

Advancement Grant Program

PANEL HANDBOOK

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ABOUT ADVANCEMENT GRANT

The Advancement Grant offers financial support to Los Angeles County school districts working to provide quality arts education to all students. The goals of the grant are to:

- assist school districts in achieving key action items in their strategic plans for arts education
- generate resources, practices, skills or knowledge that will be sustained beyond the term of the grant
- direct resources and investments into historically underserved communities to increase learning in the arts for youth who continue to face structural and systemic barriers to high quality, culturally sustaining arts education

Los Angeles County school districts that are currently partnering with the Arts Ed Collective and will be implementing board approved strategic plans for arts education in coming year are eligible to apply.

PANEL SERVICE

Applications will be reviewed and scored by a peer panel of experienced arts and education professionals. The panel may include school district administrators, community arts partners, funders and arts educators.

Panelists are expected to:

- attend panel orientation and review all orientation materials,
- attend implicit bias training (strongly encouraged),
- review, assess, and score applications in advance for each day of service, and
- attend the virtual panel meeting(s) where we will discuss and record final application scores.

Panelists' assessments and scores become the basis for applicant rankings and funding recommendations. Panelists do not recommend funding amounts or set the cut-off score below which applicants are not funded.

TIMELINE

Guidelines and Application Released	January 28, 2026
Technical Assistance provided at Open Office Hours	February 10, 2026, February 26, 2026, and March 18, 2026
Technical Assistance provided by Arts and Culture staff to individual districts through virtual meetings, telephone appointments, and recorded Application Workshops.	January through March 2026
Application Deadline	March 25, 2026
Application Audit Period Staff audits applications for completeness. Applications submitted late or with section(s) blank will be deemed ineligible.	March 26-April 8, 2026

Applications delivered to panelists	April 9, 2026
Panelist Orientation	April 9, 2026 – 4:00-5:00 pm
Review Panel convenes and scores applications	May 5, 8, 12 and 14, 2026 – 1:00 - 4:00pm
Funders Council meets to endorse awards	June 2026
Notification of Awards Applicants are invited to schedule telephone meetings to receive panel feedback	June - July 2026
Grant Acceptance Form Due	Upon notification of award
Grant Period	Date of executed contract - June 2027
Grantee Check ins with Arts and Culture staff	October 2026 - April 2027
Final reports due	May 15, 2027

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 Department of Arts and Culture rests, in part, on your familiarity with the local arts education community.

For this program, a conflict of interest is defined 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 an application if he or she 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 school district or is a board member.
- You have received fees for services from a school district within the past year.
- You have a contractual disagreement with a school district or its management.

Please complete the provided conflict of interest form in advance of the panel session; forms will be collected no later than the beginning of the meeting. **Conflicts of interest must be disclosed prior to the panel review. Please contact Arts and Culture staff in advance of the session if you have conflicts of interest or if you have questions about this policy.**

HONORARIUM

In appreciation of the time and energy panelists dedicate to the panel review process, panelists receive an honorarium of \$350. An invoice form will be provided and collected at the beginning of each panel meeting.

To receive the honorarium **panelist are required to register for an LA County vendor number prior to submitting an invoice.** Instructions for registering as a vendor can be found on our [website](#). The honorarium

check will be mailed to the address in the vendor registration within 4-6 weeks of submission of the invoice unless direct deposit has been set up. *If you currently have a LA County vendor number, there is no need to re-register. Please confirm your mailing address is up to date.*

PANEL DAY PREPARATION

Panel Meeting and Orientation

All panel meetings and panelist orientations will take place virtually via the private Zoom link that will be provided. To support clear communication, consider logging in online for video and calling in for audio via phone.

Arts and Culture staff will host a panel orientation. It is highly recommended that you participate in this orientation if you are a first-time panelist. Directions for participation will be provided. *If you are unable to attend the live meeting, a recording will be available and distributed following the meeting.*

Panel Orientation
Thursday, April 9th
4:00-5:00 pm

Panel Review and Grant Portal

Prior to the panel meeting **please read and evaluate all applications that you have been assigned**. Panelists are expected to be familiar with the contents of each application, submit comments, and provide preliminary scores based on the review criteria in advance of the meeting. No time will be provided for reading applications on the day of the panel meeting. There are no lead readers. **The preliminary review, comments, and scores must be completed 48 hours prior to the meeting.** This is to assist us in completing the review in the virtual format.

Panelists should evaluate the application in light of the Arts and Culture's review criteria (page 8) and your knowledge of the arts education field. **Each application should be considered on its own merits.**

We require that you enter all scores and comments directly into the Panelist Evaluation Form provided through the SurveyMonkey Apply portal.

All applications assigned to your panel(s) are viewable in your panelist Review Dashboard in the Apply (apply-lacdac.smapply.io/). Simply click 'Start' next to the Advancement Grant Panel Review section to access your list of assigned applications. Read, review, and submit preliminary scoring decisions for each application **prior to your panel meeting on the panel evaluation form in Apply**. Following your assessment of all assigned applications, it is **recommended that you download each application and your submitted panelist evaluation forms from the portal** in order to easily access the application materials, comments, and preliminary scores during the meeting. The day of the panel meeting, panelists should have all materials available either as printed copies or by accessing the materials digitally using a personal laptop or other electronic device via the downloaded applications or wireless connection in Apply.

If you have questions about an application, please request clarification from Arts and Culture staff rather than contacting the applicant.

Important Reminders

Prior to the day of the panel, please be sure to:

- Complete the Conflict of Interest Form.
- Complete the Payment Invoice Form
- Submit these forms and your comments and scores 48 hours before the panel discussion.

On the day of the panel, please be ready with:

- A laptop, tablet or iPad to access each application and
- Preliminary scores and comments for each application are entered into the Apply portal.
- It is recommended that you download the PDF copies of the panelist evaluation forms in case of any issues with internet connectivity during the meeting.

