

State of Illinois

JB Pritzker, Governor

Illinois Arts Council

Nora Daley,
Board Chair

Joshua Davis-Ruperto,
Executive Director

Creative Accelerator Fund

Fiscal Year 2027

Opens: September 2, 2026
Deadline: October 14, 2026

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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 are 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

Danielle Heal

Email: Danielle.Heal@illinois.gov

Tel. 312-793-1060

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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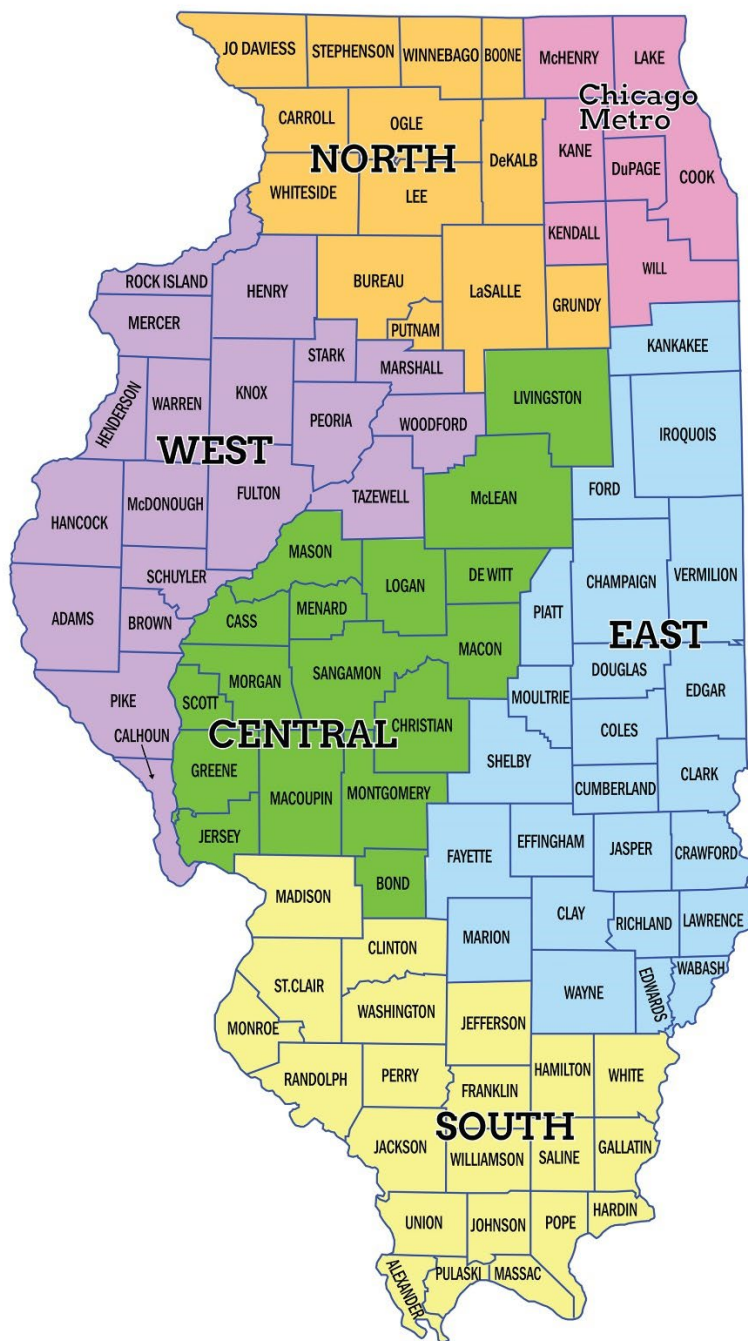
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Creative Accelerator Fund Summary

The Illinois Arts Council's (IAC) Creative Accelerator Fund (CAF) provides crucial support to artists with a goal of strengthening the creative workforce that composes a significant portion of Illinois' economic activity.

CAF selection is done by a regional randomized selection process in partnership with Illinois State Lottery to determine the order in which applications are reviewed.

