



2026 Merit Award Guidelines

The Arts Commission's Merit Award celebrates outstanding work made in the last five years by local **Established or Mid-career artists** in the literary, performing, or visual arts. Awards encourage local artists to experiment and advance their careers by continuing to produce work that pushes the boundaries of their mediums. Three awards of \$4,000 are granted so these exceptional artists can advance their artistic practice.

HOW TO APPLY + DEADLINE

Submit your completed applications via the Good Grants platform before the **deadline on Sunday, September 27, 2026 at 11:59 pm (eastern)**. Visit <https://theartscommission.org/artists/merit-awards> for FAQs, a full example copy of the application (with all the questions), important deadlines and updates, and a link to the online application.

DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

Artist CV—Curriculum Vitae (two pages maximum)
Artist statement (150 words minimum, 350 words maximum)
Bio (50 words minimum, 200 words maximum)
Work Sample Narrative (150 minimum, 350 words maximum)
Work Samples (from the past five years)
Work Sample Descriptions (Title, medium, date, dimensions, or duration)

WHO CAN APPLY

ELIGIBLE

Eligible applicants will have a minimum of **two consecutive years** of either having their creative studio or their home within 30 miles of downtown Toledo, Ohio.

Recipients must maintain residency or studio ownership for the duration of the granting period.

This year, priority is given to Established or Mid-career artists who **have not** received a Merit Award in the past. 2026 Project Grant awardees are eligible to apply.





Applications will only be accepted from artists submitting their **own original body of work**.

Artist collaboratives may submit a single application under one lead artist.

In order to be eligible for review by the Grant Panel, the application must be filled out completely and appropriately.

For the purposes of this program, applicants may identify as an **Established artist if one of the following applies:**

1. Artist is widely recognized (regionally, nationally, or internationally) in the art world regardless of age or years of experience.
2. Artist has created an extensive body of independent work.
3. Artist has 20+ years of experience as a working artist regardless of age or education.

For the purposes of this program, applicants may identify as a **Mid-career artist if one of the following applies:**

1. Artist has already established a sizable audience, a consistent body of work, and defining style over a period of a number of years
2. Artist has an ongoing record that could include: Solo and group exhibitions, performances, gallery representation, honors/awards, residencies and fellowships, reviews by art critics, grants, or publications, etc.
3. Artist has 10-20 years of experience as a working artist regardless of age or education.

INELIGIBLE

Artists **currently** employed by The Arts Commission or serving as members of The Arts Commission's Board of Trustees are **not eligible** to apply for a Merit Award.

Artists who have previously received the Merit Award must wait three years to reapply or to apply for a Project Grant, i.e. 2026 recipients may apply in 2029.

Those applying as producers, creative directors, art organizers, or those providing logistical support to other artists **are not eligible** for this opportunity.

Commercial artists are **not eligible** for this opportunity. For the purposes of this program, a





commercial artist is someone who creates visual artworks for commercial purposes, primarily to promote and sell products, services, or ideas.

Nonprofit organizations are **not eligible** for this opportunity.

DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

Competitive applications must focus on the merit of **work made in the past five years**. This could be (but is not limited to) work that is connected by a common idea, style, concept, or time period. It is important to note that this is **not a project grant**, but rather an award to commend local artists and help them continue to make exceptional artistic contributions to our community.

WORK SAMPLE NARRATIVE (150 minimum, 350 max words)

This text should provide context and insight into why you made the work you are submitting. You may want to include the ideas, concepts, themes, lived experiences, or research that are not apparent from simply viewing the work. It is important that in your description you are able to explain how this work is related to your overall artistic practice.

WORK SAMPLES

For competitive applications, it is recommended that you **submit high-quality documentation of work made in the past five years**. You **do not** need to submit something in each category. You will need a description for each work sample in your Digital Portfolio including title, dates created, materials/formats, and sizes/lengths where applicable.

