



**ARTS & SCIENCE
COUNCIL**

Community Connector Grant

Creative Individuals





Purpose

Between 2015 and 2025, ASC funded projects via our Cultural Vision Grants most centrally focused on **Innovation**, inspired by the Imagine 2025 Task Force and its community research in Charlotte. While we remain deeply committed to innovation within our arts and culture sector, our newly created Community Connector Grants prioritize **Access**.

The **Community Connector Grant** supports creative individuals in Mecklenburg County to develop new, impactful programs - or expand existing initiatives - that broaden participation in arts and cultural experiences and remove barriers to engagement across the community. While also supporting innovation and sustainable cultural infrastructure, these grants prioritize initiatives that eliminate barriers to arts and culture creation and participation, and ensure that the transformative power of arts, science, and history is truly available to *everyone*.

Strategic Support from the Public Sector

The **Community Connector Grant** stemmed from the research and development of the City of Charlotte Arts & Culture Plan, which outlined a vision to nurture and grow the arts and culture sector in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. In particular, this grant was created to address the following priorities within: **3, 5, and 7.**

3



Equitable, accessible, and inclusive support and funding are critical to advancing, growing, and sustaining *ALAANA, **LGBTQIA+ and other artists, and institutions — particularly small and mid-sized organizations — that have been historically marginalized in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg arts and culture ecosystem.

5

Eliminate barriers to arts and culture creation and participation.



7

Foster collaboration and cooperation throughout the creative ecosystem and with other sectors.





Strategic Support from the Public Sector

In addition to support from **Mecklenburg County** and the **City of Charlotte**, this community-focused programming is supported, in part, by the **North Carolina Arts Council Grassroots Arts Program** funding. The goal of this funding is to ensure that all North Carolinians have access to high-quality arts experiences and can benefit from the vital role the arts play in their communities.

Creative individuals applying for this grant **must** demonstrate how their proposed project will work to:

Expand access: Increase participation in arts, science, and history experiences by addressing practical, geographic, and economic barriers leading to limited engagement, and by implementing strategies that remove obstacles to participation.

At least one of the following secondary objectives:

1. **Foster cross-sector collaboration:** Build new or strengthen existing partnerships between cultural organizations and other community sectors (ex. health/wellness, education, economic development) to expand reach and relevance.
2. **Drive artistic, scientific, and historical development:** Support new creative work, research, or innovative approaches to presenting arts, science, and history that expand public understanding and advance cultural practice.
3. **Cultivate community well-being:** Utilize arts, science, or history to address social issues, promote civic engagement, or enhance the overall quality of life in Mecklenburg County, with a focus on community participation.

Who can apply?

- Individual creatives who operate as a sole proprietorship or LLC.
- ASC encourages collaborative projects. Artists working together should identify a single applicant that will complete this process.
- The applicant's book of work must be focused on arts, science, history, or heritage programming.
- Applicants must be 18 years of age, reside and/or have an artistic business/studio in, and primarily serve Mecklenburg County (over 75% of their work taking place in Mecklenburg County).
- Applicants must have created and/or produced community or public programming previously within Mecklenburg County. Applicants will be asked to provide context around this experience within the application.

Grant Overview

ASC will award grants **up to \$20,000** for projects that start between **June 1, 2026 to December 31, 2026 but can run through June 30, 2027.**

- **Application Opens: March 11th, 2026**
- **Deadline:** Applications will be accepted until **April 8th, 2026** at 12:00pm/Noon.
- **Projects timeline:** Must begin between June 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026 and conclude by June 30, 2027.
- **One Application Per Cycle Policy:** This grant follows a one-application-per-cycle policy. The new policy ensures fair distribution of funding across our community. We encourage applicants to submit their strongest proposal each cycle.
- **Timeline:** Applicants will be notified of approval or decline by May 12th. This date is tentative and may change if a high volume of applications are received and more time is needed for panel review.
- **Funding Tiers:** Support will be offered at three tiers based on event scope, applicant experience, and presentation of portfolio.

Funding Tiers

Grant Amount	Recommended Experience Level	Typical Project Scope	Budget Complexity
\$5,000	Emerging or early-career creative (2+ years) or artists new to public-facing community work	Artist-led, small-scale projects focused on a clearly defined community or neighborhood. Often a pilot program, single event, or short workshop series. Applicants may be building confidence managing public programs and partnerships.	Simple budget with a limited number of expense categories. Typically includes artist fees, basic supplies, modest marketing, and minimal or no contracted collaborators.
\$10,000	Mid-career creative (5+ years) with prior community-based project experience	Projects demonstrate a track record of successful public or community-centered work. May include multiple program dates, paid collaborators, intentional outreach strategies, and basic accessibility supports.	Moderate budget complexity with multiple cost categories. Often includes contracted collaborators, access supports, venue or equipment costs, and marketing/outreach. Requires more detailed budget justification and coordination.
\$20,000	Established creative leader (10+ years) with demonstrated community impact and partnerships	Large-scale or multi-site projects with strong community partnerships. Projects may serve multiple communities, include robust access supports, and demonstrate clear plans for outreach, documentation, and learning.	High budget complexity with multiple collaborators, access and inclusion supports, and layered expenses. Requires strong budget management, clear budget justification and coordination, and broader project scope.

Funding Tiers (cont.)

- **Applicants requesting \$5k must provide two references** who were actively involved in at least one of these previous community programs as a partner, vendor, venue lead, etc. Additionally, applicants have the option to include a letter of support from a past programmatic partner to strengthen their application.
- **Applicants requesting \$10k and \$20k** for project support must submit their **portfolio/previous work samples AND two references** as mentioned above.
- These funding tiers are intended to help creative individuals identify the level of support that best aligns with their **experience, project scope, and capacity**. ASC recognizes that artistic pathways are not linear, and **applicants at any career stage are encouraged to apply** for the amount that best fits their proposed work.
- A grant match is **not required** for creative individual applicants.



