



## CIAG PANELIST HANDBOOK

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## **ABOUT THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE**

The Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture advances arts, culture, and creativity throughout Los Angeles County. We fulfill our mission by providing services and support in areas including grants and technical assistance for nonprofit organizations; professional development opportunities; commissioning civic artworks and managing the County's civic art collection; implementing countywide arts education initiatives; research and evaluation; career pathways in the creative economy; free community programs; and cross sector creative strategies that address civic issues. This work is framed by the County's Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative and a longstanding commitment to fostering access to the arts. [www.lacountyarts.org](http://www.lacountyarts.org).

## **ABOUT THE COMMUNITY IMPACT ARTS GRANT PROGRAM**

The Community Impact Arts Grant (CIAG) program provides \$500,000 annually in financial support for exemplary arts projects produced by nonprofit organizations, municipalities, local tribal governments, or at fiscally sponsored organizations whose primary mission is outside the arts.

CIAG recognizes the value of the arts as a vital tool for civic problem solving across a range of issue areas. The program seeks to support the complex arts ecology of Los Angeles County by increasing access to and strengthening the quality of arts programming wherever it happens – in health nonprofits, the human service sector, criminal/restorative justice, community/economic development, or environmental justice, to name a few. This grant is designed to promote and highlight cross-sector strategies and support organizations that provide high-quality arts programs as part of their larger mission to provide services to individuals and in the community.

## **PANEL SERVICE**

The Department of Arts and Culture believes that better decisions come from having diverse voices at the table. Panelists reflect the county's diversity and geography as well as a range of professional and lived experiences. Through a participatory grantmaking panel, applications are reviewed and scored based on grant review criteria. The scores and reviews are the basis for recommendations for funding that are approved by the Arts Commission and the Board of Supervisors.

### *CIAG PANEL ZOOM INFO*

#### **Join Zoom Meeting**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86841121988?pwd=F4XlnFMb85weTsuIFankYhh8XgtCPB.1>

**Meeting ID: 868 4112 1988**

**Passcode: 559742**

**One tap mobile**

**+16694449171,,86841121988#,,,,\*559742# US**

**+16699006833,,86841121988#,,,,\*559742# US (San Jose)**

**Join instructions**

[https://us02web.zoom.us/join/86841121988?signature=zYXKGfTDzdIN6pn8vmM\\_SqCW9xAUh\\_z\\_3qaHjTeRaqTc](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/86841121988?signature=zYXKGfTDzdIN6pn8vmM_SqCW9xAUh_z_3qaHjTeRaqTc)

### *CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY*

It is presumed that panelists will have knowledge of, and connections to, applicant organizations and their representatives. Your qualification to advise the Arts Commission rests, in part, on your familiarity with the local arts and social service sectors.

The Department of Arts and Culture defines conflict of interest as a current or recent affiliation with an applicant from which you have derived or will derive material benefit. A panelist must not score or otherwise vote on a grant application if she/he/they stands to gain personally from a positive or negative review of a given applicant. For example:

- An immediate family member or “significant other” is currently employed by the organization or is a board member.
- You have served on the organization’s board of directors within the past year.
- You have received fees for services from an organization within the past year.
- You have a contractual disagreement with an organization or its management.
- You are an unpaid volunteer who serves as or holds a formal position with the organization.

### *PANELIST INSTRUCTIONS*

Prior to beginning the application review, please read and complete the following steps:

1. **Register as an LA County Vendor:** <https://www.lacountyarts.org/county-vendor-information-and-resources>. This is required to receive the panelist stipend.
2. **Review the list of applicants and complete the [Conflict of Interest and Memorandum of Understanding forms](#).** Contact staff ASAP to disclose conflicts of interest with applicants and/or if you have questions about this policy.

### **APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS**

Your responsibilities as a panelist are to review application materials, score them, comment on their excellence and merit based on the review criteria, and participate in the panel discussion.

### *PRE-PANEL ORIENTATION*

Staff will host **panel orientations on Thursday, January 15th at 10am and Wednesday, January 28th at 2pm PST**. It is highly recommended that you attend or view a recording.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88245639589?pwd=a1RBYTZlcmIwOWhMQnIER0NxtGk3QT09>

Meeting ID: 882 4563 9589

Passcode: 164622

### *APPLICATION REVIEW*

Prior to the panel meeting, read and evaluate all assigned applications and application materials via [SMApplly](#). We estimate that the review time for each application (narratives, supplemental materials, scoring and comments) will take an average of 30-45 minutes per application. In your analysis, assess

the strengths and weaknesses of each application and make note of this in the review form. We have provided some suggested comments we see most frequently in CIAG panels, which you are free to select, and we additionally have provided space for you to enter your own comments and notes. This will also facilitate more time for discussion on the day of the panel meeting. No time will be provided for reading applications during the panel meeting.

As you review applications please keep in mind:

- Awards are made on the basis of merit, not need.
- Grants must be matched at least dollar-for-dollar by the applicant organization.
- Activities must take place between July 1, 2026 and June 30, 2027.

### *POST-PANEL*

A representative from each grant panel appears before the Arts Commissioners to present a panel report and answer Commissioners' questions. Arts Commissioners review scores and comment summaries. This Arts Commission meeting takes place in April 2025. At the end of the panel meeting, the panel will discuss who is available and interested in presenting on that day. Notes and suggested talking points will be provided.

