

State of Illinois

JB Pritzker, Governor

Illinois Arts Council

Nora Daley, Board Chair

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Creative Learning Grants for Schools

Fiscal Year 2026

Opens: April 17, 2025
Deadline: May 29, 2025

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Online information about the Illinois Arts Council:

[About the Illinois Arts Council \(IAC\)](#)

[IAC Salesforce Grant Portal](#)

[IAC Accessibility Resources](#)

[IAC Glossary](#)

Accessible Guidelines

To obtain accessibility information regarding applications and written materials contact the Illinois Arts Council’s ADA/504 Access Coordinator. Please be aware staff is working remotely and it is recommended to reach out to them via email. If you prefer more direct communications send an email that contains your preferred contact telephone number and general timeline of when you are available.

IAC 504/ADA Coordinator

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Illinois Arts Council Staff Contacts

For specific information on this grant, contact the appropriate program staff. Please be aware staff are working a hybrid model and it is recommended to reach out to them via email. If you prefer more direct communications send an email that contains your preferred contact telephone number and general timeline of when you are available. To determine your Program Director please visit IAC's Program Director finder tool: <https://arts.illinois.gov/about-iac/staff/grant-staff-locator.html>

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A New Arts Council

In 2023, the Illinois Arts Council (IAC) and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) embarked on the Equitable Grant Making Assessment Initiative (EGAIN). EGAIN was a collaborative effort to examine the agency's grantmaking through an equity lens, to identify funding gaps, and recommend strategies that the agency can pursue to reduce barriers to arts support.

The aims of the initiative were to:

- Analyze the demographic distribution of IAC's general operating support awards.
- Engage IAC constituents in providing feedback about their needs, experiences, and perceptions.
- Identify equity strengths and weaknesses in the IAC's approach to general operating support funding.
- Recommend applied actions the IAC can take to work toward greater grant making equity.
- Serve as an evidence base in IAC's case for the resources needed to reach more Illinois communities with state support.

As a result of this initiative there have been significant changes to all IAC grant programs which include:

- Streamlined application processes and grant opportunities.
- The creation of six distinct regions within the state for equitable funding across the Illinois' communities.
 - Chicago Metro Region (sub-divided into 5 Metro Regions)
 - Northern Region
 - Central Region
 - Eastern Region
 - Southern Region
 - Western Region
- Applications will be reviewed and distributed by regions and will no longer be submitted by discipline categories.
- Factoring in historically under-resourced communities into the grant making structure and process.

Alongside this evaluation with NASAA, IAC also worked with the firm Aim & Arrow to evaluate the longstanding Arts & Foreign Language grant program that was run in collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). Lessons learned from this study, accompanied by conversations with ISBE, helped craft this Creative Learning Grant for Schools program.

What does this mean for IAC support of arts education?

While the Creative Learning Grants for Schools is a departure from the past years of Arts & Foreign Language grant support, we are excited to open a path to new funding opportunities for arts education. We expect to continue to evolve this program over the coming years as we continue to evaluate how IAC can best support arts education across Illinois.

We recognize that this is a significant change, but we are excited by the possibility of serving and supporting more arts learning opportunities for youth across Illinois. We are proud that the Illinois Arts Council has been able to provide support to so many Illinois artists, organizations, and schools over the past 60 years.

Creative Learning Grants for Schools Summary

The Illinois Arts Council's (IAC) Creative Learning Grants for Schools (CLGS) supports arts learning opportunities in Illinois schools. The goal of this grant is to enable schools to acquire supplies, materials, equipment, or services from Illinois artists or arts organizations, that are needed to address student needs for arts learning opportunities.

Who's Eligible

- Public K-12 school districts, schools, and charter schools.
- All previously funded Arts & Foreign Language grantees are eligible for CLGS.

Award Amount

- Up to \$20,000
- Funds will be divided regionally according to IAC's defined regions (see page 2).

Application Information

- The application requests information about the proposed arts learning opportunity to take place during the 2025-2026 school year.
- There are form fields to complete as well as uploading a narrative and completing a budget.
- This grant requires an in-school educator, or administrator, to oversee the work.

