart, DCLA's Disability Service Facilitator, at disabilityfacilitator@culture.nyc.gov.

The online CDF application can be accessed on the Applying page of our website.

Organizations that are currently in a multi-year award will submit a Renewal Application later this summer.

CDF APPLICATION DEADLINE: Thursday, May 8, 2025 5:00PM (ET)
No Exceptions

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS CONTENTS

APPLICATION

What is Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26)?

Fiscal Year 2026, or FY26, is our agency's fiscal year. It is the year July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026.

When will my application be reviewed and when will I be notified of the outcome?

The application deadline is Thursday, May 8, 5:00PM (ET). We will review each submitted application for completeness over several weeks after the deadline. Applications will be sorted into panels, which will convene in the summer and fall. Once panels conclude, funding allocations are determined by each organization's performance in the competitive process and Administration priorities. Outcomes will be announced in the fall or winter.

What is the application platform for FY26 and how do I access it?

Our grant portal is powered by Salesforce. You will be able to submit your entire application responses as well as your accompanying documents and optional work samples in one online form.

If you do not already have an organizational account in our grant portal, you must create one. As a part of your registration, you must also create an NYC-ID. Further instructions on how to create your organizational account—as well as how to add new users to your account—are available in our Registration Guide for Online Applicants.

How can I find out my assigned program officer?

You can email cdfhelpdesk@culture.nyc.gov. New applicants will not be assigned a program officer until after the FY26 application is submitted.

How do I get to the "User Management" section or the place to start working on my application?

After logging into the system for the first time you will be brought to your user profile details. Please ensure that you've updated the required fields and click "Save" at the bottom of the page. If you do not see the save button, scroll down. Once you click "Save," the system will bring you to the home page where you will see your dashboard. When you arrive at the home page dashboard you will be able to view the "User Management" tab and will also see the "Start Application" button.

How do I represent a user on my profile as an Executive Director?

Log into your grant portal account. You must be logged in as a primary user. Before you go into the application, navigate to the User Management section. Edit or add a person who you would like to designate the Executive Director.

In that user's profile, click on the "Executive Director" or "Executive Director/Co-Director" box in the bottom left corner of their profile. Clicking on the box will designate that user to be listed as an Executive Director in your application (you might have to scroll down). The user's professional title does not have to be Executive Director. You can select up to two people to be an Executive Director/Co-Director.

For more instructions, refer to our Registration Guide, pages 19–25.

Can I change my organization's name?

No. When you save your Organization Details by clicking "Create New Organization," the fields become read-only and cannot be edited. The Organization Name, AKA name, and EIN field are locked. If you must make updates to any of the locked fields, contact your program officer or the CDF help desk email for assistance. You may edit your website address, street address, and phone number in the application form itself.

Why isn't there an option to select an Executive Director in my Organization Information section in the application?

If you do not have the option to select your Executive Director in the online application, then a person has not yet been designated an Executive Director under your User Management section. Follow the instructions above.

Why can't I save my user profile information?

When saving your user profile information in the User Management section, be sure that you have completed all required fields. Note that the system does not allow for special characters such as ampersands ("&"; type out "and" instead). Enter your phone number without any formatting such as dashes, periods, or parentheses. Also type directly into the fields rather than cutting and pasting into the field.

What is my budget category?

Your budget category for FY26 CDF is determined by your FY23 operating income. Review the Application Guidelines for the different budget categories.

We use FY23 as a benchmark because it is the most recent year that all applicants should have completed and enough time has passed for you to have prepared and filed the accompanying financial materials (IRS form 990, audit, etc.).

My organization is small. Can my proposed project budget be the same as my organizational budget?

Yes. We understand that your project proposal may reflect your organization's entire activities and operating budget. While your proposed project and organizational operating budgets may be identical, we cannot fund more than 75% of your proposed project budget.

What if a required question in the application doesn't apply to me?