VISUAL ARTISTS

May submit up to **six still images** from work created in the past five years. Still images need to be 72 dpi JPG or JPEG format measuring 1200 pixels on the longest side. You may also submit a PDF. The online application will only accept files that are 25 MB or smaller. If you need to edit your images, Pixlr is a free online photo editor: <https://pixlr.com/>. You can also use this free photo resizer: <https://www.adobe.com/express/feature/image/resize>.

PERFORMING ARTISTS

May submit work completed within the last five years, as excerpts or entire works, no more than 10 minutes total as a MOV or M4P file or YouTube/Vimeo link. Please specify if the works





performed are originally created, or cite the creator. If you are applying with a music composition—your work sample should be an audio sample, not a written score.

LITERARY ARTISTS

May submit written work completed within the last five years as a PDF. Fiction/Non-Fiction submissions should be under 20 pages, double-spaced, and use a 12-point font size. Poetry manuscripts should be 10 pages, single or double-spaced, no more than one poem to a page. Playwriting/Screenplay manuscripts should be under 50 pages, may be single or double-spaced, of an excerpt of one recent work or a selection of one-acts.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTISTS

May submit written work completed within the last five years in a mix of the above three formats: still images, videos, written PDFs. If you submit a mix, you are limited to: 2 still images, 2 audio/video files or links, and 1 written PDF (5 page max).

REVIEW PROCESS

Applications will be reviewed by a Grant Panel composed of **regional representatives from the performing, literary, and visual arts communities**. The Arts Commission's Chief Executive and Operating Officers serve as ex-officio members on the Grant Panel (the ex-officio members **do not** score or make funding recommendations). Grant Panelists may prioritize awarding to artists representing a diversity of mediums or those who are first-time grantees to the Merit program.

Please be aware that applying for this grant does not guarantee funding. Not all applications will receive funding.

REVIEW CRITERIA

Grant Panelists score applications based on the criteria below.

Scale of 0-3: 0. Incomplete, 1. Needs Improvement, 2. Acceptable, or 3. Exemplary.

- Outstanding technique or craft
- Work sample documentation is high quality & relevant to the application
- Artist Statement and Work Sample Narrative provide context for the work samples
- Dedication to artistic practice
- Original and imaginative approach to work





REVIEW TIMELINE

- **Early October:** Panelists will Score and Comment on applications.
- **Mid-October:** Panelists will meet for a Zoom Panel Review where they will make funding recommendations based on application scores.
- **!! November:** The recommendations from the panel will be reviewed and approved by The Arts Commission. Applicants can expect to **receive an email** from The Arts Commission about the funding decisions.

GRANT DISBURSEMENT

Following the receipt of their signed Merit Award agreement, recipients will receive their approved award in November 2026. Awards received through this program are considered taxable to the extent that is applicable by law. Please consult a tax professional for additional advice.

All recipients will need to show proof of identification when they pick up their award check.

SPENDING PERIOD

Artists have six months from the date of payment to use the grant funds. The funds are not reimbursable, meaning they cannot be used on expenses spent prior to receiving the grant.

Funds may only be used by artists during the spending period on expenses related to advancing their artistic practice.

RECIPIENT RESPONSIBILITIES

- Recipients are expected to serve on one Grant Panel for The Arts Commission in 2027.
- Recipients are expected to participate in a video interview about the impact of the Merit Award on their creative practice in 2027.

FINAL REPORTING

Final reports are due June 1, 2027, unless otherwise requested and approved in writing. Final reports should be submitted by the above stated deadline via a digital form accessible at <https://theartscommission.org/artists/merit-awards>.





Failure to submit a final report may result in **noncompliance status** and could **disqualify the applicant from receiving future grants**. Additionally, the **award may be required to be returned in full** to The Arts Commission.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

If selected by the Grant Panel to receive funding, the grant recipient will be required to sign a release providing The Arts Commission unrestricted permission to use materials provided in the final reporting process, including but not limited to videos, images, and publicity materials, to promote the Merit Award Program.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions please reach out to Liz Bayan, Artist Services & Subgranting Manager.

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