Key Dates

Application Deadline:

- Thursday, May 29, 2025, at 11:59pm

Grant Period:

- October 1, 2025, to August 31, 2026

Creative Learning Grants for Schools Details

The Creative Learning Grants for Schools (CLGS) is a new IAC grant program to support arts learning opportunities in Illinois schools. For this grant program the arts include dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts. The main intent of the grant is to fund:

- Arts materials or equipment that will enhance arts learning opportunities.
- Engagement of Illinois artist or arts organization to lead, or support, in-school arts learning opportunities.

Applicants must:

- Apply utilizing a Salesforce grant portal account registered to the applicant.
- Submit all required application materials prior to the deadline.
- Be pre-qualified in the state's Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (GATA) system:
 - Applicants must complete a validation process through the [State of Illinois' Grantee Portal](#) to obtain a GATA pre-qualification status. The IAC will not be able to consider an application for funding until the applicant has completed this step.
 - Please note that GATA must be renewed annually. It is your organization's responsibility to maintain an active GATA registration.
 - Refer to the [Grant Accountability and Transparency Act](#) page on the IAC website for specific details.

Making Arts Accessible to All

Accessibility in the arts provides inclusive participation of people with disabilities in all cultural and creative spaces. Recipients of IAC funds are expected to make reasonable efforts for any public art activities and programs to be as accessible as possible. For further information and resources on how to do this please see the [Accessibility Resources](#) page on the IAC website.

Applicant Restrictions

- Applicants may only submit one application per fiscal year.
- Private schools are not eligible for this grant program.
- Organizations with which IAC Board members are affiliated are eligible to apply. However, a Board member may not be the authorizing official signing any documents relating to an application or grant award.
- Schools within a district, and the district, may both apply, but it must be for separate arts learning opportunities. Geographic distribution will be considered as part of the award process.

Deadline

The FY26 CLGS deadline is Thursday, May 29, 2025. The application must be successfully submitted by 11:59 PM central time to the [IAC's Salesforce grant portal](#).

Please note that all draft applications will be removed from the IAC system 30 days after the deadline.

Allowable and Unallowable Expenses

CLGS funds may be used to support eligible expenses associated with the proposed arts learning opportunity.

Detailed allowable expenses, not limited to:

- General administrative expenses directly related to the arts learning opportunity, including staff salaries (no more than 15 percent of the grant award)
- Technology, equipment, supplies, and materials directly related to this arts learning opportunity
- Field trips (e.g., transportation, admission charges) that support arts education curriculum
- Contracts with Illinois artists, and arts organizations, to provide resources for this arts learning opportunity

Detailed unallowable expenses, not limited to:

- Fundraising activities
- Expenses for outside organizations or individuals and/or short-term projects that are not connected to this arts learning opportunity
- College or university tuition
- Unreasonable travel requests
- Purchase of alcoholic beverages
- Political activities such as contributions, lobbying, or fundraisers

Creative Learning Grants for Schools Review Criteria

All CLGS applications must be complete and eligible for funds from the State of Illinois to be reviewed.

The review of CLGS applications is based on successful evidence of the answers to the following application requirements:

1. The arts learning opportunity is clearly planned and supports the students' arts education curriculum. (30 points)
2. There is a demonstrated need for this funding to accomplish this opportunity due to a current barrier. (30 points)
3. There are clear and impactful outcomes expected from this opportunity. (20 points)
4. There is an identified lead in-school educator with school, or district, support for this opportunity. (10 points)
5. Budget is cost effective use of funding. (10 points)

CLGS Process, Notification, and Compliance

Review Process

- When the application is created, the Salesforce grant portal will issue an application number that will be used in future communication regarding that application.
- Applications which have been ruled ineligible or incomplete will not be reviewed.
- Applications are reviewed based on the review criteria (see page 7).
- A group of external readers, familiar with arts learning programming, will evaluate proposals. IAC reserves the right to negotiate budget amounts and program activities based on readers' comments and staff review and to award grants based on fair and equitable distribution of programs throughout the state.
- The final recommendations are presented to the IAC board for their consideration and approval.
- A record of the review process is maintained for all reviewed applications.
- An appeal of the IAC's decision must be made in writing within 30 calendar days of the date of the notification letter. Appeals are limited to situations in which incorrect information has been used in the panel process, procedural faults have occurred, or new information not available at the time of the panel meeting which could significantly influence the recommendation is now available. Appeals should be made within the IAC online grant system and be addressed to the IAC Executive Director.