Most of the application questions are relevant to applying organizations. If a narrative question is required and it does not apply to you, type in "N/A." For a budget or number field that does not apply, enter "0".

If I'm using a fiscal sponsor, should they fill out my application?

No, your fiscal sponsor should not fill out your organization's application. You should complete your application in its entirety. If you have a fiscal sponsor, you must include in your application a letter from it indicating that it has agreed to act as a fiscal sponsor for your FY26 CDF application. This letter must be dated January 1, 2025, or later. Refer to our Application Guidelines for more information.

If we don't have an Executive Director, who should be listed in that role?

The person listed should be the person who is authorized as an executive and signatory at your organization, as reflected in your official documentation inclusive of the 990.

You must assign at least one person in your Account Profile as your Executive Director. Their name will only be available to select in the "Executive Director Information" section of the online application if they are registered. You can designate up to two people as Executive Directors.

The CDF Guidelines list "Exploration of environmental and natural sciences" as an eligible activity for a proposed project. Can you define "natural sciences" programs? Is that nature programming?

Funding received via the Department of CULTURAL Affairs must be for publicly accessible activities that are cultural in nature. We do include the humanities and natural sciences in our definition of culture, including zoos and aquariums, botany, earth science, climate science, planetary science, and environmental science.

What type of programming is public? Do public programs include exhibitions or only concerts and lectures?

The fundamental requirement for all proposed projects is that they represent a cultural activity of recognized quality that is offered to the public. Funded services can be as different as the organizations providing them, but they will all have a common commitment to public service and public participation in arts and culture.

Proposed projects can also be offered in person or via a digital platform. They can serve the general public or a target/focused audience that is a subset of the general public, such as artists, students, older adults. Exhibitions, concerts, lectures, workshops, performances, and community-based arts activities are just a few examples of the types of arts and cultural programming that would be eligible. Refer to our Application Guidelines for more information and a complete list of the priority areas of focus DCLA has identified for its support.

When describing my Previous Activities in the Organizational Accountability section, what timeframe should I use?

List activities that demonstrate programming relevant to your proposed project and your programmatic track record. You can enter up to 12 activities that have taken place between July 1, 2023 to the date of your application submission.

Where is the "Action" section to edit or delete one of my Previous Activities in the Organizational Accountability section?

Use the scroll function located just below your Previous Activities list to find the "Action" section. It is in the last column to the right of the listed activity.

Does my proposed project have to be free to count as providing public access?

No, it does not. Free activities are not required for this grant. If you intend to charge for your activity, answer the questions in the application identifying how much, who pays, and if you offer reduced payment methods.

Your proposed project should be accessible to the public, even if it is a segment of the public (like students, older adults, artist residency, etc.). Any costs associated with participation should be appropriate for the target audience and activity.

One of the ways that you can demonstrate Public Access and Impact—one of the criteria used to evaluate your project proposal—includes describing efforts to reduce financial barriers with relative affordability by using discount programs, scholarships, sliding scale prices, or other subsidies.

Can you explain the difference between direct and indirect recipients?

This will be dependent on your proposed project. For direct recipients, estimate the number of people directly served by your project. Recipients include either audience members or participants for each activity depending upon the focus of the activity.

If this number is significantly different from the number of people served by a similar activity listed in your Previous Activities, use the Project Description to explain the reasons for growth or contraction in the number served.

Indirect recipients are audiences other than the direct recipients of your project. For example, if your education program serving high-school students has a culminating event attended by friends and family, the latter are the indirect recipients of your project. Not all types of programming will have indirect recipients.

How many proposed projects can I include in my application?

You may only submit one project in your narrative proposal.

What a single project includes can be as varied as the organizations applying for CDF funding. Proposed projects can be a single event or service, an entire season of events or services, a central service with related auxiliary services or several related services. Importantly, the scope of the proposed project should be detailed and responsive to the evaluative criteria and reflect the budget and DCLA request amount.

