

GUIDELINES

FY 2026 • UNION COUNTY LOCAL ARTS GRANT (LAP)

January 01, 2026 – December 31, 2026

OVERVIEW

The Union County Local Arts Program Grant (“LAP”) is made possible by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Union County Board of County Commissioners, through the Cultural and Heritage Programs Advisory Board and the NJ State Council on the Arts, have made funds available to support local arts through a State/County block-grant partnership for non-profit arts organizations and non-arts organizations located in and serving the residents of Union County. LAP funds are awarded to organizations (“re-grantees”) that demonstrate a high degree of professionalism in producing arts activities, to promote the growth and expand the public impact of arts organizations and arts projects.

The LAP Grant operates on a 12-month fiscal period. Applications must reflect arts activities to take place from January 01 to December 31, 2026. Expenses using grant funds must be paid during 2026.

The LAP Grant is administered by the Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs (“OCHA”). These Guidelines outline the two types of LAP grants (General Operating Support and Special Project), and all requirements of the program. The application process is competitive.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications for 2026 LAP funding must be submitted online via the **OCHA Portal**, a platform from Foundant Technologies. The Portal will open **July 31, 2025**. Applicants can log in and out of the system as often as needed to complete the application. Progress is saved during each session.

Returning applicants: If your organization already has an existing account, log in to begin. Be sure to select the correct Local Arts Grant application: GOS or Special Project.

New applicants: Email a request for the link to the Portal to: msturm@ucnj.org and culturalinfo@ucnj.org, including the name of your organization. From the Portal, applicants must first create a new account before logging in and selecting the correct Local Arts application: GOS or Special Project.

[Tutorials posted here](#) provide valuable guidance in using the Foundant platform.

Application period: **July 31 – September 24, 2025**

Deadline to submit application: **September 24, 2025 at 11:59 pm**

ASSISTANCE

For clarification about this grant program, or for assistance, contact the LAP Coordinator at OCHA: Martha Sturm, email msturm@ucnj.org or tel 908-558-2550. Or email culturalinfo@ucnj.org.

THREE-YEAR FUNDING CYCLE

Organizations that qualified for the Three-year Funding Cycle (fiscal years 2025–2026–2027) shall complete the **Abbreviated Application**, as directed by OCHA. The Three-year Cycle designates a commitment from OCHA for funding over a three-year period, provided that the NJ State Council on the Arts provides funding to Union County through LAP each year. Specific awards each year depend on the level of funding received by the County. Awards may increase or decrease based on available funds, the number of worthy applicants, and other factors. Criteria to qualify for the Three-year cycle are: Organization has received LAP funds for General Operating Support for five (5) previous consecutive years; and has consistently demonstrated high standards of artistry, management, compliance and accountability, including timeliness in submitting reports.

MAJOR GOALS OF LAP

LAP provides funds for arts programs in Union County to further these goals:

- create public recognition of the value of the arts
- strengthen local arts organizations, artistically and administratively
- foster and reward artistic excellence
- increase the availability of quality arts experiences to the general public
- increase accessibility to the arts through compliance with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)
- broaden, deepen and diversify participation in the arts
- foster collaborations and partnership-building
- promote expanded public and private support of local arts activities

Applicants are encouraged to address any of these Special Areas of Interest:

- highlight the excellence of New Jersey artists and/or contemporary artists
- incorporate diverse programming and artists
- demonstrate effort to reach a diverse audience and/or underserved communities
- present programs that appeal to families
- promote high-quality, lifelong arts education

RESTRICTIONS

- Organizations may apply for 2026 funding from EITHER the Union County Local Arts Grant Program OR the Union County HEART Grant Program, but **may NOT apply to BOTH** grant programs. For guidance, contact the Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs.
- Applicant organizations cannot be funded in the same fiscal year by both the Union County Local Arts Program AND directly by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Applications are accepted from eligible organizations planning to provide the Union County public with a high-quality arts program or arts project.

- **Arts organizations** may apply for General Operating Support (GOS) or a Special Project grant (SP).
- **Non-arts organizations** may apply for a Special Project grant (SP) to fund an arts project or series.

(Eligibility - continues next page)

Local Arts Grants will be awarded to **non-profit organizations** meeting the following* requirements:

- Is Union County-based; activities take place in Union County and benefit Union County residents
- Organization is incorporated in the State of New Jersey for a minimum of two years
- Has IRS tax-exempt status in accordance with Sections 501(c)3 or 501(c)4 or pending same

Local Arts Grants may also be awarded to **libraries, schools, and units of government** for a specific Arts project.

