

2027 Creative Unrestricted Information Session Webinar

Welcome

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

My name is Lillian Osei-Boateng. I am a black woman with braided black hair and a green top.

I'm joined by my amazing colleagues on the Grants Program team: Lauren Slone and Morgan Williams and Esther Nguyen

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 Unrestricted is a good fit for your work. We're really excited about this program. It's brand new for LMCC, and we recognize how needed it is in the sector.

When you registered, you already sent in many questions. Thank you for taking the time to do that. Our goal is to address as many as possible in this presentation itself. Whatever we can't get to this evening, we'll email you back about.

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

Once again, 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're here to help.

About LMCC + MAG

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 – all of which provide funding to individual artists, collectives, and nonprofit organizations. Today, we'll focus specifically on **Creative Unrestricted!**

Creative Unrestricted funding is provided in part by the Howard Gilman Foundation and an anonymous foundation.

The program's goal is to strengthen long-term sustainability for artists and cultural organizations that play vital roles in the local creative ecosystem.

What does that mean? That you are living and making work in New York City and contributing to the city's vitality, and we want these resources to help you continue to do that.

Eligibility Criteria

At its core, Creative Unrestricted provides flexible funding for artists and organizations with sustained bodies of work and annual operating budgets under \$250,000.

Why is this the focus?

Because there tends to be a major funding gap between what's available to those who are just beginning their practice (smaller project grants, for example) and those who establish larger nonprofit organizations or business infrastructures that can access larger institutional funding opportunities.

The program welcomes artists and organizations working in the performing arts, including the widest range of cultural traditions and creative practices in dance, music, theater, and multidisciplinary performance.

When we say this is for artists with "sustained bodies of work", that means you have a history or practice of generating and sharing performing arts work with the public. This does not mean that we expect you to be considered a full-time practitioner or earn all of your income from your creative work. It does not mean that you've earned a certain number of awards, grants, or merits in the field. It does not mean that you've been practicing for a certain number of years, or that you would be considered "mid-career" vs. emerging. It means that you have a dedication to your craft and your community and a body of work, whether that includes a history of mounting 5 productions over ten years or 100 over 50 years.

In terms of the funding itself, it can be applied to the broader conditions that allow you to maintain your artistic practice or organization and develop high-quality, artistic work.

That can include things like:

- residential rental,
- healthcare or childcare,
- debt repayment,
- organizational or administrative capacity,
- staff or artist fees,
- venue rental or equipment,
- accessibility services,
- and more

A key feature we want to emphasize here is that the funding does not have to go toward a specific project. This program is designed to provide greater flexibility to direct the funds where they are most useful for each grantee's unique circumstances.

In 2027, LMCC will make 36 grants of \$20,000 each.

There will be two payments of \$10,000 each. The first installment will be paid out by June 30, 2027. Grantees can time the second payment for December 2027 or June 2028. The choice there is to help with managing any potential tax liability across calendar years or organizational fiscal year needs.

All of our other Manhattan Arts Grants programs have to tie explicitly to a project that takes place in 2027. The funds are dispersed and have to be expended in 2027. That is not the case with this program.

Ineligibility

There are a few important boundaries to know.

While what you can use the funds for is quite expansive, there are a few limitations. You cannot use the funds for:

- Capital improvements
- Building purchases
- Lobbying
- Political activities
- Scholarships or tuition assistance
- Cash prizes
- Fundraising events
- Religious worship services
- Activities completed before the grant period

- Expenses already reimbursed through another funding source

You can find this list on pages 4-5 of the guidelines. We're dropping a link to those in the chat:

<https://lmcc.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/Creative-Unrestricted-Program-Guidelines-2027.pdf>

So when you're thinking about all of this, we suggest coming back to three basic questions:

- **Do you have a sustained performing arts practice and body of work?**
- **Are you an individual, collective, or a nonprofit arts organization with 501c3 status?**
- **Is the operating budget for your work less than \$250K per year?**

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.

