



Creative Aging, Creative Futures Grant Guidelines

Program Synopsis

In collaboration with E.A. Michelson Philanthropy, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) is making available up to \$2,290,000 in funding to help state arts agencies expand the availability of creative aging programs for older adults. Grant funds from the Creative Aging, Creative Futures initiative can be used to launch new initiatives or build on existing creative aging programs led by state arts agencies.

Background/Purpose of Grant

NASAA's new Creative Aging, Creative Futures (CACF) grant opportunity provides direct funding for state and jurisdictional arts agencies (SAAs) to meet the needs of their older adult populations through the arts and creativity. The primary purpose of the Creative Aging, Creative Futures grant program is to help state arts agencies deliver more high-quality arts learning experiences to more older adults in their states by expanding point-of-service program delivery.

This funding is made possible through a partnership with E.A. Michelson Philanthropy. Since 2018, NASAA and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy have collaborated to raise awareness about creative aging, conduct research on the creative aging activities of SAAs and fund SAAs to grow their work in this area. This initiative is a continuation of that collaborative process and builds on the foundation of prior investments.

Between March 2021 and June 2025, 36 SAAs participated in the [Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging](#) (LSICA) and [States Leading Creative Aging](#) (SLCA) initiatives, funded by E.A. Michelson Philanthropy. In both initiatives, direct grants were made available to SAAs to help them deliver robust programs and services benefiting older adults in hundreds of communities across the country. Together, NASAA and the participating states [learned significant lessons](#) about how state arts agencies are

uniquely positioned to enhance the creative expression, well-being and social connections of older Americans.

State and jurisdictional arts agencies share a public mandate to make the social, educational, economic and health benefits of the arts and creativity available to all residents, especially underserved populations. Meeting the needs of America's 58 million older adults is an important component of that mission. Many of these individuals live alone. Many reside in rural areas, face financial insecurity or grapple with health challenges. All of them will encounter ageism in their daily lives. Creative aging programs are a powerful way to facilitate flourishing for older adults. State arts agencies are connected with communities across their states, are a critical part of statewide arts infrastructure, and are prepared to deliver creative aging grants and services across the entirety of their geographic boundaries. NASAA and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy remain committed to helping state arts agencies do more of what they do best: facilitating access to the arts for all communities.

Our Approach to Creative Aging

A [robust body of research](#) points to the power of the arts to support health and well-being as we age. Arts and cultural participation can improve the emotional well-being of older adults, support good physical and cognitive health, strengthen social bonds, and bring a heightened experience of purpose and joy to our lives. NASAA recognizes that there are many valid approaches to pursuing these positive outcomes. While we applaud all tactics that gainfully serve older adults, for this particular initiative NASAA is once again aligning with E.A. Michelson's emphasis on a learning model (rather than health intervention model). This approach:

- respects the high capabilities of older adults by challenging them to develop artistic skills;
- offers sequential arts instruction in a sustained and organized fashion;
- deepens social engagement; and
- employs teaching artists trained to understand the effects of aging and their significance for the design and delivery of arts programs for older adults.

For additional information, consult:

- the [Vitality Arts](#) model, from E.A. Michelson
- [What Is Creative Aging?](#) from Lifetime Arts
- [Museums and Creative Aging: A Healthful Partnership](#), from the American Alliance of Museums
- [Untapped Opportunity: Older Americans & the Arts](#), from Culture Track

Award Amount

Up to 28 SAAs will be awarded grants of up to \$77,500. NASAA will accept only one application per state arts agency.

This is a nonmatching grant category. SAAs who elect to or are able to secure additional resources to support the work will be invited to describe that on their budget form; however, the presence or absence of additional funds will not be a factor in the adjudication of this nonmatching grant opportunity.

Eligibility and Grant Requirements

Eligibility

- This grant offering is open to all 56 U.S. state and jurisdictional arts councils. Participation in a prior round of NASAA creative aging grants is not a requirement.
- Eligible SAAs must certify that they are able to complete their proposed project activities by June 30, 2028.

Allowable Activities

- Funded activities should lead to sequential, skill based arts learning activities that engage older adults in the process of artistic creation. These activities should include meaningful community or social engagement. (See [Our Approach to Creative Aging](#) above.)
- If proposed project activities include training, partnership cultivation, communications or other developmental work, those activities should create the conditions or capacities needed to provide sequential and skill based programs at a later time.
- Program activities should take into consideration the accessibility requirements of older adults.
- Funds may be used for new programs or to augment existing creative aging projects.
- To support the expansion of creative aging program delivery, the following types of activities are also allowable:
 - Developing the capacity of local providers (including but not limited to teaching artists, arts organizations, community organizations, libraries or retirement communities) to deliver successful creative aging programs
 - Pursuing collaborative initiatives with state or local entities who serve older adult populations
 - Reducing ageism and bias in programming geared toward older adults

- Expanding access to creative aging to older adult and/or artist populations with historically limited access to resources
- Developing or deepening the online delivery of creative aging programs to make them more accessible to populations with limited mobility or in rural communities
- Documenting and communicating the impact of creative aging programs on older adults

