



Regular Meeting of the
Cuyahoga Arts & Culture Board of Trustees
Cleveland Public Library - Main Branch, Louis Stokes Wing, 2nd Floor
325 Superior Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44114
Wednesday, November 12, 2025, 4:00 pm

- 1. Opening of the Meeting**
 - a. Call to order
 - b. Roll call
 - c. Auditor of State - Presentation of 2024 Audit Award
 - d. **Action:** Motion to approve September 25, 2025 minutes

- 2. Public Comment on Today's Agenda**

- 3. Executive Director's Report**

- 4. Action Items and Reports – Finance and General Business**
 - a. Finance Report
 - b. **Action:** Approval of a contract with Survey Monkey Apply
 - c. **Action:** Approval to accept a grant from The Cleveland Foundation (The Educational Foundation of America)
 - d. **Action:** Approval of 2026 Board meeting schedule

- 5. Action Items and Reports – Grantmaking**
 - a. 2026 Grantmaking
 - i. **Action:** Approval of 2026 General Operating Support grants
 - ii. **Action:** Approval of 2026 Project Support scores and grants
 - iii. **Action:** Approval of 2026 SMU Data Arts grant
 - iv. **Action:** Approval of 2026 grant to Neighborhood Connections
 - v. **Action:** Approval of 2026 grant to Assembly for the Arts

- 6. Public Comment on CAC Business**

- 7. Adjourn**

Next Regular Meeting: Wednesday, December 17, 2025 at 3:30 pm



Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees
Thursday, September 25, 2025

A meeting of the Cuyahoga Arts & Culture (CAC) Board of Trustees was called to order at 4:03 pm at the Cleveland Public Library, Louis Stokes Wing, 2nd Floor Learning Center, 325 Superior Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

The roll call showed that Trustees Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhart and Vernaci were present. It was determined that there was a quorum. Trustee Scott Taylor arrived at 4:10.

Also in attendance were: Jill Paulsen, Executive Director and CAC staff.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Action: To approve the minutes of the April 16, 2025 Annual Meeting of the Board of Trustees.

Motion by – Trustee Blakemore

Second by – Trustee DiCosimo

Vote: To approve the minutes of the April 16, 2025 Annual Meeting of the Board of Trustees.

Ayes: Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhart, Vernaci.

The motion carried.

Action: To approve the minutes of the August 13, 2025 Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees.

Motion by – Trustee Vernaci

Second by – Trustee DiCosimo

Vote: To approve the minutes of the August 13, 2025, Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees.

Ayes: Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhart, Vernaci.

The motion carried.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT ON MEETING AGENDA ITEMS

There was no public comment on today's agenda.

3. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. Paulsen thanked everyone for joining her and the Board. Ms. Paulsen's remarks can be found in the board materials on page 9.

4. CONNECT WITH CULTURE

Mary Ann Ponce from Chagrin Documentary Film Festival gave an overview of her organization to the Board.

5. FINANCE AND ADMISTRATIVE MATTERS

Finance Report

Ms. Harris stated that tax revenue through August was \$12,372,311. This is \$783,994 (6.77%) above budget and \$6.5mil. above the same period in 2024, as the result of the increased tax on cigarettes. She added that on a per unit rate of comparison, the sale of cigarettes at the wholesale level is 2.06% lower than it was for the same period in 2024. She noted that the monthly rate can vary significantly, and the year-to-date figure is always used to update long term forecasts for projected future tax receipts.

She stated interest revenue was \$362,706 and that non-grant expenditures through August were \$656,400. Non-grant expenditures are under budget due to timing of payments.

Ms. Harris said that interest revenue is tracking below budget due to the withdrawal of funds invested earlier in the year, necessary for cash flow to make grant payments. She added that while deposits have increased due to the new tax, interest rates have gone down since last year, meaning that CAC is generating less interest revenue. She added that with anticipated additional cuts by the Federal Reserve in the next year, CAC expects to continue to see less favorable rates of return in the investments its limited to by the Ohio Revised Code.

Ms. Harris said the Audit and Finance Advisory Committee met on July 9. The committee reviewed the Committee Charter and Internal Financial Controls Policy and Procedures. There were no changes recommended to the policies. The committee agreed that adding an additional section to the monthly financial report to track cigarette unit history and year-over-year changes (vs. dollars) will help to track and inform forecasts resulting from the increased unit tax. She noted that CAC's annual audit should be released in the coming weeks.

Administrative Matters: Personnel Report

Ms. Paulsen stated that Eric Hoffman joined CAC in July as a grants manager and referred the Board to the personnel report that she provided to the Board. She asked for a motion to approve the report.

Action: To approve the personnel report dated September 25, 2025.

Motion by – Trustee Scott Taylor

Second by – Trustee Vernaci

Discussion: None

Vote to approve the personnel report dated September 25, 2025.

Ayes: Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhardt, Scott Taylor, Vernaci.

The motion carried.

Administrative Matters: Contract for Services

Ms. Paulsen stated she was seeking the Board's approval to enter into a contract with Elizabeth Russell, LLC for communications services to support Board and staff work in the amount of \$21,000. Ms. Paulsen noted that these services were included in the FY25 budget.

Action: To approve the contract with Elizabeth Russell, LLC in the amount of \$21,000 for communications services to support the Board and staff.

Motion by – Trustee Blakemore

Second by – Trustee DiCosimo

Discussion: None

Vote to approve the contract with Elizabeth Russell, LLC in the amount of \$21,000 for communications services to support the Board and staff.

Ayes: Blakemore, DiCosimo, Isenhardt, Scott Taylor, Vernaci.

The motion carried.

6. GRANTMAKING ITEMS

Discussion of Grant Allocation Strategy

Ms. Paulsen reviewed the memo on page 19 of the materials provided to the Board in advance of the meeting to facilitate a discussion related to the allocation to grant programs for 2026-2027. She stated that CAC's goal is to provide stability for the nonprofits CAC funds, as CAC manages a finite resource which will decline annually over the ten-year levy period.

The Board held a discussion on this topic and strategy and posed the following questions:

Is CAC prepared if revenues come much lower than the current ten-year projection?

Yes, CAC reviews and adjusts long-term projections as revenue is received. If collected revenues are much higher or lower than projected over the next two years, the Board would need to take this into account for the following allocation period 2028-2029.

How did you arrive at the projection of \$137 million over the ten-year period?

CAC uses a three-year look back at the cigarette revenue on a year-over-year basis. For the current projection the most recent data for 2025 is being used, which is only 8 months, averaged with the tax receipt changes (all decreases) from the prior periods. This is then applied moving forward. This figure is always changing to reflect the most recent three-year average.

How would CAC pivot if tax receipts are very different than projections? Is there a strategy for this?

The CAC board closely follows the financial implications of the agency's tax revenue projections at every meeting and, as a result, is able to revisit its planned grant allocation every two years. The revenue decrease is a slow-moving change, but cumulative over time. CAC has been using this framework since its inception but this time considering the decrease in revenue over time with the goal in mind of having a level grant allocation over time, versus a declining one.

What are we hearing from grant recipients regarding their respective financial positions? What does CAC need to do given the current environment?

Arts and culture grantees continue to share that dollars are tighter, on par with other nonprofit sectors. Our recommendation is to invest long term so we can be the steady, reliable source of multi-year funding. There will always be more of a need than we could ever address.

7. PUBLIC COMMENT ON CAC BUSINESS

No public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Trustee Blakemore, seconded by Trustee Scott Taylor, to adjourn the meeting.

Vote: all Ayes. The motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 5:21 pm.

Attest:

Leonard DiCosimo, Secretary, Board of Trustees

CAC Executive Director's Report

November 12, 2025

Welcome to CAC's November Board of Trustees meeting.

Today we celebrate our new and returning grant recipients. At this meeting, CAC will approve our 2026 grantmaking. I thank our applicants and CAC staff for the many months of work it took to get to today. I appreciate the grantmaking team's focus on customer service and commitment to providing hundreds of supportive technical assistance touch points to applicants.

In preparation for our meeting, please focus your attention on the slate of Board actions, including review and approval of CAC's core work: 2026 General Operating Support and Project Support grants. In addition, we recommend three program grants to Assembly for the Arts (artist programming), Neighborhood Connections (resident-led projects), and SMU DataArts (grantee data system).

As you will read in the memos that follow, we recommend **311 grants totaling \$12.9M for 2026**. This recommendation is in line with CAC's long-term strategy to make grant commitments that enable our agency to keep its annual grantmaking as steady as possible for the next ten years.

Respectfully,

Jill Paulsen
Executive Director

Updates from CAC Staff

November 12, 2025

CAC's work is rooted in our [10-year community planning process](#) that identifies the two constituents that we must serve as: 1) nonprofit arts organizations; and 2) the residents of Cuyahoga County. Every year, staff creates a [work plan](#) that is grounded in this framework and CAC's [Mission, Vision & Values](#).

What follows is a brief update on the progress made since the last regular Board meeting in September.

1. GRANTMAKING

2025 Core Grants: General Operating Support, Cultural Heritage, Project Support

General Operating Support and Cultural Heritage grantees will begin to access and complete their 2025 Year-End Reports in early December. These are the final reports in the two-year grant cycle and release the remaining grant funds.

2025 Project Support grants continue; staff issues advance payments and approves reports throughout the year as projects take place. All Project Support grantees will complete their 2025 projects by year-end, with reports due by January 31, 2026. In December, CAC will hold a final report-out for current Project Support grant recipients as a reporting option for grants of \$5,000 or less.

