Tips for Preparing an FY2024 NEA Application

The latest Grants to Organizations guidelines (for fiscal year 2024) 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 FY2024 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
Grants for Arts Projects (GAP) and Challenge America contain descriptions of the types of projects the NEA supports. For GAP, take time to review carefully information corresponding to the artistic discipline under which you will apply; be aware that each discipline contains its own tailored instructions and requirements. For example, the GAP page for Music helpfully lists under the "Project Types" section several musical activities that are eligible for support. The Music page specifies that the NEA is particularly interested in "collaborations, innovative presentation strategies, and initiatives that help organizations engage audiences in new and meaningful ways. In addition to projects that focus on the standard repertoire, the NEA encourages the commissioning and performance of new American works." Grant applications should not cover an entire season of programming as the NEA does not fund seasonal or general operating support. Grants for Arts Projects applicants may request cost share/matching grants ranging from $10,000 to $100,000.

The GAP page for Arts Education describes competitive projects and goes into detailed explanation of Direct Learning Grants, Professional Development Grants, and Collective Impact Grants. If the target audience is intergenerational, the NEA advises applications be submitted via one of the artistic disciplines rather than to Arts Education, and the same goes for projects where the focus is exposure to or appreciation for the arts, even if it is youth-focused. Be sure to read all pages to the bottom to ensure you have seen all the posted information and review the guidance on how to choose the right discipline for youth projects.

The GAP page for Media Arts clarifies that an organization of any artistic discipline may submit **one additional application in the Grants for Arts Projects category through the Media Arts discipline for the July deadline**. See the Media Arts page for conditions and examples. It is strongly recommended that these applications align with the focus of recent Media Arts Impact Initiatives.

Challenge America offers $10,000 grant support primarily to small organizations for projects in all artistic disciplines that extend the reach of the arts to populations that are underserved. Grants require a cost share/match of $10,000 consisting of cash and/or in-kind contributions. Total project costs must be at least $20,000 or greater.

The NEA website features very helpful answers to your Grants for Arts Projects Frequently Asked Questions and Challenge America Frequently Asked Questions webpages on determining eligibility, the grant review process, how to submit an application, and understanding how Endowment and other federal funds may interact. Additionally, the GAP Applicant Resources and Challenge America Applicant Resources pages are helpful for prospective grantees to visit—in particular, the sections on Common Application Mistakes. The NEA has also created a quick guide for first-time applicants.

GAP applicants should be sure to register for the FY2024 Grants for Arts Projects Guidelines Webinar, taking place on Wednesday, January 11, 2023 at 3:00pm Eastern Time. Challenge America applicants should register for the FY2023 Challenge America Guidelines Webinar, taking place on March 1, 2023 at 3:00pm Eastern Time.

The NEA is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, and fostering mutual respect for the diverse beliefs and values of all individuals and groups. It encourages projects that address any of the following:

- Elevate artists as integral and essential to a healthy and vibrant society.
- Celebrate America's creativity and/or cultural heritage.
- Facilitate cross-sector collaborations that center the arts at the intersection of other disciplines, sectors, and industries.
- Contribute to healthy and thriving local, regional, state-wide, and national arts ecosystems and arts infrastructures.
- Invest in organizational capacity-building and leadership development for arts organizations, arts workers, and artists.
- Build arts organizations' capacity to serve a broad public through digital or emergent technology and/or support tech-centered creative practices across all artistic disciplines and forms
- Originate from or are in collaboration with the following constituencies encouraged by White House Executive Orders: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities, American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, Predominantly Black Institutions, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, and Organizations that support the independence and lifelong inclusion of people with disabilities.

  In recognition of the United States of America's 250th anniversary in 2026, the NEA also welcomes arts projects that educate and engage communities in dialogue about the past, present, and future of our nation.

  Projects may focus on reaching a particular group or demographic; however, they may not be exclusionary under Federal civil rights laws and policies prohibiting discrimination. This extends to hiring practices, artist selection processes, and audience engagement. For additional information, refer to this archived webinar: Things to Know Before You Apply: Federal Civil Rights and Your Grants Application.

Eligible organizations that received American Rescue Plan (ARP) or CARES Act funding may apply to the GAP program as long as there are no overlapping costs during the same grant period.

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. The GAP Review Criteria and Challenge America Review Criteria each contain definitions clarifying what the agency means by artistic excellence and how it evaluates artistic merit (such as "the qualifications of the

project's personnel" for GAP, "potential to make quality arts or cultural resources more widely available" for Challenge America, and "evidence of direct compensation to artists, art collectives, and/or art workers" for both grant programs) that will be worth reading. Some GAP disciplines only accept certain project types at each deadline, and 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.

