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General Operating Support for Organizations

General Operating Support for Organizations (GOSO) provides multi-year unrestricted operating support to arts and culture organizations and culturally specific organizations throughout Rhode Island that meaningfully engage and inspire their community through arts and culture programming. Organizations in this program make important contributions to the diversity and vitality of our communities, the economy of our state, the enrichment of all Rhode Islanders, and our quality of life.

Award Amount: formula based. Range is from \$3,000 - \$40,000 a year, for three years.

Who can apply

- 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations or groups fiscally sponsored by a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Rhode Island.
- Organizations or fiscally sponsored groups must fit RISCA's definitions of either being an arts and culture organization, or a culturally specific organization with significant cultural programming.

Timeline

April 1 Deadline

- Grants open for applications on Feb. 1.
- Deadline is April 1 at 11:59 p.m.
- Annual final reports are due by July 31.

Organizations may apply to the program in the fiscal year in which they become eligible. If accepted into the program, they will then reapply when the organizations in their budget cohort are up for re-evaluation:

- Organizations with annual budgets from \$100,000 - \$500,000: Deadline is April 1, 2024.
- Organizations with annual budgets under \$100,000: Deadline is April 1, 2025.
- Organizations with annual budgets over \$500,000: Deadline is April 1, 2026.

[Read more about deadlines, funding periods and decision-making process.](#)

Program Goals

The goals for this program were developed in 2020 by a 36-person working group representing arts and culture and culturally specific organizations from around the state of Rhode Island.

1. Provide multi-year unrestricted operating support for arts and culture organizations throughout the state through a competitive grant program.
2. Include organizations that are evaluated by peer review panels as being responsive and accountable to the cultural needs of their identified communities.
3. Through extensive recruitment and a streamlined entrance process, includes organizations that better represent the diversity of the state along the following parameters:
 - a. *Racial*: only five BIPOC/ALAANA-centered organizations were in this program as of 2020. RISCA set a goal of at least ten BIPOC/ALAANA-centered organizations in the program by 2025.
4. *Geographic*: there are towns and communities that have no organizational representation in GOSO. RISCA has set a goal of including at least three organizations from three different, unrepresented towns or cities in the GOSO program by 2025. Current unrepresented towns and cities include Barrington, Burrillville, Charlestown, Cumberland, Foster, Glocester, Hopkinton, Johnston, Little Compton, Narragansett, North Kingstown, North Providence, North Smithfield, Richmond, Smithfield, Tiverton, West Greenwich, and West Warwick.
Provide a just and equitable distribution of funding that helps address the damage done by generations of institutional racism. For this goal to be realized, additional funding consideration will be given to organizations that represent communities defined as underserved by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in their mission, programming, staff leadership, and board. This may include but is not limited to BIPOC/ALAANA communities; people with disabilities; or other communities who fit the NEA's definition of underserved.

[For additional examples review past grantees.](#)

Eligibility

You must be:

- A nonprofit organization.
 - Conducting business and be incorporated in the State of Rhode Island as a 501(c)(3) with tax exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service.
 - Registered with the R.I. Secretary of State.
 - Governed by a revolving board of directors, trustees or advisory board drawn from the community at large and shown to be actively involved in the governance of the organization.
 - A non-exempt, Rhode Island-based organization using a Fiscal Sponsor that fits the above requirements.
- A semi-independent cultural entity that is either 1) associated with a university or 2) a subdivision of a larger nonprofit, only if they meet the following additional eligibility criteria:
 - Manage their own budget.
 - Have at least one full-time (minimum 30 hours per week) compensated administrative staff position dedicated solely to the operation of the cultural entity.

- Have an advisory board that meets regularly to discuss policy, strategic direction, and resource development plans to ensure long-term sustainability.

To confirm nonprofit status with the state, visit [R.I. Secretary of State's online database](#).

