

2027 Creative Engagement Information Session Webinar Transcript

Welcome

Hello everyone! We're going to get started. Welcome to the 2027 Manhattan Arts Grants information session for the Creative Engagement program.

My name is Esther Nguyen, I am the Program Manager in the Artistic Programs team at LMCC. I use she/her pronouns. I am a mixed asian woman with black hair in a bun. I'm wearing a fuzzy beige sweater with striped sleeves and am standing in front of a blurred background.

I'm joined by my amazing colleagues on the Artistic Programs team: Lauren Slone, Morgan Williams and Lillian Osei-Boateng .

We're so glad you're here, and we're really honored to be the team that supports you in this process.

This session is meant to help you decide if Creative Engagement is a good fit for your work. We're going to cover the main points that you should know before starting an application and what to expect if you choose to apply. We hope you do!

We'll go over:

- *Creative Engagement* eligibility criteria
- Application components
- Panel Criteria
- The process timeline and assistance available to all applicants

There will be time at the end to answer questions.

If you come away with nothing else from this session, we want you to know that you don't have to create anything we describe here without support. We are here to help!

About LMCC + Manhattan Arts Grants

Let's start with a quick intro to Lower Manhattan Cultural Council or LMCC and Manhattan Arts Grants.

LMCC was founded in 1973 with a mission to foster a vibrant, equitable arts ecosystem by providing artists and arts organizations with essential resources to thrive. Today, LMCC serves

as the arts council for the borough of Manhattan with three programmatic areas including (1) grant funding, (2) residencies and (3) free public programming.

Manhattan Arts Grants refers to LMCC's umbrella of four grant programs: Creative Engagement, UMEZ Arts Engagement, Creative Learning, and Creative Unrestricted.

These are four distinct grant programs with different goals that provide funding to artists, collectives and nonprofit organizations.

- Creative Engagement, which we'll talk about today, is a fund for Manhattan artists and arts organizations who want to make a public-facing project that takes place anywhere from Inwood to the Battery.
- UMEZ Arts Engagement is a fund specifically for Upper Manhattan artists and arts organizations who want to make a public-facing project that takes place in Upper Manhattan.
- Creative Learning is a fund for Manhattan artists and arts organizations who want to make arts education sequential learning programs in community settings for older adults in Manhattan.
- And lastly Creative Unrestricted is a two-year fund specifically for Manhattan artists and arts organizations working in the performing arts who are looking for flexibility to support a wide range of expenses, not just a single project.

As mentioned, today, we'll focus specifically on **Creative Engagement**.

Creative Engagement is supported by three funding partners.

- New York City Department of Cultural Affairs or (DCLA) for short
- New York State Council on the Arts or (NYSCA), and
- the Howard Gilman Foundation

LMCC provides funding to artists and organizations ***that cannot apply directly to these agencies***, which generally includes earlier career artists, collectives, and new or smaller non profits.

Eligibility Criteria

At its core, Creative Engagement supports projects that give the public an opportunity to **experience, participate in, or attend an artistic event in Manhattan**. The project needs to be promoted to the public and take place **between January 1 and December 31, 2027**.

Projects can take many forms, and include a wide range of artistic disciplines and approaches, such as performances, exhibitions, screenings, public art installations, literary events, multidisciplinary community festivals, and more.

The format of the project itself doesn't determine whether it's a good fit. What's important is that there's a clear artistic goal and a well-planned opportunity for the public to encounter or engage with the work.

Additionally,

- Creative Engagement is **not only for brand-new ideas**. Many people apply with annual activities, like a neighborhood festival, which are absolutely eligible. If that's the case, you just want to spend some time describing what you are learning and trying out each year. Perhaps you're inviting a new group of artists each time, changing the format of the event slightly, or the marketing plan. What we can't support is a strictly exact repetition or re-mounting of a project that has already been funded by Creative Engagement in a prior year. Please talk to us if you have questions about this.
- When we say that the project needs to be **public-facing**, that's not limited to a traditional performance or exhibition format. Projects can be participatory, interactive, socially engaged, or take another form, as long as the public has a meaningful opportunity to experience the work. We're truly inviting your widest sense of imagination on what this looks like!