There are a [few exceptions](#) to the single application rule:

- An organization of any artistic discipline may submit more than one application in the Grants for Arts Projects category for a distinctly different project through the Media Arts discipline at the July 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.

**IMPORTANT CHANGES AND REMINDERS:

THREE REQUIRED REGISTRATIONS: Before applying, your organization must create and maintain up-to-date registrations with [Login.gov](#), the System for Award Management (SAM) at [SAM.gov](#), and [Grants.gov](#). Registering and maintaining these accounts is always FREE. These registrations can take several weeks to finalize, so begin this process early! Registrations with Login.gov, SAM and Grants.gov must be active for you to submit your application. Finalize your registrations well before the application deadline. This should allow you time to resolve any issues that may arise.

Failure to comply with these requirements may result in your inability to submit your application. See the How to Apply page corresponding to GAP and Challenge America for more details.

- Login.gov posts information in their [Help Center](#), or use their [online form](#) to submit a question.
- SAM.gov Federal Service Desk: Call 1-866-606-8220 or find information at [SAM Help](#).
- The Grants.gov Contact Center is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
  (Phone: 1-800-518-4726, email: [*support@grants.gov*](#), or consult the information at [Support](#))
- **The Arts Endowment will not accept late applications.**

Challenge America eligibility: Previous Challenge America applicants and grantees, as well as organizations that received American Rescue Plan (ARP) or CARES Act funding **are eligible** to apply for FY2024 Challenge America funding, as long as they were not recommended for FY2021, FY2022, or FY2023 funding in Grants for Arts Projects, Research Grants in the Arts, or Our Town. First-time NEA applicants and Challenge America grantees of any year are eligible to apply. The prior limit on consecutive years of receiving Challenge America grants now applies only to applicants that were recommended for FY21, 22, or 23 funding in GAP, Research Grants, or Our Town—such applicants may not apply for FY2024 Challenge America support. See [Applicant Eligibility](#) for more information.

Applying for a GRANTS FOR ARTS PROJECTS grant:

	Grants for Arts Projects (1st) **February 9, 2023**	**Grants for Arts Projects (2nd)** **July 6, 2023**
Register with Login.gov, System for Award Management (SAM) at Sam.gov, and Grants.gov or renew/verify these registrations		
Step 1: Submit "Application for Federal Domestic Assistance/Short Organization Form" to Grants.gov	**February 9, 2023 by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time**	**July 6, 2023 by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time**
Step 2: Submit Grant Application Form and Materials to Applicant Portal	February 14-21, 2023 by 11:59pm Eastern Time	July 11-18, 2023 by 11:59pm Eastern Time
Earliest notification date:	November 2023	April 2024
Work begins no earlier than:	January 1, 2024	June 1, 2024

Applying for a CHALLENGE AMERICA grant

	Challenge America **April 27, 2023**
Register with Login.gov, System for Award Management (SAM) at Sam.gov, and Grants.gov or renew/verify these registrations	
Step 1: Submit Application for Federal Domestic Assistance/Short Organization Form to Grants.gov	**April 27, 2023 by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time**
Step 2: Submit Grant Application Form and Materials to Applicant Portal	May 2-16, 2023 by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time
Notification date:	October 2023
Work begins no earlier than:	January 1, 2024

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. Find more information on the Award Administration page.

Arts Education: Guidelines are updated every year, so do take a few moments to re-read them with fresh eyes. For example, one new addition last year to the Direct Learning project type advises: "Where appropriate, applicants should describe how the project is reflective of the cultural life of the participants." Within Grants for Arts Projects and the project discipline of Arts Education, the three project types are **Direct Learning** (projects for pre-K-12 students), **Professional Development** (projects for the educators and artists who support them), and **Collective Impact** (projects for the schools and communities that serve them). Applicants interested in Collective Impact projects may wish to view this dedicated page on Arts Education Collective Impact Grants. Arts Education projects may be in any artistic discipline but 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 Avril Claytor, 202-682-5028. For Challenge America, contact challengeamerica@arts.gov, 202-682-5700.

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 and all the way through.**

Panelists and staff also offer the following:

- 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.
- 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, though it's worth noting that "creative process" is now included in defining artistic excellence. 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.
- Again – read the guidelines carefully and thoroughly each year. There can be a lot of information, and sometimes additions or changes can be subtle, yet offer some insight into how your activity might suit a particular discipline. Do your best to read through all information with as fresh a perspective as possible to be sure you understand the parameters and opportunities. When in doubt, feel welcome to contact NEA staff, but the earlier you can ask your questions, the more time you can adapt your application accordingly!