**Organizations not meeting the three criteria may apply as the Special Project of an “umbrella organization” for one year only.*

Grantees under this program must comply with Labor Standards under Section 5(1) of the National Foundation of Arts and Humanities Act of 1965; the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Title IX of the Education and Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (which addresses accessibility issues); and may not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sexual preference or disability.

TWO CATEGORIES OF SUPPORT

Eligible organizations may apply for funding in one of two categories:

GENERAL OPERATING SUPPORT (GOS)

This category is exclusively for arts organizations, and is not project-specific. **Request cannot exceed 40%** of organization’s total projected annual operating budget. Applicants should present the full range of their organization’s operations and must demonstrate high standards of artistry and management.

SPECIAL PROJECT (SP)

This category is open to both arts and non-arts organizations, to fund an arts project or arts series. Examples of Special Projects are:

- Series of performances, films or presentations
- Programs for youth, senior citizens, or people with disabilities
- Culturally specific work
- Enhanced costuming, orchestration, choreography or marketing
- Arts education
- Board development or staff training
- Strategic planning
- Marketing and Publicity
- ADA assistive services
- Technical Assistance (*see below*)

For arts organizations only, a Special Project may be a **Technical Assistance** project — a one-time consultancy by qualified professional(s) to strengthen the administration of an arts organization or the quality of programs presented to the public. Organization must demonstrate a genuine need for assistance in one of these areas: administration, marketing, long-range planning, ADA services, or artistic development. Consultant’s **proposal** must be uploaded with application.

ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES

- Music
- Dance
- Theatre
- Opera / Musical Theatre
- Visual Art
- Design Arts
- Crafts
- Photography
- Media Arts / Film
- Literature
- Folklife / Traditional Arts
- Multi-disciplinary
- Interdisciplinary
- Presenters

LEVELS OF SUPPORT

Minimum Request: **\$1,500**

Maximum Request:

- For General Operating Support (arts organizations only), **\$15,000** is the maximum request. Amount requested for GOS cannot exceed **40%** of organization's total projected 2026 operating budget.
- For a Special Project, **\$5,000** is the maximum request.

CASH MATCH: All applicants are required to fund their 2026 arts program or project with a **Cash Match of 25% or more**. Your organization must use other funding sources to spend at least 25 cents on the dollar (based on final award) towards grant-funded activities. The Local Arts grant will not fully pay for a Special Project. Your organization may request the maximum of \$5,000 for a Special Project, provided your budget shows total expenditures of \$6250 or more, reflecting the 25% Cash Match.

Example: Your organization seeks funding for a Special Project costing \$5,000. You can request a grant of \$4,000 and your budget must show you will spend \$1,000 (or more) on expenses using other funding sources. If you are awarded an amount lower than your requested amount, you will need to either (a) increase the amount spent using funds from other sources or (b) scale back the project's expenditures.

USE OF LAP FUNDS

GENERAL OPERATING SUPPORT

ELIGIBLE Use of Grant Funds

This grant is for arts organizations only, and is not project-specific. Expenditures using grant funds may include, but are not limited to:

- Staff salaries
- Consultants
- Professional development
- Internet, phone or other utilities
- Printing and postage
- Marketing, publicity and advertising
- Materials or supplies
- Leased equipment
- Fundraising and development
- Assistive services or equipment (ADA)
- Insurance and audit expenses
- Domestic travel and transportation

INELIGIBLE Use of Grant Funds

LAP funds **cannot** be used for:

- Capital improvements or capital equipment purchases
- Hospitality / refreshments *
- Previous program deficits
- Fellowships, endowments, awards or scholarships
- Foreign travel

** Expenses for hospitality or refreshments cannot be paid with LAP grant funds, however such expenses MAY count towards the required Cash Match.*

SPECIAL PROJECT

ELIGIBLE Use of Grant Funds

This grant is project-specific. Funds must be used to pay expenses for the Project only:

- Fees for outside professional artists
- Fees for other outside Professionals
- Printing & postage
- Materials or supplies
- Rented space or equipment
- Maintenance costs
- Marketing, publicity and advertising
- Staff training
- Board development
- Strategic planning
- ADA assistive services
- Arts education

INELIGIBLE Use of Grant Funds

LAP funds **cannot** be used for:

- Normal year-round administrative salary
- Projects that serve as a fundraiser
- Capital improvements or capital equipment purchases
- Hospitality / refreshments *
- Previous program deficits
- Fellowships, endowments, awards or scholarships
- Foreign travel
- Projects by religious institutions that do not actively seek a wide general audience

** Expenses for hospitality or refreshments cannot be paid with LAP grant funds, however such expenses MAY count towards the required Cash Match.*

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

Organizations funded by LAP are required to spend all grant funds (and Cash Match) on eligible expenses by Dec. 1, 2026; and to properly document paid expenses totaling the **Grant Award + Cash Match** by the Final Report deadline, Dec. 15, 2026.

