

Boston Cultural Council Grant and Application Guidelines

Fall 2024, Fiscal Year 2025

About the Boston Cultural Council and the Grant

The Boston Cultural Council (BCC) distributes general operating grants annually through the [BCC Organizational Grant](#). These funds are sourced from the City of Boston's Operating Budget, and the Mass Cultural Council (MCC), a state agency, to support small and mid-sized nonprofit and fiscally-sponsored organizations, as well as unincorporated entities and artist collectives. The goal is *to foster innovative and original arts, cultural, and creative programming that: 1.) advances a vibrant, creative and just Boston and 2.) improves the quality of life in our city*. The BCC grant program aims to work in tandem with other grant programs to ensure that all Boston residents can access and participate in arts programming and creative expression.

The BCC is a 5+ member council composed of Boston residents and is facilitated by the Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture (MOAC). Council members work in partnership with MOAC on the strategic direction of the grant program, and they also provide final approval of selected grantees. Council members are selected on the basis of their lived experience within Boston's arts, cultural, and creative communities and their demonstrated commitment to cultural equity.

Our Commitment To Equity

To truly thrive, Boston must be an equitable city. The Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture (MOAC) and the Boston Cultural Council acknowledge the systemic harm perpetuated by Boston's arts sector. People of color in Boston have faced significant barriers to creative resources, space, and economic opportunity. We commit to an intersectional racial justice lens that uplifts those most harmed by systemic oppression and racism. We hold ourselves accountable to implement policies and programs that eliminate structural racism, embrace collective healing, and center BIPOC/ALAANA and LGBTQIA+ community members, as well as those who face discrimination due to their age, gender, disability, social status, neighborhood, citizenship status, and more. The BCC, in partnership with MOAC, envisions a vibrant and creative Boston, where everyone can access and participate in the arts.

BCC Grant Strategy and Priorities

Ensuring that BCC grants contribute toward its goals requires a deliberate focus on funding organizations that embody and advance cultural equity within Boston's arts ecosystem. BCC also seeks to address inequities in arts funding across the city. A [2016 study published by The Boston Foundation](#) highlights that while small to mid-sized organizations comprise 86% of Boston's arts sector, they receive disproportionately less funding compared to larger institutions.

To counter this imbalance, the BCC prioritizes support for small to mid-sized arts organizations in the Boston arts ecosystem by focusing on organizations with annual budgets under \$2 million, committing the majority of grant funds to those with the smallest budgets. Priority is given to organizations where arts and cultural programming are central to their mission. Only organizations who can demonstrate over 50% of their programming is located in the city of Boston are eligible for this grant. In summary, BCC is committed to fund small to mid-sized organizations that exemplify and promote cultural equity in the Boston arts ecosystem.

BCC Grant Categories and Eligibility

Grant Categories

Organizations may apply for grants up to a set limit, based on their organizational budget (total expenses from the most recently completed fiscal year). If an organization is selected as a recipient, they will receive the total amount they are eligible for in their budget category. The categories are:

Tier 1: \$5,000	Organizations with budgets between \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000 qualify for Tier 1.
Tier 2: \$7,500	Organizations with budgets between \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 qualify for Tier 2.
Tier 3: \$10,000	Organizations with budgets less than \$500,000 qualify for Tier 3.

Eligibility: Who is Eligible to Apply?

- 501(c)(3) organizations with budgets under \$2 million whose mission and programming demonstrates a clear commitment to foster and sustain the arts and/or cultural creative expression in any arts discipline
- Boston-based organizations or organizations not based in the City of Boston but whose primary programming takes place in Boston and demonstrates strong community partnership. Reviewers will be looking for specific examples of public benefit to the people of Boston, and confirmation that the organization provides 50% or more of their programming in the city of Boston.
- Unincorporated groups can apply with a fiscal sponsor as long as they meet the rest of the eligibility criteria. This includes: artist collectives, volunteer groups, publications, and any other group jointly working toward common creative goals
- Organizations can submit only one proposal per funding cycle
- Organizations with L3C designations are eligible to apply

Grant Fund Restrictions

Grant funding may not be used for the following items:

- To pay salaries or stipends for employees of the Boston school system, library, parks department, or municipality
- On capital expenditures for schools, libraries, and other municipal agencies
- On programming that discriminates or discourages participation on the basis of race, gender, religious creed, color, national origin, ancestry, disability, sexual orientation, or age
- To purchase food or beverages of any kind