Who's Eligible

- Individual artists with an active and sustained practice. (see full definition page 5)
- At the time of application artists must:
 - Be age 21 or older.
 - Be established as an Illinois resident prior to October 14, 2025.
 - Be able to include a work sample created by you during 2024-2026.
 - Be able to include a work sample created by you during 2023 or prior.
 - Not be currently enrolled in a degree-obtaining program, including a college or university in any undergraduate or graduate program. Ph.D. candidates need to have completed their course work by the application deadline to be eligible.

Who's Ineligible

- Recipients of the FY25 or FY26 Creative Accelerator Fund Awards
- Individuals enrolled in any degree-obtaining program (including high school, bachelor, or master's-degree programs) at the time of application or during the award period. (Ph.D. candidates need to have completed their course work by the application deadline to be eligible.)
- Organizations or schools. This award is for individuals only.

Award Amount

- \$10,000 award
- This award is taxable income

Connect with IAC

- Mark all IAC emails address as "safe" to ensure delivery to your inbox rather than spam/junk. This includes systems emails listed on page 11.
- A pre-recorded webinar to walk through the full CAF application is available on [IAC's website](#).
- Throughout the guidelines are links to specific timestamps within [the webinar](#) that address some of the frequently asked questions.
- There will be a series of Drop-In meetings offered. Drop-in sessions are one-hour sessions for Q&A. Click on the link [on the website](#) at the time of the meeting to join.
- You can also contact [your Program Director](#) with any questions. This [video link](#) will walk you through how to use the online tool.

Key Dates:

- Application Deadline is Wednesday, October 14, 2026, at 11:59pm.
- A final report will be due September 30, 2027.

Creative Accelerator Fund Details

For the purpose of CAF, IAC defines “Individual Artist with an active and sustained practice” as:

- An individual working in arts, crafts, design, dance, digital media, film/video, literature, music, performance, photography, theater, visual arts, folk and traditional arts, or community-based arts.

By “active and sustained,” we mean that you are currently committing time to practicing your art form that you have practiced since at least 2023. You do not necessarily need to derive significant income from your work in the arts (though it’s also fine if you do). It is also acceptable if your art form has changed over those years. The first submitted work sample needs to have been completed in 2024, 2025, or 2026. The second submitted work sample needs to have been completed in 2023 or prior.

There are numerous fields that benefit from creativity that we are not able to support with CAF. We value the creative energy you bring to this work. However, this program’s funding was approved by Illinois Arts Council’s governor-appointed Council to support individuals working in artistic disciplines. So, while we recognize your creativity in your respective field, we cannot provide CAF awards for this work.

Below are examples of both eligible, and ineligible, art practices. If you have any questions about whether your work is eligible for CAF please [contact us](#).

Examples of *eligible* art practices include, but are not limited to:

actors	musicians
performance artists	composers
theater designers and directors	conductors
puppeteers	creative writers of all genres
choreographers	visual artists
dancers	muralists/public artists
filmmakers/videographers	community-based artists
media artists	community-based teaching artists

Examples of *ineligible* art practices include, but are not limited to:

therapeutic arts of any kind	cosmetology
software development	fitness
computer engineering	martial arts
curators	producers (festival, venue, events, film, etc.)
culinary	

For the purpose of CAF IAC defines “Work Sample created by you” as:

Creative work should be:

1. Entirely created by you, or
2. Created with a substantial contribution by you.

If the latter, please explain in the Work Sample Description what your part in the work’s creation is. For example, if you were the cinematographer for a film scene that was written/directed/performed by others, you’ll need to specify your contribution was the cinematography.

Collaborative applications will not be considered for CAF. It is expected that if both artists are eligible for CAF they will submit their own separate applications.

If artificial intelligence (A.I.) was used as a tool in the creation of your work, that needs to be explained in the Work Sample Description. Applications should clearly demonstrate meaningful human authorship and creative leadership within any Artificial Intelligence (AI)-assisted work. You may not submit any work entirely generated by an A.I. program as your own.

Applicants must:

- Apply utilizing a Salesforce grant portal account registered to the applicant.
- Submit all required application materials prior to the deadline.