Notification

All applicants will be notified of funding decisions once the IAC has reviewed and approved funding recommendations. Applicants approved for funding will receive, via email, instructions regarding requirements to accept and claim the grant (see Grant Acceptance section below). Please note that some email systems direct IAC notification emails to spam email boxes or quarantine them by the security settings on the organization's server/domain. We encourage you to mark "no-reply@webmerge.me" and "InsureSign@send.insuresign.com" as safe email addresses in your account.

Once all documents have been returned via the IAC Salesforce grant portal and all requirements met, including the completion, and filing of all previous fiscal year Final Reports, the grant will be processed, and the payment voucher will be sent to the office of the State Comptroller. Once the payment voucher has been received by the State Comptroller payments can take two to six months.

Grantees can check the status of the grant payment through the [Comptroller's vendor website](#), or sign-up to be notified about the payment via email, text, or both. Grantees can also sign up for direct deposit from the Illinois Comptroller. Grantees are eligible for direct deposits if they have received a payment from The Comptroller's Office within the previous 24 months. Otherwise, the check will be mailed to the address on file. Please contact The Comptroller's Office at (217) 557-0930 if you would like to set up direct deposit.

Compliance

Grant Acceptance

For awards to be processed all grant acceptance documents must be submitted to the IAC Grants Office. Grant acceptance is a multi-step process that requires uploads to the Salesforce grant portal and email exchanges. It is the responsibility of the applicant to read all emails carefully and follow the instructions.

The documents to be submitted via the IAC Salesforce grant portal include:

- Completed and signed W9 form.
- Copies of letters submitted to legislators. Organizations that receive an IAC award are required to notify by letter their state representative, state senator, and the Office of the Governor of the grant amount and the project or program it helps support. Prior to mailing the letters to the legislators, make electronic copies of the letters to include with your grant acceptance materials.
- Legal Status Disclosure Certificate (LSDC) signed and dated by the authorizing official.
- Grant Agreement signed and dated by the authorizing official.

Applicants approved for funding will be requested to upload a W9 and copies of the legislative letters to [IAC's Salesforce grant portal](#). Following the upload of these documents the Authorizing Official will be sent a link to sign the grant agreement and LSDC via Formstack.

Please note that while full applications will be submitted once every three years, grant agreements will still be issued for a single year. Grantees will need to claim their funds via the grant acceptance process described here every year.

Final Report

All FY26 CLGS grantees will be required to complete and submit a final report no later than September 30, 2026, as stated on the grant agreement. Final reports will be available in Salesforce grant portal 4-6 weeks prior to the deadline date. The IAC grants office will notify grantees when final reports have opened in the Salesforce grant portal.

The final report for CLGS grants will ask:

- Brief narrative on the activities, and outcomes. Address any changes from what was described in the application.
- Total project budget revenue and expense including IAC funds.
- Brief explanation if the overall project expense was greater than the project income.
- Attendance for different activities and events both in-person and online.
- Populations benefited by race, age, or distinct group.
- Addresses for all activity locations.
- Optional quote on the impact of the grant and photo with photo credit.

Grant Portal Overview & Applicant Information

IAC utilizes an [online grant portal](#), powered by Salesforce, to accept applications. The IAC CAF online application consists of form field components and the uploading of required documents. Each component must be completed and submitted in the required format by the deadline.

For instructions go to the [Using Salesforce](#) section of the IAC website. There is also a [user manual](#) for the online grant portal on our website to help guide the application process. Please review this carefully and use as a reference.

Accessing Your Account

The online grant system can be accessed at <https://arts-illinois.my.site.com/>

- If you already have a user account, use your existing account information to login.
- If you do not have a user account, create a new account by clicking “Not a member” and complete the form with name, email and password.

Applicants should use Chrome as the online browser when accessing Salesforce, as the system will not operate properly in other browsers.

If you have difficulties accessing your account (e.g. password reset not working or cannot create an account), email Program Representative, Jasmine Roberson at Jasmine.Roberson@Illinois.gov for assistance.

Applicant Information

Once logged in all applicants should first click on the Applicant Information tab from the top header in Salesforce.

- New applicants should add an organizational applicant account, complete and save all required form fields.
- Returning applicants should make sure all information is saved and is up to date on their individual applicant account.