Additionally, the BCC does not award grants to:

- Individuals (Individual artists seeking funding from the Mayor’s Office of Arts and Culture may be eligible for the Opportunity Fund and the Neighborhood and Downtown Activation Grant. Please see MOAC’s [website](#) for grant opportunities.)
- K-12 schools or K-12 school foundations
- Main Streets organizations
- Colleges or universities
- “Friends of…” organizations whose primary purpose is to support government entities
- Religious organizations or programs of any kind. Religious organizations can serve as fiscal sponsors as long as they are not receiving any of the funds provided.

How to Apply

Application Checklist

- Account registration with Submittable.com
- Most recent financial information like a board approved budget or a budget completed using the [BCC budget template](#)
- Financial documents such as Forms 990 or 1023 that contain your organization’s EIN, year of formation, and NTEE code (if applicable)
- Materials for the online application including your organization’s mission statement
- Up to three support materials such as brochures, flyers, images, testimonials, or other collateral that demonstrates your programming and mission

Application Forms and Submission

BCC uses Submittable for all grant applications. The FY25 BCC Organizational Grant application can be found [here](#). If you would like to review the application questions in advance of starting an application, [you can go here](#). If you are a first time applicant, you will need to create an account with [Submittable](#). Grant updates and final reports will be made through this account, so we recommend using an email address that is generic for your organization - something that multiple people have access to. While we prefer to have all proposals submitted online, we also accept hand-written hard copies. Hard copies can be picked up in the MOAC’s office: 1 City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02108 (Eighth floor, Room 802).

Application Opening and Deadline

The BCC grant application opens on September 1, 2024. The application deadline is Wednesday October 16, 2024 at 11:59PM. If you are submitting a hand-written hard copy, it must be received no later than October 16, or delivered to the MOAC's office by 5:00PM on October 16.

No late applications will be accepted, and MOAC staff will not be available after 5pm on October 16. To avoid technical issues, it is recommended to submit your application before the deadline.

Application Support, Accessibility and Accommodations

We have an FAQ that you can [access here](#) and on our website. We will be updating it weekly to include the questions applicants are sending in and their answers, in case that information is helpful to all other applicants.

If your question is not resolved through the FAQ, or you would like to meet with a staff member, the Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture will host office hours for applicants to discuss the BCC Organizational Grant and its application. The office hours schedule is as follows:

- Monday, September 9th from 5-6PM EST
- Wednesday, September 25th from 12-1PM EST
- Thursday, October 10th from 9AM-10AM EST

You can access office hours using [this link](#).

If you have any further questions, please email BCC@Boston.gov with the subject line "Question about BCC Grant Application." Answers to these questions will be added to the FAQ. If you need accommodations or assistance with your application, please contact BCC@Boston.gov. If you would prefer to call, please call 617-635-2787.

Review Process

Once received, grant applications are initially reviewed for eligibility and completeness. If eligible and complete, applications are assigned for review, scored via an evaluation rubric, discussed and selected by the Grant Advisory Team, and approved by the BCC board. All applicants will be notified of BCC funding decisions in the spring and grants will be disbursed in the spring and summer of 2025.

The BCC is committed to implementing transparent, equitable and inclusive grantmaking practices. The BCC Organizational Grant review process will engage MOAC's Grant Advisory Team, a cohort of diverse stakeholders inclusive of community members and MOAC staff. The aim of the Grant Advisory Team is to position community members as key decision makers on systems and structures that ultimately have the power to shape their lives and the well-being of their communities.

Evaluation Criteria

Once basic eligibility is met, proposals will be evaluated based on a set criteria. Please see the rubric on page 5 to view the evaluation criteria.

Reconsideration

An applicant may request reconsideration of a decision on its application if the applicant can demonstrate that the BCC failed to follow published application and review procedures. Reconsideration requests must be made in writing (email or hard copy) and sent to the Mass Cultural Council at the address below or to lcc@art.state.ma.us within fifteen (15) days of the notification date on the disapproval letter (postmark date on envelope or timestamp on email). No reconsideration may be requested by grantees regarding their grant size.