Common FAQs

We also want to take a moment to lift up the top two questions about the program so far that relate to fit:

- 1) The first question is - "Can I apply to this program and LMCC's other programs, like Creative Engagement, UMEZ Arts Engagement, and Creative Learning?"
 - a) The answer is no. The primary reason is because we want to do the best job we can of stretching our funds to support as many artists and organizations as possible each year.
- 2) The second question is - "If I can't apply to both, which one should I choose?"
 - a) The answer is going to depend on your unique priorities.
 - i) If you have a public project in 2027 that you need resources to finish, and that's the most pressing concern, then we would guide you towards Creative Engagement and UMEZ Arts Engagement.
 - ii) If you don't have a project in 2027, or if it's in pretty good shape fundraising-wise, but you could really use funds to secure months of studio space to work, or you'd really like to wipe out some debt so you can pay your collaborators a higher fee, or you want to work with an elder to archive and carry cultural lineages forward, whatever the case might be, then we're going to guide you to Creative Unrestricted.
 - iii) If you have a project **and** other needs, then you may want to consider that our project funds tend to have a 40% success rate. We honestly don't yet have a baseline for CU's program's success rate, but we're expecting a high number of applications. There will be exactly 36 grants this year.

- iv) If you still feel like, “Ah, I don’t know what to choose”, I would suggest talking to us about it 1-1. We cannot predict what the outcomes will be, but we’ll support you in making your best choice with what you know right now.

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. This can save you time as a checklist of information you’ll need to gather.

We’ll drop the application preview link in the chat.

<https://lmcc.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/2027-Creative-Unrestricted-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 6-7 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 acknowledge that each of you may have a very different relationship to whether, and if, you use AI. 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.

Application Form

Alright, continuing on! You can find the application link on our website by clicking the APPLY button.

Once you click on it, you'll select "CREATIVE UNRESTRICTED 2027 - APPLICATION FORM"

You'll then log in and you'll see some intro text about the program. 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 application is organized into three sections: (1) APPLICANT INFORMATION, (2) APPLICANT DOCUMENTATION, and (3) DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY.

Section I is the heart of the application. This is the section that panelists will review closely to evaluate the program criteria.

Application Form: Section I Part A

Part A starts with two brief questions:

- You'll select how you would characterize your performing arts discipline, whether dance, music, theater, or multidisciplinary performing arts.
- You'll choose whether you are applying as a nonprofit organization, an individual artist, or a collective. Individuals and collectives may opt to receive the funds directly or via a fiscal sponsor. Based on whichever you choose, a series of questions will open up that are refined slightly based on your selection. I want to pause for a moment and emphasize this part. You should be very clear and careful about which applicant type you select as this has ramifications for what happens should you get a grant. If you have any questions about what recipient type you should apply as please contact us and we can talk it through.

Everyone answers six narrative questions about your work, your capacity, your impact, your challenges, your ambitions, and your approach to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility.

The goal across all of these questions is to communicate what your practice of generating work in the performing arts looks like, and to help the panel understand how you would like to grow your work over time and create impact by, with, and for your community in New York City.

You'll notice that there are **suggested word counts of 500 for every question**. 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 in each field 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 should bring them as close as possible to your practice and goals.

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.

Your first sample should be a segment of a completed work that represents your aesthetics, production quality, etc. We know there can be some real stressors here for making decisions like what if my work is durational? or what if the footage is shaky? etc.

You want to try to communicate the energy, rhythm, pacing, passion, or audience connection that your work can create in its finished state. Panelists understand that they are only experiencing a snippet, and they also understand that it can be expensive and impossible to get great footage or recordings. They are asked to set those things aside and try to focus on the content. Their responsibility is to try to understand your artistic goals above all else.

Your second work sample is optional. You can think of that one strategically. For example, it could show work by another collaborator if you are a collective or co-leadership organizational model, work from another performing arts discipline or project, or a rendering or work-in-progress if you want to share the future direction of your work.

Ultimately, think of your work samples as **the section that helps the panel understand your artistic intentions and ambitions.**

Ok, that's it for Section 1!

Application Form: Section II

Moving onto Section II of the application: Applicant Documentation

Again, depending on whether you chose nonprofit organization, individual artist, or collective in the first section, a series of relevant questions will open here.

For nonprofit organizations, you'll need to provide documentation of your 501(c)(3) status, proof of address in Manhattan, a financial statement, and your FY2027 organizational budget. The budget can be uploaded in your own template. You may include projections or estimates and the budget categories that are relevant to your organization.

