



FY25 Grant Review Panelist Handbook

City of Berkeley | Civic Arts

1. OVERVIEW

1.1 About the Civic Arts Grants Program

Civic Arts provides grant funding to support a vibrant arts ecosystem, strengthen diverse cultural expressions, and ensure equitable access to arts and culture throughout Berkeley.

Grants are awarded through a competitive application and panel review process in these categories:

- **Arts Programs:** promotes cross-sector collaborations and opportunities for non-arts organizations to hire arts and cultural workers or partner with Berkeley-based arts organizations for programming, and allows Berkeley residents to engage in Greater Bay Area programming offered by non-Berkeley arts organizations. *This is a pilot program.*
- **Capital Projects:** supports the long-term sustainability of the arts and culture sector by retaining and improving arts organizations' spaces in the City of Berkeley. *This is a pilot program.*
- **Community Festivals:** supports festivals and special events in Berkeley. Grant-funded events must be open to the entire public and have a free component. *Grants in this category are awarded annually.*
- **General Operating Support:** provides general operating funding for Berkeley-based nonprofit arts and cultural organizations. *Grants in this category are awarded on a two-year cycle and applications are only accepted every two years.*
- **Individual Artist Projects:** supports artists living in Berkeley with project-based funding. Projects must include a public presentation that engages Berkeley residents in a meaningful way. *Grants in this category are awarded annually.*

1.2 Transparent Funding Process

The review panel process is designed to ensure that our grantmaking is transparent, thoughtful, and reflective of Civic Arts' cultural equity values. Grant review panels are an integral part of providing city funds to Berkeley's arts and cultural sector.

The Grant review panel is comprised of individuals located in the greater Bay Area with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Individuals apply to be included in the panelist pool through an open call. The Civic Arts Commission approves the pool of panelists that can be selected to serve on a panel. Panelists are knowledgeable about the arts and cultural sector as it pertains to non-profit organizations, practicing artists, cultural events, and cultural equity. If accepted to be included in the Civic Arts grant panelist pool, you are eligible to serve up to two years. Panelists may apply again to be included in the panelist pool after the two-year eligibility expires.

Each grant category is reviewed by a separate panel comprised of at least three panelists. Staff ensures that the makeup of panels is representative of Berkeley's demographics and the artistic disciplines evident in the grant application pool.

The grant review panel meeting is public and facilitated through a Zoom webinar. Applicants may attend the panel review meeting and are given a few minutes to address the panel.

Each application receives a final score by averaging all panelists' scores. Final application scores and proposed award amounts are sent to applicants, and made public through the [Civic Arts Commission meeting](#) agenda packet.

1.3 Funding Recommendations and Final Funding Decisions

Panelists do not make funding recommendations or decisions. Panelists' primary job is to score the applications in accordance with the review criteria and scoring scale. Staff create funding scenarios based on the amount of available funding, number of applications, and panelist scores. These scenarios are reviewed by the Grants Subcommittee, and recommended to the full Civic Arts Commission. The Civic Arts Commission makes the final approval of grant awards at their public meeting.

2. GETTING STARTED

2.1 Orientation Webinar

Panelists will be invited to attend a virtual orientation webinar over Zoom. The orientation will provide an overview of the grant panel process and cover specific details about your grant category. You will attend the orientation with other grant panelists reviewing applications in the same category.

Attending the orientation webinar is a mandatory part of your panel service. The orientation will be scheduled at a time that works for all panelists.

2.2 Confidentiality

As a Civic Arts grant review panelist, you are expected to keep the content of all applications confidential prior to the grant panel review meeting. This includes *not* sharing the names of individual or organizational applicants.

2.3 Grants Management System

All applications will be reviewed electronically using our grants management system, [Submittable](#). Technical assistance using Submittable is available through [Submittable's Customer Support](#). This is the same grants management system you used to apply to be a panelist.

2.4 Assigned Applications

You will be assigned a set of applications to review in your Submittable account. You are responsible for reviewing and scoring all of your assigned applications **at least 24 hours before the grant review panel meeting**.

It is important that all applications in a single panel are reviewed and scored by the same panelists. If all assigned applications are not reviewed and scored before the grant review panel meeting, you will not participate in the review panel meeting and not be paid for your panel service. Partial completion of your assignments will also result in forfeiture of panel service and payment.

2.5 Conflicts of Interest

All panelists must complete a Conflict of Interest Form before reviewing assigned applications. Once completed, return the signed form to Civic Arts staff.

Any panelist who has a conflict of interest with an application(s) must recuse themselves from reviewing that application(s). Civic Arts staff will remove any applications for which you have a conflict from your Submittable account.

A ‘conflict of interest’ is defined as a situation in which a panelist has a competing professional, financial, or personal interest that could impair their ability to perform their evaluation responsibilities objectively.

2.6 Technical Assistance

Technical assistance for grant review panelists is available from Civic Arts staff by email, phone, or virtual appointment. Civic Arts staff can provide guidance on how to review applications and answer questions you may have during the review process.

Staff contact: Hilary Amnah, Grants Program Lead
hamnah@berkeleyca.gov
510-981-7539
[Schedule a virtual appointment](#)

2.7 Accommodations for Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations to review grant applications should make their requests to the Civic Arts staff at civicarts@berkeleyca.gov. Staff works with the Disability Compliance Program (ada@berkeleyca.gov) to review and fulfill the request. **Disability-related accommodation requests must be made at least 72 hours in advance of deadlines or meetings.** TTY users can dial 7-1-1 to be connected to a specially trained communications assistant from a [state relay provider](#).

