

Sample form, not for offline completion.

Visit <https://artscommission.grantplatform.com> to apply.

2026 Merit Award

APPLICATION DUE DATE

Applications are due *before* Sunday, September 27, 2026 at 11:59 pm.

REVIEW PROCESS

Applications will be **reviewed by a Grant Panel** composed of The Arts Commission’s Board of trustee members and representatives from the performing, literary, and visual arts communities (both from Toledo and the Midwest). 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.

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.

We will answer questions about this application Monday-Friday during regular business hours: 8:30 am - 4:30 pm. Questions will be answered in the order that we receive them.

Please **give yourself plenty of time** to review the application and reach out to us if you have any questions.

Liz Bayan—LBayan@theartscommission.org

Your Full Name

☐ I hereby certify that I am the individual named above and that the information provided in the application is true and accurate.

Merit Award Guidelines 2026

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.

Email: lbayan@theartscommission.org

Phone: 419.254.2787 Ext. 1018

ELIGIBILITY REVIEW

Please fill out these questions to determine if you are eligible for this grant opportunity. Only those applicants who meet all eligibility requirements will be able to continue with the full application.

You will be unable to see the full application until you pass the Eligibility Review.

If you'd like to review the 2026 Merit Award Guidelines or view the full application please visit our website—[at this link here](#).

Please note that previous Merit Award winners must **wait three years to reapply**.

If you received a Merit Award in 2024 or after, you are ineligible to apply this year.

- In order to be eligible for review by the Grant Panel, the application must be filled out completely and appropriately.
- This year, priority is given to Established and Mid-career artists who have not received a Merit Award in the past.
- Artist collaboratives may submit a single application under one lead artist.

Are you an individual artist or artist collective?

☐ Yes, Individual Artist

☐ Yes, Artist Collective

☐ No

If applying as a collaborative, please only submit one application.

Do you currently live or have a studio within 30 miles of downtown Toledo, and have done so for the *last two consecutive years*?

☐ Yes, I have lived or held a studio in Toledo for at least 2 years

☐ No

Applicants may be required to provide proof of residency.

I consider myself:

☐ Hobbyist artist

☐ Emerging artist

☐ Mid-career artist

☐ Established artist

For the purposes of this program, artists are asked to define their creative careers using the following criteria.

You *may* identify as a Hobbyist artist if one of these applies:

—Making art is not your profession or career.

—It's something fun you do in your spare time.

—You make things purely for self-fulfillment or self-satisfaction or for the love of making things.

You *may* identify as an Emerging artist if one of these applies:

—You have 0-10 years of experience as a Working artist regardless of age or education.

—You are actively working to grow your creative career with things like exhibitions, performances, honors or awards, publications, artist lectures/presentations, etc.

—You are someone who's made a career change or recently decided to prioritize your art above everything else.

You *may* identify as a Mid-career artist if one of these applies:

—You have 10-20 years of experience as a Working artist regardless of age or education.

—You have already established a sizable audience, a consistent body of work, and defining style over a period of a number of years.

—You have 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.

You *may* identify as an Established artist if one of these applies:

—You have 20+ years of experience as a working artist regardless of age or education.

—You are widely recognized (regionally, nationally, or internationally) in the art world regardless of age or years of experience.

—You have created an extensive body of independent work.

Are you currently employed by The Arts Commission or serving as members of The Arts Commission's Board of Trustees?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Artists **currently** employed by The Arts Commission or serving as members of The Arts Commission's Board of Trustees are **NOT** eligible for the Merit Award.

Are you applying as a producer, commercial artist, creative director, art organizer, or those providing logistical support to other artists?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Per the guidelines: Producers, commercial artists, creative directors, art organizers, or those providing logistical support to other artists **are not eligible** for this opportunity.

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

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.

Are you applying for a nonprofit organization?

☐ Yes

☐ No

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

After you've finished answering all of the questions above, click on the **SUBMIT ELIGIBILITY** button in order to proceed.

- If you pass the Eligibility Review, you will have access to the rest of the application.
- If you do not pass the Eligibility Review, you will not be able to fill out the application.
- If you have questions about Eligibility, please read through the 2025 Merit Award Guidelines on our website—[link here](#).

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Please be aware that applying for this grant does not guarantee funding.

Not all applications will receive funding.

We will answer questions about this application Monday-Friday during regular business hours: 8:30 am - 4:30 pm.

Questions will be answered in the order that we receive them.

Please **give yourself plenty of time** to review the application and reach out to us if you have any questions.

Liz Bayan, Artist Services & Subgranting Manager: LBayan@theartscommission.org.

First Name

Last Name

Personal Pronouns (optional)

Email Address

List Full Names, Emails, and Websites, or Social Media handles of collaborators (if applying as a group). (optional)

Phone Number

Full Street Address

Building number, Street Name, and Apartment/Suite number if applicable.

City**Zipcode**

Artists who live or have a studio within 30 miles of downtown Toledo are eligible to apply for this grant.

Is your creative studio outside of your home?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Have you ever applied for an art grant before?

☐ Yes, a couple of times.

☐ Yes, I've been applying to art grants for many years.

☐ No, this is my first time applying for an art grant.