### *A PRIMER FOR APPLICATION REVIEW*

Read through this Panelist Handbook as well as the Reviewer Guide. Contact staff if you have any questions. Important links and information for accessing the applications are available on the [CIAG panelist webpage](#), including the Reviewer Guide, Review Criteria, CEI Resources, Sample Application, Conflict of Interest and MOU, Applicant Roster and a recording of the Pre-Panel Orientation.

## **APPLICATION GUIDELINES & TIMELINE**

2026-27 CIAG applications were received in September 2025. Eligible applications are reviewed in February 2026, and the panel's recommendations will be considered at the Arts Commission meeting in April 2026. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions on or before July 2026.

The official public grant announcement will be posted on [lacountyarts.org](http://lacountyarts.org) in summer 2026.

All organizations and projects in this applicant pool are eligible for review. It is up to panelists to evaluate the diverse range of projects against the application requirements detailed in the Community Impact Arts Grant Program Guidelines (see link to CIAG panelist webpage, above.)

As outlined in the guidelines, the LA County Department of Arts and Culture has integrated Culturally Equity and Inclusion (CEI) in the application and review process. For additional details about CEI, please reference the CEI Resources document (see link to CIAG panelist webpage, above.)

## **REVIEW CRITERIA, SCORING & COMMENTS**

Panelists' assessments and scores are the basis for applicant rankings and recommendations to the Arts Commissioners. Arts Commissioners then recommend funding amounts and set the cut-off score below which applicants are not funded.

## REVIEW CRITERIA POINT DISTRIBUTION

Criterion	Point Distribution
Artistic Merit	35
Organizational Readiness/Management Capacity	20
Quality of Project Plan	15
Quality of Project Evaluation	5
Knowledge of Target Constituents and Needs	25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

### APPLICATION ASSESSMENT & SCORING

Panelists should consider each application on its own merits. The 100-point scoring system assigns a greater maximum point value to artistic merit than to the other criteria as the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture believes artistic merit to be a fundamental consideration. **If you have questions about an application, please request clarification from grants staff rather than contacting the applicant organization directly.**

Assign a preliminary score for each review criteria and notes that correspond to each score prior to the panel meeting in [SMAppl](#)y.

### APPLICATION COMMENTS

The peer panel process is not only a means to allocate grant funds but also to assist in the administrative and artistic growth of the applicants through helpful feedback about organizational and program management.

We encourage panel comments that convey respect at all times, are balanced, acknowledge strengths and identify application weaknesses offering constructive suggestions for improvement.

Department of Arts and Culture staff will take notes on comments made during the panel meeting. Applicants are encouraged to make phone appointments with the grants staff subsequent to the award notifications to discuss panel comments in greater detail. NOTE: Zoom panel meetings are recorded to assist staff in compiling notes, but comments are not attributed to specific panelists and the recording is not shared.

## PANEL PREP & MEETING LOGISTICS

### PANEL MEETING LOGISTICS

Grants and Professional Development staff will facilitate the panel meeting.

- The day begins with staff and panelist introductions and the submission of forms, if not completed prior to the panel meeting.
- Panelists discuss the application as a group for a maximum of 15 minutes.

- Panel discussion follows the order of the review criteria beginning with artistic documentation/merit and working through the remaining review criteria: organizational readiness, management capacity, project plan, project evaluation and knowledge of target constituents and needs. Organizational effort in cultural equity and inclusion will also be discussed. *All panelists are expected to provide comments for each application.*
- Following the application discussion, panelists report a total score for each applicant.
- After the applications have been reviewed, staff calculates an overall score for each applicant (an average of all panelist scores) and generates a table for review, with first round scores ranked from highest to lowest.
- Panelists review their score for each applicant for accuracy and personal consistency. Additional discussion and individual score adjustments may be made at this time, especially if there is a wide disparity between the highest and lowest score given to an application. The panelist body may also elect to raise the score of an applicant.
- Once consensus is reached, staff tallies final scores.
- At the conclusion of the panel meeting, panelists share ideas for process improvement with staff. The Department of Arts and Culture values the perspectives of panelists and relies upon them to improve the grantmaking and panel processes.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: I don't think this application is eligible for Department of Arts and Culture support, based on my reading of the guidelines. Should I still review the application?

A: Yes! Please review it, taking note of your thoughts. All applications included in the review are eligible but bring your eligibility questions to the panel for discussion.

Q: This applicant really needs/doesn't need this money. May I factor this into my score?

A: No, you may not. Assess applications according to the application's merit, not perceived need. All nonprofit organizations need funds.

Q: Can I deduct a standard number of points for applications with misspellings, poor grammar, etc.?

A: While a poorly presented application does impact scoring insofar as it fails to convey vital information, and speaks to organizational readiness, do not make any point deductions on the basis of "looks" alone.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Q: I know the executive director and a few of the board members. Is there a conflict of interest?

A: If you feel capable of objectively assessing the organization and you have not materially benefited from your association with the executive director/board members for the past 12 months, there is no conflict of interest.

Q: I've been in discussions with the organization's staff members about a joint project a few months from now. Do I need to excuse myself from the discussion?

A: Yes. If it is possible that you may derive future material benefit from an upcoming collaboration, you may not vote on the organization's application.

### *EMERGENCIES*

Q: It is the morning of the panel, I or my dependent family member is severely ill. What do I do?

A: Please make every effort to honor your commitment to serve on the grants panel. While it is important to have all panelists present, emergencies happen. If you cannot attend, please email [CIAG@arts.lacounty.gov](mailto:CIAG@arts.lacounty.gov) in advance of the meeting the day of the panel.

Thank you for your service!