Information requested for an organizational applicant account includes:

- Organization Name and General Contact Information
- Year Founded or year organization began arts programming
- Organization Mission
- Primary Discipline Selection – select one
- Any additional disciplines reflected in programming – select as many as applicable
- Staff and Board overall demographic information.
 - Number of Board Members
 - Number of Black, indigenous, and/or people of color (BIPOC) Board Members
 - Number of Staff Members
 - Number of BIPOC Staff Members
- Contact information for Authorizing Official (for CLGS this should be the Superintendent or Principal), Executive Director, Board President, and Accessibility Coordinator (a designated staff member responsible for overseeing accessibility). We recommend keeping separate persons with separate emails as the different contact officials in the Salesforce grantee portal. This will help us reach out to your organization in case any of the emails change. If your organization does not have ongoing office

staff, including individual cell numbers can also be helpful.

- UEI number (12 characters) and FEIN number (10 characters, including hyphen, e.g., 12-3456789).

Please note the information in the applicant information tab may be updated at any time. Please keep the information current to ensure communications from IAC reach you.

Grant Program Selection and Completion

After the Applicant Information is completed, applicants should click on the Grant Programs tab to access the application.

- Select the “Creative Learning Grant for Schools – 2026” grant program and click apply.
 - The system will prompt you to select an applicant. For CLGS this must be an organization.
- Complete the form fields in the application (see page 12) and click save.
- Upload all supporting documents (see page 12)
- Complete the budget requested in the system (see page 12)
- Certify and submit the application to IAC Salesforce grant portal.
 - Please note this is a two-step process. Once the application is complete click the Submit Button in the lower left-hand corner. A pop-up will require certification of eligibility and application content.
 - After certification there is a submit button which must be clicked to complete the application in the IAC Salesforce grant portal. The application will not be successfully submitted until the second submit button is clicked.

General Online Application Information

- Please note that after any application is started it will appear on the home screen in the Salesforce grant portal.
- Once the application is started the applicant can revisit the application at any time before the deadline to continue working on the application.
- Within the grant application the requirements/sections will be listed along the left-side of the screen.

Application Overview

Application Components

1. Form Fields

Below are the form fields to complete after clicking Apply for the Creative Schools Grant – 2026 grant program:

First, click checkbox to provide assurance that:

- The Applicant Information tab has been updated

Next, complete the following form fields:

- Type of school or district
- Name and contact information for the in-school educator, or administrator, overseeing the work.
- Grant Notification Official Name and contact information.
- Grade levels to be served by this opportunity.
- Number of students to be served by this opportunity.
- Brief Request Summary

2. Supporting Documents

There is one supporting document to be uploaded:

1. Application Narrative

Please refer to the “Supporting Documents” section for full descriptions.

3. Budget

Applicants must complete the application budget within Salesforce requesting the following line-item IAC-expenses:

- Supplies / materials (consumable during the span of the arts learning opportunity)
- Equipment (longer lifespan beyond the arts learning opportunity)
- Contractual services
- General administrative expenses (up to 15% of the grant amount requested)

Please note this is specific to the expenses being requested for support from IAC. The Salesforce system will cap the request at \$20,000.

Supporting Documents

Supporting Documents submitted via upload:

- May be no larger than 25 MB in size.
- Should be saved as a pdf with 12-point font size and 1-inch margins.

1. Application Narrative

The narrative is limited to three pages and must address the following:

Arts Learning Opportunity:

- Describe the arts learning opportunity that will be supported by your grant request.
- Who are the students that will be served by this opportunity?
- How does this opportunity currently support students' arts education curriculum? This curriculum may include activities that take place before, during, or after school.
- What is the timeline for the implementation of this arts learning opportunity, and who is responsible for the required tasks?

Need:

- What is the expense for this arts learning opportunity?
- What is the barrier preventing this work from happening without this grant?

Outcome

- Describe the expected outcome(s) for students. This may include engagement, academics, and/or social-emotional learning (SEL) that may result from this arts learning opportunity.

School / District:

- How will the lead educator, or administrator, oversee the work and how are they supported by the school/district?

For general information contact:

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Visit the [Illinois Arts Council Board Members](#) page for a complete list of current board members.



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