


# Program Guidelines for Annual Funding 2026-2027

Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations



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# Guidelines Annual Funding 2026–2027

## Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations

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# Guidelines Annual Funding 2026–2027

## Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations

### Program Summary

**Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations** (OACO) offers annual and multiyear funding opportunities that support the ongoing operations of established organizations and their programs and services which contribute to the development and sustainability of Nova Scotia's arts and culture sector. This program is funded through Nova Scotia's Department for Culture, Communities, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH).

### Who Can Apply

The applicant must be an established non-profit society or co-operative with an arts and culture mandate that is in good standing with the Nova Scotian Registry of Joint Stock or under the federation Corporations Act.

### Application Deadline

11:59 pm on April 30 2026.

### Funding Streams

There are two funding streams, only one is open for applications in 2026–27:

- Annual:** supports established arts and culture organizations with their core operational and programmatic costs.  
Funding level recommendations are determined by organization size, scope, and performance in assessment. **The maximum available grant amount is \$25,000.**
- Multiyear:** This stream operates on a three-year grant cycle, and the next cycle will be for the years 2027–2030. The application window for this stream will open in 2027. See "[Appendix A](#)" for more details.

### Contact and Application Submissions

For any questions regarding this fund, contact Jessica Peddle, Community Cultural Development Officer: [CHDapplication@novascotia.ca](mailto:CHDapplication@novascotia.ca) or 902-476-9308.

### Accessibility Statement

If you encounter any barriers or need accessibility support during the application process, contact the Program Officer at least two weeks before the deadline for assistance.

### Commitment to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA)

Nova Scotia's Department for Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH) is committed to ensuring our programs and services are equitable, accessible, and inclusive. Understanding the demographics of our clients and people we serve will help us determine whether our programs, funding allocations, and processes are inclusive of Nova Scotia's diverse communities.

# Guidelines Annual Funding 2026–2027

## Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations

### Program Objectives

**Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations** (OACO) supports established arts and culture organizations with their core operational and programmatic costs so they can continue to contribute to the long-term development and sustainability Nova Scotia's arts and culture communities. The program's purpose is to support organizations achieve the following outcomes:

- support people at all levels of artistic involvement
- make arts and culture more accessible by promoting participation in and reducing barriers to access
- provide relevant professional development and other knowledge sharing and capacity-building opportunities
- develop new and strengthen existing relationships among organizations engaged in artistic and cultural activities
- advance the development of Nova Scotia's cultural diversity within the arts and culture sector
- foster stewardship of cultural resources through effective governance and planning
- encourage development and stability of key programs and services for positive community and sector impact

### About Annual Funding 2026–2027

Annual OACO Funding supports arts and culture organizations with their core operational and programmatic costs so they can continue to contribute to the development and sustainability Nova Scotia's arts and culture communities from April 2026 to March 2027.

The Annual funding stream resets every year which means previous recipients have to reapply on an annual basis. Each assessment will be based solely on the current submission, as funding resets to zero at the end of the grant period.

The maximum available grant amount is \$25,000.

## Eligibility for Annual Funding

### Previous OACO Recipients

Previous recipients of OACO funding will have to reapply on an annual basis. Each assessment will be based solely on the new application, as the preexisting funding relationships terminate when the contract ends. Past funding allocations do not guarantee success with future applications. Likewise, previous allocation amounts do not guarantee or determine future allocation amounts.

Recipients of 25–26 OACO funding are not required to confirm their eligibility with the Program Officer ahead of the deadline.

### New Applicants

Applicants who were not funded through the 25–26 OACO program **must** contact the Program Officer within two weeks of the deadline to confirm eligibility before submitting an application. Failure to do so will automatically make the application ineligible. Following this pre-application screening, the preliminary eligibility determination will be communicated via email.

While an applicant might have met preliminary eligibility, it may be that an application is later deemed ineligible due to incomplete application materials or non-compliance with eligibility criteria that was not apparent in the initial screening process.