Additionally, you must also:

- Fit the Arts Council's definition of an arts and culture organization or a culturally specific organization. If your organization fits the definition of a culturally specific organization, a significant portion of your organization's programming must be cultural programming.
- Be in continuous operation and exhibiting or producing arts and culture programming for each year of the past five years. The programming may be seasonal in nature and not necessarily take up a full academic or calendar year.
- Present programs in spaces that are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. You are ineligible for a RISCA grant if your facility does not meet ADA standards. See the [NEA's Accessibility: Publications, Checklists, & Resources](#) for more information.
- Obtain three GOSO eligibility points in three consecutive years. An organization gains an eligibility point in a year by either:
 - Being awarded a Project Grant for Organizations (PGO) or a Project Grant in Education (PGE).
 - Receiving an adjusted panel score of 83 or higher on a PGO or PGE grant application.

Underserved Community-Centered Organizations – including BIPOC/ALAANA-centered organizations – or organizations that are based in and engage towns and communities unrepresented in the GOSO program only need two eligibility points in two consecutive years.

Ineligible

If you are:

- Receiving a legislative line item from the state of Rhode Island.
- Delinquent on any final reports for previous RISCA grants.

Applying with a Fiscal Sponsor

- Non-exempt, R.I.-based organizations can apply via a Fiscal Sponsor if they have an average annual budget under \$50,000. A Fiscal Sponsor is an organization registered with R.I.'s Secretary of State Office and can accept a grant on your behalf. The Sponsor must be financially, administratively, and programmatically responsible for all conditions of the grant.
- Organizations interested in using a Fiscal Sponsor must contact the Deputy Director prior to beginning an application for approval and to request a grant profile that links the organization to the Fiscal Sponsor.
- Nonprofit organizations acting as Fiscal Sponsors can also apply for grants for their own programs or be awardees.

When submitting a grant via a Fiscal Sponsor, a letter of agreement between the applicant and the Fiscal Sponsor must be provided. [Download the fiscal sponsorship letter template](#). Typically, Fiscal Sponsor will charge an administrative fee ranging from 0-10 percent depending on the degree of administrative support and bookkeeping required. This fee can be factored into the budget.

Fiscal Sponsor Requirements

A Fiscal Sponsor:

- Must fit the Arts Council’s definition of a nonprofit organization as stated above.
- Is responsible for signing any grant documents and ensuring that the sponsored organization follows the rules of the grant program and submits their final report.

Funding Rules and Restrictions

For applicants applying to the program in the year in which they become eligible and at a deadline not for their budget cohort (an “off year” applicant), please see the FAQ.

For applicants applying or reapplying at the deadline for their budget cohort (an “on year” applicant), grant awards will be determined by the following factors:

- Panel ranking and funding recommendation.
- Organization’s annual operating budget.
- If the organization has an annual average budget under \$1 million and fits RISCA’s definition of being an Underserved Community-Centered Organization.
- The amount of funds allocated for organizational support by the Council.

Budget Class	Award Range	“Middle” Award	Award Increments
under \$50K	\$3,000 - \$5,000	\$4,000	\$3,000; \$4,000; \$5,000
\$50-\$100K	\$4,000 - \$7,000	\$5,500	\$4,000; \$5,500; \$7,000
\$100-\$250K	\$5,000 - \$9,000	\$7,500	\$5,000; \$7,500; \$9,000
\$250-\$500K	\$6,000 - \$13,000	\$9,500	\$6,000; \$9,500; \$13,000
\$500K-\$1M	\$8,000 - \$17,000	\$12,500	\$8,000; \$12,500; \$17,000
\$1-\$2M	\$10,000 - \$21,000	\$15,550	\$10,000; \$15,500; \$21,000
>\$2M	\$15,000 - \$40,000	\$27,500	\$15,000; \$21,250; \$27,500; \$33,750; \$40,000

The amounts listed in the tables above and below are estimated grant award ranges. Each year GOSO award amounts are determined based on RISCA’s legislative budget allocation. Award amounts listed do not represent guaranteed minimums and maximums, and organizations are strongly encouraged to budget conservatively when forecasting potential awards.

