

Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations

2025–26 Guidelines for Stream I Core Annual Funding

Deadline: April 15, 2025

Purpose

The objective of the Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations Program is to support the ongoing operations of established organizations and the programs and services that contribute to the development and sustainability Nova Scotia's arts and culture communities. Specifically, the program achieves this objective through investment in the core operational and programmatic costs of organizations whose mandate supports:

- 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
- production and/or presentation of artistic performances and events
- opportunities for people to participate in and build community life through access to arts and cultural experiences
- activities that contribute to the long-term development of the arts and cultural sector
- enhanced stability for arts and cultural organizations

Program Outcomes

The program provides support to professional arts and cultural organizations to achieve outcomes that:

- support people at all levels of artistic involvement at an appropriate level of artistic quality.
- promote participation in and access to the arts for people of differing ages and abilities

- provide relevant professional development and other knowledge sharing and capacity-building opportunities
- develop new and strengthen existing relationships among organizations engaged in 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

Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage's Commitment to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA)

Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH) supports our communities to thrive by promoting active living, tourism, and Nova Scotia's diverse culture, heritage, and languages. We pride ourselves in helping to grow communities and organizations by providing programs and services that support these areas.

We are committed to ensuring that our programs and services are free of discrimination and barriers, and value equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility). By applying this lens, and ensuring it is a core value in our programs and decision-making processes, we are taking steps to address the long-standing systemic barriers that impact many communities in our province.

Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage is committed to advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility across Nova Scotia, and we support partners who share in this commitment.

General Eligibility

Organizations applying to this program must demonstrate that they meet the following general eligibility criteria. Further eligibility criteria are identified under "Funding Streams" below. **All criteria (general plus Stream I) must be met for an application to be accepted for assessment.**

- is a registered not-for-profit society or not-for-profit cooperative in good standing with the Provincial Registrar of Joint Stock Companies or federally registered under the Corporations Act as a not-for-profit society or cooperative based and operating in Nova Scotia
- has a mandate/primary operational focus that is centred on Nova Scotia arts and culture and supports the program Purpose as stated above

- does not receive operating assistance from any other provincial government agency or department, including Arts Nova Scotia
- employs full-/part-time paid administrative staff (or equivalent*) to manage on-going arts and culture programs and services
- 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, except for presenting festivals which may have seasonal programs
- secures additional sources of revenue, such as corporate contributions, donations, sales, and membership fees, and must pursue other sources of public or private funding
- possesses the capacity to compile annual financial and statistical information
- supports the work of Nova Scotian professional and emerging arts and cultural professionals and fairly compensate artists, arts and cultural practitioners, technicians, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers, in keeping with community and sector standards within the field of practice

*May be a combination of contract staff and volunteers. Contact the Program Officer for further details.

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
- organizations who submit incomplete applications

Expenses

The Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations program supports the general administrative, operational, and programming costs of successful applicant organizations. Eligible operating costs of arts organizations and groups typically include items such as: 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; and annual depreciation or amortization costs related to capital expenditures.

Funding received through a successful application to this program may not be applied to the following:

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

Funding Streams

The Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations program offers two streams of core funding per the criteria below.

Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations Stream I: Core Annual Funding

Stream I: Eligibility

In addition to the general eligibility criteria listed above, organizations must demonstrate the following:

- have been operating for at least two (2) years before the date of application
- have successfully completed two (2) 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.)

IMPORTANT: If your organization was a recipient of funding from either 2023-24 Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations program or 2023 One Time Special Operations Grant, these requirements have already been met.

Stream I: Applications

Qualifying Stream I applicants must submit applications on an annual basis to be eligible for funding consideration in successive fiscal years. Each assessment will be based solely on the current submission, as funding resets to zero at the end of the grant period.

Organizations that receive Stream I (Annual) funding will be considered for Stream II (Multiyear) program eligibility at the beginning of the following Stream II evaluation cycle (i.e., every three years) subject to meeting additional Stream II eligibility requirements.

Organizations that receive Stream I (Annual) 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. Note that eligibility does not guarantee receipt of funds.

Stream I: Maximum Funding Levels

The maximum grant is \$25K annually. Eligible expenses include core operating costs of arts and cultural programming; expenses must be exclusive of any costs associated with the servicing of organizational debt; capital project costs; or other substantial project funding. (See table below for calculating the median.)

Funding level recommendations are determined by organization size, scope, and performance in assessment.

Priority will be given to equity-deserving organizations who have not accessed the program in previous years.

Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations Stream II: Core Multiyear Funding (Intake for this stream will re-open in 2027-28)

Calculating Median

The median is the middle point in a dataset—half of the data points are smaller than the median and half of the data points are larger (see below for an example). *The median calculation differs from an average calculation.*

Example

List your actual expenses for the previous three completed fiscal years:

Year 1 \$24,000

Year 2 \$56,000

Year 3 \$52,000

Arrange from lowest amount to highest: \$24,000 \$52,000 \$56,000

The median is the middle number in the range: \$52,000

Using the median ensures outliers are not part of the calculation. If we simply took the average of these three years, it would be \$44,000.

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.

As well, 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.

If this amount exceeds 25% of an organization's annual budget, the excess should be designated or reinvested into operations.

Applicant Categories

Applicants to the Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations program will be organized and evaluated in relation to the three categories described below: Facilities, Festivals, and Service. 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.

The application questions for each of the categories are the same, however the weighting of the review will be different depending on the applicant’s category (see “Appendix A” to this document). Applicants should familiarize themselves with the evaluation focus of their respective category and ensure that responses to the application questions emphasize the information most relevant to that focus.

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

Application Process

Past recipients of either the **2024** Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations program or the 2023 One Time Special Operations Grant are strongly encouraged to speak with the Program Officer well before the deadline to discuss their proposed category and the requirements for application.

Organizations that have not previously received funding from either the **2024** Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations program or the 2023 One Time Special Operations Grant are required to speak with the Program Officer to determine their eligibility under the program guidelines.

Applicants are required to read and fully understand these guidelines and application requirements prior to submitting:

- Applicants must determine their eligibility under Stream I (Annual) and complete the appropriate application form.
- Applicants must self-identify their organizational category and frame their responses in relation to the weighted criteria outlined in “Appendix A”.

Application submissions must include the following:

1. completed **Application Form** (Stream I), to include:

- » applicant contact information
- » organizational information
- » EDIA self-identification and
- » statutory declaration.

Note that completed application forms must be signed and dated by the organization’s board chair.

2. completed **Written Assessment Responses** (submitted as a single PDF) to the following:

- » program and organizational reporting for most recently completed programming year
- » program planning for upcoming year (Stream I Annual)
- » EDIA performance, and
- » organizational standing and effectiveness

3. **Financial Documentation** to include:

- » a **Budget**, presented as a comparative table with columns for the following data. (A separate template in Excel will be provided for easy completion. (If your organization has filed with the Canada Council, you may submit your CADAC financials in lieu of the comparative table.)
 - › column 1: Actual revenues and expenses for the 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 your current year (as of **February 15, 2025**)
 - › column 4: Budget for coming year
 - » a copy of board signed **Financial Statements** for the most recently completed year for the most recently completed fiscal year, including a balance sheet (assets, liabilities, equity/debt)/statement of financial position and income statement for the most recently completed fiscal period. Financial statements must be signed by an authorized representative of the organization. Externally prepared statements must include all “Notes to the Statements.”
 - » if your organization has an accumulated deficit greater than 10% of revenues for the most recently completed year you must include notes which outline your debt reduction plan.
4. Discretionary supplementary materials (optional) should be materials of direct relevance to your application, and may include:
- › Examples of current and recent programming (exhibitions, performances, etc.)
 - › Examples of current and recent services (workshops, residencies, etc.)
 - › Organizational planning documents (strategic plans, EDIA plans, etc.) referenced in the application.

IMPORTANT: Incomplete applications will not be considered for assessment or funding.

Applications and any associated materials should be submitted via email to CHDapplication@novascotia.ca according to the instructions below. (If you are unable to submit via email, please contact the Program Officer before the deadline date.)

- Only submissions will be accepted to this email address. Please direct all questions to the program officer.
- Include your organizational name on all files
- Send one application per email
- Subject line should be: “Organization Name – Program Name”
- Keep attachments under 25MB

- Accepted document formats are Word, Excel and PDF.
- Applications (or portions of applications) submitted in other formats (including Google Doc and Numbers) will be deemed ineligible.
- Applications (or portions of applications) sent via cloud-based attachments (WeTransfer, Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.) will be deemed ineligible.
- Do not send an additional hard copy via post/other means.

Deadline and Confirmation

The deadline for submission of application materials is 11:59 pm on April 15, 2025.

All applications sent to CHDapplication@novascotia.ca should receive an auto-reply confirmation. If you do not receive confirmation within one week, contact the program officer. You must contact the program officer within two weeks of the deadline for us to consider your application. **Applications will only be considered if there is proof of email being sent by the deadline.**

Application Assessment

Funding Applications are reviewed by staff in the Culture and Heritage Development Division for completeness and eligibility. Applications that are both complete and eligible are reviewed by an internal assessment panel whose recommendations are forwarded to the Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage for final decisions.