The team continues to manage reporting requirements, grant payments, and site visits to strengthen relationships with grantees and help them succeed in our process.

2026 Core Grants: General Operating Support and Project Support

In September, CAC held online written panel reviews, in accordance with the grant guidelines for 2026 Project Support. Panel scores have been submitted and recommended grant amounts have been calculated. Pending approval, grant recipients will attend orientation workshops to kick off the grant year in January.

For 2026, General Operating Support grantees who met eligibility criteria were automatically recommended for a grant. Pending approval, grant recipients will set 2026 Goals which are due to CAC on January 31, 2026 and release initial grant payments.

At the November meeting, the CAC Board will be asked to approve **308 grants totaling \$12,343,477** for the 2026 grant cycle, distributed across General Operating Support and Project Support. Details on the grantmaking recommendations and the panel process are included in a memo in this packet.

Other Programming Grants: Resident-Led & Support for Artists

2025: CAC continues to co-fund resident-led arts and cultural projects in Cleveland and East Cleveland through a grant to [Neighborhood Connections](#). The next [Action Grants](#) will be announced in November. The final Arts & Culture Network Night will take place Thursday, November 20 from 6-8 pm at Future Ink Graphics inside the Pivot Center in Ohio City. All are welcome.

Assembly for the Arts continues to design and manage programs funded by CAC's Support for Artists grant. The Creative Impact Fund will award 30 artists with \$5,000-\$10,000 in flexible funding in November. The Boost Fund, which funds a total of 140 Cuyahoga County artists with \$1,500 each in 2025, will announce a final round of recipients in December.

2026: For next year, CAC recommends a grant to Neighborhood Connections for \$50,000 to fund resident-led arts and culture projects in Cleveland and East Cleveland. CAC also recommends a grant to Assembly for the Arts for a 2026 Support for Artists in the amount of \$500,000. See the memo in this packet for details, along with information on CAC’s grant to SMU Data Arts for an ongoing grantee data tracking platform.

2. COMMUNICATIONS

Sharing the Impact of Public Funding

CAC continues to create and promote tools for our grantees to tell the story of how public funding from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture has impacted their organization and community. These include:

- Grantee Communications Toolkit: CAC continues to create and refine tools to help grantees acknowledge CAC funding. Included in this toolkit are several CAC Fact Sheets, all of which are also available on the new FAQ page.
- ClevelandArtsEvents.com: Promotion of the Cleveland Arts Events website, where CAC grantees are required to post their CAC-funded programs and events, is yielding great results. Through October, the site has been visited by more than 84,000 unique users, a 5% increase over 2024. More than 2,200 events have been posted on the site by CAC grantees and other groups in 2025.

Media Placements

In addition to consistent crediting for Cuyahoga Arts & Culture in the media by our partners, below is a sample of recent media clips focused on CAC’s work:

- [Painting the Town: Shaker Arts Council unveils nine new art-wrapped utility boxes](#) – FreshWater Cleveland (September 18, 2025)
- [Collaboration between funders, groups key to health of arts, leaders say](#) – Akron Beacon Journal (September 18, 2025)
- [AsiaTown’s Mid-Autumn Festival brings art, community and permanence to once-empty lot – The Land](#) (October 2, 2025)

3. EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK AND OPERATIONS

Connecting with Community and Building Our Capacity

CAC staff presented at or participated in the following workshops, peer groups, and trainings:

- Arts Midwest – Culture Bearers Award Panelist, Dayvon
- Creative Ohio – Advocacy Leadership Institute (completed), Maya
- Creative Ohio – Regional Directors, Jill
- National Taxing Authority Working Group, Jill
- Philanthropy Ohio Conference, Jake
- Race Forward – Building Racial Equity Foundations, Decision-Making for Racial Equity, Dayvon
- Urban Arts Coalition – National Directors, Jill

FINANCIAL UPDATE

2025 YTD

Revenue. Tax revenue through October 31 was \$15,646,800. This is \$850,569 (5.75%) above forecast. Interest revenue through October was \$430,451, which is \$42,549 below forecast. The overall expected yield on investments, while still strong, is approximately 1% less than it was a year ago with the potential for additional interest rate cuts in the future.

Revenue Trends. Year-over-year unit sales of cigarettes at the wholesale level YTD have decreased by 3.19% over the same period in 2024. The three-year rolling average of unit sales decrease is currently 7.6%.

Expenditure. The majority of CAC's budget is comprised of 2025 grants which were approved in November and December 2024. These grants are accrued at the beginning of the year and recognized on the balance sheet. Non-grant expenditures through October were \$828,987 and are tracking \$91,942 below budget primarily due to the timing of payments and a staff opening earlier in the year.

Investments. As of October 31, CAC's general fund is invested as follows:

- STAR Ohio: \$5,602,952 (yield 4.22%)
- RedTree Investment Group: \$8,772,543 (yield 4.14%)

Budget Projections at Year End

It is projected that CAC will end 2025 with tax receipts of approximately \$18.8M, which is nearly \$10M more than 2024, and approximately \$900k above the 2025 forecast revenue of \$17.9M.

Total expenditure is close to budget for most major categories. As is typical, in 2025 there were several organizations that could not complete their 2025 grant obligations, and the forfeiture of their grants is reflected in the financial overview.

2026 Budget Preview

At the November 12 meeting, the Board will be asked to approve grants for 2026, which are the foundation of CAC's 2026 budget, with grants comprising more than 92% of the budget.

Total revenue for 2026 is estimated to be \$18.7M (\$18.1M excise tax, \$600k interest). This incorporates the expectation of decreases in demand for cigarettes, using a 3-year average lookback at the year-over-year decline in sales of cigarettes in Cuyahoga County. For the purposes of this forecast, a 7.85% decrease in tax revenue was used, determined by a three-year, year-over-year average of the decrease in tax receipts from 2022-2025 (EST).

Expenses are estimated to be \$14M inclusive of all grantmaking and administrative costs.

2026 Budget (Draft) and 2025 Budget Comparison

	Cuyahoga Arts & Culture 2026 vs. 2025 Budget		
	2026 Budget Draft	2025 Budget Adopted	Change
Income			
Tax Revenue	18,093,593	17,919,250	174,343
Interest	600,000	600,000	0
Other	25,000	26,000	-1,000
Total Income	18,718,593	18,545,250	173,343
Expenses			
Salaries, Wages and Benefits	845,000	821,261	23,739
Facilities, Supplies, Equipment	66,385	65,275	1,110
Professional Fees	135,998	139,002	-3,004
A & C Management	67,600	65,000	2,600
Grant Awards	12,907,977	11,325,847	1,582,130
Depreciation Expense	1,300	1,300	0
Total Expenses	14,024,260	12,417,685	1,606,575
Net Revenue	4,694,333	6,127,565	-1,433,232

In December, staff will finalize team objectives for 2026. This work will help us build the remainder of the 2026 budget, which will be presented to the Board for approval on December 17.

Cuyahoga Arts & Culture				
Through 10/31/2025				
	Actual YTD	Budget YTD	\$ Over/Under Budget	% of Budget
Ordinary Revenue/Expenditures				
Revenue				
Excise Tax	\$ 15,646,800	\$ 14,796,231	\$ 850,569	105.75%
Interest	\$ 430,451	\$ 473,000	\$ (42,549)	91.00%
Other revenue	\$ 35,000	\$ 26,000	\$ 9,000	134.6%
Total Revenue	\$ 16,112,250	\$ 15,295,231	\$ 817,019	105.34%
Expenditures				
Salaries, Wages and Benefits	\$ 657,809	\$ 684,642	\$ (26,834)	96.1%
Grantmaking Expenses	\$ 43,965	\$ 61,783	\$ (17,819)	71.2%
Grants**	\$ 11,245,611	\$ 11,325,847	\$ (80,236)	99.3%
Facilities, Supplies, Equipment	\$ 49,797	\$ 57,218	\$ (7,421)	87.0%
Professional Fees	\$ 77,416	\$ 116,202	\$ (38,786)	66.6%
Depreciation	\$ -	\$ 1,083	\$ (1,083)	
Total Expenditures	\$ 12,074,598	\$ 12,246,776	\$ (172,178)	98.6%
Net Ordinary Revenue	\$ 4,037,652	\$ 3,048,455	\$ 989,197	

** Outstanding 2025 grant obligations are on the balance sheet.

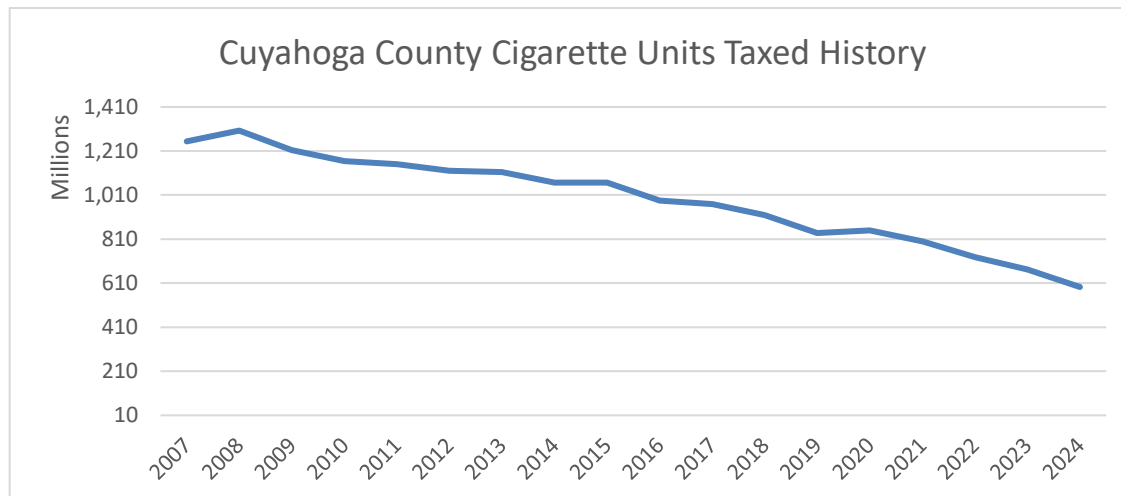
Non-grant cash disbursements YTD	\$ 828,987	\$ 920,929	\$ (91,942)
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**Cuyahoga Arts and Culture
Balance Sheet
As of October 31, 2025**