In line with RISCA’s strategic plan and the goals of this program, additional funding consideration will be given to organizations with average annual budgets under \$1 million that fit RISCA’s definition of an Underserved Community-Centered Organization, including BIPOC/ALAANA-Centered Organizations. For organizations who fit these criteria, panels may recommend them for a limited number of available grant awards that are 1.5 times larger:

Budget Class	Award Range	“Middle” Award	Award Increments
under \$50K	\$4,500 - \$7,500	\$6,000	\$4,500; \$6,000; \$7,500
\$50-\$100K	\$6,000 - \$10,500	\$8,250	\$6,000; \$8,250; \$10,500

\$100-\$250K	\$7,500 - \$13,500	\$10,500	\$7,500; \$10,500; \$13,500
\$250-\$500K	\$9,000 – 19,500	\$14,250	\$9,000; \$14,250; \$19,500
\$500-\$1M	\$12,000 - \$25,500	\$18,750	\$12,000; \$18,750; \$25,500
\$1-\$2M	N/A	N/A	
>\$2M	N/A	N/A	

All grant awards are contingent upon the availability of funds from the Rhode Island State General Assembly and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

- GOSO grantees are ineligible to apply for or receive funding from any other RISCA grant program during their grant award period, unless otherwise indicated. Grantees may function as fiscal sponsors for other Arts Council grant applicants, or partner on projects with other Arts Council applicants.
- Grant applications are considered on a competitive basis. Award amounts may vary cycle to cycle depending on available funds, number of applications, and the panel decision-making. [For more information on our Decision-Making Process, visit our Applicant Resources web page.](#)
- If you receive a grant, you must credit on all marketing materials. [See Acknowledging RISCA.](#)
- Substantive changes to an organization’s mission, scope of programming, or organizational structure may necessitate a review at any time by Arts Council staff to determine ongoing eligibility. It is the responsibility of the organization to inform the Arts Council of such changes when they occur. Financial malfeasance (meaning intentional deception or fraud) will result in immediate ejection from the program.

Allowable

- General operating expenses, e.g., salaries, rent, and utilities.
- Any program activity supported by these funds must take place in Rhode Island.

Not Allowable

Grant funding cannot be used for the following:

- Capital projects, including the construction or renovation of buildings, or additions to buildings.
- Development efforts, such as social events or benefits or any fundraising expenses.
- Addressing, eliminating or reducing existing debt or for contributions to an endowment fund.
- Purchasing of alcohol, food, or beverage.
- Prizes and awards for an event, person, and/or organization.
- Regranting.
- Activities that are associated with a graduate or undergraduate degree program or for which academic credit is received.
- Applications for projects that proselytize or promote religious activities, or which take place as part of a religious service.
- Programming, performances, and exhibitions unavailable and/or inaccessible to the public.
- Expenses incurred or activity happening outside of the award period.

Evaluation Criteria

Per the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) enabling legislation, The NEA requires that state arts agencies include artistic merit and artistic excellence in their evaluative criteria. However, the NEA allows state arts agencies to define artistic merit and excellence for themselves and in conversation with their communities. For this grant program, artistic merit and artistic excellence is defined as "Artistic Vibrancy and Relevancy."

Artistic Vibrancy and Relevancy (50%): Is there evidence that the organization meaningfully engages and inspires its community through arts and culture to achieve its mission?

- Core programming is strongly related to the organization's mission and their defined organizational community.
- Demonstrates a complete and thorough understanding of the geographic community their organization is based/largely programs.
- Able to clearly articulate who the audience or communities they engage with through their programming, indicating data or information sources. Explains how who they engage relates to their mission.
- Needs, desires, and/or identities of their organizational community are reflected in organization's artistic and cultural programming.
- Community support materials come from a varied array of community sectors, both arts and non-arts, and reflect a robust support for the organization.

