



## OUR TOWN: Frequently Asked Questions

### BASICS

**Q: What is "creative placemaking?"**

A: Creative placemaking integrates arts, culture, and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities. Creative placemaking requires partnership across sectors, deeply engages the community, involves artists, designers and culture bearers, and helps to advance local economic, physical, and/or social change, ultimately laying the groundwork for systems change. This definition is intentionally open and broad because creative placemaking draws on all artistic disciplines, and can be deployed as a strategy to address a wide range of community issues or challenges from public health to safety, economic development to housing. For additional information on NEA's definition of creative placemaking, as well as the Our Town Program's Theory of Change and other resources, visit [www.arts.gov/impact/creative-placemaking](http://www.arts.gov/impact/creative-placemaking).

**Q: What is the success rate for applicants?**

A: Based on numbers from previous years, Our Town applications have a success rate of roughly 20%.

**Q: If we received an Our Town grant last year, can we apply again this year?**

A: Yes, you may apply to the Our Town category for FY 2023 for a **distinctly different project, or a distinctly different phase of the project**, from that which was funded.

**Q: How long can my grant period be?**

A: Your grant period may be up to two years in length, and may start on July 1, 2023, or any time thereafter. If your project is part of a multi-year initiative, you may describe the broader vision but your application, including the budget, should reflect only the activities or phases of work that will occur within the grant period.

**Q: Will projects in small towns and rural areas be competitive?**

A: Yes. We are seeking a diverse range of applicants and encourage communities of all sizes to apply.

**Q: Can we apply for a project that addresses impacts of COVID-19?**

A: Yes. The Our Town program seeks to leverage creative placemaking and innovative partnerships in responding to evolving and emerging local community needs. These may include efforts to support artists and cultural organizations in addressing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, artist unemployment, racial inequity, and other needs that may not be clear at this specific time.

## **REVIEW PROCESS**

### **Q: How will the projects be evaluated?**

A: Congress specified in our authorizing legislation that "artistic excellence and artistic merit" are the criteria by which all applications must be evaluated. For more detailed information about how artistic excellence and artistic merit apply to Our Town projects, see the "[Review Criteria](#)" in the guidelines.

### **Q: How can I demonstrate artistic excellence for my proposed project?**

A: Artistic excellence is evaluated based on the material and work samples submitted with the application. This includes the quality of the artists, culture bearers, design professionals, organizations, works of art, activities, and/or services that the project will involve; and their relevance to the community in which the project takes place. If artists are not yet selected, a description of the process and criteria for selection will enable panelists to assess artistic excellence.

### **Q: Who reviews and selects grantees?**

A: All applications will be reviewed according to the review criteria of artistic excellence and artistic merit by an advisory panel composed of qualified peer experts, including at least one knowledgeable layperson, representing a range of multidisciplinary art, design, and economic and community development fields. Panel recommendations are forwarded to the National Council on the Arts, which then makes recommendations to the Chair of the NEA. The Chair reviews the Council's recommendations and makes the final decision on all grant awards. [A list of past Our Town panelists](#) is available on the website (see the Design discipline).

### **Q: Can staff help me with my application?**

A: Members of Design and Creative Placemaking staff are available to answer specific questions about the application materials and forms. However, we do not review full proposals or provide edits to text or budgets in advance of the application deadline. Email [OT@arts.gov](mailto:OT@arts.gov) with any questions.

## **OTHER NEA GRANTS**

### **Q: Can my organization apply to receive funding from both the Our Town and Grants for Arts Projects or Challenge America categories?**

A: Yes. You may apply to other NEA funding opportunities, including Grants for Arts Projects or Challenge America, in addition to Our Town. In each case, the request must be for a **distinctly different project or a distinctly different phase of the same project**, with a different period of performance and costs.

## **BUDGET, COST SHARE, AND MATCHING FUNDS**

### **Q: Do all cost share/matching funds need to be committed in advance of the submission deadline?**

A: No, but we ask you to designate on the budget form funding that is committed versus funding that is being proposed or sought. Designate committed funding with a (\*) after the source.

**Q: Can funds raised prior to the project be used as part of the cost share/match?**

A: Yes. However, cost share/matching funds must be spent on eligible activities included as part of the proposed project, during the proposed period of performance.

**Q: Can cost share/matching funds be in-kind?**

A: Yes. No formula exists for how much of the required cost share/match can be in-kind. However, reviewers tend to look very carefully at any project with a budget that shows a cost share/match that is largely in-kind; generally, some cash cost share/match is preferred. In all cases, cost share/matching funds are evaluated in the context of the project and the community. Remember, if you use in-kind contributions as part of your cost share/match, you need to maintain proper documentation. For help in doing this, see our [sample format](#) for recording in-kind (third party) contributions.

**Q: Can federal funds such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) or Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) funding count toward the cost share/match?**

A: No. Even though these funds may come through your state, the original source is federal. No cost share/matching funds can be from federal sources and these should not appear in your Our Town project budget as either income or expenses.