3. GRANT PANEL PROCESS

3.1 Independent Review

Applications are evaluated in a grant review panel meeting according to the grant program’s review criteria and scoring scale. Each grant category has a specific set of criteria by which the application is evaluated, but all categories use the same scoring scale. Review criteria are weighted, so some criteria may be worth more or less of the total application score.

Scoring Scale:

5	Exceptional	meets review criteria to the highest degree
4	Strong	strongly meets review criteria
3	Good	adequately meets review criteria; average
2	Fair	moderately meets some of the review criteria; needs some improvement
1	Underdeveloped	minimally meets the review criteria; greatly needs improvement
0	Weak	does not meet any elements of the review criteria

Panelists initially evaluate and score their assigned grant applications independently using their own computer or device to access [Submittable](#). You will have several weeks to complete your independent review before meeting virtually to conduct the full panel review.

3.2 Panel Comments

In addition to scoring each application, **you are required to provide written comments on each review criterion**. The comments should support your reasoning for your numerical score for that criterion. (For example, if you give a review criterion a “5,” you will need to include comments about why the application “meets the review criteria to the highest degree.”)

The panel comments should be constructive. You may use language from the review criteria or scoring scale in your comments. Although not obligated to use them, some examples of comments can start with:

- The application would have been strengthened by...
- The timeline for this project is/isn't feasible because...
- The vision for the event is clear and will be culturally rich or significant because...
- The work samples do/do not reflect a high level of skill because...
- The team shows commitment to community engagement through...
- The budget is realistic and appropriate because it includes...
- The applicant demonstrates the ability to produce a festival of this scale because...
- The organization shows focus and commitment to Cultural Equity as evidenced by...

Applicants may request their written panel comments once they have received official notification of their application's acceptance or decline. If panel comments are requested, your name will not be associated with your comments, and all panelists' comments will be sent as an aggregated document.

3.3 Lead Reviews

Panelists will be assigned as “Lead Reviewers” for some applications. Though you will review and score every assigned application, you will act as the expert on your “lead reviews.” You will start the panel discussion for each of your lead reviews and should know the application material thoroughly.

3.4 Virtual Panel Meeting

The grant review panel meeting will occur virtually over a Zoom webinar. It will be scheduled at a mutually beneficial time for staff and panelists. Panelists are expected to access a device (computer, tablet, etc.) to attend the full panel meeting. Depending on the number of applications being reviewed, the panel could take one to two business days. The grant review panel is open to the public and applicants are encouraged to attend.

You will receive a full agenda of the grant review panel in advance of the meeting. The agenda will include:

- a welcome and introduction,
- the order and timing of applications,
- time for breaks,
- a final review of all applications,
- and a panel process evaluation discussion.

During the panel meeting, each application is discussed in the order presented on the agenda. **The Lead Reviewer starts the discussion by stating the applicant's name/organization, and then goes into their panel comments based on the review criteria.** Once the Lead Reviewer is finished, the other panelists have an opportunity to add additional comments and assessments.

Each application gets 10 minutes for discussion. The first seven (7) minutes are for panelist assessment. If in attendance, applicants are permitted three (3) minutes at the end of their application's time allotment to clarify any aspects of the application that may have been misunderstood by the panelists. The three minutes to address the panelists may not be used to give additional information not included in the application.

If a panelist has a conflict of interest with an application, they recuse themselves for the application's 10-minute review period.

After all applications have been individually discussed, the panelists review all final scores to ensure consistent evaluation of all applications. The final review is also an opportunity to look at the scores in a ranked order and adjust if necessary.

3.5 Panel Process Evaluation

Civic Arts staff reviews grants program policies and processes after each grant cycle.

At the end of the virtual grant review panel meeting—once all application scores are finalized—there is a brief discussion about your thoughts on the grant review process. You have an opportunity to verbally share your thoughts on the panelist orientation, application questions, review criteria, Submittable, the virtual grant review panel, staff's facilitation of the meeting, and anything else regarding the grant review process.

You will also receive a Grant Review Panelist Survey by email. The information on this survey is anonymous and is an additional way to communicate feedback about your panel service experience.

4. PAYMENT FOR SERVICE

4.1 City of Berkeley Vendor Forms

Panelists need to become registered vendors with the City of Berkeley to receive their honorarium payment. A [Vendor Application and a W9](#) need to be completed and returned to Civic Arts staff to become a registered vendor.

4.2 Invoicing

After the grant review panel meeting has concluded, panelists receive an invoice from Civic Arts staff for the honorarium payment. The payment will be the equivalent of \$25 per application. All applications must be evaluated for payment; no partial payments will be issued.

4.3 Requirements for Completing Panel Service

Use the following list as a guide to ensure all required elements of your panel service are completed.

In order to receive the honorarium payment, you must:

- attend the panelist orientation,
- return a completed conflict of interest form,
- score and comment on all assigned applications before the independent review deadline,
- participate in the entire grant review panel meeting,
- return the required vendor forms (Vendor Application and W9),
- complete the Grant Review Panelist evaluation survey,
- and return your signed invoice.