### Eligibility Criteria

Organizations applying to this program must initially demonstrate that they meet the following eligibility criteria for an application to be accepted for assessment:

- is an established Nova Scotia-based registered non-profit society or cooperative in good standing\* with the Provincial Registrar of Joint Stock Companies or under the federal Corporations Act
- has a mandate/primary operational focus centred on Nova Scotia arts and culture, which supports the Program Objectives as well as:
  - » the creation and cultural expression as demonstrated through music, theatre, dance, visual arts, material arts (craft, fibre arts, etc.), literature, film, media arts, or other forms of artistic practice
  - » the production and/or presentation of artistic performances and events
  - » the stewardship of cultural resources through effective governance and planning
- does not receive operating assistance from any other provincial government agency or department, including Arts Nova Scotia

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### Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations

- can demonstrate that it has been operating for at least two years before the date of application
- has successfully completed two project grants available through Culture and Heritage Development Division of CCTH or Arts Nova Scotia within the last five years. (A complete list of applicable programs is available from the Program Officer.)
- maintains an active membership or shows a form of community support that includes Nova Scotia residents and persons other than those who serve on the Board of Directors
- operates programs year-round, offering programming and services without seasonal breaks; except for presenting festivals which may have seasonal programs
- secures additional sources of revenue such as corporate contributions, donations, sales, membership fees, and public or private funding
- can provide Board-signed financial statements and statistical information as required by the program
- supports the work of Nova Scotian professional and emerging arts and cultural professionals and fairly compensates artists, arts and cultural practitioners, technicians, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers in keeping with community and sector standards within the field of practice
- employs full-/part-time paid administrative staff to manage on-going arts and culture programs and services. Under certain circumstances this may be a combination of contract staff and volunteers. Contact the Program Officer for further details.

\* Applicants are required to be a registered non-profit organization in good standing (e.g., not defaulted, revoked, struck off, dissolved, etc.). It is necessary that your organization has an **active** registration status with either the NS Registry of Joint Stocks or the federal Not-for-profit Corporations Act at the time of submission.

### Ineligible Organizations

- private or for-profit entities
- municipalities, First Nation Band Councils, museums, archives, libraries, churches/faith-based organizations, multi-cultural associations, or any other organization whose main operational and programmatic focus is not the delivery of arts and culture programming
- universities, colleges, other post-secondary institutions, school boards, public/private secondary schools, First Nations schools administered by a First Nation and Indigenous administered schools
- organizations that exist primarily to provide professional arts training or have established professional arts training as an integral component of their overall activities

## Applying for Annual Funding

This section outlines important information to help applicants prepare their application according to the evaluation criteria and assessment process.

### Organizational Category and Weighting

Applicants are required to self-select which one of the three categories best describes the programming mandate and service delivery model of the applicant organization: Facility, Festival or Service Organizations. These are defined below:

Facilities	Festivals	Service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• own or operate facilities in which most or all of the space is dedicated to arts and cultural activity;</li> <li>• offer professional artistic programming through exhibitions, performances, presentations, lectures and community arts facilitation or production;</li> <li>• provide a blend of community and avocational arts activities for people of varying ages along with access to space for artistic development and growth.</li> <li>• <b>Assessment emphasis</b> on the <b>stability</b> and consistency provided by the organization within the community served, and the <b>access</b> to the programs and services delivered to the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• present professional or established artists to the public by way of artistic and cultural performances, exhibits and demonstrations;</li> <li>• encourage community engagement, tourism and economic activity;</li> <li>• enhance the positive impact of festivals in the community and province while heightening public awareness and appreciation of Nova Scotian arts and artists.</li> <li>• May operate seasonally</li> <li>• <b>Assessment emphasis</b> on the <b>quality</b> of the organization’s presentations and programming and <b>engagement</b> with existing and new audiences (uptake, retention, and growth).</li> </ul>	<p>Includes regional/community arts councils.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promote the development of a specific arts discipline or subsector by providing quality services to a membership base;</li> <li>• offer professional development/knowledge sharing within geographic communities or communities of practice;</li> <li>• foster public participation and leadership growth through the arts in ways that are appropriate for the community served.</li> <li>• <b>Assessment emphasis</b> on the <b>relevance</b> of the work to the organization’s target communities and membership and the <b>impact</b> of services, programs and activities on the sustainability and growth of the sector.</li> </ul>

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## Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations

While the application questions for each category are the same, the assessment weighting is different for Facilities, Festivals and Service Organizations. The evaluation criteria can be found in the Evaluation Framework for Annual Funding 2026–2027 for Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations document. The weighting is a prioritization method that is demonstrated through the percentages found next to each criterion. Applicants should ensure that written assessment answers emphasize the information most relevant to their organizational category.