Project Ineligibility

There are a few important boundaries to know.

Creative Engagement does not support projects that have a primary goal to deliver arts education, professional training, therapeutic, religious, or social-service activities. While the project can have an arts education workshop as a component, for example, it needs to be clear that the central goal of creating the work is to deliver an artistic experience to the community.

Additionally, when thinking about the costs of the work, keep in mind that the funding must be connected to the specific project that you're proposing. General operating expenses, capital equipment, artwork acquisition, scholarships, and so forth, are not eligible. You can find **the full list of ineligible expenses in the guidelines on page 4**.

So when you're thinking about all of this and whether your project is a fit, we suggest coming back to three basic questions:

- **Is there a clear artistic goal?**
- **Is there a meaningful opportunity for the public to experience or engage with it?**
- **And does the proposed funding directly support bringing the project to the public?**

If the answer to those questions is yes, this is likely a good fit. If you're unsure in any way, we encourage you to reach out to us before applying.

If you have a project in mind, the next piece to consider is who should apply on behalf of the project and who could receive a grant in the event of an award?

In terms of the actual application, people with many different roles, from lead artists to grant writers, nonprofit staff, curators, etc. can create an account and submit. This is no problem. However, we suggest that you work with the person or organization that would be best suited to receive the grant in the event of an award, if that is not you.

The grant is intended to go directly to the creators of the project, which can be an individual artist, the representative of a collective, or a nonprofit organization. The individual or organization that would receive a grant must have proof of residence or address in Manhattan, be over 18 years of age, and not be a matriculated, full-time student at the time of the application. Specific document requirements and funding eligibility are based on whether you choose an individual or organization. We'll cover this more when we get to the section of the application that asks for it.

As an open call, we welcome applications from those who have never applied before, those who have experience applying, and current or past grantees. Anyone who has received the funding three cycles in a row, 2024, 2025, and 2026, is eligible to apply again to this program in 2028.

We also ask that current and past grantees submit Final Reports by January 31, 2027 to be considered eligible for this funding cycle. Please check in with us directly if you have questions or concerns about this.

Submittable

Ok, you've got a sense of what and who the program can support.

Let's move on to highlighting what the application is going to ask of you. All of the Manhattan Arts Grants opportunities are hosted on the **Submittable platform**.

A couple of tips:

- We've generated a full preview of all of the application questions that you can download as a PDF on LMCC's website. It can be helpful to look through it before to get a sense of what will be asked of you. You can use the document as a check list.

We're dropping the application preview link in the chat.

<https://lmcc.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/2027-Creative-Engagement-Application-Questions.pdf>

- If you do decide to apply, please connect your Submittable account to an email address that you check regularly. We'll send notifications, updates, and questions about your application directly through the Submittable platform. We have information about creating a Submittable account on pages 9-10 of the guidelines, but if you have any trouble with that part, please let us know.

AI Policy

Our guidelines speak to AI usage for creating your application, but we wanted to highlight that here quickly. We also acknowledge that each of you may have a very different relationship to whether, and if, you use it. We could host a session on this topic alone, but for the purposes of creating your grant application it's important to know that:

LMCC allows applicants to use generative AI in preparing grant applications. Regardless of the tools used, applicants are responsible for ensuring that all information submitted is accurate, truthful, and appropriately represents the proposed work. Applicants should review and verify all materials before submission and should not include any content they cannot independently verify.

The use or perceived use of AI should not influence a panelist's assessment of an application. Panelists may not upload, enter, or otherwise provide LMCC application materials or applicant information to generative AI tools as part of the review process.

So that's for our AI policy.

Application Form

Alright, continuing on! If you are ready to apply, you can find the application link on our website in the APPLY button.

Once you click on it, you'll select "CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT AND UMEZ ARTS ENGAGEMENT FORM".

Both funding programs use the **same application**. You don't need to worry about selecting one or the other. You'll automatically be considered for both programs based on the answers you provide in the application.

Once you've logged in, you'll see some intro text about both programs. This is all the same information as what's on the website.

Then you'll scroll down and see an Eligibility Quiz. This is new this year. We added it at the beginning to help ensure that you meet the baseline eligibility criteria before you spend time completing the full application.