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.
- IAC Board and staff members are prohibited from applying.

Deadline

The FY27 CAF deadline is Wednesday, October 14, 2026. The application must be successfully submitted by 11:59 PM CST 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.

Unallowable Expenses

CAF is holistic support to individual artists; we trust you know the best way to invest and sustain your artistic practice.

However, as a state agency there are some expenditures that are not allowable with state funds including:

- subsidizing an individual's academic study or projects associated with that academic study
- political activities such as contributions, lobbying, or fundraisers

Creative Accelerator Fund Review Criteria

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

- 1. Does the application demonstrate the individual artist has an active and sustained practice?**
 - Applicant has provided a work sample of artwork they created in 2024-2026.
 - Applicant has provided a work sample of artwork they created in 2023 or prior.
 - Applicant has described their art practice and how CAF may benefit them as an artist.
- 2. Is the application complete?**
- 3. Is the artist eligible to receive funds from the State of Illinois?**
 - Applicant can show proof they have been an Illinois resident prior to October 14, 2025.
 - Applicant has submitted a valid State ID or Driver's License.
 - Applicant is compliant with all IAC requirements.
 - Applicant is not on the Illinois Stop Payment List. Individuals may be placed on the Illinois Stop Payment List for not being in compliance with all state agencies. Examples include owing money to another state agency or not being up to date with reporting on state grants.

CAF 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).
 - The award process is determined via randomized selection. Applications will be grouped according to IAC region and, in partnership with the Illinois State Lottery, are randomly selected to determine the order in which applications are reviewed for eligibility.
 - The final recommendations are presented to the IAC board for their consideration and final approval.
 - A record of the review process is maintained for all reviewed applications.
-

Notification

All applicants will be notified of funding decisions once the IAC board 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). Disbursement needs may be requested at this time. Disbursements must take place within the grant period as detailed within the grant agreement. Artists with a disability are encouraged to look at services provided by [IL ABLE](#) to assist with managing award funds.

Please note that some email systems direct IAC notification emails to spam email boxes or quarantine them by the security settings on the applicant's server/domain. We encourage you to mark "no-reply@webmerge.me" and "InsureSign@send.insuresign.com" as safe email addresses in your email 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 in Salesforce for the applicant. Please contact The Comptroller's Office at (217) 557-0930 if you would like to set up direct deposit. If you move while waiting for a check payment, please contact IAC staff immediately regarding the change in address.

This award is taxable income. Individual grantees will be issued a 1099-G from the state comptroller for the year in which the grant funds are received.

Compliance

Award Acceptance

For awards to be processed all acceptance documents must be submitted to the IAC Grants Office. Award 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.
- Artist biography, of 300 words or less, that notes your preferred name for public communications.
- Headshot or other work-related photo that may be used in public communications. Photo should be in jpeg format with photo credit/meta tag (image no larger than 750px x 750px, 20MB)
- Award acceptance document signed and dated by the Applicant.

Following the upload of these documents the Applicant will be sent a link to sign the award acceptance document agreement via Formstack.

Final Report

All FY27 CAF recipients will be required to complete and submit a final report no later than September 30, 2027, as stated on the grant agreement.

The Final Report for CAF award will ask:

- How did the CAF award benefit you as an artist
- Optional quote on the impact of the award and/or photo with photo credit

Grant Portal Overview & Applicant Information

IAC utilizes an [online grant portal](#), powered by Salesforce, to accept applications. The 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.

This [video link](#) will address the most common Salesforce questions and needs. Other resources include the [Using Salesforce](#) section of the IAC website and a [user manual](#) to help guide the application process.

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 individual 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 individual applicant account includes:

- Applicant Name (legal name)
- Artist Name, if applicable
- Website, if applicable
- Email Address
- Phone Number
- Mailing Address, including a drop-down selection of zip-code and county.
- Primary Discipline Selection – select one
- Any additional disciplines reflected in artistic practice – select as many as applicable
- Checkboxes if individual identifies as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) or has a disability.