Organizational Responsiveness and Ingenuity (30%): Is there evidence that the organization effectively operates in dialogue with their defined organizational community, with leadership reflective of that community?

- Has board that is reflective of their organizational community and its diversity and is proactively engaged in efforts to ensure that is sustained.
- Needs of their organizational community are reflected in operations (e.g., board and/or staff decision-making, policy development, planning, or evaluation).
- Worked in dialogue with their organizational community to negotiate a recent challenge.

Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access (20%): Is there evidence the organization is reflecting stated DEIA goals through organizational representation and meaningful actions?

- Representation of staff (at a variety of levels), artists and key collaborators that include those in their organizational community who come from underserved communities in both their public-facing programming and administrative work.
- Engaging in meaningful actions to ensure representation within from underserved communities that is commensurate with where they are at in those efforts, as well as their staff size and resources.
- Examples actions shared are substantive and reflect the organization's DEIA goals or priorities.

Support Materials

Required Documentation for Determining Applicant Eligibility

- 501(c)(3) Determination Letter.
- SAM-UEI, a 12-character Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) assigned by the federal System for Awards Management (SAM), must be submitted by any entity receiving federal funds.

- 990s from your organizations 2020, 2021, and 2022 fiscal years. A 990 is the type of annual tax return 501(c)(3) nonprofits file.
- Board approved budget from your current or most recently completed fiscal year.
- If you are using a Fiscal Sponsor, you need your Fiscal Sponsor's 501(c)(3) Determination Letter, SAM-UEI, a 990 from their 2022 fiscal year, and a Fiscal Sponsor letter. Use the [Fiscal Sponsor Template](#) for your letter.

Required Support Materials for Panel Review

- Current list of board members. If an applicant is using a fiscal sponsor or applying as a semi-independent cultural entity, submit a list of the advisory board/committee(s) guiding the organization's work.
- Board and Staff Demographics chart. This chart is available within the GOSO application.
- Up to four support materials from the last three years showing the artistic and cultural programming of your organization.
- Up to four support materials from the last three years showing how the work of your organization is meaningful to your organizational and geographic communities.

Note: If you are submitting video or audio, please link to YouTube, Vimeo, SoundCloud in the text box and on the support material list. File formats you can directly upload to the application include JPG, PDF, Word, Excel. Please do not submit files in Pages or Number format. Our grants system is unable to read files in these formats.

Glossary

A special thanks to our colleagues at the City of Seattle Office of Arts and Culture and Grantmakers in the Arts whose work informed some of the definitions in this glossary.

ALAANA (African, Latin American, Asian, Arab, Native-American): This is an acronym for Asian, Latina/o/x/e, African, Arab, and Native American intended to be inclusive of any individual, culture, community, or arts organization from these racial/ethnic identity groups. The term intentionally names these broad racial and ethnic identities rather than grouping them under the more generic term "people of color." *Source: Grantmakers in the Arts.*

Arts and Culture organization: Not-for-profit based groups that provide as their primary mission regular cultural programs or services, which may include producing or presenting a series or regular program of performances, educational programming, exhibitions, media presentations, festivals, readings, or literary publications. Producing is a primary focus on direct creation, production, performance or exhibition of arts; presenting is a primary focus on organizing, selecting or curating and contracting a series, season or festival of performances or events created by other artists and producing groups.

Not-for-profit organizations that include arts and culture as a primary and major focus of a larger mission may apply, if their larger mission is centered in serving a specific cultural group.