Mass Cultural Council
Attn: Community Department
10 St. James Avenue, 3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02116-3803

Grant Payment

During the 2024-2025 grant cycle, all Boston Cultural Council grants will be made in full and up front. Grant reporting is required for all grant amounts. All grantees must establish a Supplier ID before payment is processed. You can go [here](#) to learn how to create a Supplier/Vendor ID. Please email vendor.questions@boston.gov or call 617-961-1058 for additional assistance.

Conflict of Interest

The Boston Cultural Council observes the Mass Cultural Council’s Conflict of Interest Policy regarding review panels. To ensure that all review panels are free from conflicts of interests, panelists are required to disclose any current or prospective affiliations they or their immediate family members have with an actual or potential applicant. “Affiliation” applies to employment, board memberships, independent contractual relationships, advisory or policy relationships, substantial contributor relationships, or other financial relationships. In addition, panelists are required to disclose any past or current adversarial relationships with actual or potential applicants. Panelists will not be permitted to participate in discussions or votes relating to applicants with whom they have an affiliation or relationship.

Scoring Rubric for BCC Grants 2024-2025 (FY25)
1. Organizational & Financial Eligibility

<p>The applicant is a 501c3 or is fiscally sponsored. Their budget size falls into the grant program categories.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Eligibility Section: the Organization has confirmed they meet all eligibility requirements outlined in this section of the application. ● The Facts: The organization has uploaded required documents such as their 501(c)(3) determination, or their required fiscal sponsor documents. 	<p>Yes / No</p>
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2. Arts, Cultural, and Creative Work

2a. Arts Discipline	0	1	2	3
<p>The organization is doing relevant work in an area of the arts, cultural, and creative expression that aligns with the BCC Grant funding priorities in the City of Boston.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Facts: Org. Type, location of majority of services/programming ● The Basics: Mission, how long have you been doing this work, core programs? ● Mission/Values: promote cultural equity and innovative and original arts and creative programming? <p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organization is based in the City of Boston and/or primarily provides clear impact to communities within the City of Boston (primarily equates to demonstration that more than 50% of programming is located directly in the City of Boston) ● Central to the organization's mission and/or programming is a clear commitment to foster and sustain the arts and/or cultural creative expression in any arts discipline. 	<p>(Fails to meet criteria)</p>	<p>(Meets some criteria)</p>	<p>(Meets criteria)</p>	<p>(Exceeds criteria)</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program provides innovative and original arts, cultural, and creative programming that 1.) advances a vibrant, creative and just Boston and 2.) enhances the quality of life in our city. 				
<p>2b. Authentic Community Roots</p> <p>The organization has solid community roots, whether by being locally led (power and decision making are community-driven) and/or having authentic partnerships with Boston-based residents, groups, and/or organizations that have a direct relationship to the community impacted by the programming.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Basics: Mission, how long have you been doing this work, core programs? Equity in Boston: Serves historically excluded communities? Reflective Leadership: If and how staff reflect the communities with whom you work and/or Boston’s diverse communities <p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization clearly communicates who it is serving and why, can describe the community in which it works and the role it plays in that ecosystem Organization is community-led and/or has opportunities for community-led decision making and input and/or can demonstrate how it has put community input into practice Organization has authentic partnerships rooted in the community they work with (multiyear partnerships, partners who represent community interest, shared power with partners) 	<p>0 (Fails to meet criteria)</p>	<p>1 (Meets some criteria)</p>	<p>2 (Meets criteria)</p>	<p>3 (Exceeds criteria)</p>
<p>3. Unique Value to Boston Arts Ecosystem</p>				

<p>3a. Serves Unique Gap/Need</p> <p>The organization fills an important gap in the Boston arts ecosystem.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Equity In Boston: Present unique artistic and cultural perspective outside of dominant ideologies ● The Basics: Mission, how long have you been doing this work, core programs? ● The Basics: Budget for hiring artists? ● How do you know you will be successful? <p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organization can state what unique role it plays in Boston or in its community ● Organization can point to an evidence-based or experience-based community need that it is addressing ● Organization has a cultural or artistic perspective that is underrepresented in the current arts ecosystem 	<p>0 (Fails to meet criteria)</p>	<p>1 (Meets some criteria)</p>	<p>2 (Meets criteria)</p>	<p>3 (Exceeds criteria)</p>
<p>3b. Innovative Programming</p> <p>The organization offers programming that uses innovative approaches to better serve culturally diverse audiences, ensuring that its offerings are culturally competent, responsive, and inclusive.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Equity In Boston: Present a unique artistic or cultural perspective? ● The Basics: Mission, how long have you been doing this work, core programs? ● The Basics: Budget for hiring artists? ● How do you know you will be successful? <p>Criteria:</p>	<p>0 (Fails to meet criteria)</p>	<p>1 (Meets some criteria)</p>	<p>2 (Meets criteria)</p>	<p>3 (Exceeds criteria)</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Present artistic and cultural perspective outside of dominant ideologies ● Programs continue to evolve/grow/iterate to best meet organization’s mission and goals and be responsive to the current moment ● Organizations receive positive feedback on the success of their programs and integrate feedback 				
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4. Commitment To Equity