Notification of Results

Funding decisions are made following confirmation of CCTH's budget. All efforts will be made to provide funding results to organizations within 8–12 weeks. All applicants will be notified via email.

Payment Conditions/Release of Funding

Applicants approved for funding will receive a letter outlining the terms and conditions of funding. Funding recipients must meet the following conditions:

- Applicants who are approved for funding receive a letter outlining the terms and conditions of funding.
- Non-repayable contributions must be used for the activity as described in the application.

- The Department must be notified in advance of any significant changes in the activities to which the contribution is allocated.
- Applicants who do not receive the amount they requested may be required to submit a revised budget based on the approved amount.
- Support from the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH) must be recognized as outlined in the "Requirements for Acknowledging Funding" as referenced in the Terms and Conditions letter.
- Funding recipients are subject to provincial audit.

Reporting Requirements

Applicants funded through the 2024–25 Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations (OACO) program will satisfy their final reporting requirements through the successful completion of their application to Stream I of the 2025 OACO program. A separate final report form will not be required.

Organizations funded through the 24–25 OACO program who do not apply to the 2025–26 Operating Assistance to Cultural Organizations program will be required to submit a separate final report form, which will be provided to them by the Program Officer.

25-26 Stream I Core Annual Funding: Final reporting requirements will be integrated into the following year's application for the program. A separate final report will not be required unless your organization chooses not to apply to the following year.

Overdue Final Reports

If your organization has received investment from any program of the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage or Arts Nova Scotia for which the Final Report is overdue, no funds can be released until the overdue report has been received and approved.

Contact

Application materials should be submitted to CHDapplication@novascotia.ca

Questions regarding the program criteria and/or application process should be directed to:

Jessica Peddle, Community Cultural Development Officer
Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage
jessica.peddle@novascotia.ca or 902-476-9308

Appendix A Evaluation Matrix

Applicants to the OACO program are required to self-select one organizational category, based on the best alignment of those category descriptions to the work of the organization. Applications will be assessed in relation to areas of emphasis specific to that category. Organizations should review the weighting prior to responding to the application questions.

Facilities

Stability **20%**

- consistently displays professionalism in relation to the Nova Scotian arts and cultural community.
- has a proven ability to negotiate change, adapt to new circumstances, and tolerate risk.
- operations are directed by a strategic plan/program plan for the organization.
- shows commitment to organizational learning and innovation with respect to the services it offers on behalf of its membership/community.

Access **20%**

- offers programming promotes participation in and access to the arts for people of differing ages and abilities.
- reports strong attendance/public participation and positive growth.
- demonstrates broad, meaningful and collaborative relationships with community.
- programming supports people at various levels of artistic involvement.

Quality and Engagement **15%**

- demonstrates a high level of artistic quality in its choice of programming and services offered.
- engages operational staff, creative contributors, mentors, instructors, etc. with appropriate skill sets and training with a focus on supporting Nova Scotians.
- programming choices are reflective of engagement with the interests of its community.
- demonstrates consideration of audience development and engagement with new audiences.

Relevance and Impact **15%**

- operations and programming are assessed on an ongoing basis.
- proposed programming is adaptive to trends/issues within the sector/industry.
- supports the appreciation and understanding of professional arts and culture in the broader community.
- offers programming creates meaningful opportunities for Nova Scotian professional artists and cultural workers that contribute to their artistic growth and the development of their careers.

EDIA Performance **10%**

- reflects a commitment to the principals of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility by maintaining and growing meaningful relationships with the Indigenous community, other People of Colour, LGBTQ2S+ people, the Deaf and disability communities, and/or other equity-deserving communities throughout your organization, including board, staff, artists, programming and audience.
- demonstrates attention to ensuring that public participation with the organization's programs is not limited by barriers to accessibility (incl. financial, physical or cultural).

Organizational Standing and Effectiveness **10%**

- indicates an active and engaged Board of Governors.
- indicates that the appropriate policies and procedures are in place and in use to support the effective operation of the organization and its programs.
- demonstrates an understanding of the role of leadership, management, and the board in good governance and fostering inclusion and a healthy, sustainable workplace.

Financial Stewardship **10%**

- has provided a reviewed financial report that has been signed by the appropriate member(s) of the Board.
- has provided a comprehensive budget for the period required under the application stream, that provides a clear, feasible and accurate reflection of the organization's revenues and expenditures.
- demonstrates the achievability of the organization's proposed programs and services as reflected in sound budgets, planning, resource allocation, and the organization's overall health.