PANEL MEETING LOGISTICS

Please remember to have access to your reviewed applications and completed evaluation forms on the day of the panel meeting.

Arts and Culture staff will moderate the panel meeting. Staff who serve as district liaisons may be present during the panel conversation as listeners as well a staff notetaker.

- Staff and panelists introduce themselves. The moderator will confirm the collection of conflict of interest forms and honorarium invoices.
- Panelists will receive a document the morning of the panel meeting that includes the preliminary panel comments and scores and an overview of the applications requiring additional discussion.
- All applications with a wide range of scores will be discussed as a group for a maximum of 15 minutes.
- Panelists may request discussion of an application that may not have a wide range of scores.
- All panelists discuss each applicant's alignment to the review criteria and provide comments on each application being discussed.
- Following discussion of each application, panelists report a final score to the notetaker.
- After all applications have been reviewed, the moderator will average the scores and generate a table with the reported scores, ranked from highest to lowest. Each panelist reviews their scores of each applicant for accuracy.
- If there is still a wide disparity between the highest and lowest score given to an application, additional discussion and individual score adjustments may be made. Panelists as a body may also elect to raise the score of an applicant. When consensus is reached the moderator tallies final scores and final score sheets are re-submitted in Apply.

At the conclusion of the panel meeting, panelists share ideas for improving the process. Arts and Culture values the perspectives of panelists and relies upon them to suggest ways to make this public grant program more responsive to applicants' needs.

PANEL MEETING COMMENTS

It is part of Arts and Culture's mandate to foster excellence in the arts in the County of Los Angeles. Therefore, the Department views the peer panel process as not only a means to allocate grant funds but also to assist in the growth of the school districts through helpful feedback about their management and programs. Comments and advice given by a panel of peers carries tremendous weight with the applicants.

Arts and Culture encourages panel comments that are balanced, acknowledge strengths and identify weaknesses of the application, offer constructive suggestions for improvement, and convey respect at all times.

The Arts and Culture staff will take notes on comments made during the panel meeting. Comments are not attributed to specific panelists. Applicants are encouraged to make phone appointments with the staff to discuss panel comments.

REVIEW CRITERIA AND SCORING SCALE

All Funding Requests must demonstrate the following to be eligible for funding:

Criterion 1: STRATEGIC DIRECTION (35 points maximum)

Arts education goal(s) for the upcoming year are described in detail and are included in an active district plan such as the Strategic Plan for Arts Education or the Local Control Accountability Plan and align with the Arts Ed Blueprint. All district plan(s) are clearly cited. There is a compelling justification of why this is the right time to focus on this aspect of the district's arts plan, how this project builds upon past successes, and how it moves the district towards providing arts education for all students – and particularly those who have been historically and systematically excluded or precluded. It is clear how the project will initiate or expand arts education in the district. The proposed project is clearly aimed at generating resources, practices, skills, or knowledge that will be sustained beyond the term of the grant.

Outstanding	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor	Doesn't Qualify
33-35	29-32	25-28	21-24	1-20	0

Criterion 2: QUALITY OF PROJECT PLAN (30 points maximum)

The project is thoughtfully designed. The project plan identifies specific activities that can be realistically accomplished with the designated resources and timeline. The project plan proposes specific tactics to support young people who have been historically and systematically excluded or precluded from participation in arts learning in ways that are culturally relevant, and responsive to the students to be served.

Outstanding	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor	Doesn't Qualify
28-30	24-27	21-23	16-20	1-15	0

Criterion 3: QUALITY OF PROJECT EVALUATION (10 points maximum)

The project has measurable goals and an appropriate evaluation methodology in place that uses qualitative and quantitative data to assess changes in the scale, quality, or equity of arts instruction provided in the school district.

Outstanding	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor	Doesn't Qualify
10	9	7-8	4-6	1-3	0

Criterion 4: PERSONNEL CAPACITY (15 points maximum)

Professional staff are in place to manage and implement the project. There is evidence of support from multiple levels of district leadership. Staff or community partners providing student instruction or professional development for educators have demonstrated capacity to engage participants in diverse and culturally responsive learning experiences. The roles and responsibilities of the staff, district administration, and proposed partners are clearly defined.

Outstanding	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor	Doesn't Qualify
15	13-14	11-12	8-10	1-7	0

Criterion 5: FISCAL CAPACITY (10 points maximum)

Project expenses are clearly described and calculated accurately. Specific activities have been appropriately budgeted. A minimum of one-to-one matching funds are committed and identified.

Outstanding	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor	Doesn't Qualify
10	9	7-8	4-6	1-3	0

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

APPLICATION REVIEW

Q: I don't think this application is eligible, based on my reading of the guidelines. Should I still review it?

A: Yes. If the consensus of panelists is that the application is ineligible, it will not be considered.

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 merit, not perceived need.

Q: Can I factor into the scoring any misspellings, poor grammar, etc.?

A: While a poorly presented application does impact scoring insofar as it fails to convey vital information, do not make any point deductions based on "looks" alone.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Q: I know the district and school staff. Is there a conflict of interest?

A: If you feel capable of objectively assessing the school district and you have not materially benefited from your association with them for the past 12 months, there is no conflict of interest.

Q: I've been in discussions with the district'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 score their application.

LOGISTICS

Q: May I keep the applications after the session?

A: Yes. However, staff will collect the evaluation forms at the end of the panel meeting.

EMERGENCIES

Q: It is the morning of the panel. I or my child is severely ill. What do I do?

A: While it is important to have all panelists present, if you can't attend, you can't. In advance of the session, please leave a voicemail at (213) 379-6691 or send an email to kstinnett@arts.lacounty.gov.