	Total
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	
KeyBank	83,493.67
RedTree (U.S.Bank)	8,772,542.72
Star Ohio	5,602,952.11
Total Bank Accounts	\$ 14,458,989
Accounts Receivable	
11000 Accounts Receivable	\$ 1,630,733
Total Accounts Receivable	\$ 1,630,733
Other Current Assets	
12100 Prepaid Expenses	5,935.80
Total for Other Current Assets	\$5,935.80
Total Current Assets	\$ 16,095,657
Fixed Assets	
15000 Furniture and Equipment	
17000 Accumulated Depreciation	\$ 7,783
Total Fixed Assets	\$ (1,773)
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 6,010
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	
Liabilities	\$ 16,101,667
Current Liabilities	
Other Current Liabilities	
24000 Payroll Liabilities	\$ 1,173
24200 GOS Grants	\$ 908,844
24300 PS and CH Grants	\$ 681,557
24400 SFA and Other (CC) Grants	\$ 87,029
Total Other Current Liabilities	\$ 1,678,603
Total Current Liabilities	\$ 1,678,603
Total Liabilities	\$ 1,678,603
Equity	
32000 General Fund	\$ 10,385,412
Net Income	4,037,652
Total Equity	\$ 14,423,064
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	\$ 16,101,667

CIGARETTE TAX RECEIPTS FY 24 VS FY 25 YTD					Per Unit Comparison		
Month	2024	2025	2025 \$VAR	24/25 % VAR \$	Units 2024	Units 2025	24/25 % VAR
JANUARY	\$ 720,680.19	\$ 779,850	\$ 59,170	8.2%	48,045,346	51,990,000	8.2%
FEBRUARY	\$ 585,197.39	\$ 944,786	\$ 359,588	61.4%	39,013,159	26,993,877	-30.8%
MARCH	\$ 601,562	\$ 1,501,604	\$ 900,042	149.6%	40,104,135	42,902,970	7.0%
APRIL	\$ 762,671	\$ 2,090,165	\$ 1,327,494	174.1%	50,844,755	59,718,999	17.5%
MAY	\$ 823,926	\$ 1,834,470	\$ 1,010,545	122.6%	54,928,378	52,413,441	-4.6%
JUNE	\$ 1,302,380	\$ 3,005,148	\$ 1,702,767	130.7%	86,825,348	85,861,361	-1.1%
JULY	\$ 274,154	\$ 580,403	\$ 306,250	111.7%	18,276,912	16,582,956	-9.3%
AUGUST	\$ 798,357	\$ 1,635,885	\$ 837,528	104.9%	53,223,783	46,739,577	-12.2%
SEPTEMBER	\$ 762,716	\$ 1,643,755	\$ 881,039	116%	50,847,755	46,964,441	-7.6%
OCTOBER	\$ 755,751	\$ 1,630,733	\$ 874,982	116%	50,383,384	46,592,366	-7.5%
NOVEMBER	\$ 659,755						
DECEMBER	\$ 842,362						
TOTALS	\$ 8,889,512	\$ 15,646,800	\$ 8,259,405	211.8%	492,492,955	476,759,988	-3.19%

Historical Unit Sales of Cigarettes for Cuyahoga County				
Year	Actual	Units	Annual Change	3 year average
2007	\$ 18,815,996	1,254,399,737		
2008	\$ 19,540,480	1,302,698,647	3.85%	
2009	\$ 18,222,183	1,214,812,200	-6.75%	
2010	\$ 17,456,610	1,163,773,972	-4.20%	
2011	\$ 17,241,240	1,149,415,970	-1.23%	-4.06%
2012	\$ 16,791,300	1,119,420,000	-2.61%	-2.68%
2013	\$ 16,719,606	1,114,640,400	-0.43%	-1.42%
2014	\$ 15,984,716	1,065,647,719	-4.40%	-2.48%
2015	\$ 15,986,647	1,065,776,471	0.01%	-1.60%
2016	\$ 14,767,137	984,475,779	-7.63%	-4.00%
2017	\$ 14,533,031	968,868,731	-1.59%	-3.07%
2018	\$ 13,799,929	919,995,234	-5.04%	-4.75%
2019	\$ 12,552,790	836,852,635	-9.04%	-5.22%
2020	\$ 12,732,464	848,830,953	1.43%	-4.22%
2021	\$ 12,009,236	800,615,733	-5.68%	-4.43%
2022	\$ 10,931,382	728,758,800	-8.98%	-4.41%
2023	\$ 10,083,086	672,205,752	-7.76%	-7.47%
2024	\$ 8,889,512	592,634,131	-11.84%	-9.52%
2025 YTD/Oct.	\$ 15,646,800	476,759,988	-3.19%	-7.60%





MEMORANDUM

Date: November 12, 2025
To: CAC Board of Trustees
From: CAC Grantmaking Team
Re: 2026 Grants: General Operating Support & Project Support

SUMMARY

This year, CAC accepted applications to the 2026-27 General Operating Support (GOS) and 2026 Project Support (PS) grant programs and carried out the application and panel review processes as outlined in the grant guidelines.

For 2026, CAC recommends **308 grants totaling \$12,343,477, including:**

- 152 General Operating Support grants totaling \$11,441,500
- 156 Project Support grants totaling \$901,977

BOARD ACTION

Approve 2026 grant amounts and applicable grant panel scores.

I. BACKGROUND

At its February 2025 meeting, the Board **approved 2026 Grantmaking Objectives** to guide the development of grantmaking guidelines/policies for Board of Trustees review, discussion and approval at the April 16 meeting. These included:

- 1) **Prioritize consistent and reliable operating support funding** for Cuyahoga County arts and culture nonprofits.
- 2) Build **efficient and effective grantmaking practices** to the benefit of grant applicants and current grantees.
- 3) **Increase awareness and transparency** around CAC's purpose, authority, and decision-making processes.
- 4) **Continue CAC's emphasis on public benefit** by funding arts and culture nonprofits and programs that connect all Cuyahoga County residents with arts and cultural experiences.
- 5) **Deepen connection and trust with our grant recipients** through ongoing listening, conversations, and feedback and evaluation processes.

At its April 2025 meeting, the Board **approved grantmaking guidelines** for the 2026-27 General Operating Support and 2026 Project Support grant programs. CAC launched the application process in May 2025, and administered the grant programs as detailed in those documents and as outlined below:

- **2026-27 General Operating Support** is core to CAC’s mission and provides meaningful, multi-year flexible support to core mission arts and culture nonprofits based in and serving the residents of Cuyahoga County. The program accepted applications from eligible nonprofit organizations of all sizes with a demonstrated core mission of arts and culture. Grants may range from \$5,000 up to \$1,000,000 based on organizations’ budget sizes, financials, staffing, and CAC’s available funding.
- **2026 Project Support** promotes public access and supports the breadth of arts and culture programming in Cuyahoga County. Nonprofits in Cuyahoga County with or without a demonstrated core mission of arts and culture that meet CAC’s guidelines could apply for 2026 Project Support funding, including new applicants. Grants may range from \$1,000 up to \$7,500.

At its September 2025 meeting, the Board **affirmed a long-term grantmaking strategy** that prioritizes consistent and predictable operating support for Cuyahoga County arts and culture nonprofits over the next decade. To achieve this goal, the Board agreed that CAC must allocate a grantmaking investment for 2026 and 2027 that allows CAC to sustain a level annual investment through 2035. This proposed grant funding level of approximately \$12.9M each year is expected to be sustainable for the life of this operating levy, providing a consistent grant allocation amount from 2026 through 2035. CAC receives revenue monthly and adjusts projections continuously throughout the year and levy cycle.

II. APPLICANT TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

From May through July, staff held a variety of technical assistance opportunities, workshops (virtual and in-person), and other materials to help applicants succeed with their 2026 application. This summer, those offerings included:

- Cuyahoga Arts & Culture Grant Opportunities Workshop
- Plante Moran: Understanding and Filing a 990 workshop
- Project Support application workshop
- General Operating Support application workshop
- SMU | DataArts – Getting Started with the Cultural Data Profile and Data at Work: Introduction to DataArts Analytic Tools workshops
- Virtual application “office hours” for applicants to meet one-on-one with CAC staff to address their organizations’ application and specific questions.

In all, more than 245 grantees and prospective applicants participated in these sessions. Staff also utilized emails and personal phone calls regarding technical assistance and reminders to help applicants and grantees navigate our process with ease.

