

Tips for Preparing an FY21 NEA Application

The 2020 (FY21) Grants to Organizations guidelines are now available on the [National Endowment for the Arts' \(NEA\) website](#). To be fully prepared for the application process, read the guidelines very carefully, check out the list of Frequently Asked Questions, familiarize yourself with the reporting requirements in advance, and be in touch with NEA staff. Here are the League's tips for preparing an FY21 NEA application, which includes an overview of guideline changes and important reminders, as well as suggestions on where to find more complete information.

Get the Essential Facts on the Guidelines

The NEA directs applicants to funding opportunities through the field or discipline of the project, such as [Music](#), [Arts Education](#), and [Media Arts](#). The FY21 [Grants for Arts Projects](#) and [Challenge America](#) categories contain descriptions of the types of projects they support. Grant applications previously submitted to the Art Works category will now be submitted to the Grants for Arts Projects category. Read the category descriptions carefully to review the types of projects that are eligible for support. **The NEA's website features very helpful answers to your [Grants for Arts Projects Frequently Asked Questions](#) and [Challenge America Frequently Asked Questions](#)**, such as how to select the right Grants for Arts Projects projects, determine eligibility, understand the grant review process, and submit an application. [Online presentations](#) about the guidelines for Grants for Arts Projects and Challenge America are available in mid-January.

The NEA especially encourages applications that address any of these following activities:

- Celebrate America's creativity and/or cultural heritage.
- Invite a dialogue that fosters a mutual respect for the diverse beliefs and values of all persons and groups.
- Enrich our humanity by broadening our understanding of ourselves as individuals and as a society.
- And applications from: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities, American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, African American Serving Institutions, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, and Organizations that support the independence and lifelong inclusion of people with disabilities.

Application Deadlines and Process

Grants for Arts Projects and Challenge America applications are reviewed on the basis of two criteria: artistic excellence and artistic merit, with elements corresponding to each grant program. Please note: under the Grants for Arts Projects grant program, there are 15 disciplines, each with its own application requirements and detailed instructions under the Part Two of the guidelines. Be sure to study the Project Types/Projects section for [music](#), [arts education](#), and so on, to make certain you are selecting the correct



discipline and instructions. Please see <https://www.arts.gov/grants-organizations/gap/application-review> and <https://www.arts.gov/grants-organizations/challenge-america/application-review>. All types of projects may apply under either deadline for Grants for Arts Projects: **February 13 and July 9, 2020**, or for [Challenge America](#), but organizations may submit **only one application in a calendar year** to the agency: either in the Grants for Arts Projects or Challenge America categories, but not both. (As a further reminder, an organization that receives Challenge America grants for three years in a row is not eligible to apply to the category for the following one-year period.

There are a few exceptions to the single application rule:

- An organization may submit more than one application in the Grants for Arts Projects category through the Media Arts discipline at the July 9, 2020 deadline.
- A parent organization may apply on its own and then again on behalf of an eligible separately identifiable independent component. Consult with [Arts Endowment staff](#) to verify eligibility. Programs and projects of organizations do not qualify as independent components.
- Our Town and Research: Grants in the Arts are not subject to the single application rule, but the request must be for a distinctly different project.

Remember that Grants.gov requires a multi-step registration process that must be completed before you can submit your application. **You should allow at least three weeks to complete this registration process.** It is your organization's responsibility to register with Grants.gov, which includes having a DUNS number and registering with the [System for Award Management \(SAM\)](#), where your organization's information must be renewed annually. Please remember that you can always go directly to sam.gov to renew your DUNS number directly and without cost. Failure to comply with these requirements may result in your inability to submit your application.

- The Grants.gov Contact Center is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. (Phone: 1 800 518 4726. email: support@grants.gov)
- SAM.gov Federal Service Desk: Call 1-866-606-8220 or see the information posted on the SAM.gov website at [SAM User Guides](#).
- **The Arts Endowment will not accept late applications.**

Applying for an GRANTS FOR ARTS PROJECTS grant (links below are specific to Music):

	Grants for Arts Projects (1st) February 13, 2020	Grants for Arts Projects (2nd) July 9, 2020
Step 1: Submit SF-424 to Grants.gov	Register/renew by at least 1/22/20. NEA recommends submitting to Grants.gov by February 4, 2020 if possible.	Register/renew by at least 6/17/20. NEA recommends submitting to Grants.gov by June 30, 2020 if possible.
Step 2: Submit Materials to Applicant Portal	February 18-25, 2020 by 11:59pm Eastern Time	July 14-21, 2020 by 11:59pm Eastern Time

Notification date:	November 2020	April 2021
Work begins no earlier than:	January 1, 2021	June 1, 2021
- NEA Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How to Prepare and Submit an Application o Online Presentation: Grants for Arts Projects Guidelines (mid-January) o Grants for Arts Projects Application Checklist 	