Festivals

Stability and Access

15%

- consistently displays professionalism in relation to the Nova Scotian arts and cultural community.
- has a proven ability to negotiate change, adapt to new circumstances, and tolerate risk.
- offers programming promotes participation in and access to the arts for people of differing ages and abilities.
- reports strong attendance/public participation and positive growth.

Quality

20%

- demonstrates a high level of artistic quality in its choice of programming and services offered.
- engages operational staff, creative contributors, mentors, instructors, etc. with appropriate skill sets and training with a focus on supporting Nova Scotians.
- demonstrates considerable planning related to marketing and promotion of its programs to its audience/community.
- maintains relationship to artists and performers/professional service providers reflects commitment to industry standards.

Engagement

20%

- programming choices are reflective of engagement with the interests of its community.
- demonstrates consideration of audience development and engagement with new audiences.
- reflects support and satisfaction amongst the community and the target market.
- planning processes involve formal or informal assessment of their audience.

Relevance and Impact

15%

- operations and programming are assessed on an ongoing basis.
- proposed programming is adaptive to trends/issues within the sector/industry.
- supports the appreciation and understanding of professional arts and culture in the broader community.
- offers programming creates meaningful opportunities for Nova Scotian professional artists and cultural workers that contribute to their artistic growth and the development of their careers.

EDIA Performance

10%

- reflects a commitment to the principals of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility by maintaining and growing meaningful relationships with the Indigenous community, other People of Colour, LGBTQ2S+ people, the Deaf and disability communities, and/or other equity-deserving communities throughout your organization, including board, staff, artists, programming and audience.
- demonstrates attention to ensuring that public participation with the organization's programs is not limited by barriers to accessibility (incl. financial, physical or cultural).

Organizational Standing and Effectiveness

10%

- indicates an active and engaged Board of Governors.
- indicates that the appropriate policies and procedures are in place and in use to support the effective operation of the organization and its programs.
- demonstrates an understanding of the role of leadership, management, and the board in good governance and fostering inclusion and a healthy, sustainable workplace.

Financial Stewardship

10%

- has provided a reviewed financial report that has been signed by the appropriate member(s) of the Board.
- has provided a comprehensive budget for the period required under the application stream, that provides a clear, feasible and accurate reflection of the organization's revenues and expenditures.
- demonstrates the achievability of the organization's proposed programs and services as reflected in sound budgets, planning, resource allocation, and the organization's overall health.

Service Organizations

Stability and Access

15%

- consistently displays professionalism in relation to the Nova Scotian arts and cultural community.
- has a proven ability to negotiate change, adapt to new circumstances, and tolerate risk.
- offers programming promotes participation in and access to the arts for people of differing ages and abilities.
- reports strong attendance/public participation and positive growth.

Quality and Engagement

15%

- demonstrates a high level of artistic quality in its choice of programming and services offered.
- engages operational staff, creative contributors, mentors, instructors, etc. with appropriate skill sets and training with a focus on supporting Nova Scotians.
- programming choices are reflective of engagement with the interests of its community.
- demonstrates consideration of audience development and engagement with new audiences.

Relevance

20%

- operations and programming are assessed on an ongoing basis.
- proposed programming is adaptive to trends/issues within the sector/industry.
- operations and programming are informed by the community of interest that it serves.
- proposed programming is responsive to the results of previous programming.

Impact **20%**

- supports the appreciation and understanding of professional arts and culture in the broader community.
- offers programming creates meaningful opportunities for Nova Scotian professional artists and cultural workers that contribute to their artistic growth and the development of their careers.
- demonstrates active relationships with relevant sector organizations.
- fosters positive interaction with its intended community through mentorship and partnership.

EDIA Performance **10%**

- reflects a commitment to the principals of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility by maintaining and growing meaningful relationships with the Indigenous community, other People of Colour, LGBTQ2S+ people, the Deaf and disability communities, and/or other equity-deserving communities throughout your organization, including board, staff, artists, programming and audience.
- demonstrates attention to ensuring that public participation with the organization's programs is not limited by barriers to accessibility (incl. financial, physical or cultural).

Organizational Standing and Effectiveness **10%**

- indicates an active and engaged Board of Governors.
- indicates that the appropriate policies and procedures are in place and in use to support the effective operation of the organization and its programs.
- demonstrates an understanding of the role of leadership, management, and the board in good governance and fostering inclusion and a healthy, sustainable workplace.

Financial Stewardship **10%**

- has provided a reviewed financial report that has been signed by the appropriate member(s) of the Board.
- has provided a comprehensive budget for the period required under the application stream, that provides a clear, feasible and accurate reflection of the organization's revenues and expenditures.
- demonstrates the achievability of the organization's proposed programs and services as reflected in sound budgets, planning, resource allocation, and the organization's overall health.