The quiz will also ask you to confirm that you're aware of important information before applying:

The key thing we want you to know is that:

If you are selected, you might not receive funds until May 2027. This means that if you apply with a project that takes place between January and April, you need to be able to cover the costs upfront.

If you aren't in a position to do that, we highly recommend that you apply with a project that takes place after May 2027.

If all of your quiz answers are correct, you'll be taken to the full application form automatically.

If you are prompted that you're ineligible and you think that's incorrect, please email us!

Once you are in the application, you'll see its organized into three sections: (1) PROJECT INFORMATION, (2) GRANT RECIPIENT, and (3) DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY.

Section I is the heart of the application. This is the section that panelists will review closely for their evaluation.

Application Form: Section I Part A

Part A is: **Project Goals and Creative Team**. This is where you'll provide the who, what, when, where, and how of the project. The goal here is to help the panel understand your artistic goals and envision what you want the public to experience.

- You'll provide a project title
- a short and a long project description.
 - A good rule of thumb is to try to write this in a way that a friend or family member would understand. Aim to make your ideas and passion for the work as clear as possible.
- You'll select which discipline you want your project to be assessed under.
 - For example, if you feel that panelists who know the field of dance would be the best group to understand and evaluate your project, please select dance. If you're not sure which to pick, please email us and we can help you decide.
- You'll also create a planning timeline.
 - Try to provide as many details here as you can. Panelists look at this as your roadmap to getting the project created and shared with the public.
- Lastly, you'll list your full creative team, including both pending and confirmed contributors. You may add as much detail about them and their roles as you like.
 - We also ask you to enter at least one lead artist responsible for creating the work and their biographical experience.

You'll notice that there are **suggested word counts** to help you understand the amount of information we're looking for. You're welcome to come in under or over as long as you've delivered the amount of detail that clearly communicates your ideas.

You also want to pay close attention to the description text as it will give you additional instructions or helpful prompts for how to answer each question.

Application Form: Section I Part B

Part B of Section I is: **Work Samples**.

Your work samples are an opportunity to help the panel experience the work you described in Part A.

The samples tie the application together and help the panel imagine what the community, audience, or public will get to experience. It's an opportunity to bring them as close as possible to your artistic goals, so you want to use them to your advantage!

In the application, you have the option to submit up to two samples: one required and one optional. For both, you can submit audio, video, image, or text, either as a link or an upload.

When choosing your samples, we suggest that you think less about which is your best or favorite work, and instead, choose a sample that is connected in some way to what you're proposing.

Your first sample should be what best depicts your proposed project so that the jury can understand and envision your goals. For example:

- If you're proposing a dance production, try to submit video work by the same choreographer or cast that is of a similar scale
- If you're proposing a participatory installation, try to submit images or video of past installations that show how participants interact with the work

Your second sample is optional. You can think of that one strategically. For example, it could show work by another lead artist, work from another discipline or project, or a rendering or work-in-progress that helps clarify something that's difficult to understand from your project description alone.

Work-in-progress documentation can be especially useful if your proposed project is very different from your past work or includes elements that are hard to envision without seeing them.

When possible, we recommend pairing a work-in-progress sample with a completed work so the panel can understand both the direction of the proposed project and the quality of your work when fully realized.

Ultimately, think of your work samples as **evidence that helps the panel understand the artistic vision you're describing**. Choose the samples that give them the clearest picture of the work you're proposing.

Application Form: Section I Part C

Part C of Section I is **Community, Audience, or Public**.

Because LMCC provides access to public funding through this program, it's particularly important to describe your goals for reaching the Manhattan public here. This section asks you

to tell us who you hope will experience your project, why that audience is meaningful to the work, and how you plan to connect with them.

You'll also provide some practical information about the presentation, including your dates, location, and estimated audience.

We know that a lot of these numbers and plans may not be finalized, or will change after you submit. You don't need to spend any time worrying about getting this exactly right, or that you will be required to match these numbers. It's truly okay to provide rough estimates.

So that was part C.

Application Form: Section I Part D

The last part in Section I is Part D: The Project Budget.

There are two core questions here: The budget itself and the grant amount.