**Q: Can community infrastructure costs be considered part of the cost share/match for something like a streetscape project?**

A: Costs that pertain strictly to preparing a site specifically for the art or design work, such as slabs or pedestals, landscaping that's necessary for the art work or landscaping that is the art work (e.g., a mosaic tiled walkway with landscaping that is required for the work) are allowable. Installation of street lighting or wayfinding signage are not allowed. Costs to prepare the street, including purchase of property, building appropriate access, infrastructure, etc., are not allowable and can't be used for cost share/match.

**Q: Are artists' or consultants' fees eligible expenses?**

A: Yes. Fees for individuals involved in the project are eligible, such as fees for artists, performers, designers, architects, facilitators, or other consultants. All fees must be incurred during the period of support.

**Q: Is rent for space for an event an eligible expense?**

A: Yes, but not for a party or reception.

**Q: Can overhead be funded?**

A: You may claim administrative costs or overhead as direct costs under "3. Other expenses" on the Project Budget form. (This assumes that there is a basis for justifying the costs as direct costs.) You also may use a federally negotiated indirect cost rate to account for overhead.

**Q: Can salaries for administration or additional fundraising be funded?**

A: Salaries, contract fees, and stipends for administration and project management are allowed, as well as fund raising specifically for the approved project.

**Q: Does sharing the funding between the two required partners count as subgranting or regranting?**

A: No. Subgranting is defined as regranting funds to an individual or organization for activities that are conducted independently of your organization and for the benefit of the subgrantee's own program objectives.

**Q: Does anything need to be done to formalize the financial relationship between the two required partners?**

A: When a grantee partners with another organization that will directly support project costs tied to the federal award, the grantee must ensure a contractual agreement is in place that outlines the relationship and responsibilities of each partner. In addition, the partner's accounts and documentation will be subject to review if audited by the NEA or the grantee's own auditors.

### **ELIGIBLE PARTNERS**

**Q: Can a private foundation or corporate entity serve as a partner?**

A: Partnerships must involve at least two primary partners as defined by these guidelines: a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization and a local government entity. One of the two primary partners must be a cultural (arts or design) organization. Only the two primary partners can serve as lead applicants, but additional partners across all sectors are encouraged.

**Q: Can a local government arts agency apply and fulfill the role of the cultural organization and the government agency?**

A: Yes, but it would still need a nonprofit organization to serve as the other primary partner.

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ENTITY**

**Q: Can a city/town/ county apply for more than one project?**

A: Yes. Since FY 2021, we have eliminated the limit of only two applications per community. Multiple applications may be submitted from within the same geographic area. However, if more than one application is submitted from a single lead applicant, local government, or within the same geographic area, the capacity of the lead applicant, local government, or geographic area to carry out and sustain multiple Our Town projects will be considered in the review of applications.

**Q: Can a tribal government entity apply?**

A: Yes, federally recognized tribal governments qualify as local governments.

**Q: Can a regional government entity apply as a primary partner?**

A: No, regional government entities do not qualify as local governments and may not apply as a primary partner.

**Q: Do public school districts or community colleges qualify as a local government entity?**

A: Local education agencies (school districts) and local government-run community colleges are eligible to represent a local government entity they serve. Note that a letter of endorsement from

the highest ranking official for the local government is required regardless of who the local government partner is, e.g., the superintendent of a school district cannot send the letter.

**Q: Does a city council or alderman office qualify as a local government entity?**

A: No. City council or aldermen's offices do not qualify as local government entities. In the case of city governments, the local government entity partner should be a department within city government (i.e. department of public health, etc.).

**Q: Does a state university qualify as a local government entity?**

A: No, as with all state level entities, a state university does not qualify as a local government entity under the Our Town guidelines. If the state university has nonprofit status designated by the IRS, however, it may serve as the required nonprofit partner on an Our Town project.

**Q: Does a quasi-local government organization, such as a Business Improvement District (BID) or Chamber of Commerce, qualify as a local government entity?**

A: No. Business improvement districts and chambers of commerce do not qualify as local government entities.

**Q. Does a U.S. territory qualify as a local government entity?**

A: If no local government exists, the territory government can qualify as the local government. In these cases, the territory's state arts agency also may serve as the local government primary partner. However, all grant funds must be passed on to the other partners.

**LETTERS OF ENDORSEMENT/STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT**

**Q: If we have a local government entity on board as a partner, do we still need a letter of endorsement from the highest ranking official for the local government?**

A: Yes. A letter of endorsement from the highest ranking official for the local government is required.

**Q: Can you guide us as to what the letter of endorsement should contain? Do you have a template that we can use?**

A: We do not have a template. However, the document should be a one-page formal endorsement letter, on appropriate letterhead, from the highest ranking official for the local government (e.g., mayor, county executive, or tribal leader). This letter should reflect the official's familiarity with and support for the project.

Many local government structures exist. Provide in your letter a sentence explaining why this official is the leader of the local government. For example, "In the Village of XYZ, our city manager is the highest-ranking government official."

**Q: We are applying with the local government as lead applicant. Should we submit an endorsement letter from the highest ranking official for the local government, or a statement of support from the nonprofit organization?**

A: You are required to submit both.