III. APPLICANT POOL OVERVIEW

CAC welcomed new and returning applicants who met eligibility criteria to both the 2026-27 General Operating Support and 2026 Project Support grant programs. First-time applicants must apply through the Project Support grant program. This year, 355 nonprofits submitted applications, of which 315 were eligible to apply for funding. These include:

2026 Eligible Grant Applicant Summary	
Total Applicants	315
<i>Returning Applicants</i>	296 (94%)
<i>New Applicants</i>	19 (6%)

New in 2026, CAC opened the General Operating Support program to any eligible organization with a core mission of arts and culture, regardless of budget size and staffing structure. This resulted in 152 eligible applicants for the 2026 General Operating Support program, an increase from the current number of seventy (70) grant recipients in 2025. Most new applicants were current Project Support grant recipients with annual budgets of \$200,000 or less. Current Project Support grantees who were eligible for General Operating Support but chose to apply for Project Support in 2026 cited the ease of the Project Support grant, their own capacity, or the project-based nature of their programming as reasons they did not want to apply for General Operating Support. CAC will continue to evaluate the outcomes of this application cycle to inform its future planning.

IV. FUNDING CRITERIA

The funding criteria for CAC Project Support grants are **Public Benefit, Artistic & Cultural Vibrancy, and Organizational Capacity**. To reflect CAC’s role as a public funder – committed to using public dollars to benefit the public – CAC weighs Public Benefit more heavily than the other two funding criteria. Applicants are educated on the criteria through the grant guidelines and technical assistance, and Project Support panelists are trained to review applications using the criteria.

V. PROJECT SUPPORT PANEL REVIEW

As detailed in the guidelines, a panel of experts reviewed the applications based on CAC’s funding criteria. **Twenty-seven (27) qualified arts and culture professionals served as panelists for the 2026 Project Support grant panel process.** See the Panelist Memo in this packet for details.

Using panel as an educational tool

Panelists reviewed and scored each application in accordance with the funding criteria in the 2026 grant guidelines. All Project Support applicants will receive their scores and written comments from panelists, and they will be published on our website. The written feedback ensures a transparent and consistent review process and serves as an educational tool for current and future applicants.

Note: eligible applicants to the General Operating Support grant program were automatically recommended for a grant; there is no panel review process. GOS grant recipients have all previously participated in a CAC panel process, are vetted for eligibility every year, and are expected to demonstrate alignment with CAC's three funding priorities throughout the grant cycle during goal setting and reporting processes.

VI. CALCULATING GRANT AMOUNTS

For 2026-27 General Operating Support grants, eligible applicants were automatically recommended for funding. Grant recipients will set goals based on CAC's funding criteria and report on progress during the grant period. For Project Support grants, panelists reviewed each application against the funding criteria and provided a score using the scoring framework, as outlined in the guidelines.

General Operating Support

- Grants up to \$20,000 are determined using an **average of the revenue reported on the organization's two most recently completed IRS Form 990s**. If an organization files IRS Form 990-N (organizational revenues up to \$50,000), the grant amount is \$5,000.
- Grants from \$20,000 up to \$1,000,000 are determined using a **formula based on revenues of all organizations eligible for this grant range**. The formula was created by The Ohio State University for Ohio Arts Council's grant calculations. CAC has used the GOS formula since its inception in 2007.

Project Support

- Grant amounts are calculated based on the applicant's request amount, panel score, and CAC's available funds.
- **Maximum grant request amounts are determined by an organization's CAC grant history and budget size (as determined by an applicant's IRS 990 filing).**
 - First-time grantees and organizations completing IRS Form 990-N are eligible for up to \$5,000.
 - The maximum grant for other organizations is \$7,500.
 - Panel scores (on a 1-10 scale) are used to determine grant amounts. Applicants must receive an average score of at least 6 out of 10 to be recommended for funding. Applicants with higher scores receive a higher percentage of their grant request amount.

NEXT STEPS: November 12 Board Meeting

At the November 12 meeting, CAC's Board will vote on recommended 2026 grants and panel scores.

Combined, this slate is 308 grants totaling \$12,343,477 for the 2026 grant cycle.

See Appendix 1 for a list of all applicants' scores and recommended grant amounts. See Appendix 2 for a list of the organizations that will not be recommended for funding.

APPENDIX 1: Applicants Recommended for Funding (Grant Amounts and Scores, if applicable)

2026 General Operating Support

Organization	Grant Amount
Abrepaso Flamenco	\$ 6,000
AfricaHouse International	\$ 5,000
Apollo's Fire Baroque Orchestra	\$ 128,500
Aradhana Committee	\$ 20,000
Art House	\$ 38,308
Art of Me Productions	\$ 18,500
Art Therapy Studio	\$ 45,192
Artful	\$ 15,000
Artists Archives of the Western Reserve	\$ 25,863
Arts Impact	\$ 51,896
Arts Without Borders	\$ 5,000
Assembly for the Arts	\$ 52,769
Baseball Heritage Museum	\$ 20,000
Bay Village Community Band	\$ 5,000
BAYarts	\$ 54,077
Beck Center for the Arts	\$ 149,846
Berea Arts Fest	\$ 6,000
Blazing River Arts Group INC	\$ 5,000
BlueWater Chamber Orchestra	\$ 18,500
BorderLight	\$ 36,953
Brite Cleveland	\$ 20,000
Broadway School of Music and the Arts	\$ 32,867
Carolyn L. Farrell Foundation	\$ 16,500
Cassidy Theatre Inc.	\$ 20,000
Center for Arts-Inspired Learning	\$ 91,979
Chagrin Arts	\$ 10,000
Chagrin Documentary Film Festival	\$ 37,916
Chagrin Valley Little Theater	\$ 30,896
ChamberFest Cleveland	\$ 33,337
Children's Museum of Cleveland	\$ 110,088
Choral Arts Cleveland	\$ 5,000
City Ballet of Cleveland	\$ 10,000
CityMusic Cleveland	\$ 29,809
Cleveland Arts Prize	\$ 18,500
Cleveland Association of Black Storytellers	\$ 5,000
Cleveland Ballet	\$ 20,000

Cleveland Botanical Garden	\$ 196,311
Cleveland Chamber Choir	\$ 10,000
Cleveland Chamber Collective	\$ 5,000
Cleveland Chamber Music Society	\$ 16,500
Cleveland Chamber Symphony	\$ 5,000
Cleveland Classical Guitar Society	\$ 41,111
Cleveland Cultural Gardens	\$ 20,000
Cleveland Dance Project Company	\$ 5,000
Cleveland Institute of Art	\$ 481,419
Cleveland Institute of Music	\$ 513,690
Cleveland International Film Festival	\$ 112,830
Cleveland Jazz Orchestra	\$ 26,246
Cleveland Museum of Natural History	\$ 463,937
Cleveland Play House	\$ 340,598
Cleveland Pops Orchestra	\$ 67,555
Cleveland Print Room	\$ 44,158
Cleveland Public Theatre	\$ 107,347
Cleveland Restoration Society	\$ 107,952
Cleveland Rocks: Past Present and Future	\$ 18,500
Cleveland Silent Film Festival and Colloquium	\$ 5,000
Collective Arts Network	\$ 22,922
CollectivExpress	\$ 7,500
Comité Mexicano	\$ 5,000
Contemporary Youth Orchestra	\$ 25,620
convergence-continuum	\$ 15,000
Dance Evert	\$ 5,000
DANCECleveland	\$ 42,683
Dancing Classrooms Northeast Ohio	\$ 18,500
Djapo Cultural Arts Institute	\$ 18,500
Doan Brook Watershed Partnership	\$ 40,346
Dobama Theatre	\$ 52,538
DuffyLit	\$ 12,500
Dunham Tavern Museum & Gardens	\$ 16,500
Encore Chamber Music Institute	\$ 20,000
Ensemble Theatre	\$ 15,000
Foluke Cultural Arts	\$ 20,000
Friends of the McGaffin Carillon	\$ 6,000
Good Company A Vocal Ensemble	\$ 5,000
Graffiti HeArt Corporation	\$ 5,000
Great Lakes Science Center	\$ 254,194
Great Lakes Theater	\$ 179,454

Greater Cleveland Urban Film Festival	\$ 29,962
Heights Arts	\$ 27,546
Heights Youth Theatre	\$ 12,500
ICA - Art Conservation	\$ 58,201
Ideastream Public Media	\$ 615,630
In Harmony Therapeutic Services	\$ 12,500
Ingenuity	\$ 50,706
Inlet Dance Theatre	\$ 34,973
International Women's Air & Space Museum	\$ 18,500
Italian Cultural Garden	\$ 5,000
Julia De Burgos Cultural Arts Center	\$ 30,140
Kaboom Collective	\$ 16,500
Karamu House	\$ 126,780
Kulture Kids	\$ 15,000
Lake Erie Ink	\$ 34,134
Lake Erie Nature & Science Center	\$ 81,160
Lakewood Young Filmmakers Academy	\$ 5,000
LAND studio	\$ 174,659
LatinUs Theater Company	\$ 18,500
Les Délices	\$ 20,000
Literary Cleveland	\$ 37,860
Little Lumpy's Center for Educational Initiatives	\$ 7,500
Local 4 Music Fund	\$ 18,500
Maelstrom Collaborative Arts	\$ 7,500
Maltz Museum	\$ 130,705
Men of Independence	\$ 5,000
Mojuba! Dance Collective	\$ 10,000
Morgan Arts of Papermaking and Educational Foundation	\$ 39,628
Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland	\$ 115,130
Music and Art at Trinity Cathedral	\$ 6,000
Musical Theater Project	\$ 35,349
Musical Upcoming Stars in the Classics	\$ 18,500
Naach Di Cleveland	\$ 5,000
Nature Center at Shaker Lakes	\$ 87,767
Near West Theatre	\$ 52,802
North Coast Men's Chorus	\$ 28,221
Oh Sew Powerful	\$ 5,000
Ohio Contemporary Ballet	\$ 42,915
Parma Area Fine Arts Council	\$ 5,000
Piano Cleveland	\$ 79,255
Playhouse Square	\$ 1,000,000