DEADLINES & SCHEDULE FOR APPLICATION PROCESS

Jul. 31, 2025 Portal opens for applicants to apply

Sep. 24, 2025 Application deadline – portal closes at 11:59 pm

Application are evaluated by an independent Panel of Arts Professionals in Fall 2025. The OCHA Advisory Board must approve all funding decisions and grant awards. Applicants will be notified of the decision and award amount (if funded) in late December 2025 or early January 2026.

APPLICATION COMPONENTS

The application must be completed online using the Foundant Technologies platform. Once submitted, the application cannot be changed. The application consists of these sections:

- Introduction & Eligibility
- Application (or Special Project) Summary
- Organizational Background
- Arts Program (or Special Project) Management & Details
- Financial Plan
- Publicity & Marketing
- Accessibility & ADA

Certain support materials must be **uploaded**. For example, applicants may upload Word or Excel files, images, or scanned documents. Ensure that your scanned documents are fully legible before uploading. File-size limits apply. In some cases, applicant can opt to either enter text OR upload a document. In some cases, applicant may combine entering text AND uploading a document.

Support materials include resumes, budget and publicity samples. Materials representing the arts program should document artistic quality, and should not be more than two (2) years old.

All applicants should demonstrate:

Artistic Excellence – Demonstrate specifically what the arts organization does and/or what the artists being hired do, reflecting professionalism.

Administrative Capacity – Answer all questions thoroughly and succinctly. Furnish all materials requested, and submit accurately calculated budget(s). Proofread before submitting.

Community Outreach & Participation – Demonstrate outreach to specific populations.

Special Project applicants must complete the Special Project Budget Table outlining the expenses planned by category. Operating expenses, such as printing and supplies, should only reflect costs spent on the Project. Maintenance costs are usually in-kind, unless specifically charged to the Project. The Budget Table requires entering expenditures using grant funds and entering expenditures using **Cash Match** funds (must spend 25% of grant request or more using funds from other sources).

REVIEW PROCESS & EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each application will be carefully read, evaluated and discussed by an independent Panel of Arts Professionals. Evaluations are based on these criteria:

Artistic Merit

- Quality of program and artists, demonstrated by support material and resumes
- Activities that further applicant's artistic goals and objectives
- Programming that enhances or stretches participants' artistic potential

Administrative Ability

- Strong management and a realistic plan for executing project
- Demonstrates ability to deliver program effectively
- Promotes greater public awareness of the importance and value of the arts
- Demonstrates effective marketing/PR plan with tactics to promote activities widely
- Quality of evaluation tools shown

Public Participation - Accessibility & ADA

- Demonstrates efforts to involve people of diverse ethnicities
- In compliance with ADA, or making substantial progress and effort to make programming accessible in accordance with the ADA
- Demonstrates commitment to accessibility and inclusion
- Collaborates with other group(s) to expand participation

Financial Management

- Demonstrates fiscal responsibility
- Presents a realistic, appropriate budget
- Shows diverse funding sources

Overall Impression

- Overall impression of grant application and program in totality
- Significant strengths or weaknesses

Evaluations will also consider whether application addresses any Special Area of Interest:

- Program highlights New Jersey artists and/or contemporary artists
- Incorporates diverse programming and artists
- Program appeals to families
- Efforts to reach diverse and/or underserved communities
- Promotes high-quality, lifelong arts education

FUNDING DECISIONS

Specific grant award amounts are based on factors including: the total funds granted to Union County by the State of New Jersey, the number of applicants, and the Panel's Evaluations. Prior-year reporting and compliance can affect decisions and awards for applicants previously funded.

APPEALS PROCESS

Appeals to the LAP decision will be entertained only if an applicant is not funded and can specifically demonstrate that the application was misinterpreted or misunderstood during the evaluation process. An appeal must be made only on the basis of the information contained in the initial application. The specific amount of an award is not grounds for an appeal.

Applicants may submit a written appeal up to 30 days after notification of the OCHA decision. Such an appeal should be initiated by email to culturalinfo@ucnj.org as well as a hard-copy letter sent by US Mail to: Office Administrator, Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs, 633 Pearl St., Elizabeth, NJ 07202. OCHA staff will clarify the appeals procedure for any applicant requiring further information.