### Determining Reporting Years

CCTH runs its funding programs according to the government fiscal year of April 1–March 31. However, organizations may have different fiscal years based on their own organizational priorities, operational cycles, or industry standards. Organizations are therefore allowed to report according to the fiscal cycle that aligns with their organization.

The table below shows how to match your organization’s fiscal year to the reporting periods required in the application.

Three common fiscal year models are shown in the rows: Government Fiscal Year, Calendar Year, and Custom Year. If your organization uses a custom fiscal year (e.g., starting August 15, September 1, October 31), simply adjust the years in the table to align with your own cycle.

### Reporting Timeframes

		Most Recently Completed fiscal year	Current fiscal year	OACO Funding year
<b>Fiscal Cycle</b>	<b>Government Fiscal Year</b>	April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025	April 1, 2025 – March 31, 2026	April 1, 2026 – March 31, 2027
	<b>Calendar Year</b>	Jan 1, 2024 – Dec 31, 2024	Jan 1, 2025 – Dec 31, 2025	Jan 1, 2026 – Dec 31, 2026
	<b>Custom Year</b>	July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025	July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026	July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027

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## Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations

### What To Submit

An application should include the following:

- **Application Form:** completed in full, signed and dated by the organization's board chair.
- **Written Assessment:** Questions are in Section 2 of application form.
- **Lists:**
  - » Current staff and Board Members including positions/titles
  - » Activities undertaken in both Most Recently Completed and Current years
  - » Programs and services planned for the OACO Funding year
- **Comparative Budget Table:** Using the Excel template on our website (or using CADAC tables, should the applying organization report to other funders that way), provide:
  - » **Column 1:** Actual revenues and expenses for Most Recently Completed year
  - » **Column 2:** Budget for Current year as approved at the start of the year
  - » **Column 3:** Forecast for year-end revenues and expenses for Current year (as of April 15, 2026)
  - » **Column 4:** Projected budget for the OACO Funding year
- **Financial Statements** for the Most Recently Completed fiscal year, that must include:
  - » balance sheet (assets, liabilities, equity/debt) / statement of financial position
  - » income statement / statement of operations for the fiscal period

If an organization does not have Board-approved financial statements for the Most Recently Completed fiscal year at the time of deadline, let the Program Officer know ahead of the deadline and provide a date for when these will be available. The Program Officer will send an email to confirm that a draft Financial Statements document or an income statement/profit and loss sheet can be submitted in lieu of the Financial Statements. The Financial Statements will still have to be submitted by the due date provided by the organization.

### Important Notes:

- **The financial statements must be signed by a Board Member**
- Externally prepared statements must include all "Notes to the Statements."
- A debt reduction plan must be provided if there is a deficit greater than 10% of revenues for the Most Recently Completed year.

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## Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations

### Eligible and Ineligible Expenses

Below is a list of eligible operating costs that are typically included in budgets by applying organizations:

- artistic, technical and administrative staff/personnel
- marketing personnel and materials
- employee benefits
- professional services (e.g. accountants, payroll services)
- phone, internet, web hosting, yearly domain registration
- facility rent, property taxes, utilities, property and liability insurance
- annual depreciation or amortization costs related to capital expenditures

#### **Ineligible Expenses:**

- capital expenditures or major equipment purchases
- start-up costs or seed money
- grants, endowments and scholarships
- organizational budget deficits, repayment of loans or servicing of organizational debt

### Calculating an Organization's Median

To determine the financial size of an organization in a fair way, applicants are requested to calculate the median of an organization's expenses for the three most recently completed years. A median calculation differs from an average calculation; it is the middle point in a dataset. This means it is the number found in the middle of a set of numbers.