Allowable expenses include, but are not limited to:

- consulting fees
- honoraria for speakers, project advisors or panelists
- travel/transportation to creative aging activity sites, trainings or partner consultations
- registration fees
- convening expenses: space rental, audiovisual costs, food, accessibility accommodations, etc.
- technology costs related to online program design or delivery, including video conferencing platforms, web programming, site design, etc.
- artist stipends/fees
- materials
- salary for staff directly involved in creative aging program development or partnership activities
- subgrant awards for creative aging activities consistent with the intent of this NASAA grant program (If this option is elected, the SAA must make award determinations; adjudication may not be delegated to a third party.)
- administrative expenditures directly related to management of the CACF project

Unallowable activities and expenses include:

- stand-alone performances, exhibits or activities that are not part of a sustained arts learning program
- services designed primarily as health interventions (using art for therapeutic purposes to treat cognitive or physical diagnoses). Please see [CACF Grant Guidelines FAQs](#) for more information.
- tuition or activities for which academic credit is given
- programs or services for children, unless intergenerational programming with older adults is the focus of the program
- administrative expenditures, rent or overhead unrelated to the management of the CACF project
- deficits incurred from past activities
- expenses incurred before the start or after the ending date of the grant period

All funding must be expensed by June 30, 2028.

Grant Time Line

NASAA will initiate a single grant application round in September 2025. Funded projects may commence any time after February 2, 2026, and must conclude on or before June 30, 2028. State arts agencies may propose their own start and end dates for projects within those date brackets, to give themselves as much flexibility as possible.

- Application opens: Week of Monday, September 15, 2025
- Application deadline: Friday, November 21, 2025, 11:59 p.m. Eastern
- Award notification: Week of Monday, January 5, 2026
- Grant implementation period begins: No earlier than Monday, February 2, 2026
- Grant implementation period ends: No later than Friday, June 30, 2028
- Final report deadline: Friday, September 1, 2028

How to Apply

- Please apply using the [Creative Aging, Creative Futures: Grantee Information](#) web page.
- To access the Grantee Information web page, please email NASAA Arts Learning Projects Director Susan Oetgen for the password (susan.oetgen@nasaa-arts.org).
- Submit your Project Details, a Project Narrative (no more than six pages) and your Project Budget electronically to creativeaging@nasaa-arts.org.
- You will receive a confirmation email once your submission has been accepted.
- For more detailed information about how to apply, please refer to the [Grant Guidelines FAQs](#).

Application Components

Project Details

- Name of state or jurisdictional arts agency
- Name, title and phone/email contact information of individual responsible for application
- Name, title, organizational affiliation and phone/email contact information of individual responsible for project implementation
- Project title
- Project start and end dates
- Do you anticipate needing to use a fiscal receiver? See the [Grant Guidelines FAQs](#) for more discussion on this point.

Project Narrative

Please address all of the following questions in a Project Narrative of no more than six single-spaced pages.

1. Describe the creative aging initiative you propose to undertake with this award.
 - What project activities will occur?
 - Who will be served by project activities? How will stakeholders be consulted in the design of the initiative?
 - Where and when will project activities take place? If projects are digital/virtual, describe that strategy.
 - How will you promote the project and secure the buy-in of partners and participants?
2. Describe how your project creates specific opportunities that benefit creative aging providers and older adults.
3. Describe how you plan to ensure access to creative aging in underserved communities through your project.
4. Describe how your project will be staffed and managed to successfully complete activities within the CACF grant time frame. If you anticipate any challenges or constraints that could make your project more difficult, please indicate how you will approach those challenges.
5. Describe how your project will contribute to the future of creative aging work in your state.

Project Budget

- Please complete the Project Budget form for your proposed project, including income and expenses.
- Project revenues should reflect \$77,500 in the Creative Aging, Creative Futures line.
- Applications that do not have a balanced budget will not be eligible for funding.
- There are no required matching funds; however, applicants should include any matching funds, cash, or in-kind resources or services that are available for the project. The presence or absence of additional funds will not be a factor in the adjudication of this grant opportunity.

Special Note: Limited Additional Support for First-Time State Arts Agency Grantees

NASAA has made a special arrangement with Lifetime Arts to provide additional support for CACF grantees who have not participated in either the Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging or States Leading Creative Aging initiatives. After CACF grants are adjudicated and awarded, a limited amount of funding will be made available to cover the costs of training for community organizations (libraries, arts organizations,

senior centers, etc.) positioned to implement creative aging programs. This set-aside funding is restricted to SAAs who have not participated in either prior initiative (LSICA or SLCA) and is intended to be used in connection with your creative aging program delivery. Participation is optional.

Information about this potential support has been provided here to assist your overall program planning, but should not be included as a source of income in your proposed budget. More details about this opportunity will be available after grants have been adjudicated and awarded.