Your proposed project can be focused on one program or event that you plan to offer, or it can include multiple components. There should be an organizing principle that frames your project. Review the instructions in the application form, and our Application Guidelines for more information, including how to submit a competitive application.

Where do I enter my proposed project description?

Navigate to the "Project Summary" page in the Public Service and Impact section of the application. When there, click the "Start Project" button at the bottom of the screen. This will take you to the Project Details page, where there are several questions about your project, including the 5000 character project description. Click "Next" to continue throughout the section.

What should my DCLA Project Request Amount be based on?

For FY26, we recommend that you request between the minimum and maximum award in your budget category. If you anticipate *additional* City Council Member Item funding you expect us to administer, add that number to your request amount (even if the sum is larger than the maximum award). Be sure to list the pending Member Item in your budget note.

Your request should be reasonable and realistic given the scope of your proposed activity and projected costs. Your total request should not be less than the minimum award in the organization's budget category or represent more than 75% of your total project costs.

What is the difference between Programmatic Background Materials and Work Samples?

Programmatic Background Materials should relate to your arts and cultural public engagement over the past two to three years. Materials should relate to your proposed project as much as possible. It is a 10-page PDF that should provide context for the arts and cultural activities your organization offers as well as the audiences and participants it engages. It can include—but is not limited to—programmatic, educational, and marketing materials.

Providing Work Samples is optional. A Work Sample should provide documentation of the creative output that resulted in your programming. If you presented a performance, it can be a video clip of the performance. If

you taught painting to students, it could be images of the work they created. For more information, review our Application Guidelines.

Do you have any guidance regarding best practices when writing about people with disabilities?

When writing about the disability community, and in general, we recommend using current language to describe your activities, demographics, and communities served. Think about using terms that are inclusive, asset-based, and "people-first" (as appropriate – this may not apply to all scenarios equally). Focus on what conveys respect for the situation and audience. Examples of inclusive language related to the disability community include "wheelchair accessible" and "people with disabilities." Examples of inclusive language as it refers to other communities could be "people experiencing homelessness" or "emerging English language learners."

Can I submit video link in my organizational background materials?

You must submit a PDF file (up to 10 pages) of relevant materials that establish your arts and cultural public engagement over the past three years. Do not include hyperlinks in your organizational background materials PDF; they will not be reviewed here.

Can I submit video links or other examples of our programming elsewhere?

You may submit up to two links of video work samples that demonstrate programming relevant to your CDF project proposal. You may also upload PDF documents with images or writing samples. Your work samples should demonstrate the best quality of your programmatic work and relate to your proposed project. Sharing work samples is optional. Panelists will be instructed to review up to two minutes of each work sample video. Review our Application Guidelines for more information.

Can I be considered for Language Access Fund (LAF) or Disability Forward Fund (DFF)?

Not every application will qualify to be considered for LAF or DFF. If you do not qualify for LAF or DFF and if you do not include a description of LAF or DFF activities in your project narrative, you must click "No" and type "N/A" under the "Create NYC Initiatives" section of the CDF Application.

If you would like to be considered for LAF or DFF funding, you must include a description of the proposed activities that meet the fund's goals in your project narrative. Review our Application Guidelines for more information.

What kind of activities are eligible for LAF or DFF? How can I be considered?

Proposed projects that demonstrate one or more of the outlined goals for LAF or DFF are eligible to be considered for funding. For more information about the objectives and outlined goals of the funds, review our Application Guidelines.

To be considered for either of the funds, click on "Yes" under the respective fund in the "Create NYC Initiatives" section of the online application. You must also include a description of the proposed activities that meet the fund's goals in your project narrative.

Are schools eligible to apply for CDF?

Preschools, Kindergartens, elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools are not eligible to apply for CDF regardless of whether they are a public school, a parochial school, a charter school, or a private school.

Can I apply for CDF if I didn't apply for City Council discretionary funding?