Praxis Fiber Workshop	\$ 20,000
Radio on the Lake Theatre	\$ 6,000
Rainey Institute	\$ 90,574
Refresh Collective	\$ 35,696
Renovare Music	\$ 16,500
Roberto Ocasio Foundation	\$ 5,000
Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum	\$ 773,736
Roots of American Music	\$ 25,560
Sankofa	\$ 5,000
Sculpture Center	\$ 20,730
Shaker Historical Society	\$ 16,500
Singing Angels	\$ 15,000
Slovenian Museum and Archives	\$ 6,000
SPACES	\$ 52,880
STV Bavaria	\$ 7,500
Suburban Symphony Orchestra	\$ 6,000
Talespinner Children's Theatre	\$ 20,000
The Cleveland Museum of Art	\$ 957,801
The Cleveland Opera	\$ 10,000
The Cleveland Orchestra	\$ 1,000,000
The Dancing Wheels Company & School	\$ 44,189
The Movement Project	\$ 10,000
The Music Settlement	\$ 192,929
The MVMT Dance Co.	\$ 15,000
Trobár Medieval	\$ 5,000
Ukrainian Cultural Arts Association of Greater Cleveland	\$ 6,000
Ukrainian Museum Archives	\$ 27,841
Upcycle Parts Shop	\$ 18,500
Valley Art Center	\$ 41,984
Waterloo Arts	\$ 18,500
Western Reserve Chorale	\$ 7,500
Western Reserve Historical Society	\$ 224,188
Writers in Residence	\$ 12,500
Zygote Press, Inc.	\$ 27,162

2026 Project Support

** Indicates a first-time grant recipient*

Note: Scores range from 1-10. A score of 6 out of 10 is required to be eligible for funding.

Applicants with higher scores receive a higher percentage of their grant request amount.

Organization	Score	Grant Amount
10K Movement*	8.50	\$ 5,000
Achievement Centers for Children	8.50	\$ 5,360
America Asian Pacific Islander Organization	7.75	\$ 4,250
America SCORES Cleveland	8.25	\$ 7,500
American Hungarian Friends of Scouting	8.50	\$ 7,500
American Slovenian Polka Foundation	8.25	\$ 7,500
Arts Renaissance Tremont	7.75	\$ 4,250
Association of African American Cultural Garden	7.50	\$ 6,375
Association of Asian Indian Women In Ohio	6.25	\$ 4,250
Babel Box Theater*	7.00	\$ 4,250
Baldwin Wallace University	7.25	\$ 6,375
Beachwood Arts Council	7.75	\$ 4,250
Bedford Historical Society	6.50	\$ 3,060
BigHearted Blooms	8.75	\$ 7,500
Brecksville Theatre	8.25	\$ 7,500
Broadview Brecksville Heights Community Chorus*	7.00	\$ 4,250
Brooklyn Heights Service Clubs	7.50	\$ 4,250
Building Heights*	6.25	\$ 4,250
Canalway Partners	7.75	\$ 6,375
Case Western Reserve University	9.50	\$ 7,500
Catholic Charities Diocese of Cleveland	9.00	\$ 7,500
Cedar Fairmount Special Improvement District	6.75	\$ 6,375
Center for Employment Opportunities	8.75	\$ 4,950
Cesear's Forum	8.75	\$ 5,000
City Club of Cleveland	9.00	\$ 7,500
Cleveland Arts Education Consortium	7.75	\$ 6,375
Cleveland Clinic Foundation	7.00	\$ 4,250
Cleveland Composers Guild	8.50	\$ 5,000
Cleveland Contemporary Chinese Culture Association	7.50	\$ 6,375
Cleveland Grays Armory Museum	6.75	\$ 3,487
Cleveland Inner City Ballet	7.25	\$ 4,250
Cleveland Leadership Center	8.00	\$ 7,500
Cleveland Neighborhood Progress*	9.25	\$ 5,000
Cleveland Philharmonic Orchestra	6.75	\$ 3,825

Cleveland Rape Crisis Center	9.25	\$ 7,500
Cleveland Repertory Orchestra	8.25	\$ 5,000
Cleveland School of the Arts Board of Trustees	9.75	\$ 7,500
Cleveland Shakespeare Festival	7.00	\$ 4,250
Cleveland TOPS Swingband	8.00	\$ 5,000
Cleveland Treatment Center	8.75	\$ 7,500
Cleveland Uncommon Sound Project	8.50	\$ 5,000
Cleveland Winds	8.25	\$ 5,000
Cleveland Women's Orchestra	7.75	\$ 6,375
Club Dominicano De Cleveland*	8.25	\$ 5,000
Colors+ Youth Center	8.50	\$ 7,500
Community Life Collaborative	8.25	\$ 6,500
Connecting for Kids	9.00	\$ 7,500
Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad	8.50	\$ 7,500
Darl Center for the Arts	6.75	\$ 4,250
Deutscher Musik Verein	7.25	\$ 1,955
Downtown Cleveland Inc.	8.50	\$ 3,000
East Cleveland Farmers' Market Preservation Society	7.25	\$ 1,700
Edward E. Parker Museum of Art	8.50	\$ 4,000
Empowering Epilepsy	8.50	\$ 7,500
Environmental Health Watch	7.25	\$ 6,375
Euclid Symphony Orchestra	8.75	\$ 5,000
Far West Center	10.00	\$ 7,500
Fashion Talks Foundation	6.75	\$ 4,250
Food Strong	8.50	\$ 5,000
Fostering Hope	8.25	\$ 7,500
Friends of the East Cleveland Public Library	7.00	\$ 3,400
From Me 2 U, Inc	8.25	\$ 7,500
FrontLine Service	10.00	\$ 7,500
FutureHeights	9.00	\$ 7,500
Gardening in the District	7.75	\$ 4,250
German Central	7.25	\$ 6,375
Golden Ciphers Youth Development & Cultural Arts Center	7.75	\$ 4,250
Greater Cleveland Film Commission	9.00	\$ 7,500
Greater Cleveland Neighborhood Centers Association	8.75	\$ 7,500
Harvard Community Services Center	8.00	\$ 7,500
Haus of Transcendent	8.50	\$ 7,500
Hellenic Preservation Society of Northeastern Ohio*	7.25	\$ 4,250
High Art Fridays*	7.50	\$ 4,250
Hispanic Police Officers Association	8.00	\$ 7,500
Historic Gateway Neighborhood Corporation	6.50	\$ 6,375

India Fest USA	8.25	\$ 5,000
InMotion	8.75	\$ 5,420
International Community Council-Worldwide Intercultural Network (ICC-WIN)	7.75	\$ 4,250
Jewish Family Service Association of Cleveland Ohio	7.00	\$ 6,375
Jewish Federation of Cleveland	6.75	\$ 6,375
Jones Road Family Development Corporation	8.00	\$ 7,500
Kings & Queens of Art	6.75	\$ 4,250
Lake View Cemetery Foundation	9.00	\$ 7,500
LakewoodAlive	8.75	\$ 5,000
Larchmere PorchFest	8.50	\$ 5,000
Lexington-Bell Community Center	8.00	\$ 7,500
LGBT Community Center Greater Cleveland	9.50	\$ 7,500
Linking Employment, Abilities & Potential (LEAP)*	8.00	\$ 5,000
Little Italy Redevelopment Corporation	6.00	\$ 2,720
LYLESART	8.25	\$ 5,000
Mandel Jewish Community Center of Cleveland	9.75	\$ 7,500
Metro West Community Development Organization	7.00	\$ 6,375
Midnight Art Club	6.50	\$ 4,250
MidTown Cleveland	6.50	\$ 4,250
Museum of Creative Human Art	6.50	\$ 4,250
NAMI Greater Cleveland	6.75	\$ 6,375
New Avenues to Independence	8.00	\$ 7,500
No Exit	8.25	\$ 5,000
No Surf House*	6.00	\$ 4,250
North Pointe Ballet	8.75	\$ 7,500
North Union Farmers Market	6.50	\$ 3,625
Northeast Ohio Hispanic Center for Economic Development	9.50	\$ 7,500
Northeast Ohio Musical Heritage Association	8.75	\$ 5,000
NuPoint Community Development Corporation	8.50	\$ 5,000
OCA Cleveland	9.00	\$ 5,000
Ohio City Inc	8.00	\$ 7,500
Old Brooklyn Community Development Corporation	6.75	\$ 5,440
One South Euclid	9.00	\$ 7,500
Open Doors Academy	7.25	\$ 6,375
Open Tone Music	9.00	\$ 7,500
Pakistani Cultural Garden	7.75	\$ 4,250
PALS for Healing	9.00	\$ 7,500
Parma Symphony Orchestra	6.25	\$ 4,250
Phantasy Community Foundation*	9.00	\$ 5,000
Polish Village Parma	8.00	\$ 5,000
Powerful Long Ladder*	9.25	\$ 5,000

