



MEMORANDUM

Date: February 25, 2025
To: CAC Board of Trustees
From: CAC Grantmaking Team
Re: 2026 Grantmaking Objectives

SUMMARY

In preparation for the forthcoming 2026 grant cycle, CAC has set the following objectives to guide our work. These objectives are rooted in robust grant recipient feedback, a national funder scan research project, and strategic alignment with plans for CAC's third levy cycle.

BOARD ACTION

We seek the Board's discussion and approval of these objectives as we develop grant guidelines and policies for public feedback and the Board's approval this spring.

Background

Over the last year, CAC held its **Grantee Connect Series**, a listening and learning project with our grant recipients. The series focused on grantee engagement with an emphasis on short-term improvements to our grantmaking practices and gathering feedback to inform long-range planning. A process summary outlines key learnings from our anonymous grantee survey and ongoing nonprofit roundtables, as well as details on methodology, links to the survey instrument, and results.

In 2024, CAC also conducted **broad research on nine arts and culture funders** across the United States that make grants using public funds. This included a robust website analysis, interviews with key staff members at each organization, and the development of summary profiles and learnings to inform our work.

Together, these projects **increased grantee engagement and feedback**, building on CAC's ongoing practices and relationship with the nonprofits we fund. As we look to the next grant cycle (2026), we have developed a set of objectives to guide CAC's planning, rooted in the findings of this work and our continued commitment to evaluate and align our core grant programs to CAC's purpose.

2026 Grantmaking Snapshot

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| Grant Period: | January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026 |
| Core programs: | 2026-27 General Operating Support, 2026 Project Support |
| Anticipated applicants: | Approximately 300 Cuyahoga County-based nonprofits |
| Key dates: | <p>Spring 2025: Board approves policies within 2026 grant guidelines.</p> <p>Summer 2025: Applications due, CAC staff reviews applicant eligibility, utilizing peer panel of outside experts to assess some applications.</p> <p>Fall 2025: Board sets grantmaking allocation, by program.</p> <p>Winter 2025: Board reviews and approves grants at a public Board meeting</p> |
| Grantmaking budget: | To be determined – based on future tax revenue collections and Board allocations (Q3 + Q4 2025) |

2026 Grantmaking Objectives

The following objectives will guide the development of 2026 grantmaking guidelines/policies for Board of Trustees review, discussion and approval.

- 1) **Prioritize consistent and reliable operating support funding** for Cuyahoga County arts and culture nonprofits.

This may include:

- Prioritizing operating support for eligible Cuyahoga County nonprofits **with a primary mission of arts and culture**.
- Continuing **multi-year commitments for operating support grant recipients** (same grant amount for two years, e.g. 2026 and 2027).
- Utilizing more **predictable funding categories**, based on budget size, across programs.
- Continuing or implementing **appropriate caps and floors** across programs, to ensure equitable distribution of grant funds.
- Folding eligible **Cultural Heritage** grantees into operating support grants.
- Continuing to fund nonprofits **without a primary mission of arts and culture**, but with a reduced maximum grant amount.

- 2) Build **efficient and effective grantmaking practices** to the benefit of grant applicants and current grantees.

This may include:

- Further **streamlining and simplifying grant applications and reporting**, with a focus on trust-based philanthropy and right-sized expectations for applicants and grantees.

- Combining CAC’s two-step **eligibility check and application** processes into one cohesive process.
- Providing grant team members more efficient structures to prioritize **relationship-building** and focus on CAC’s **core mission** – funding arts and cultural nonprofits.

3) **Increase awareness and transparency** around CAC’s purpose, authority, and decision-making processes.

This may include:

- Continuing **communications efforts** to underscore CAC’s role/impact in the funding/arts community, authority, and purpose.
- Reviewing and **sharing** around CAC’s process of determining an organization’s eligibility for CAC funding and specific grant programs, including how CAC determines an organization’s primary mission and definitions of arts and culture as outlined in Ohio Revised Code.
- Refining **tools to explain grant calculations**.

4) **Continue CAC’s emphasis on public benefit** by funding nonprofits and programs that connect all Cuyahoga County residents with arts and cultural experiences.

This may include:

- Maintaining CAC’s **three core funding priorities**: public benefit, artistic and cultural vibrancy, and organizational capacity.
- Using CAC’s transparent application and further simplified **panel review process** for Project Support.
- **Setting goals** and using other grantmaking processes, with a focus on public benefit, to assess grantees and share their impact with the public.
- Investing appropriately to ensure that the **public is aware of CAC-funded programs** and events.

5) **Deepen connection and trust with our grant recipients** through ongoing listening, conversations, and feedback and evaluation processes.

This may include:

- Continuing CAC’s **grantee connect meetups**, and other listening opportunities.
- Focusing on **co-creation and responsive technical** assistance throughout the grant cycle/process.
- Leveraging **data and reporting responses** to provide deeper insights to its grantmaking and the challenges/opportunities facing CAC grantees.