If you have an existing Salesforce account for an organization you oversee, or founded, you will still need an individual account in Salesforce to apply for CAF. Applications from organizations will be made ineligible.

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 Accelerator Fund – 2027” grant program and click apply
 - The system will prompt you to select an applicant. For CAF this must be an individual.
- Complete the form fields in the application (see page 12) and click save
- Upload or link to all required attachments (see page 12)
- Certify and submit the application to IAC Salesforce grant portal (see below)

Certification and Submission

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.

The certification required for applicants is:

The applicant HEREBY CERTIFIES THAT:

1. I have reviewed the Illinois Arts Council's FY27 CAF guidelines and meets the Illinois Arts Council eligibility requirements.
2. I am legally able to receive taxable income in the U.S.
3. I am currently and have been a resident of the state Illinois for the twelve months prior to the application deadline.
4. I am at least twenty-one years of age at the time of application.
5. I am not enrolled in a degree obtaining program.
6. The figures, facts, and representation in this application, including all exhibits and attachments, are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Any application determined to include false, fictitious, or fraudulent information will be immediately made ineligible and may be subject to legal action and penalties.

THIS ASSURANCE is a legal document to the State of Illinois and is binding on the Applicant.

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.
- There is no need to click on the financials tab. That is not required for the CAF application, it is part of the architecture of Salesforce and is used for other grants. If you do click on it, simply click the Return button at the top left of the screen.

Application Overview

Application Components

1. Form Fields

After clicking Apply for the Creative Accelerator Fund – 2027 grant program click checkboxes, or select the appropriate Yes or No dropdown, to provide assurance that:

- The Applicant Information tab has been updated
- You are an active artist during 2024-2026
- You are a sustained artist with activity from 2023 or prior
- You have been established as an Illinois resident prior to October 14, 2025.
- You are legally able to receive taxable income in the U.S. (e.g., U.S. citizen, permanent resident, and/or any other person who can provide a W9 and SSN or ITIN).
- You are 21 years of age or older.
- You are not currently enrolled in a degree-obtaining program.
- You acknowledge that recipients are determined by randomized selection in partnership with the Illinois State Lottery.
- IAC may use images of your work samples in our communications and outreach.
- You consent to a potential interview with IAC's communications team. The IAC regularly connects with its grantees to help promote the work they do and to celebrate arts and culture in Illinois. IAC outlets include The Muse newsletter, website, and social media.

If any of the assurances above do not align with CAF requirements that application will be made ineligible.

Also complete the following form fields:

- Number of years as a practicing artist outside of a degree obtaining program
- Title of Work Sample 1
- Year of completion for Work Sample 1 (must be between the years of 2024-2026)
- Title of Work Sample 2
- Year of completion for Work Sample 2 (must be 2023 or prior)

2. Supporting Documents

The supporting documents to be provided are:

1. Application Narrative
2. Work Sample 1: Completed 2024-2026
3. Work Sample 2: Completed 2023, or prior
4. Valid Illinois Driver's License or State ID
5. One-year Residency Verification

Please refer to the "Supporting Documents" section for full descriptions.

Supporting Documents

Supporting Documents utilizing video or audio files submitted via a link (ex. YouTube, Vimeo, SoundCloud, etc.):

- Have no size restriction
- Must be public and without password protection. Work sample must remain without password protection until applicant receives CAF selection communication.
- May not link to sites that require an account (e.g., Instagram)

Supporting Documents submitted via upload:

- May be no larger than 25 MB in size.
- Salesforce will accept the formats listed below:
 - Audio acceptable formats are: mp3, .wav, .ogg.
 - Video acceptable formats are: .vi, .mov, .mpeg, .mpg, .swf
 - Document Files acceptable format is: .pdf

Watch this [video link](#) for information on the CAF Supporting Documents.

1. Application Narrative

The narrative is limited to one page or a two-minute video or audio recording answering the following:

Tell us about your art practice

- What art form(s) do you practice
- Describe the community area(s) of Illinois where you practice your art
- How the award would benefit your art practice

If narrative is submitted as a recording, the recording must be made for this application specifically answering the bullets listed above. Applicants should not be concerned with the production quality of the recording.