Yes. You are not required to apply for City Council discretionary funding to apply for CDF funding.

For more information on the City budget process, City Council Member Item Support, and City Council Initiatives, read our [Application Guidelines](#)..

If we missed the City Council discretionary funding application in February 2025, can we still apply to CDF?

Yes, you may still submit an FY26 CDF Application if you meet all the eligibility criteria. City Council discretionary funding is a separate funding source from DCLA. You must have submitted a City Council funding application to be eligible for City Council discretionary funding. It is not a pre-requisite for applying to CDF funding.

If we applied for City Council discretionary funding in February 2025, do we still have to submit an FY26 CDF application?

If you applied for City Council discretionary funding—which includes both Member Items and City Council Initiatives—and anticipate or want to have that funding administered by the Department of Cultural Affairs — yes, you must have applied directly to the City Council by their February deadline AND you must submit a complete an eligible FY26 CDF application to DCLA by the May 8th deadline.

Note that there are differences between the Member Items and City Council Initiatives. Proposed projects for Member Items **must be the same** as your CDF proposed project. City Council Initiative funding projects **must not overlap** with your CDF project. For details about City Council discretionary funding, go to page 26 of the [Application Guidelines](#).

PANEL REVIEW

How does the panel review my application?

CDF applications will go through a competitive panel review during the summer and fall of 2025. Proposals are reviewed by peer panelists who have current expertise in arts and culture in New York City as well as one City Council staff member. Applications will be evaluated based on the three weighted evaluative criteria, as outlined in the Application Guidelines.

Will the panel see my entire application?

Whereas you complete an entire application in order to comply with City requirements and internal data collection, the panelists read the "Panelist View". The Panelist View presents the sections of the application related to your proposed project, as well as your mission and history, primary and past activities, audience engagement, general staffing, Board governance, DEIA efforts, funding, and budget and planning. The panelists are also provided with the uploaded support materials/work samples to help them evaluate your proposal. We indicate in the application which questions the panelists will not see.

How are panelists selected?

DCLA strives to maintain a high level of integrity and impartiality in its decision-making processes. To ensure an inclusive perspective, DCLA encourages submissions for peer panelists who represent the diversity of New York City's arts ecosystem with respect to professional experience as a cultural worker, race, ethnicity, disability, age, gender, and sexuality. DCLA considers a variety of factors when compiling each panel and may not be able to utilize the services of all qualified nominees. More information and the submission form to be considered as a panelist are available on our website.

How does my track record—recent accomplishments in regular programming—rank in the scoring process since many organizations don't change programs frequently?

Each organization will present its project in full, using the narrative fields in the application. Organizations may refer to recent accomplishments as a way of illustrating their capacity to successfully execute the proposed project for FY26.

FUNDING

When should I expect to receive my funding?

There are a number of requirements for recipients of City funding, but our ongoing goal is to process grant awards as quickly as possible. We work as efficiently as possible and note changes that we can implement in future years. FY26 grantees should expect to receive their CDF notification email in the fall or winter and initial payments will begin to be released in the weeks after that.

How will my organization's funding amount be determined?

There are seven budget categories in FY26. Your minimum award amount will be determined by the applicable budget category for your organization, which is based on your FY23 operating income. If awarded, your grant award amount will depend on your budget category, the ranking of your application in the panel review process, whether your organization is a new grantee (organizations that have not received a CDF baseline award within the last six years), and the final amount allocated to CDF once the City's budget is adopted. Review our Application Guidelines for more information.

What do you mean by CDF baseline award?

A CDF baseline award is the portion of a grantee's CDF award that is sourced from the Department's baseline budget and is determined by the application's evaluation by the panel (please see pages 11-12 of the CDF guidelines for how the baseline funding amount is determined). If you receive a multi-year award, the amount that is committed to be renewed is the CDF baseline award only. A baseline award does not include Additional Fund Allocations described in Appendix A of the CDF guidelines, such as: Additions Based on Panel Percentile, Create NYC Initiatives funding, Safety Net Funding, or CDF Equity Funds. If you have any questions about whether you have received a baseline award in the past, please consult your CDF award letter and/or email your program officer.

