

Cultural Sustainability: Operating Grants for Arts Organizations

Open to arts nonprofit organizations, fiscally sponsored groups, private entities, and state/federally recognized tribes, the Cultural Sustainability program offers general operating funds to organizations rooted in communities of color.

Program Description

Cultural Sustainability, an initiative of The Wallace Foundation in partnership with the six U.S. Regional Arts Organizations, is designed for arts organizations rooted in communities of color with annual operating expenses under \$500,000.

Selected organizations will receive:

1. **General Operating Funding** (up to \$150,000, average award is \$50,000)
2. **Collaborative Learning Opportunities** (within a cohort of fellow grant recipients, South Arts, and other applicants)

Cultural Sustainability acknowledges the invaluable contributions arts and cultural organizations of color make in our communities and the broader cultural landscape. Funded in part by the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, South Arts' program will strive to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within the arts sector while learning how organizations that have historically been underrepresented advance sustainability. The initiative is guided by the question: **“How do arts organizations founded by, with, and/or for communities of color define and develop their well-being and that of their communities?”**

South Arts will award approximately twelve organizations located among the [nine-state service area](#) with general operating grants totaling more than \$1.14 million.

Important Dates & Deadlines

- Applications open **November 15, 2024**.
- Peer Learning Webinar will be held on **December 12, 2024**. ([Register here](#))
- Application closes **February 5, 2025**.
- Eligibility Review in **February 2025**.
- Application Review in **March-April 2025**.
- Panel Meeting in **May 2025**.
- Applicants will be notified of funding decisions by email in **June 2025**.
- Grant Program Period is from **July 2025 - June 2026**.

Accessibility

For accessibility support with applying to Cultural Sustainability, contact Lisa Smalls, Interim Program Director: lsmall@southarts.org or 404.874.7244 ext. 837.

Eligibility Requirements

The following are the main eligibility requirements necessary to be considered for Cultural Sustainability. Please see the criteria section to understand the full guidelines.

Eligible applicants include:

- Designated non-profit arts organizations
- Fiscally sponsored arts groups
- Arts-centered private entities (such as LLCs, Partnerships, Benefit Corporations)
- State or federally recognized tribal governments
 - **Eligible applicants must also be:**
 - Organizations serving and located within South Arts' [nine-state service area](#) (AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, or TN)
 - Organizations with an annual revenue of less than \$500,000 in their last two fiscal years (based on their last two reported IRS 990 forms or financial statements).
 - Organizations with at least three years of arts programming experience. Years of activity need not be consecutive nor connected to date of incorporation.

Ineligible applicants include:

- Lobbying organizations
- K12 schools, colleges, universities, and units of government.
- Organizations based outside of AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, or TN

Who is this program designed for?

We welcome organizations to self-identify how they are rooted in communities of color, and for the purpose of addressing this program's research question, our primary focus is to fund arts organizations that reflect one or more the following:

- Include a person or persons of color, either artistically or administratively, in key leadership capacities
- Predominantly in service of Black, Latine, Asian, Arab, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and/or Caribbean communities, or another community of color
- Founded by and/or for a community of color
- Have a majority staff and/or board culturally reflective of the community they serve

- Produce culturally specific work that preserves or advances a specific art or tradition e.g. Indigenous, refugee, and/or immigrant
- Provide economic benefit to artists of color
- Have been historically underfunded
- Are located within communities significantly impacted by historical contexts such as redlining, gentrification, displacement, and/or limited access to essential resources for well-being (e.g. healthcare, fresh food, clean drinking water, etc.)

South Arts is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. We have prioritized this commitment to ensure that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) led organizations, LGBTQIA+ led organizations, and organizations representing persons with disabilities are represented as both applicants and grantees. In addition, we encourage applications for projects that engage BIPOC artists, LGBTQIA+ artists, and artists with disabilities.

Grant Awards

Organizations may request up to 30% of their annual operating budget for two consecutive fiscal years (maximum total award is up to \$150,000). South Arts will disburse up to 95% of the total award up front and will co-design the funding schedule with each organization once grant recipients are selected. Final payments will be given upon receipt of the final report at the close of the grant period in June 2026.