You'll need to complete a budget table that asks for both expenses and income.

If you haven't made a project budget before or find tables and grids challenging to complete, we're happy to help you create one.

The table gathers expenses first:

- Think of the budget as an opportunity to paint a numerical picture of your project. This is where you assign a number to all of the things you mentioned in your project description. The goal is to make a solid effort to include everything you might need. LMCC does require you to include a fee for every human contributing to the project, including confirmed and tentative artists, and relevant staff.
- We understand that it also may be impossible to know exactly how much you need to complete this project. Knowing that, you are encouraged to make a reasonable estimate of what the maximum range will look like, not the minimum. The budget is not a test of how cheaply you can produce your work. We want you to be able to make the work you're dreaming of.

When you scroll down a bit, the table will ask for your secured or confirmed **income**. This can include a grant you've already been awarded or individual donations received. If you don't have any confirmed income yet, that's ok, you can leave that section empty.

A couple of things to consider generally:

- You'll see in the table there are pre-entered suggested categories, you don't need to use every category, just use the ones that apply to your project.

- In the description column, you want to be specific at how you arrived at numbers so the panel understands the math behind your budget. *For example: 20,000\$ = 4x musicians at 5,000\$ for 2 concerts.*

We understand that many of you are creating this as a sketch, and that it could change when you have real cash to work with. The panel is not looking for an exact number or specific formula. Your budgets will all look pretty different based on what each of you want to create. Again, the panelists are looking to see if the costs roughly reflect what you described in the project description.

- So, if you describe a project that sounds really resource heavy (mentioning lots of people, materials, rehearsal time, permits, etc.) but you don't reflect any of those pieces in the expense budget, the panel will have questions.
- It's important to understand that they aren't questioning if you are resourceful, or if you can make something awesome with exactly what you have available to you. They are questioning what will appear like a discrepancy between the ideas you've posed and what they cost to make happen. This is also why it's important to err on the maximum side instead of the minimum.

Okay, now that you've filled out your expenses and income, the table will automatically calculate the balance between those numbers at the bottom, which shows the estimate of what you need to fundraise.

You'll be asked to select a grant request amount from LMCC between \$1,000-20,000 that is as close as possible to your balance.

Let's say your balance is \$8,700. To account for some of the unknowns, we suggest rounding up to the next closest number in the dropdown list, which would be \$9,000.

It's also important to understand that the amount you request isn't necessarily the exact amount you'd receive in the event of an award. However, to the degree possible, LMCC's goal is to fund as many applicants as possible at their full request amount.

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THAT is all for the part of the application that will be reviewed by the panel. We want to emphasize that you don't need to think of each question as a completely separate exercise.

Ultimately, your narrative questions + work samples + budget should paint a cohesive picture of what you are trying to accomplish. Each part should be in harmonious conversation with one another.

Application Form: Section II

Moving onto Section II of the application: The Grant Recipient.

Tying back to what we mentioned in the eligibility section, the grant is intended to go directly to the creators of the project, which can be individuals or organizations. The grant recipient signs the contract, receives the funds, and is responsible for reporting and any tax liability.

Start with first asking yourself:

Who would carry out the responsibilities that come with a grant?

- (1) An individual with residence in Manhattan (applying on behalf of themselves or their collective)?
- (2) An organization legally registered in Manhattan?

Depending on which option is selected, we then have a few different pathways for receiving the funds based on our funding partners' eligibility:

- Individual artists can receive the funds:
 - directly
 - through a nonprofit fiscal sponsor based in Manhattan
 - through a nonprofit fiscal sponsor in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens or Staten Island
 - Or as a Tribal Nation member present within New York State
- Organizational grant recipients can receive the funds
 - As an arts nonprofit with 501c3 status
 - As a NY state chartered educational institution
 - Or as a Government or Quasi-Governmental Entity

Each of these options have a unique set of required documents. In all cases, you'll be asked to provide proof of Manhattan residency or address. The best place to review these requirements is in our application preview PDF beginning on page 7, which we'll drop in the chat again.

<https://lmcc.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/2027-Creative-Engagement-Application-Questions.pdf>

Once you make this selection, you cannot change it after submitting the application. In the event of an award, LMCC will pay the full grant amount as a bank transfer to the entity selected in this section.