**Q: Is there a limit to the number of statements of support that we can submit?**

A: Yes. You may submit up to 10 letters of support. We encourage you to be selective in listing only the partners or individuals that are critical to the project's success, not those that are solely funding sponsors or project beneficiaries. If you are working with multiple agencies within a community, only one statement is necessary. Keep statements to one page each.

**OTHER**

**Q: My organization received American Rescue Plan (ARP) or CARES funding. Can we also apply to Grants for Arts Projects?**

A: Yes. However, you need to be sure that there are no overlapping costs. If your ARP or CARES and Grants for Arts Projects applications include items such as salaries, fees, or facilities costs, make sure those costs don't overlap, i.e., occur at the same time.

**Q: Can our organization use funds we received from the Small Business Administration (SBA) or other federal agencies as cost share/match for an NEA grant?**

A: No. Federal funds are not allowed to be used as cost share/match for federal grants (2 CFR §200.306). In addition, the NEA's enabling legislation does not allow any federal funds to be used as cost share/match for its grants. This includes the Paycheck Protection Program and Shuttered Venues Operators Grants (SVOG) from the SBA, as well as other federal funding, including funding from:

- Corporation for National and Community Service (e.g., AmeriCorps)
- National Endowment for the Humanities
- National Park Service
- National Science Foundation
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Department of Education (e.g., 21st Century Community Learning Centers)
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Or an entity that receives federal appropriations such as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting or Amtrak

Note that organizations are eligible to apply for NEA funding even if they have applied for and received funding from the SBA, provided the organization isn't double-claiming any individual's salary. Recipients will be required to keep documentation to show which employees are being paid from each funding source so that the government isn't paying more than 100 percent of a salary. Applicants with additional questions about SBA programs should contact the SBA directly as we are unable to provide guidance on programs other than our own.

**Q: Should the application address how my organization will respond if our project activities end up being affected by COVID-19?**

A: This is not a requirement, but you can provide a very brief description of any contingency plans in the Project Description narrative. The Project Description is where you should address all of the [Review Criteria](#), and it may be useful for the panel's assessment of your organization's ability to carry out the project (see the criteria under artistic merit).

**Q: What if my organization ends up not being able to carry out the project activities in our application due to COVID-19?**

A: If you are recommended for a grant, you will have an opportunity to request changes (e.g., a time extension, a modification to project activities) at that stage of the process. If you receive a grant, you will have the opportunity to request project changes later in the process, as outlined in the [How to Manage Your Award Handbook](#).

We will work with you to try to accommodate changes to your project, but approval is not guaranteed. If you need to request a change, please contact your NEA specialist to discuss what is possible.

**Q: How should my organization formulate its project if we're not sure when in-person gatherings will be possible due to COVID-19? Will it be possible to make project changes if needed later in the process?**

A: You should do your best to complete information within the application to the best of your knowledge.

If you are recommended for a grant, you will have an opportunity to request changes (e.g., a time extension, a modification to project activities) at that stage of the process. If you receive a grant, you will have the opportunity to request project changes later in the process, as outlined in the [How to Manage Your Award Handbook](#).

We will work with you to try to accommodate changes to your project, but approval is not guaranteed. If you need to request a change, contact your NEA specialist to discuss what is possible.

**Q: What are some examples of measurement tools you'd like to see?**

A: You should propose measurement tools that are feasible and appropriate for your organization and project. You will be asked to address the anticipated results in your application. If you receive a grant, you will be asked to provide evidence of those results at the end of your project. Given the nature of Our Town projects, benefits are likely to emerge over time and may not be fully measurable during the period of a grant. You will need to provide evidence of progress toward achieving improved strengthening of the community(ies) as appropriate to the project. We recognize that some projects involve risk, and we want to hear about both your successes and failures. Failures can provide valuable learning experiences, and reporting them will have no effect on your ability to receive NEA funds in the future.

Beyond the reporting requirements for all grantees, selected Our Town grantees may be asked to assist in the collection of additional information that can help the NEA determine the degree to which agency objectives were achieved. For example, Our Town grantees may be asked to participate in surveys or interviews, and/or may be asked to assist in publicizing and promoting these data collection efforts. You may be contacted to provide evidence of project accomplishments including, but not limited to, work samples, community action plans, cultural asset studies, programs, reviews, relevant news clippings, and playbills. Remember that you are required to maintain project documentation for three years following submission of your final report.

**Q: Can federally recognized tribes apply?**

A: Yes. In keeping with federal policies of **Tribal Self Governance** and **Self-Determination**, we may provide support for a project with a primary audience restricted to enrolled members of a federally recognized tribe. Applicants (federally recognized tribal governments, nonprofits situated on federally recognized tribal lands, or other nonprofits whose mission primarily serves federally recognized tribal enrollees) should consult with [our staff](#) to verify their eligibility before preparing an application.

**Q: Can non-federally recognized tribes apply?**

A: Yes, as long as the applicant is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3), U.S. organization. Projects for non-federally recognized tribes and indigenous groups may be supported, but project participation can't be restricted to only tribal members.

**Q: Can Native Hawaiian groups apply?**

A: Yes, as long as the applicant is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3), U.S. organization. Projects for Native Hawaiians may be supported, but project participation can't be restricted to only Native Hawaiians.