GRANT PAYMENTS

An organization awarded a Local Arts grant is a "re-grantee," since funds are granted to Union County, then re-granted to organizations. Funds are paid to re-grantees in two installments:

- Initial payment (75% of award) is paid after the LAP contract is signed and executed, and state funds for 2026 have been allocated by Union County.
- Final payment (25% balance) is a **reimbursement**, paid after: (1) re-grantee has spent funds on eligible expenses equal to or greater than grant award + 25% Cash Match, and has submitted the Final Report documenting paid expenses and (2) the Final Report is approved by OCHA.

EXPENDITURES USING GRANT FUNDS

All grant funds must be fully expended (spent and fully paid) by Dec. 01, 2026.

REPORTING

At grant-funded events, re-grantee shall record attendance and demographics for the purpose of reporting. Taking photos and compiling publicity materials regularly will facilitate eventual reporting.

Reports must be completed and submitted online via the OCHA Portal.

An Interim Report will be due by **July 15, 2026**.

A Final Report will be due by **December 15, 2026**. Final Report must include support materials including documentation of paid expenses totaling at least the Grant Award + 25% Cash Match.

Qualifying forms of documented expenses: paid itemized receipts, cancelled checks, or Accounting / bookkeeping output (such as QuickBooks ledger or bank statements). Expenses should be categorized and itemized clearly, according to the organization's budget for the grant. The purpose of expenses submitted must be clearly indicated.

Re-grantees should record **In-Kind donations** (donated goods or services, including volunteers' time) to the program/project. The Final Report requires providing the cash value of all In-Kind donations.

Non-compliance with terms of the grant may affect current or future funding.

ADA

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 (Federal law), requires that all public programs and services be made **accessible to all people**, regardless of an individual's physical or developmental disability. ADA applies to all providers of public programs, whether an organization applying owns the site of programming, rents it, or uses donated space.

Full participation in your program by people with disabilities is facilitated by physical accessibility (such as a wheelchair-accessible venue); by program accessibility (such as using large type, audio devices or captioning, and accessible web design); and by training staff to implement policies and practices.

The Cultural Access Network offers comprehensive resources for ADA planning and compliance. Visit the Cultural Access Network Project at www.njtheatrealliance.org (click on "Industry Services," then click "The Cultural Access Network"); or call 973-250-6661 ext. 1; or email Kat Lily, Access Coordinator, at klily@njtheatrealliance.org. Organizations are strongly encouraged to send at least one Board Member to attend an ADA workshop annually.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANT RECIPIENTS

1) Workshop Attendance

During each year funded, grant recipients are expected to attend at least one Technical Assistance Workshop hosted by OCHA. To fulfill this requirement, grant recipients may also attend a *comparable* professional development event or workshop that suits their organization's specific needs. Any Board member or multiple people can attend.

2) Submit Grant-Funded Events

During each year funded, re-grantees are asked to notify OCHA of grant-funded events open to the public, by submitting the [OCHA Cultural Calendar Event Form](#).

3) Funding Credit – Publicity Requirements

Funding support must be acknowledged, with credit given to the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs on all publicity and published materials (including press releases, ads, programs, flyers and web pages), regarding public activities for which funds from this grant are used. In publicizing programs supported by the grant, the State Council **logo must appear as shown below**, with the credit statement on 3 lines in between the logos.



Made possible by funds from the Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs, a partner of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.



For various file formats of the Council logo & funding credit, contact the Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs, or download them at http://www.nj.gov/state/njsca/dos_njsca_grants-manage.html#graphics

Statement must display the following language **exactly** and legibly, in Helvetica or Arial font:

Made possible by funds from the Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs, a partner of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

If spoken by a re-grant representative, funding credit must be to the same effect.

Print materials: Minimum size of logos with embedded statement is set by the height of the circle portion of the logos, which cannot be shorter than 0.5 inches.

Website and email blasts: Minimum size of logos with statement is also set by the height of the circle portion of the logos, which can be no shorter than 75 pixels. If necessary, the statement may appear as fine print (not embedded), separated slightly from the Council logo.

Digital ads: Circle part of Council logo cannot be shorter than 50 pixels. Credit statement may be omitted if necessary. For ads with a width smaller than 225 pixels, it is not necessary to include the Council logo or credit statement.

4) Programs & Evaluation

A re-grantee shall furnish OCHA with two complimentary tickets (or announcement of a free event) each year, so that a County Commissioner can attend or an OCHA staff member or Board member can attend for evaluation purposes. Email msturm@ucnj.org or culturalinfo@ucnj.org with event details and admission information.