BIPOC: An acronym that stands for Black, Indigenous and people of color. The term is meant to unite all people of color while acknowledging that Black and Indigenous people face different and often more severe forms of racial oppression and cultural erasure as consequences of systemic white supremacy and colonialism. *Source: diversitystyleguide.com*

BIPOC/ALAANA-centered organization: an organization with a mission and programming that is explicitly reflective of a community or communities of color, and where the board, staff, artists, and collaborators, include a significant representation of that community. A BIPOC/ALAANA-centered organization is defined by the following organizational characteristics:

- Primary mission, intentions, and practices are BY, FOR, and ABOUT art, heritages, histories, cultures and communities of colors.
- Executive Leader (Executive Director, Managing Director, Producing Artistic Director, CEO, President) identifies as BIPOC/ALAANA.
- Board is at least 60% BIPOC/ALAANA-identifying individuals, per the definition above.
- Staff is at least 60% BIPOC/ALAANA-identifying individuals, per the definition above.

Culturally specific organization: A culturally specific organization serves a particular cultural community and is founded, led by, and staffed with people who are members of that community.

These nonprofits and community-based organizations help people thrive by starting on a foundation of shared cultural identities, histories, languages, and experiences. Often beginning as grassroots efforts, these organizations remain embedded in the fabric of their communities as they grow. *Source: Community Foundation of Southwest Washington.*

Diverse: composed of distinct qualities and characteristics; age, color, ethnicity, ancestry, sex, family or marital status, gender identity or expression, language, national origin, physical and mental disability, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, veteran status, citizenship status and other characteristics that make individuals unique.

Equity: The fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.

Fiscal Sponsorship: An organization that fits RISCA's definition of a nonprofit organization that accepts a grant on behalf of the sponsored organization and is financially, administratively, and programmatically responsible for all conditions of the grant. The Fiscal Sponsor is also responsible for signing any grant documents and ensuring that the sponsored organization follows the rules of the grant program and submits its final report.

Geographic Community: the people who live in the place (neighborhood, town, or city) in which your organization is physically located, as well as the geography and character of the place. If your organization doesn't have a physical location, this would be the place in which you most frequently offer programming. Descriptions of the people in the community could include demographic and geographic makeup, including information about relevant socioeconomic factors, as well as diversity of age, ethnicity, race, gender, ability, education, etc. Descriptions of the geography and character could include discussion of relevant history, physical features that define the community (e.g., rivers, streets), community institutions and resources, and density (e.g., urban, rural).

Inclusion: The act of creating an environment in which every person feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming place embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people, where each person is able to share the full spectrum of their humanity and be seen and heard without fear.

Institutional Racism: Institutional racism, or systemic racism, describes societal patterns and structures that impose oppressive or otherwise negative conditions on identifiable groups on the basis of race or ethnicity (wikipedia.com). It is a form of racism that is embedded as normal practice within society or an organization. It can lead to such issues as discrimination in criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, political power, and education, among other issues (thoughtco.com). In arts and culture funding, institutional racism has led to the historic exclusion and undervaluing of BIPOC/ALAANA communities and individuals, and an inequitable distribution of philanthropic dollars. To learn more, see the study [Not Just Money: Where is the Money Going?](#) by the Helicon Collaborative.

Nonprofit Organization: Is incorporated in and conducting business in the State of Rhode Island, with 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service, registered with the Rhode Island Secretary of State, governed by a revolving board of directors, trustees or advisory board drawn from the community at large and shown to be actively involved in the governance of the organization.

Organizational Community: the people who comprise the audiences or communities your organization engages through their programming. This community should include audience members, artists, students, and other groups that are significant to the organization. Descriptions of the community could include demographic and geographic makeup, including information about relevant socioeconomic factors, as well as diversity of age, ethnicity, race, gender, ability, education, etc.

Underserved communities. The National Endowment for the Arts defines “underserved” communities as “ones in which individuals lack access to arts programs due to geography, economic conditions, ethnic background, or disability.” This definition may include BIPOC/ALAANA communities, people with disabilities, immigrant groups, rural populations, aging populations, people living in poverty, people experiencing houselessness, incarcerated populations, communities recovering from trauma or disaster, and military service members and veterans. Please note that in accordance with the NEA’s definition, age alone does not qualify a community as underserved.