I'm not submitting an application by the May 8th deadline because I'm in a multi-year award this year. When will I be renewing?

We plan to launch the FY26 CDF Renewal Application in late spring/early summer 2025. We will notify renewing grantees via email when the Renewal Application is available.

If awarded funding, will I be funded for three years? Are there any restrictions on who can apply for multi-year funding?

If you did not receive a CDF baseline award within any of the three prior fiscal years (FY23, FY24, or FY25), then you are only eligible for a single-year award.

If you received at least a CDF baseline award within the last three fiscal years, you are eligible for a three-year award. If you're awarded a three-year award, you must submit a complete and eligible renewal application for years two and three by the required renewal application date. Renewal applications are not subject to panel review.

What if I receive a multi-year award and my budget category changes during my award period?

Our multi-year award provides committed funds over three years to help stabilize grantees. The baseline award is the amount committed to the awarded organization whether its operating income goes up or down over the three years. The committed baseline amount will not change during the multi-year period.

If you receive a multi-year award through the current application cycle, it will span FY26–FY28. Your next competitive application would be in 2028 for the FY29 CDF. In line with our current policy, we would use FY26 operating income to determine your budget category for the FY29 CDF Application.

PANELISTS

How can I serve as a panelist for FY26?

The Department of Cultural Affairs' Cultural Development Fund is one of the primary ways City funding is distributed to arts and cultural nonprofits across the five boroughs. For the upcoming award cycle, panels will collectively review applications from over 650 groups, and work alongside agency staff to make recommendations that will lead to the allocation of Cultural Affairs' public dollars.

We're seeking panelists on a rolling basis with current expertise in the arts and cultural landscape of NYC to bring a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds to the table. This is your chance to serve our cultural community and gain the experience of participating actively in public arts funding. Each year, CDF grants support hundreds of organizations representing the full breadth of NYC's cultural life.

Selected panelists will convene virtually in summer and fall 2025. DCLA provides stipends of $480 for panelists' work evaluating FY26 CDF grant applications. The anticipated time commitment is 25-35 hours, including online training, two days of prep, and one day serving on the panel.

[Learn more about being a panelist—including how to submit your name for consideration—in our online form here](#).

Can I be considered as a panelist if I'm submitting a CDF application?

Yes. We strive to maintain a high level of integrity and impartiality in our decision-making processes. To ensure an inclusive perspective, we encourage submissions for peer panelists who represent the diversity of New York City's arts ecosystem. Peer panelists include individuals in organizations that are also applying for a CDF grant. No panelist will serve on the same panel that is reviewing their organization's own application submission.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

What resources do you offer to prepare me for my FY26 CDF application?

- Review the Applying webpage to see the updated Guidelines and related materials
- Register your organization's CDF account and all relevant contacts to receive important communication from DCLA during the application period
- Review the FY26 CDF Application Panelist View to understand how panelists will view your application
- Use the downloadable FY26 Application Worksheet to draft your answers in advance
- Sign up to attend an FY26 CDF Application Webinar live or watch the video once posted
- Sign up to attend a virtual Office Hours session if you have questions after watching a webinar
- Email your program officer with any remaining questions you have
- If you do not know who your program officer is, or you are applying for the first time, connect with the Programs Unit via email at cdfhelpdesk@culture.nyc.gov
- For technical issues you encounter, submit a CDF Technical Incident Support Form for assistance

COMMENTS

How can I share my feedback with DCLA on my experience with the CDF process?

Once you submit your application you will be emailed a link to a short survey. Prior to then please send your comments and feedback to cdfhelpdesk@culture.nyc.gov.