Reaching Heights	8.50	\$ 7,500
RhythmiCLE Sound Tap Company	6.50	\$ 4,250
Rollin' Buckeyez	8.75	\$ 7,500
Rose Centers for Aging Well	9.25	\$ 7,500
Schmooze Ohio	6.25	\$ 4,250
Seat of the Pants	9.50	\$ 7,500
Sew4Service*	8.25	\$ 5,000
Shaker Arts Council	8.75	\$ 5,000
SHED Projects*	8.75	\$ 5,000
Shore Cultural Centre	7.75	\$ 4,250
Slavic Village Development	9.00	\$ 5,000
Smart Development*	8.25	\$ 5,000
SOS: Strengthening Our Students	7.33	\$ 5,950
Stella Maris*	6.33	\$ 4,250
Stellar Acrobatic Dance Academy	9.00	\$ 5,000
Tender Hearts Crusades	8.67	\$ 7,000
The Foundry	7.00	\$ 6,375
The Gathering Place	6.75	\$ 6,375
The Harvard Square Center	6.67	\$ 4,250
The Land	9.00	\$ 7,500
The Meeting Place Learning Center	7.25	\$ 6,375
Thea Bowman Center	8.67	\$ 7,500
Tremont West Development Corporation	8.67	\$ 7,500
Tuskegee Airmen North Coast Chapter*	7.50	\$ 4,250
University Circle Inc.	8.67	\$ 7,500
UpStage Players	7.67	\$ 4,250
Ursuline College	8.33	\$ 7,500
VIVA Bavaria	7.33	\$ 6,375
West Park Kamm's Neighborhood Development	8.67	\$ 6,585
West Shore Chorale	8.00	\$ 7,500
West Side Catholic Center	9.00	\$ 5,000
West Side Community House	8.33	\$ 7,500
Western Reserve Fire Museum & Education Center	7.00	\$ 4,250
Western Reserve Land Conservancy	6.00	\$ 6,375
Westlake Chinese School	7.00	\$ 6,375
Westown Community Development Corporation	6.67	\$ 6,375
Windsong, Cleveland's Feminist Chorus	8.33	\$ 6,000
Women in Film and TV Ohio*	8.75	\$ 5,000
YMCA of Greater Cleveland	8.25	\$ 7,500
Youth Challenge	9.33	\$ 7,500

APPENDIX 2: Applicants Not Recommended for Funding

Note: Scores range from 1-10. A score of 6 out of 10 is required to be eligible for funding.

2026 Project Support

Organization	Score
Community Cup Classic Foundation	5.25
Folknet	4.50
Jennings Center for Older Adults	5.75
Malachi Center	5.75
Ohio Selfie World Foundation	5.50
Restore Cleveland Hope, Inc.	5.50
The Student Conservation Association	5.25



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MEMORANDUM

Date: November 12, 2025
To: CAC Board of Trustees
From: CAC Staff
Re: 2026 Grants to Assembly for the Arts, Neighborhood Connections, SMU DataArts

Board Actions: To supplement Cuyahoga Arts & Culture’s core grantmaking, CAC recommends three one-year grants totaling **\$564,500** for 2026:

- 1) **\$500,000** to **Assembly for the Arts** to design and manage a program that provides support for Cuyahoga County artists
- 2) **\$50,0000** to **Neighborhood Connections** to support resident-led arts and culture projects throughout Cleveland and East Cleveland
- 3) **\$14,500** to **SMU DataArts** to provide CAC grant recipients a tool to track program participation and financial measures for CAC grant reporting

1) Grant to Assembly for the Arts – 2026 Support for Artists (SFA)

Through its Support for Artists grant to Assembly for the Arts, CAC invests in a local nonprofit to provide funding and support that benefits Cuyahoga County artists whose work connects with and benefits the community. In 2025, Assembly for the Arts designed and managed a Support for Artists program that provided **\$450,000 in funding and support services to 176 local artists and creatives**. This included flexible funding awards ranging from \$1,500 - \$10,000 and access to a variety of memberships, promotional support, and institutional connections.

For 2026, Assembly proposes continuing its current SFA program offerings: the “Creative Impact Fund,” which provides flexible funding in the amount of \$10,000 to 22 Cuyahoga County Artists; and the “Boost Fund” which provides \$1,500 grants to 144 artists through a randomized lottery system. Both programs will be guided by the continuation of Assembly’s artist advisory committee, which pays six artists a \$2,500 stipend to help shape all of Assembly’s work. In all, **172 artists will receive \$451,000 in funding** next year.

Note: Separate from this SFA26 grant recommendation, Assembly for the Arts is recommended to receive \$52,769 in general operating support funding from CAC in 2026.

2026 Grant Recommendation

For 2026, CAC recommends a grant of **\$500,000** for Assembly to continue to design and manage Support for Artists programs. Assembly’s proposal outlines an SFA26 program that will provide \$451,000 in funding and support to 176 artists in 2026. See a detailed expense budget, as provided by Assembly, below in Appendix A.

2) Grant to Neighborhood Connections – 2026 Resident-Led Arts & Culture

Through its resident-led grant to Neighborhood Connections, CAC supports emerging community-based and neighborhood projects across Cleveland and East Cleveland. Since 2013, CAC has co-funded over **510 resident-led arts and culture projects** through Neighborhood Connections.

In 2026, “Neighbor Up Action Grants” will support arts and culture initiatives led by dozens of grassroots groups and organizations. Applicants are eligible for grants up to \$5,000, with CAC matching up to 50% of the award. Neighborhood Connections selects grant recipients using a committee of residents, providing responsive grants throughout the year. See a detailed expense budget, as provided by Neighborhood Connections, below in Appendix B.

2026 Grant Recommendation

For 2026, CAC recommends a grant in the amount of **\$50,000** to co-fund resident-led projects in Cleveland and East Cleveland.

3) Grant to SMU DataArts – 2026 Data Collection and Reporting for Grantmakers

For more than a decade, CAC has invested in SMU DataArts to better understand CAC grant recipients’ operations and financial health using the Cultural Data Profile (CDP) and reports. The data and reports provide important insights used in CAC’s application and reporting processes, and in the aggregate, provide relevant impact data about the organizations that CAC supports.

In 2026, CAC will continue to receive access to the SMU DataArts data collection service, which includes dedicated support for CAC staff and grantees, access to data monitoring and analysis tools, Funder Reports of each applicant and grantee organization, and additional tools for grantees such as annual reports, program activity, fundraising, working capital, marketing, and workforce analysis reports. CAC will also receive an engagement webinar, hosted and delivered by SMU DataArts staff. See a budget summary below in Appendix C.

2026 Grant Recommendation

For 2026, CAC recommends a grant of **\$14,500** for SMU DataArts for continued data collection and reporting purposes.

Next Steps

Pending approval, CAC will issue grant agreements for 2026, and work with Assembly, Neighborhood Connections, and SMU DataArts throughout the grant year as they implement their programs.

APPENDIX A

Assembly for the Arts – 2026 Budget Detail

Expense Category – CAC Funds Only	Amount	Notes
Creative Impact Fund (CIF)	\$220,000	22 artists × \$10,000 unrestricted grants
Boost Fund	\$216,000	144 artists × \$1,500 project-based grants across 3 cycles
Artist Advisory Committee Stipends	\$15,000	\$2,500 stipends paid to 6 artist members
Stipends to Jurors	\$7,200	CIF juror compensation (12 panelists x \$600 stipend each)
Personnel	\$24,200	This line reflects direct staff time dedicated to managing and implementing the Support for Artists program. The majority of this expense covers program- specific responsibilities, including coordination, artist support, and grant administration. Additional staff time provides essential operational and administrative support to ensure successful delivery.
Dues & Subscriptions	\$8,600	Submittable software subscription
Marketing and Communications	\$1,800	Social media, digital ads and other public relations outreach
Printing and Production	\$1,000	Flyers and other printed materials
Professional Development	\$3,000	Artist workshops, coaching, and business development
Space/Events	\$2,200	Costs for public info sessions, artist gatherings, and/or workshops
Miscellaneous / Contingency	\$1,000	Buffer for unexpected costs
Total SfA26 Expenses	\$500,000	

APPENDIX B

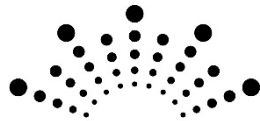
Neighborhood Connections – 2026 Budget Detail

Item	Description	Amount
Neighbor Up Action Grants	These funds from CAC will be used to support arts & culture initiatives in the city of Cleveland and the city of East Cleveland. There will be a total of \$47,000 available in 2026. Grant decisions are made by the Neighbor Up Action Grant Committee of 30 Cleveland and East Cleveland residents.	\$47,000
Administrative Support	Funding provides support for the administration of these grants, including staff time, costs for the grants management system, and for communications.	\$3,000
Total		\$50,000

APPENDIX C

SMU Data Arts – 2026 Budget Detail

Item	Description	Amount
SMU DataArts CDP Data Collection Service	Data Collection and Reporting for Grantmakers. Understand arts and culture organization operations and health with our Cultural Data Profile (CDP) and reports.	\$12,500
Online Training for CAC Grant Recipients	Available to anyone who wishes for us to host a webinar for their specific group, select from a list of our standard webinars.	\$2,000
Total		\$14,500



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MEMORANDUM

Date: November 12, 2025
 To: CAC Board of Trustees
 From: CAC Staff
 Re: 2026 Panelist Recruitment and Roster

SUMMARY
 In September 2025, a group of 27 arts and cultural experts from across the nation served as panelists who reviewed and scored applications for CAC’s 2026 Project Support (PS) grant program. No action is required.