Your financial documents should clearly meet the requirement that your operations do not exceed \$250,000 annually. There is not a budget minimum or floor.

For the financial statement, you're asked to upload the most recently filed IRS Form 990 available. If the organization did not file a 990N, you can submit an itemized financial statement of income and expenses for your most recently completed fiscal year.

Individuals need to provide proof of residence in Manhattan and indicate whether or not they would prefer to receive the funds directly or via a nonprofit fiscal sponsor organization. For those who may be considering a move in the next two years, please submit in good faith that you expect to be a resident of Manhattan in 2027 and 2028. We understand that that could change, and we'll cross that bridge with you, if needed. Your fiscal sponsor can be located anywhere in New York City. You may also be unincorporated, a sole proprietor, or have an S-Corp or LLC.

Acceptable options for proof of residency include:

- *Utility bill (e.g. electricity, cable, gas, etc.)*
- *Bank or credit card statement. Please remove any sensitive information*
- *Valid Driver's license or IDNYC*
- *Current lease agreement*
- *Voter Registration Card*

Individuals must also complete a projected budget for calendar year 2027 that can include a mix of personal and professional expenses and income. We are intentionally asking for the calendar year because it aligns better with navigating taxes as an individual.

We have provided a template in the application. There are pre-entered, suggested categories. You don't need to use every category, just the ones that apply to your situation. Again, this budget should demonstrate that your artistic operations do not exceed \$250,000 annually, and there is no minimum.

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

Collectives have the exact same requirements as individual artists. It's important to note, though, that you need to identify one member as the representative of the group who will sign paperwork and receive the funds on the group's behalf. That person must have proof of residence in Manhattan. The other members can reside in other boroughs. The same option to use a nonprofit fiscal sponsor applies.

Collectives also need to provide a 2027 calendar year budget for your artistic operations as a group (whether or not you are formally incorporated as a business entity), not to exceed

\$250,000. You may upload your own template. If you need guidance on what to include, please reach out to us.

That's it for section II.

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 artistic lead or director of the nonprofit organization, the individual artist, or the member of the collective that is serving as the grant recipient in the application. There are a couple of questions here which help us better 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.

Review Process + Criteria

We are almost at the end folks!

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. We look for panelists who bring deep expertise in a variety of artistic genres in the performing arts, breadth of backgrounds, and knowledge of Manhattan communities.

If you or someone you know would make a great panelist, we'd love your recommendations! Just fill out the form on our site, or grab the link we just posted in the chat.

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

Depending on application volume, we tend to hire between 40-50 panelists per year to support all grant programs.

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 keep the panel review criteria in mind. These criteria are not listed in order of priority; each is equally important:

- The first criterion is: **Artistic quality**, including the rigor, evolution, and commitment to the applicant's artistic practice over time. This ties to your narrative question responses and the work samples. Here you can ask yourself:

- Have I clearly expressed my vision, cultural lineages, traditions, and commitment to craft?
- Have I helped the panel understand the artistic experiences I want to create over the long-term in my career?
- Second, is **Timeliness of support** including how unrestricted funding would strengthen or sustain the applicant's organization or artistic practice. This ties to your narrative question responses. Ask yourself:
 - Have I clearly described how this funding could make a difference in the capacity, sustainment of practice through challenges, and professional ambitions?
- And third, is **Community and field impact**: including the applicant's contribution to audiences, peers, and the cultural vitality of New York City. You can ask yourself:
 - Have I expressed who my community is or who I want them to be in NYC, whether that's other peer artists, members of my neighborhood, particular spaces, etc.?
 - Have I expressed the contribution I would like to make as an artist or an organization?

We know these aren't easy questions to answer, necessarily, but the goal is to recommend grants to individuals and organizations who are committed to their crafts, committed to their communities, and want to make a long-term contribution. It should be clear that receiving a grant like this at this moment in the artist's career or organization's life can make a difference in their ability to sustain their work in the short, and hopefully, long-term.

Timeline & Next Steps

We're almost there!

The **Creative Unrestricted 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 or about 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.

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 our website at [LMCC.net/Apply](https://lmcc.net/Apply).

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

That's all! Thank you so much!