If uploading a file, it should be named: Applicant Name_Narrative

2. Work Sample 1: Created 2024-2026

The first work sample must be from a work created by you in 2024, 2025, or 2026. The work sample submitted may not be from work created for a degree-obtaining program.

Each work sample has a corresponding field to describe it in a maximum of 1,000-characters. In the Work Sample Description field, applicants may provide any additional details pertaining to the work they think are pertinent.

If your work sample does not list the date of completion in the description the application will be ineligible.

If uploading a file, it should be named: Applicant Name_Work Sample 1

3. Work Sample 2: Created 2023, or prior

The second work sample must be from a work created by you in 2023 or prior. The work sample submitted may not be from work created for a degree-obtaining program.

Each work sample has a corresponding field to describe it in a maximum of 1,000-characters. In the Work Sample Description field, applicants may provide any additional details pertaining to the work they think are pertinent.

If your work sample does not list the date of completion in the description the application will be ineligible.

If uploading a file, it should be named: Applicant Name_Work Sample 2

4. Valid Illinois Driver's License or State ID

CAF is funded by state taxes and therefore requires a minimum of one year of residency in the State of Illinois.

Your residency verification requires your valid Illinois Driver's License or Illinois State ID. A valid Illinois Driver's License or Illinois State ID will need to expire on, or after, October 15, 2026. If it expired on, or before October 14, 2026, it is not valid.

If the issue date is on, or before, October 14, 2025, this is the only residency document required to upload.

If the issue date is after October 14, 2025, you must also submit One-Year Residency Verification detailed below.

IAC maintains a Personal Identity Protection Policy which can be found on our website:

<https://arts.illinois.gov/personal-identity-information-protection-policy.html>

Submit a picture of the front of your Illinois Driver's License or Illinois State ID as a PDF file named: Applicant Name_Residency

5. One-Year Residency Verification

If the issue date of your Illinois Driver's License or Illinois State ID is after October 14, 2025, you must also submit one of the following additional pieces of residency verification to show you have lived in Illinois for more than one year:

- Your previous Driver's License or State ID
- A utility bill in your name from prior to October 14, 2025
- A W2 or 1099 from 2024

If your application does not meet the residency verification it will be ineligible.

Submit this document as a PDF file named: Applicant Name_Additional Residency

Creative Accelerator Checklist

Applicants may use the checklist below as a tool to assist in preparing their CAF application. Applicants should always read the guidelines for full details on the application requirements.

Should I apply?

- ☐ I have been practicing a CAF-eligible artform since at least 2023
- ☐ I am currently practicing a CAF-eligible artform
- ☐ I can provide current proof of Illinois residency since at least October 14, 2025, using IAC's required documentation
- ☐ I am 21 or older
- ☐ I am not in a degree-obtaining program

If all the above are checked, move on to preparing the application materials.

To complete the application in Salesforce I will need:

- ☐ A user account to login to the Salesforce grant platform
- ☐ A current Individual Applicant account in Salesforce to use when applying for CAF.
- ☐ A Narrative document or video answering the questions on page 13 in the guidelines
- ☐ Work sample 1: created in 2024, 2025, or 2026
- ☐ Year work sample 1 was created: _____
- ☐ Title for work sample 1: _____
- ☐ Work sample 2: created in 2023 or earlier
- ☐ Year work sample 2 was created: _____
- ☐ Title for work sample 2: _____
- ☐ Illinois Driver's License or State ID
 - The Illinois identification must expire on, or after, October 15, 2026.
- ☐ If the Illinois Driver's License or State ID was issued after October 14, 2025, I also need one of the following:
 - My previous Driver's License or State ID
 - A utility bill in my name from prior to October 14, 2025
 - A W2 or 1099 from 2024
- ☐ To submit the complete application in Salesforce by the deadline: October 14, 2026, at 11:59pm

NOTE: This page is not part of the application. It is intended as an optional tool to prepare for the application.

For general information contact:

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



The IAC acknowledges continuous support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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