Background

Panelists play a pivotal role in CAC’s grantmaking process, serving as the independent group of outside experts that review and evaluate applications. Staff work year-round to recruit and train a diverse and reputable roster of panelists from across the nation. Their brief biographies are on the following pages.

Panelist Selection

Staff identified, recruited, and vetted candidates through personalized emails, references, and interviews to ensure alignment with CAC’s funding criteria and process. CAC also accepts panelist nominations through an open call on our website. This process resulted in a slate of respected regional and national leaders thoughtfully selected and qualified to evaluate grant applications, including a mix of returning (19) and new (8) panelists. The group is diverse in artistic/management expertise, race/ethnicity, gender, and age:

Panelist Race and/or Ethnicity	
Asian or Asian American	7%
Black or African American	37%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x	11%
Multiracial	4%
White or European American	37%
Did not disclose	4%

Panelist Age	
25-30	11%
31-40	37%
41-50	30%
51-60	11%
61-70	11%

Panelist Gender	
Female-identifying	60%
Male-identifying	29%
Other-identifying	7%
Did not disclose	4%

Panelist Disability Status	
Living with a disability	11%
Not living with a disability	89%

Panel Review Process

Panelists received all application materials and access to our online system in August. Every panelist participated in training webinars and was provided with handbooks to ensure all were prepared to serve. Panelists scored each application in accordance with the funding criteria in the 2026 grant guidelines. All Project Support applications were reviewed with written scores and comments, which will be posted on CAC's website.

The panelist roster was made available to the public following the conclusion of panel reviews: [Project Support Panel Guide](#),

Panelist Feedback

All panelists are asked to complete a survey following the close of panel. Below is some of the feedback offered about CAC's process that we will use to inform and improve our process.

In all, every panelist (100% of respondents) felt that CAC set clear expectations about their role and responsibilities as panelists, and that CAC was clear in explaining and defining CAC's funding criteria. Comments include:

“Out of all of the arts councils/orgs that I've paneled for, Cuyahoga Arts & Cultures continues to set a high bar. You set the gold standard of how grantmaking processes should be run.”

“The idea of public benefit continues to guide my own grantmaking.”

“Working with CAC as a grant panelist was an extremely seamless experience...I was also very impressed with CAC's commitment to inclusivity.”

Cuyahoga Arts & Culture 2025 Panelist Biographies

**denotes previous service as a Cuyahoga Arts & Culture panelist*



Brittany Alston, she/her
Charleston, SC

Brittany is a self-taught photographer/visual artist, and has expertise in financial analysis, case management, and paralegal/legal work. She has served as an art grants panelist before and has worked with multiple galleries and museums. She has assisted with multiple film festivals and has been a contributor to multiple magazines.



Liz Bayan, they/them
Toledo, OH

Liz Bayan is a half-Iranian artist, writer, educator, curator, letterpress printer, and designer. They joined The Arts Commission as the Artist Subgranting Coordinator in 2024. Before that, Liz was the Curator and Director at The Neon Heater Art Gallery, Co-President of AIGA Toledo, Instructor of Graphic Design at BGSU, and the Instructor of Photography and Graphic Design at Southeast Missouri State University. They got their BFA in Digital Arts from the University of Oregon and an MFA in Emerging Practices from SUNY, University at Buffalo.



***Rem Cabrera, he/him**
Kalamazoo, MI

Rem Cabrera resides in Kalamazoo, MI and is the Grants Manager for The Gilmore International Piano Festival. He spent 17 years as the Chief of Cultural Development for the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs. Cabrera has served as a panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts, the New England Foundation for the Arts, SouthArts, the Florida Division of Arts and Culture, Miami-Dade Art in Public Places, the City of Miami and YoungArts.



***Karla Centeno, she/her
San Diego, CA**

Throughout her career, Karla has sought experiences that allow people to see the world as it is while imagining what it could be. She has had the privilege of working in arts at all levels as a museum educator, writer, curator, director of education, and grantmaker. She also co-founded *alofus*, an artist-run collective and online gallery.



***Lisa Chang, she/her
Madison, AL**

Lisa Chang, MSW, Co-Director of Huntsville Bail Fund, has spent over 20 years working in development, community engagement, and management for advocacy, arts, and faith-based nonprofits. With a unique background in social work and engineering, Lisa brings expert relationship management and a data-driven approach that is rooted in anti-racism and anti-oppression. Lisa has worked for a variety of arts, faith-based, and advocacy organizations such as Pulitzer Arts Foundation, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, and the Bloomberg School of Public Health. She has also served on numerous nonprofit boards, including Prison Performing Arts, Encore Stage and Studio, and the Microwave Dave Music Education Foundation.



***LaShawnda Crowe Storm,
she/her
Indianapolis, IN**

LaShawnda Crowe Storm is an artist, activist, community builder and occasionally an urban farmer. Whether she is making artwork or sowing seeds, Crowe Storm uses her creative power as a vehicle for dialogue, social change and community healing. At the core of Crowe Storm's creative practice is a desire to create community; any community in which the process of making art creates a space and place for difficult conversations around a variety of topics, with an eye to community healing. Crowe Storm has an M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a B.A. in mass communications and English Literature from the University of Michigan. She has received numerous awards for art and community activism including but not limited to a MdW Fellowship (2023), Power Plant Award, De Haan Artist of Distinction Award, Art Place America National Creative Placemaking Award and Creative Renewal Fellowship.



***Sheryl Doades, she/her
Ellettsville, IN**

Sheryl currently works full-time for Indiana University Bloomington as a writing/editing specialist in marketing. She also works as an adjunct professor for the O’Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs, where she earned her master’s degree in arts administration in 2024. In addition, she serves on the board of Off Night Productions, Bloomington, Indiana’s women-led theatre company producing contemporary theatre and music on off-nights of the traditional performance week. Both before and concurrent to this work, Sheryl has worked as a professional teaching artist, director, and performer.



***Jeff Garrett, he/him
Davison, MI**

Jeff Garrett is a grants Program Manager and ADA 504 Accessibility Coordinator for the State of Michigan Arts and Culture Council. Previously, Jeff served as the Director of the Art School at the Flint Institute of Arts. He has teaching experience in Michigan Public Schools, has been adjunct faculty at Vincennes University, Saginaw Valley State University, Mott College, and was Head of the Art & Design Department at Crowder College. He received a Master of Fine Arts degree in Ceramics with Distinction from Indiana State University.



**Sarah Gilmer, she/her
Pittsburgh, PA**

Sarah J. Gilmer is a Pittsburgh native with 10 years of arts administrative experience. She currently serves as the Programming Manager at Kelly Strayhorn Theater where she manages the organization’s Freshworks residency for new performance, youth and family programming, and special projects. Sarah previously worked with nonprofit organizations the Equity | Impact Center and Pittsburgh Cultural Trust where she managed community arts events highlighting local visual and performing artists. Prior to returning to Pittsburgh in 2016, Sarah worked with Sydney-based CCEntertainment as an event coordinator for music tribute tours throughout the suburbs of Sydney. Sarah holds a Bachelor of Arts in economics from American University and studied worship music and ministry for 3 years at the Hillsong International Leadership College.



***Michael Greer, he/him
Bainbridge Island, WA**

Michael Greer is a seasoned cross-sector leader with decades of experience in for-profit and nonprofit organizations across the United States, India, and China. As President and CEO of ArtsFund—Washington State’s largest independent, unrestricted arts and culture funder—Michael leverages his diverse experience to create practical and inspiring community solutions through the arts. His professional background spans financial services, manufacturing, performing arts, arts administration, and philanthropy. He serves on several boards, including United Way of King County and the Puget Sound Regional Council, among others.



***Deonté Griffin-Quick,
he/him
Avenel, NJ**

Deonté Griffin-Quick, a New Jersey native, is a nationally recognized, award-winning actor, arts administrator and consultant. He was most recently managing director of external affairs at Artist Communities Alliance (ACA), the international service organization for artist residency programs and artist-centered organizations. Before joining ACA, Griffin-Quick served as director of programs and services at New Jersey Theatre Alliance. In 2019 Griffin-Quick developed and spearheaded the New Jersey Arts and Culture Administrators of Color Network. He is a recipient of the inaugural Individual Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Award from the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and the Discover Jersey Arts Leadership Award from the ArtPride New Jersey Foundation. Griffin-Quick holds a B.A. in theatre with a communications minor from Kean University and a master’s degree in arts administration from Drexel University.



**Danielle Hamner, she/her
Pittsburgh, PA**

Danielle Hamner is a passionate advocate for community well-being and social justice. As a Licensed Independent Social Worker (LISW), and Adjunct Professor, she brings a unique perspective to her work, drawing on her background in both clinical and community-level social work. She is guided by a core belief that a healthy society is rooted in cultural engagement and creative expression. Danielle holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Social Work from The University of Pittsburgh and is pursuing a Doctorate of Public Health (DrPH) at Tulane University. With her skills and experience, she is dedicated to helping communities flourish. Her passion for the arts is a natural extension of her professional commitment to building a healthy and engaged society.