To ensure full geographic representation of South Arts' region, only a few organizations may receive \$150,000. We expect the average award to be closer to \$50,000.

Eligible Expenses: Funds may be used towards general operations such as (but not limited to) rent, salaries, utilities, retiring debt, endowments/investments, retreats, sabbaticals, wellness funds, emergency preparedness, or other measures to promote organization wellness and sustainability.

Ineligible Expenses: Funds may not be used towards public art projects, capital projects such as construction, and purchases of land or facilities.

Tax Exemption Reminder: Organizations that are not tax-exempt are responsible for reporting grant funds to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). If you are not tax-exempt, please consider the tax implications of your total awarded amount. South Arts will help connect you with resources if you need tax advisement.

Collaborative Learning Experiences

In addition to grant funds, South Arts is offering Collaborative Learning Experiences through a cohort engagement model that will help us better understand how arts organizations rooted in communities of color align their **mission, organizational structures,** and **engagement with their communities** to enhance their organizational well-being and that of the communities they serve.

By serving in the roles of funder, convener, and advocate, South Arts will participate in this work alongside grant recipients. While we understand that a single grant award is not the sole solution,

we hope this will help organizations to build and/or strengthen their own systems of sustainability and open doors to new resources, networks, collaborators, and advocates.

The following is an initial model of how the cohort will engage in the Collaborative Learning Experiences (it may be subject to change and does not represent the full range of options available). This is meant to give applicants a sense of what to expect – for example, we may engage in some, not necessarily all, of the types of gatherings listed below. More detail around how this unfolds will be co-designed with grant recipients at the time of award.

Guiding Questions

- **Mission:** How are we defining well-being?
 - Themes (options):
 - Wellness
 - Culture
 - Solidarity

- **Organization Structure:** How are we developing/enhancing well-being internally and externally? How should we be?
 - Themes (options):
 - Relationship & Reciprocity
 - Repair & Healing

- **Community Engagement:** How are we helping to sustain well-being in the community?
 - Themes (options):
 - History & Advocacy
 - Preservation & Sustainability

- **Types of Gatherings (options):**
 - Caucusing Session(s)
 - Peer Learning (with South Arts, grant recipients, and applicants)
 - Individual and/or Small Group Coaching (with a field expert)
 - Local Cohort Experience (organized by grant recipients in their own community)

- **Frequency of Gatherings (options):**
 - Quarterly
 - Every Other Month
 - Monthly

Reporting & Engagement

South Arts is here to support your work and talk through progress, challenges, successes, and learnings. Funded organizations may select their frequency of check-in conversations with South Arts that best fits their needs:

- Quarterly or
- Twice a Year (mid-year and year-end)

All funded organizations will be asked to complete a final online report to document their use of funds and accomplishments/experience at the end of the grant period in June 2026.

Application Criteria

South Arts has designed criteria that will help us better understand how arts organizations rooted in communities of color align their **mission, organizational structures, and engagement with their communities** to enhance their organizational well-being and that of the communities they serve.

Applications are reviewed and funding decisions are made using the following criteria to evaluate each application:

1. **Alignment (25%):** Is the organization's mission aligned with the values of the community? We're looking for arts and culture organizations that are in solidarity with the community and work to equitably shift power to enhance community well-being.
2. **Relationship (25%):** Is the organization trusted and led by community voices? We're looking for organizations that share power within their organizational structures and have the relationship infrastructure to enhance their own well-being and that of the community.
3. **Impact (25%):** We're looking to historically understand the organization's impact according to the community and are most interested in those that take an advocacy approach within their community engagement to enhance well-being. How will grant funds help sustain and/or enhance what the organization is already doing in these areas?
4. **Cohort Engagement (12.5%):** Is the organization ready and willing to engage with their peers in the Collaborative Learning Experiences? We're looking for a unique array of arts and culture organizations that will most benefit from and contribute to the cohort experience.
5. **Financial Stewardship (12.5%):** How does the organization manage financial resources? We're not looking for perfection. We understand the financial strain that organizations rooted in communities of color have faced and how creative they've been to sustain their work. Rather, we're interested to know: is the organization-managing resources with transparency and accountability?