What is the primary focus of your creative practice?

☐ Visual

☐ Literary

☐ Sound

☐ Film

☐ Performing

☐ Music

☐ Dance

☐ Fashion

☐ Multi-Disciplinary

I consider myself: (please check all that apply)

☐ Craftsperson

☐ Fine Artist

☐ Teaching Artist

☐ Community Artist

☐ Conceptual Artist

☐ Something not listed above.

How did you learn about this opportunity?

☐ Press Release

☐ Newspaper or Print media

- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Arts Commission Email
- ☐ Individual Referral
- ☐ Word of Mouth

Please check all that apply.

Would you like to be added to our email list? We send out emails promoting upcoming grant opportunities, artist mixers, and workshops.

- ☐ Yes, please add me to your email list.
- ☐ I already receive your emails.
- ☐ No thanks!

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

The questions below are **OPTIONAL** and are intended to help us understand the communities we serve. When you fill out the application online, you will be given the option to choose, "Prefer not to say."

Grant Panelists will not see this information when they review your application.

Gender

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Prefer to self describe
- ☐ Prefer not to say

I identify as a member of the LBGTQIA+ community.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

My ethnic or cultural background is: (optional)

- ☐ Asian/South Asian
- ☐ Black/African/Afo-Caribbean
- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Hispanic/Latinx
- ☐ Middle Eastern/Arab

- ☐ Native American/Alaskan Native
- ☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Prefer to self describe
- ☐ Prefer not to say

I identify as a person with a disability. (optional)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your age range? (optional)

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65 +
- ☐ Prefer not to say

DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

When you are uploading files or linking URLs (audio/visual only), try refreshing the page if there are fields that you no longer want. For example: You click that you wanted to upload 3 still image files but then change your mind and only want to do 2—refresh the page and you can change this.

If you're having issues uploading a file, please try refreshing the page or logging out and logging back in. You could also try quitting your Browser (Safari, Firefox, Chrome, etc.) and that may help. Just make sure you **SAVE YOUR PROGRESS** first!

!! ATTENTION !!

Please note that the submission of your application is only possible once your **Work Samples** and **Artist CV** have finished uploading.

We recommend allowing sufficient time for the upload process to ensure your application can be submitted successfully and **before the deadline on Sunday, September 27 at 11:59 pm.**

REVIEW PROCESS

The Merit Award is reviewed by a Grant Panel that consists of artists who live outside of Toledo. Due to this fact, Grant panelists may be unfamiliar with your work, please take that into consideration when completing the following section.

DIGITAL PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENTS

- 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 Description (Title, medium, date, dimensions, or duration)

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

ARTIST WEBSITE (optional)

You will not be able to submit your application if you list more than one website.

SOCIAL MEDIA (optional)

You will not be able to submit your application if you list more than one website.

ARTIST CV

(2-page max)



Please submit this as a PDF.

Check out the slides from our Grant Application Workshop about Artist CV/Resumes + Bios.

[Artist CV + Bios Workshop Slides](#)

Please be aware that the following sections have word limits. You will not be able to submit your application unless you reach the word limit for each question.

We advise that you give yourself extra time to check your word count before trying to submit.

ARTIST STATEMENT

350 words

(Minimum 150, Maximum 350 words)

An artist statement broadly explains what you make and why. When explaining what you make, don't over explain your process unless it is experimental or innovative. One way to approach writing an artist statement is to record yourself talking about your art to a friend or family member. Afterwards, listen to the recording and pick out what feels important to describe in your statement.

Please see these links for more information about writing an artist statement.

<https://www.collegeart.org/standards-and-guidelines/guidelines/visual-art-cv>

<https://thecreativeindependent.com/guides/how-to-write-an-artist-statement>

Please review the slides from our Grant Workshop about **Artist Statements** for guidance.

[Artist Statement Workshop Slides](#)

ARTIST BIO

200 words

(Minimum 50, Maximum 200 words)

An artist bio is a narrative version of your resume/CV that features your career achievements or highlights. A bio should be written in the third person. (i.e. Smith is a local ceramicist with 5 years of experience... She creates...). Your bio will often be reproduced in public statements, press releases, and similar promotions.

[Artist Bio Workshop Slides](#)

WORK SAMPLE NARRATIVE

350 words

(Minimum 150, Maximum 350 words)

This text should provide context and insight into why you made the work you're 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.

☐ I confirm that all work samples submitted were **completed in the past five years.**

What type of Work Sample would you like to upload?

Still images

Audio/video

Written

Mix

- **Still images**—up to 6 images.
- **Audio/video**—excerpts or entire works, no more than 10 minutes total as a MOV or M4P file. You may upload up to 3 files as long as they do not go over 10 minutes combined. You may also upload 3 URL links to a YouTube or Vimeo page as long as they do not go over 10 minutes combined.
- **Written**—upload a PDF—see guidelines for genre specific requirements.
- **Mix of the above**—if you submit a mix, you are limited to: 2 still images, 2 audio/video files or links, and 1 PDF written (5 page max).

If you have any **issues submitting your application**, contact us as soon as possible.

Liz Bayan, Artist Services & Subgranting Manager: LBayan@theartscommission.org