Calculating the median ensures that the organization is assessed according to usual operating scale rather than including the fluctuations of outlier years (examples: receiving larger one-time grants or a stark reduction in operations due to external or internal influences).

Steps to calculating the median of an organization.

1. List your actual expenses for the three most recently completed fiscal years.
2. Arrange from lowest amount to highest.
3. The median is the number found in the middle

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## Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations

### Example – Calculating the Median

1. List the actual expenses for the three most recently completed fiscal years:

**Year 1** \$24,000   **Year 2** \$56,000   **Year 3** \$52,000

2. Arrange from lowest amount to highest:

**Lowest** \$24,000   **Median** \$52,000   **Highest** \$56,000

3. The median is **\$52,000**

### In-Kind Costs

In-kind costs are costs that have a value but are not paid in cash. This can be items such as donated equipment or space and free professional services. In-kind contributions can be included in your budget to demonstrate organizational capacity and commitment. Review the In-Kind Goods and Services Policy for more about eligible in-kind costs and reporting details.

### Disclosure and Relevance of Surplus and Designated Funds

Organizations may acquire funds for long-term designated use. Details regarding designated funds must be disclosed in the organization's submission to this program. CCTH respects the organization's declaration that such funds are protected for long-term use and does not deem them as funds available for the organization's general operations. Thus, organizations with designated funds are eligible to receive assistance towards annual operating expenses.

Such funds can result from donations and contributions for assigned purposes. This could include gifts of money on condition they are invested in perpetuity (or for a designated period of time) and that funds or interest income earned be used for a prescribed purpose such as a scholarship.

An undesignated gift of money may be designated for long-term investment from which interest earned, or interest and a portion of the principle, be used to fund specific programs.

Undesignated funds may be accumulated for contingency or cash flow purposes.

Organizations that demonstrate a surplus that exceeds 25% of an organization's annual budget must provide explanation how the excess will be designated or reinvested into operations.

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### Sending your application via email

Applications should be submitted in one email with the subject line: “Organization Name – Program Name”. Do not send an additional hard copy via post/other means. Ensure that:

- Your organization name is on all files
- Documents are submitted in Word, Excel or PDF format\*
- The size of all attachments is under 25MB and are sent in one email

\*Applications, or portions of applications, submitted in other formats will not be included in the assessment and scoring process. This includes Google Docs, Numbers, WeTransfer, Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.

Send your application to: [CHDapplication@novascotia.ca](mailto:CHDapplication@novascotia.ca)

### What happens after you've applied?

Applicants should receive a confirmation via email. If an applicant does not receive confirmation by May 7, 2026, it is up to the applicant to contact the Program Officer to confirm receipt latest by May 14, 2026.

Applications will only be considered if there is proof of application submission being sent by the deadline.

### Review Process Explained

It can take 8–12 weeks for your application to be assessed and notifications to be send out.

**1. Review of submitted materials.** The Program Officer reviews your application for eligibility and completeness. You are responsible for ensuring that all required components of the application package are submitted and a checklist is provided in the application form to assist you. If your application is missing required components or provided in the incorrect formats, applications will be assessed purely based on the application materials submitted as required and scored accordingly.

**2. Assessment of applications.** Applications are assessed by a panel made up of staff members of the Culture and Heritage Development Division using the evaluation criteria detailed in the Evaluation Framework for Annual Funding 2026–2027 for Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations. The assessments are based on the content of an application materials as submitted in the accepted formats and not on personal knowledge or outside research.

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## Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations

**3. Ministerial Review.** After the panel has reviewed your application, recommendations (Recommended, Not Recommended or Ineligible) are forwarded to the consideration of the Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. Note that applications are ‘under review’ until such time as the Minister conveys a final decision, and updates regarding the status of application cannot be given during this period. External factors outside of our control may impact timelines.

### **4. Notification of results are sent via email.**

If your Notification letter states that your applications is:

- » **Recommended:** it means your application is approved for funding. The amount of funding approved will be stated in this letter.
- » **Not Recommended:** it means your application did not achieve the minimum score required and it will not receive funding.
- » **Ineligible:** The detail provided in the submission was incomplete or reflected non-compliance with eligibility criteria. An “ineligible” determination resulting from assessment takes precedence over a pre-application screening.