Adjudication Process and Criteria

Process

- To assist state arts agencies with preparing their applications, NASAA will convene three technical assistance webinars during the application period. Applicants also are encouraged to contact NASAA's [arts learning projects director](#) with specific questions, and/or to request review of application materials prior to the submission deadline.
- Incomplete applications or those proposing unallowable expenses will be removed from consideration.
- A panel of independent reviewers will evaluate applications according to the program criteria. Panelists will include individuals with diverse perspectives who are knowledgeable about state arts agencies, arts learning and older adults.
- The panel will convene virtually in December 2025. Any applicant can observe panel meetings.
- NASAA will make final funding decisions based on panel ratings, available resources and the goals of the program.
- While panel scoring will be the primary consideration in determining awards, NASAA may take additional factors into account to ensure fair funding opportunity for all states, including small-budget states and first-time applicants.
- NASAA will notify applicants about grant awards by January 5, 2026.

Criteria

As a threshold criterion, adjudicators will begin by screening applications to ensure that the primary focus is on the delivery of arts learning programs for older adults.

Further adjudication criteria for this grant opportunity have been directly informed by state arts agency feedback garnered from prior grant cycles. CACF applications will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- **Opportunity for Impact (9 points)**

Successful applications will address specific opportunities that are ripe for the initiation or expansion of creative aging program delivery in their states. Proposals should describe activities to be conducted and the anticipated benefits for creative aging providers and older adults.

- **Access to Creative Aging in Underserved Communities (9 points)**

Applicants should identify the populations they intend to reach through their CACF initiative. Please indicate the barriers encountered by those populations and the strategies your SAA will use to provide access to creative aging programs in underserved communities.

- **Project Feasibility and Management (9 points)**

Adjudicators will consider the feasibility of the proposed project, including whether it can be successfully managed for completion within the proposed time frame. The realistic assessment of anticipated challenges will also be considered.

- **Consideration of Future Creative Aging Work (3 points)**

Applicants should describe how your SAA is cultivating relationships, resources or delivery systems that may help to sustain creative aging services beyond the life of this grant.

Please review the [CACF Adjudication Rubric](#) for additional details on panel review and scoring.

To formulate a strong project plan and a competitive application, applicants are encouraged to consider the insights surfaced in [Leveraging State Investments in Creative Aging: Reflections on a National Initiative](#), the [LSICA evaluation summary](#) and NASAA's creative aging [Recommended Resources](#) list.

Payment Disbursal and Reporting Requirements

- Once grants are announced, NASAA will request from awardees an invoice and W-9 for the amount of the grant.
- State arts agencies must be the grantees of record on award letters of agreement.
- Please note: The time line for processing your grant award does not start until NASAA receives your signed letter of agreement, invoice and W-9. Once we

receive these documents, it will take approximately four weeks for NASAA to issue a check.

- NASAA will disburse 100% of the grant amount at the beginning of the grant period.
- At the project period midpoint (approximately April 2027), all grantees will be required to schedule a brief meeting with NASAA's arts learning projects director to describe work completed and spending to date and to demonstrate continued commitment to the project.
- All grant recipients are required to notify NASAA of any significant changes in time line, personnel, collaborating organizations or strategy.
- Recipients must submit a final report 60 days after the completion of the grant period, no later than September 1, 2028. Fulfillment of reporting requirements (including the supply of descriptive information, participation counts, activity locations and completion of an exit interview) is a condition of the grant. [Survey metrics](#), along with all other application materials, are available on the [Creative Aging, Creative Futures: Grantee Information](#) web page. (For the password, contact NASAA's Susan Oetgen, susan.oetgen@nasaa-arts.org.)
- NASAA may engage an independent consultant to collect qualitative data and/or conduct exit interviews to inform a NASAA program evaluation. Cooperation with this project component is a condition of accepting the grant.

Ownership and Copyrights

NASAA and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy do not claim ownership, copyrights, royalties or other claims to artworks produced as a result of these grants. NASAA and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy reserve the right to reproduce and use such materials for official, noncommercial and educational purposes, including but not limited to use on NASAA and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy websites, emails, social media and print materials.

Access and Nondiscrimination Requirements

All grantees funded by NASAA under the CACF program must conduct activities that are free from discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color, creed, national origin, age, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetic bias, disability, citizenship, veteran status, or other categories protected by applicable District of Columbia or state or federal laws. All activities supported through CACF grants must also be conducted in compliance with the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the ADA Amendment Act of 2008 and the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, as well as the 2010 ADA Title III regulations for nondiscrimination.

Additional Requirements

- Grant recipients are required to acknowledge NASAA and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy in all print, audio, video and Internet materials and all publicity materials (such as press releases, brochures, posters, advertisements and websites) related to grant activities. Detailed information will be provided in the grant contract package.
- Throughout the award period, grantees will ensure that NASAA and E.A. Michelson Philanthropy receive any public communications or media releases pertaining to the project.

Questions/Contact

NASAA staff is available to provide assistance throughout the application process, including answering eligibility and requirement questions, refining proposal ideas, discussing fiscal receiver issues, reviewing proposal drafts and providing other forms of assistance. Discussions with staff do not influence funding decisions. For inquiries about the grant program or the application submission process, please email NASAA Arts Learning Projects Director Susan Oetgen at susan.oetgen@nasaa-arts.org.