Please also remember that LMCC staff cannot offer tax, financial or legal advice so we recommend you speak to a professional about how grant funds may impact you.

It's important to note that this selection impacts which funding partners you may be eligible for. There is a diagram in our guidelines, also on the slide, which outlines this.

We aren't going to go over all these details here because we actually don't want you to worry about them, and you certainly don't have to remember them! We have made them available to help you decide what may be the best option for you.

What we want you to do here is focus on writing the best application possible in Section I and think about the best way for you to receive the funds.

LMCC staff will work in the back end to look at all your documentation and determine what you are eligible for.

Alright - that should be it!

Application Form: Section III

And this finally brings us to the short demographic survey at the end of the application, which you can complete as the lead artist or on behalf of the lead artist listed in the first section. There are a couple of questions here which help us understand who we are reaching and who we are not reaching yet. **Panelists cannot access this section and it has no bearing on the review of your application.** We report this information in an anonymized and aggregated manner to our funding partners. In all cases you can choose which information to disclose, if any.

Okay that was all for the application! We are almost at the end folks!

Review Process + Criteria

Now that you're all done applying and have put together a beautiful application, let's talk about the review criteria.

Grant applications are evaluated by panelists who are artists and creative leaders themselves. They bring deep expertise in a variety of artistic genres, breadth of backgrounds, and knowledge of Manhattan communities.

If you or someone you know would make a great panelist, we'd love your recommendations! We seek recommendations through a form, which is on our website and we'll also drop it in the chat.

<https://airtable.com/appTuRBRxNI5GKpTX/pag26LjbJ7QYEnBcE/form>

Depending on application volume, we tend to seek 40-50 participants per year.

Panelists review every application and make funding recommendations based on their assessment of the program criteria. LMCC's Artistic Programs team determines award amounts, with final approval from LMCC's Board and funding partners.

When putting together your application, it's helpful to have the panel review criteria in mind. These criteria are not listed in order of priority; each is equally important:

- The first criterion is: **Artistic goals**: Applicant effectively expressed the artistic intentions, creative process, and ambitions of the project. This ties to Part A of the application. Here you can ask yourself:
 - Have I clearly explained what I'm trying to make and why?
 - Have I helped the panel understand the artistic experience I want to create?
- Second, is **Community impact**: Applicant clearly identifies the intended audience or public for the project and presents a thoughtful and realistic plan for reaching and engaging that audience. This ties to Section C of the application. Ask yourself:
 - Have I clearly identified who my project is for and how I will reach them?
- And third, is **Viability**: Applicant effectively expressed a clear plan to bring the work to the public. This ties to the planning timeline and your budget. You can ask yourself
 - Have I explained how I'm going to make this project happen?
 - Do my timeline, budget, and creative team all match what I'm proposing?

Timeline + Next Steps

We're almost there!

The **Creative Engagement application deadline is November 12, 2026 at 6:00 PM Eastern Time**. There are **no extensions** to the deadline so plan in advance! If you already know that you'll want to seek assistance for any part of the application, please reach out to us asap.

After the deadline, we'll review your applications for eligibility and completeness and may contact you if edits or additional information is needed. The panel review and Board approvals will take place between January and March 2027 and you will be notified of results on April 5th, 2027.

Grantee contracting will begin in mid-April, and feedback for declined applicants will become available in July 2027 with the intention to make the information as useful as possible for a new application in the next cycle.

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Last but not least, we know this is a lot of information, and putting together applications can be really daunting, so between now and November 12th, we have a number of ways you can receive help on your application!

- We are hosting applicant labs – which are informal, in-person drop-in sessions. You can come with questions, get technical assistance on your application, or just work alongside other applicants and our team. We have four coming up in October at different locations across Manhattan.

- We are also hosting office hours the week leading up to the deadline. These are virtual meetings where you can come with specific questions or receive guidance from LMCC staff on specific aspects of your application.

You can learn more and RSVP for all these sessions on [LMCC.net/Apply](https://lmcc.net/Apply).

Lastly, you are welcome to email us at creativeengagement@lmcc.net.

That's all! Thank you so much!