**Cinzi Lavin, she/her
Winsted, CT**

Cinzi is a musical dramatist/playwright whose works have been produced around the U.S. and abroad. In 2010, she performed by invitation at the White House. Besides numerous state and national honors for artistic achievements, she was recognized by the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution for her influence on American culture and was voted into the National League of American Pen Women for distinction in both Letters and Music. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Cinzi's professional experience includes: Journalism, editing, teaching literature, dance, theatre (acting, playwriting, producing), music (writing, performance, teaching, recording, singing, and conducting).



***Jo-ann Lawrence, she/her
Stone Mountain, GA**

Jo-ann Lawrence is a non-profit professional with extensive experience across diverse sectors including theatre, ballet, museums, healthcare, foster care, early education, and disability services. Her core expertise encompasses grant writing and training, grant making, annual fund development, board management, strategic planning, capital campaigns, and comprehensive program creation and management. Throughout her career, Lawrence has served as manager of two African American historical theatres, directed a city-wide arts education program, and overseen a healthcare grant making initiative. Lawrence holds a B.S. in Arts Administration from Butler University and an M.A. in Performing Arts Management from Columbia College Chicago.



***Ellen Milligan, she/her
Seattle, WA**

Ellen Milligan is Vice President of Grantmaking at ArtsFund. She has been a member of the ArtsFund team since 2016, and before that, worked for performing arts organizations on the West Coast and in the Midwest, including three summers at Music@Menlo Chamber Music Festival & Institute in the San Francisco Bay Area. She earned her B.A. from Ohio State University. She has served as a member of the Seattle Cultural Accessibility Consortium Steering Committee since 2021.



***Lisa Much, she/they
Columbus, OH**

Lisa Much is the founder of Much Support Consulting. She has a broad knowledge of Ohio, having worked in many corners of the state. Her background is predominantly in community development with a specific focus on Ohio, having worked for the Ohio CDC Association (OCDCA) for over nine years and with Leadership Ohio for over two years. Before OCDCA, she worked as a theatrical stage manager for theaters throughout Chicago and Columbus. Much currently serves on the Ohio Women in Government (OWIG) steering committee as the Communications Co-Chair and has previously served on the boards of the Community Opportunity Alliance (formerly NACEDA) and the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) of Central Ohio. She has a BA in Theater Management from Green Mountain College and an MA in Public Policy and Management from the John Glenn College at The Ohio State University.



**Tim Murphy, he/him
Denver, CO**

Tim Murphy joined the SCFD staff in September 2021. A Virginia native, Tim moved to Denver in 2011 and is proud to call Colorado home. Tim worked in nonprofit fundraising for nine years at MSU Denver, The Colorado Symphony, and The Center on Colfax. He received his undergraduate degree in Human Services, Nonprofit Studies, from MSU Denver and completed his Master of Public Administration at the University of Colorado- Denver. Tim lives in Downtown Denver with his partner and their two dogs, Fisher and Gladys. His hobbies include playing tennis, hiking, attending plays, musicals, and concerts, and gardening.



***Alicia Olivo
Pasadena, TX**

Alicia Margarita Olivo is a Houston-based Mexican American writer-director, arts manager, and weather enjoyer. As an arts manager, Alicia serves as the Manager of Membership Programming at Benvenuti Arts, as well as a Community Storyteller with Houston BIPOC Arts Network & Fund. Alicia was the Texas Representative in the 2022-2023 National Leaders of Color Fellowship cohort and will be a Mid-America Arts Alliance Artist Leadership Fellow in 2025. Alicia is currently a Writer-in-Residence at the Writers' Colony at Dairy Hollow. The writer has also directed or assistant directed for TEATRX, Rec Room Arts, Stages, and Wellesley Repertory Theater.



***Penny Pun, she/her
New York, NY**

Penny Pun is a New York-based playwright, dramaturg, and producer. She was born and raised in Hong Kong. She is an advocate for the AAPI, Disabled, and immigrant communities. She is the Associate Director of Civic Alliances at the Perelman Performing Arts Center. She has been an Adjunct Faculty Member of Marymount Manhattan College since 2021. She has spoken at performing arts industry conferences for leading organizations, such as Dramatists Guild and Theatre Communications Group. She has also been interviewed by numerous publications like The New York Times, The Dramatist, and American Theatre magazine. Her plays have been developed by Leviathan Lab, Pan Asian Rep, Rising Circle Theater Collective, and the Tony-nominated JW Theatrical.



**Philip Rice, he/him
Mackinac Island, MI**

Dr. Philip Rice is a composer, poet, designer, community organizer, and administrative professional with a proven record of over ten years transforming communities, regions, organizations, and projects in the nonprofit sector to drive prosperity in rural and urban settings. As a lifelong artist, his work has touched nearly every sector of the art world and the creative economy. Currently residing full-time on Mackinac Island, he is strongly committed to quality of life in Michigan and the Midwest.



***Susan Roll, she/her
Escanaba, MI**

Susan Roll is an Industrial Engineer with two decades of manufacturing support experience in the semiconductor industry. She has experience in engineering, marketing, and human resources. She has over 20 years of management and training experience. After leaving the manufacturing sector Susan created her own business coaching business in the rural Upper Peninsula of Michigan. She added her love of arts and culture into her employment world by becoming an arts administrator (Executive Director for community arts center) and has been engaged in promoting arts and culture locally. With over a decade of arts administration Sue has been involved in arts and culture granting in Michigan as an applicant, recipient, and administrator. Since her teens, Susan creates costumes and fabric manipulation as a creative outlet.



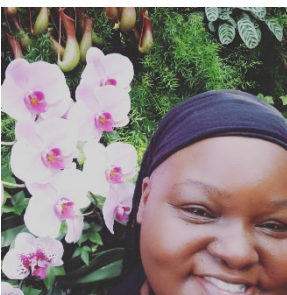
***Christopher Schram,
he/him
Kalamazoo, MI**

Christopher Schram is retired after a 30+ year career in the non-profit arts sector serving in executive leadership and development roles with organizations in Florida, Illinois, and Michigan. He has served on grant panels for the Southern Arts Federation, the arts councils of the states of Florida, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, and the arts councils for the cities of Chicago, Cleveland, Miami Beach, and San Diego.



***Michael Smith, he/him
Wexford, PA**

Michael A. Smith is the Executive Director of The Fine Foundation, a funder of arts & culture and Jewish life in the greater Pittsburgh region. Before working as a grantmaker, he established a reputation for enabling bold arts-based economic development projects through a career in institutional development, most recently at the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust. Michael earned a Ph.D. in English from Duquesne University, where he researched placemaking, geocriticism, and the American railroad. He is published in MDPI's Humanities journal and the St. John's Humanities Review. Michael serves on the board of Northland Public Library and on the advisory committee of the International Poetry Forum, the Franciscan Volunteer Ministry', and on the Committee on Honors and Awards for the MLA. He has reviewed grants for The Whiting Foundation and Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, among others.



**Tasha Tavaras, she/her
East Point, GA**

Tasha Tavaras holds both undergraduate and graduate degrees from the Savannah College of Art and Design and was an intern with Fulton County Arts & Culture's Contracts for Services Department before becoming their CFS Contract Specialist. When not working to help support the Arts, Tasha can be found gardening and hanging out with her husband and 4 cats.



***Anna Tragesser, she/her
Kempton, IN**

Anna Tragesser collaborates to amplify arts and culture in Indiana. She's been nationally recognized for artist entrepreneurship support while working for Indiana Arts Commission and is a trusted voice in arts funding as both a career grant manager and freelance grant writer. She currently works for Indy Arts Council, supporting both individual artists and nonprofits. Anna is also deeply engaged in building understanding and creativity between urban and rural communities. Her creative practice includes site specific quilts, flags and banners. She holds master's degrees in public affairs, nonprofit management, and arts administration from Indiana University.



***Tamara Williamson,
she/her
Memphis, TN**

Tamara Williamson is the development manager at the Children's Museum of Memphis (CMOM). In this role, she writes grants and newsletters for the organization, as well as writing the museum's annual report. Before her role at CMOM, Tamara was the grant writer for Shelby Residential and Vocational Services (SRVS), an organization that supports people with disabilities.



***Courtney Young, she/her
Lafayette, LA**

CC Young is a writer (of fiction, screenplays, popular culture criticism and creative nonfiction & the founder of Quitman Studios, a creative studio designed to curate exceptional storytelling experiences across space, technology & medium.



Board of Trustees: 2026 Meeting Schedule

All regular meetings will start at 4:00pm unless otherwise noted.

Date	Location
Wednesday, February 18	TBD
Wednesday, April 15 <i>Annual Meeting</i>	TBD
June (anticipated) <i>Board Retreat</i>	TBD
Wednesday, September 16	TBD
Wednesday, November 18 <i>Approval of 2027 grants</i>	TBD
Wednesday, December 16* <i>Approval of 2027 budget</i> <i>*meeting starts at 3:30pm to include an executive session</i>	TBD

Contractor	Amount	Purpose	Term	Requires Board Approval
Survey Monkey Apply	\$9,737	Online application and reporting system for all Cuyahoga Arts & Culture grantees.	1/12/2026-1/12/2027	N
The Cleveland Foundation	\$25,000	Accept an operating support grant provided to CAC, via The Cleveland Foundation, by the Education Foundation of America (EFA).	1/1/2026 - 12/31/2026	Y

** contracts valued more than \$5,000 will be reported.