## **Funding Allocation**

The maximum grant is \$25K, however funding allocation varies depending upon the organization’s size, scope, and performance in assessment, along with other factors such as:

- Eligibility of costs and level of detail provided in the proposed budget
- The strength of your application against the evaluation criteria and other applications from like-sized organizations
- Strength and perceived accuracy of financial reporting and projections
- The available budget for OACO Program

## **Unsuccessful Applications**

Unsuccessful applicants can reach out to the Program Officer for feedback on their application.

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## Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations

### Successful Applications

Applicants who are approved for funding receive a letter outlining the terms and conditions (T&Cs) of the funding which they will need sign and return to the Program Officer before funds can be disbursed. Successful applicants will also be required to:

- notify the Program Officer in advance of any changes of the approved activity, or any other significant changes (such as a change in Board members, organizational structure, or contact person).
- ensure the funds are used for the activities described in the application and correlate to the eligible costs listed in the Terms and Conditions.
- submit a Final Report to account for the funding received in 26–27. The application process for the subsequent year's program (27–28) will incorporate reporting for the 26–27 funding allocation including financial reporting which may be subject to additional audit. (NB: Recipients of 26–27 OACO funding that do not apply for the 27–28 OACO program will be responsible for submitting a separate final report to close the 26–27 funding file.)

### Payment Procedure

Successful applicants will be able to choose one of two payment methods. The preference is to provide approved payments through electronic deposit, but accommodation can be made to provide payment via cheque where necessary.

It may take up to eight weeks to receive the funds once an application is successful and the Terms and Conditions document is signed.

### Final Reporting

Outstanding final reports from previous funding may result in future applications to any of CCTH's funds not being assessed or a delay in payment.

### Applying for project funding

Organizations that receive Annual OACO funding may submit applications to the Culture and Heritage Development Division's or Arts Nova Scotia's project funding programs only if the projects proposed are special one-time activities or pilot projects, provided they meet the eligibility criteria of the program(s). **Activities that enhance/add to on-going or core programs/events are not eligible for project funding.** OACO recipients are encouraged to consult the relevant Program Officer before beginning a project funding application to ensure the activity is not considered a part of their on-going/core operations. Eligibility does not guarantee receipt of funds.

## **Using Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

Organizations may choose to use generative AI tools to help draft their applications. If doing so, these tools should be used for support rather than as a replacement for your own work. Ensure all submitted text accurately reflects the organization and the intended proposal. Applicants are responsible for reviewing and verifying any AI-generated elements for accuracy before submission.

## **Misrepresentation**

Providing false or misleading information in an application may result in serious consequences, such as loss of eligibility for the current application and/or future applications.

Successful applicants are required to sign a Terms and Conditions agreement that includes additional provisions regarding accuracy and disclosure.

## **Appendix A: About Multiyear Funding 2027–2030**

The Multiyear funding stream operates on a three-year grant cycle. The next cycle will be for the years 2027–2030 and the application window will open in 2027.

### **Eligibility for Multiyear Funding**

Applicants will need to meet the same eligibility criteria as for annual funding. Further eligibility requirements are that they must:

- have median annual expenses (over the previous three completed fiscal years) of at least \$100,000.
- have been a recipient of OACO funding (Annual or Multiyear) in the previous three years.
- operate programs year-round, except for presenting festivals which may have seasonal program.

### **Eligible expenses**

Eligible expenses include:

- Artistic, technical and administrative staff/personnel
- Marketing personnel and materials
- Employee benefits
- Professional services (e.g. accounting)
- Phone/internet
- Facility rent, property taxes, utilities
- Property/liability insurance.

### **Funding Allocation**

Funding level recommendations are determined by organization size, scope, and performance in assessment. Grant amounts are allocated in tiers according to organizational median expenses.

### **Interim Reporting**

Recipient organizations are required to provide an interim report, and financial statements before receiving funding from years 2 and 3 of their three-year funding agreement. At the end of the three-year agreement, applications must be submitted to the new grant cycle.

A full set of eligibility criteria and detailed guidelines will be available when the program opens for intake in 2027–28. The details listed here are subject to change.