Applying for a **CHALLENGE AMERICA** grant

	Challenge America April 9, 2020	
Step 1: Submit SF-424 to Grants.gov	Register/renew by at least 3/18/20. NEA recommends submitting to Grants.gov by March 31, 2020 if possible.	
Step 2: Submit Materials to Applicant Portal	April 14-21, 2020 by 11:59pm Eastern Time	
Notification date:	December 2020	
Work begins no earlier than:	January 1, 2021	
- Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How to Prepare & Submit an Application o Online Presentations (available in mid-January): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Challenge America Guidelines with overview and tips o Challenge America Applicants Interested in Applying to Grants for Arts Projects o Challenge America Application Checklist 	

****Reminders****

Project Reporting: The Arts Endowment staff will assign one of the agency’s objectives to your project: Creation, Engagement, Learning (all Arts Education grantees will be assigned the Learning objective), or Our Town. Before applying, review the reporting requirements for the agency’s objectives: [Standard -- for Creation, Engagement, Learning; Arts Education, for all Arts Education grantees; or Our Town](#). Beyond the reporting requirements for all grantees, selected Grants for Arts Projects grantees will be asked to assist in the collection of additional information that can help the NEA determine the degree to which agency objectives were achieved. You may be contacted to provide evidence of project accomplishments including, but not limited to, work samples, community action plans, cultural asset studies, programs, reviews, relevant news clippings, and playbills. Remember that you are required to maintain project documentation for three years following submission of your final reports.

Arts Education: [Projects](#) are for pre-K-12 students (**Direct Learning**), the educators and artists who support them (**Professional Development**), and the schools and communities that serve them (**Collective Impact**). Arts Education projects may be in any artistic discipline. Projects for short-term arts exposure, arts appreciation, or intergenerational activity should not be submitted under Arts Education; rather, they should be submitted under the appropriate artistic discipline. Competitive projects will: 1) Increase access to arts education through the use of innovative strategies or scaled up proven methodologies; and 2) Have national, regional, or field-wide significance. This includes local projects that can have significant impact within communities or are likely to demonstrate best practices for the field. Further guidance about how to [choose the appropriate category for arts learning projects](#) can be found online.

Contact NEA Staff - Early!

NEA program staff is extremely helpful and willing to answer your questions! Consider being in touch with an NEA specialist, **well before the grant deadline nears**, to talk through your plans for preparing an application or to seek comments regarding your previous applications to the NEA. Whether your project was funded or not, comments will strengthen your next application. Also, please note that after you've consulted with NEA staff, it is acceptable to submit a new, improved application for a project which has been declined in a previous application.

The following NEA music staff may be contacted: [Court Burns](#), Music Specialist (music organizations with names beginning A-L) 202 682 5590 and [Anya Nykyforiak](#), Music Specialist (music organizations with names beginning M-Z), 202 682 5487. For answers to questions relating to Arts Education, please contact [Denise Brandenburg](#), 202 682 5044. For Media Arts, contact [Sarah Burford](#), 202 682 5591 or [Avril Claytor](#), 202-682-5028. For Challenge America, contact [Mary Sellers](#), 202 682 5480 or challengeamerica@arts.gov.

More agency contacts are available [online](#).

Extra Advice from NEA Panelists and Staff

When NEA panelists meet to review grant applications, the League asks NEA staff for any extra tips for orchestras preparing applications. During grant review sessions, panelists are unanimous in one request to all applicant organizations, large and small: **Read the guidelines carefully.**

Panelists and staff also offered the following specific guidance:

- NEA grants are awarded only for specific projects. Attempts to disguise requests for general operating support as projects are easily detected.
- **Work samples are crucial for evaluating the artistic quality of your project.** Pay very careful attention to the quality of your work samples, particularly audio and video recordings, and make sure the samples reinforce the objective stated in your project. Check the guidelines and adhere to the suggested length.

League of American Orchestras

- When designing a project, if you choose to submit a collaborative one, think creatively about potential long-term partnerships with community organizations and be sure to make clear the collaboration is not just a one-shot relationship that will end after completion of the project.
- When describing your project activities, be sure to identify a **clear, singular, defined goal** for the project, and outline concrete steps that will be taken to reach the goal. A project *need not be new* to the applicant organization to qualify for a grant, but will earn more serious attention if it is clearly integrated into your organization's mission. Review your project description against the guidelines for [Grants for Arts Projects](#) or for [Challenge America](#), respectively.
- Artistic excellence and artistic merit are the only criteria used in the review of grant applications. When describing artistic excellence as it relates to an arts education project, explain the quality of artists and educators and how this could impact the arts learning experience. When describing artistic merit, describe the potential of the project to broaden access to the arts, expand and diversify audiences, or strengthen communities through the arts.
- For applications including a commissioning request, whenever possible, include opportunities for the commissioned work to be performed in multiple venues and for varying audiences.
- In the financial section of the web form, be certain to answer all questions as completely as possible, including the question regarding the organization's fiscal health. Do not leave that section blank. If the orchestra has a deficit, provide a detailed explanation of plans to address it.
- Write as clearly and succinctly as possible. Do not use acronyms or initials unless they are well known.
- Spell-check your written material in advance, and have it proof-read. Panelists feel failure to submit carefully prepared applications indicates potential carelessness in the execution of your project.

americanorchestras.org/advocacy-government/nea-funding/nea-funding-opportunities/tips-for-your-application.html