<p>4a. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion</p> <p>The organization is an equitable employer with intentional plans and actions focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. It can clearly communicate its approach, demonstrate progress toward these goals, and share examples of policies or organizational changes made to achieve equitable outcomes.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Basics: Mission, how long have you been doing this work, core programs? ● Your Mission & Values: Within your team, how do you promote cultural equity to advance a more vibrant, creative and just Boston? ● Your Mission & Values: Please tell us about your internal organizational practices, policies and procedures. <p>Examples may include but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supporting employees' unique circumstances to help them achieve personal and professional goals, ensuring employees of various backgrounds are able to thrive within the workplace ● Communicate diverse hiring practices, such as rethinking job descriptions to eliminate jargon, reduce bias, and better support applicants with diverse cultural backgrounds, and applicants with transferable skills. 	<p>0 (Fails to meet criteria)</p>	<p>1 (Meets some criteria)</p>	<p>2 (Meets criteria)</p>	<p>3 (Exceeds criteria)</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organizational demographics are representative of their communities and/or Boston’s historically excluded communities (for example: BIPOC/ALAANA and LGBTQIA+ community members, as well as those who face discrimination due to their age, gender, disability, social status, neighborhood, citizenship status, etc.) ● Organization supports creation and maintenance of affinity spaces for employees from underrepresented backgrounds. ● Educates leadership and staff on equity, addressing unconscious, cultural competency, and microaggressions to foster inclusivity ● Regularly reviews policies to remove barriers and ensure equal opportunities for all <p>The above list summarizes a blog post by the Mass Cultural Council. Click here to review the full post.</p>				
<p>4b. Removing Barriers</p> <p>The organization is intentional about removing barriers and/or expanding access to the arts.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Equity in Boston: In what ways does your organization expand access? Serve different abilities? Reach historically excluded communities? ● The Basics: Mission, how long have you been doing this work, core programs? <p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organization has clear examples of how it is removing barriers to the arts, including who is impacted and how ● Organization has communicated a clear accessibility strategy for its programs and/or facilities 	<p>0 (Fails to meet criteria)</p>	<p>1 (Meets some criteria)</p>	<p>2 (Meets criteria)</p>	<p>3 (Exceeds criteria)</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization is centering access and inclusion in program design (pay what you want, programs specifically for people with disabilities, etc) 				
<p>4c. Vision</p> <p>The work they do is aligned with the BCC’s vision of equity.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your Mission & Values: How do your values and mission support cultural equity in Boston? The Basics: Mission, how long have you been doing this work, core programs? <p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organization is explicit about their vision of equity Organization demonstrates commitment to an intersectional lens Organization centers the voices of those historically excluded from access to power and resources Organization is committed to increase access to and participation in the arts 	<p>0 (Fails to meet criteria)</p>	<p>1 (Meets some criteria)</p>	<p>2 (Meets criteria)</p>	<p>3 (Exceeds criteria)</p>
<p>Reviewers Cut</p>				
<p>5. Reviewer’s Cut</p> <p>This is an opportunity for the reviewer to rate the overall application in case the questions above have missed an important component the applicant shared. Please rate the organization and their work on a scale of 0 to 3 based on your overall impression of the organization's alignment with the BCC Organizational Grant goals and priorities.. If reflective of information not captured by this rubric, please note this in the comments section.</p>	<p>0 (Fails to meet criteria)</p>	<p>1 (Meets some criteria)</p>	<p>2 (Meets criteria)</p>	<p>3 (Exceeds criteria)</p>

<p><i>Equity Alignment Subtotal</i> <i>(up to 9 points)</i></p>	
<p>Total (out of 24 points)</p>	