For additional explanation of the criteria and how it connects to the application questions, see the [application table](#) and [rubric](#).

Application Questions

Below are the narrative questions included in the Cultural Sustainability application. In addition to providing organization demographic information, applicants will respond to the following questions:

1. Tell us about your organization and any values that drive your work. (See Alignment Criteria)
2. Describe the community you serve (please include any qualitative and quantitative information that you have readily available). How are you addressing your communities'

needs and interests through your work, and how has community support directly contributed to your organization's success? (See Relationship Criteria)

3. How will this grant impact your organization's work and the well-being of the community you serve? (See Impact Criteria)
4. a) What could the pilot program and cohort provide you with to support your work, unique expertise, and knowledge?
b) In turn, what unique expertise and knowledge can your organization add to the experience? (See Cohort Engagement Criteria)
5. a) Please upload financial statements of your organization's total operating budget from the last two completed fiscal years.
b) Provide a brief budget narrative to help explain any deficits, surplus, or other context you would like us to know about your operating budget. (See Financial Stewardship Criteria)

Please share supporting materials that can help us better understand your work. Support material is optional; however, it is highly encouraged. You may include items such as:

- community testimonials, letters, awards;
- work samples;
- examples of projects, policies, or processes that promote organization and/or community well-being;
- historical context about the community your organization is located in and/or serve;
- photos;
- excerpts from annual reports or other marketing materials; and
- links to short videos or audio clips.

You may provide up to three (3) uploads. Each upload should not exceed five (5) pages; however, if your document is longer, please indicate the five (5) pages you would like us to review. You may include up to three (3) links to video or audio clips up to 5 minutes long. If your media is longer, indicate the 5-minute portion we should view.

Application Review

- South Arts staff will review applications for eligibility.
- Reviewers will read, score, and comment on eligible applications. Reviewers are community members across South Arts' region with lived experience and a deep understanding of the needs/interests of communities of color and the arts and culture ecosystems operating within them.
- Organizations with the strongest reviews and program alignment will move forward for panel discussion. The panel is composed of a small number of reviewers who will make funding recommendations to South Arts.
- South Arts staff will review panel recommendations and make final funding decisions, ensuring there are organizations represented from each state within South Art's region and are of diverse artistic and cultural practices and traditions. Funding decisions will not be based upon scores alone but will also consider the holistic qualitative review of an organization's application through panel discussion and the alignment with the guiding research question and goals of the program.

How to Apply

Applications will be submitted electronically through South Art's Salesforce database. Here is a [short video](#) to assist you with starting an application. While the South Arts team has prepared this for the Express Grants program, it is still relevant to the Cultural Sustainability program.

Applications are due by 11:59pm ET on **Wednesday, February 5, 2025**. South Arts encourages applicants to contact us with questions more than 48 hours before the application deadline. Staff support is available weekdays 9:00am-5:00pm ET.

After reviewing program guidelines, [log in to Salesforce](#) to apply.

Resources for Applicants

Accessibility: For accessibility support with applying to Cultural Sustainability, contact Lisa Smalls, Interim Program Director: ismalls@southarts.org or 404.874.7244 ext. 837.

Database Support: Here is a [short video](#) to assist you with starting an application.

FAQs: See our list of [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Office Hours: South Arts staff will hold drop-in office hours on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10:00am-11:00am ET throughout the application period. [Sign up](#) to attend available dates.

Peer Learning Webinar: Join us on **December 12, 2024** from **2:00-3:30 PM ET** for a Peer Learning Webinar, where we'll discuss the application criteria within the context of real examples from organizations across the southern region. We'll share resources of other funding opportunities beyond Cultural Sustainability and afterwards, invite information sharing between applicants and funders. [Register here](#).

General Support: For questions about Cultural Sustainability Grants or to schedule a one-on-one conversation, contact Aiyana Straughn, Director of Arts Partnerships: astraughn@southarts.org.

Opportunities for Applicants: Some applicants not selected for funding may receive an invitation to have their organization's work featured in Cultural Sustainability storytelling and/or participate in a number of Collaborative Learning Experiences. More information will be shared once grant recipients are selected.

Funding Opportunities: See this [document](#) for additional regional and national resources for arts organizations.