Underserved Community-Centered Organization: an organization with a mission and programming that is explicitly reflective of a community defined as underserved by the NEA, and where the board, staff, artists, and collaborators, include a significant representation of that community. An Underserved Community-Centered organization is defined by the following organizational characteristics:

- Primary mission, intentions, and practices are BY, FOR, and ABOUT art, heritages, histories, and cultures of a particular underserved community.
- Executive Leader (Executive Director, Managing Director, Producing Artistic Director, CEO, President) identifies as a member of the underserved community who is the focus of the organization’s mission.
- Board is at least 60% individuals who identify as a member of the underserved community who is the focus of the organization’s mission.
- Staff is at least 60% individuals who identify as a member of the underserved community who is the focus of the organization’s mission.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: For the sake of determining which deadline, I apply at and what my grant award could be, how do I calculate my average annual budget?

A: Budget size for determining application and grants awards will be based on the three-year average of your organization's total cash expenses listed in your 990s from your 2020, 2021, and 2022 fiscal years. If your organization files a 990 EZ, your total cash expenses should be listed on the first page of your 990 (Part I, line 17). If your organization files a standard 990, your total cash expenses should also be listed on the first page of your 990 (Part I, line 18).

If your organization's annual budget is under \$50,000, you will submit your 990N from your 2020, 2021, and 2022 fiscal years for compliance purposes. If your organization is fiscally sponsored, you will submit your fiscal sponsor's 990 from their 2022 fiscal year for compliance purposes.

Q: How are grant awards determined for new organizations applying in an off year?

A: For newly eligible organizations awarded a GOSO in an off year, the grant award will not follow the regular funding scheme for the program. Instead, the grant awards will be based on availability of funds but will be at least \$4,000.

When the organization is up for reapplication with the rest of their budget cohort, the grant award will follow the regular funding scheme.

If a newly eligible organization applies in an off year and does not receive a grant, they are welcome to reapply with the rest of their budget cohort when they are next up for reapplication.

Q: How was this grant program developed?

A: In February 2020, RISCA's Governor-appointed Council leadership approved a timeline and process for the restructure of the Investments in Arts and Culture program, the prior version of RISCA's general operating support program. In particular, RISCA's Governor-appointed Council wanted to ensure that RISCA's support of arts and culture organizations affirms our values of equity and access.

As a part of the process, RISCA stewarded a working group that helped vet and devise strategies for achieving goals of the program within the context of the new [strategic plan](#), new values statement, and the Governing Council's directive.

The working group met four times between May – October 2020. Consisting of 36 people from 22 RI-based arts and culture organizations around the Ocean State, participating organizations varied in size, communities engaged, and artistic discipline/cultural tradition.

The working group consisted of organizations in the Investments in Arts and Culture program, as well as current cohort and alumni organizations of the [Rhode Island Expansion Arts Program](#): AS220, Arts Equity RI (formerly VSA Arts), Chorus of Westerly, City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, Community MusicWorks, Eastern Medicine Singers, Hera Gallery, India Association of Rhode Island, Island Moving Company, Kingston Chamber Music Festival, Manton Avenue Project, New Urban Arts, newportFILM, Oasis International, Providence CityArts for Youth, Rhode Island Black Storytellers, Rhode Island Latino Arts, RI Philharmonic Orchestra and Music School, Riverzedge Arts, Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre, Teatro ECAS, and Trinity Repertory Company.

In addition to the working group, RISCA drew on the expertise of many field colleagues in developing this new program. A special thank you to our colleagues at the Arizona Commission on the Arts, the City of Seattle Office of Arts and Culture, Grantmakers Council of Rhode Island, Indiana Arts Council, Indiana University's O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Maryland State Council on the Arts, Mass Cultural Council, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, and the Rhode Island Foundation.