What is eligible?

This grant is meant to support community-facing programming. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Development and presentation of free or low-cost public programming that removes financial barriers to participation
- Community-based arts, science, or history programming delivered in nontraditional or neighborhood-based settings
- Programs that provide culturally responsive, multilingual, or disability-accessible experiences
- Participatory or co-created projects that meaningfully engage community members as contributors, not just audiences
- New artistic, scientific, or historical work developed specifically to reach underrepresented communities
- Programs that integrate arts, science, or history into broader community well-being efforts, such as civic engagement, public health, youth development, or economic mobility
- Projects that strengthen or pilot cross-sector partnerships with entities in education, health/wellness services, social services, housing, workforce development, or neighborhood associations
- Festivals, outside of Culture Blocks geographical areas, are eligible to apply. However, this grant will only support arts and culture programming within these requests – it will not provide general operating support to the festival.

What are examples of eligible projects?

Visual Arts

- Multilingual community printmaking or ceramics labs
- Artist-led exhibitions that incorporate accessibility features such as tactile works, audio tours, and relaxed viewing hours

Performing Arts (Dance, Music, Theater)

- Free neighborhood performances paired with community workshops and post-show discussions
- Intergenerational dance or music residencies embedded in senior centers, youth programs, or healthcare facilities
- Community-devised theater projects addressing local issues such as housing, immigration, or public health

Literary Arts

- Multilingual writing workshops serving newcomers and long-term residents, culminating in a public reading or publication
- Youth storytelling programs focused on personal experience, creativity, and self-expression
- Oral history-based poetry projects preserving and sharing local narratives

Film, Media, & Digital Arts

- Community-led documentary projects capturing neighborhood histories or cultural traditions
- Digital storytelling labs for youth with limited access to creative technology
- Public screenings paired with facilitated dialogue and accessibility supports

What are examples of eligible projects?

Science & Environmental Programs

- Hands-on science learning experiences delivered in partnership with schools or community organizations in areas with limited access to informal science education
- Environmental programs integrating art, data visualization, and community science
- Public science exhibitions or demonstrations designed for families and first-time or nontraditional audiences

History, Heritage, & Cultural Preservation

- Community-based oral history projects preserving local histories and lived experiences in Mecklenburg County
- Living history programs developed in collaboration with community members and local historians
- Pop-up history exhibits installed in neighborhood spaces rather than traditional museums

Cross-Disciplinary & Cross-Sector Projects

- Arts and public health collaborations addressing mental wellness or trauma-informed care
- Creative workforce programs linking arts training with career pathways or job readiness
- Civic engagement projects using art or storytelling to encourage community dialogue and participation

What are examples of eligible expenses?

- **Project/Program Implementation Costs**

- Program-related supplies and materials
- Space rental for public programming
- Marketing and outreach expenses that prioritize community-based distribution strategies designed to reach audiences with limited access to arts and cultural programming, including place-based outreach, partnerships with local organizations, and targeted digital campaigns – ex. geotargeted or language-specific social media advertising. (Up to \$3k in support)
- Documentation and evaluation related to measuring access, participation, and community impact

- **Artist & Facilitator Support**

- Fees, honoraria, or stipends for artists, scientists, historians, educators, and culture bearers
- Support for consultants or projected-based leaders, collaborators, or facilitators (non-salaried staff)
- Training directly tied to the proposed project's delivery and community impact (ex. Teaching Artist training fees)

What are examples of eligible expenses?

- **Access & Inclusion Supports**, including but not limited to:
 - **Accessibility Accommodations**
 - American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation
 - Captioning (live or recorded)
 - Audio description
 - Large-print, Braille, multilingual, or alternative-format materials
 - Sensory-friendly program design, including modified lighting, sound, or structured experiences
 - **Physical and logistical supports**
 - Transportation assistance for participants or audiences (e.g., bus rentals, ride stipends, or shuttle services)
 - Adaptive equipment or materials necessary to ensure inclusive participation
 - **Subsidized tickets**
 - These must be intentionally directed to individuals and/or organizations with demonstrated financial need, rather than general promotional or discount-based offers (ex. BOGO or limited-time sales). Applicants must present an existing, public-facing scholarship or access program – most commonly a website link to this resource (up to \$5k in support).

What is **not** eligible?

- General operating support
- Existing staff salaries or benefits
- Multi-year requests
- Food or catering costs
- Capital improvements or purchase of property
- Debt or debt reduction efforts
- Storage space
- Political events for or against a political candidate, ballot measure, or bill.
- Projects already covered fully by another funding source or serving as a fundraiser.
- Retroactive funding (projects that begin before the grant period)
- Student work completed for academic credit or as part of an academically supported project, program, or residency.
- Projects, productions, workshops, and/or programs that include obscene material. In general, obscene material is considered offensive or indecent, often involving sexual acts or nudity. *Determination of whether material is obscene will be solely in the discretion of ASC.*
- Projects that are religious in nature or specifically serve only congregation membership, faculty/student body, or other exclusive group are not eligible.
- Projects that involve work with PreK-12 children during the school day are not eligible.
- Applicants that have delinquent paperwork for a previously funded ASC grant are not eligible.

Application Components

- **Applicant Overview**
 - General information for applicant (contact info, address, business type, etc.)
 - Applicant artistic mission statement (optional)
 - Describe your previous experiences in developing community programming. Walk us through a past event that was successful and your process for ensuring impact.
 - Reference #1 Name, Title/Org, Phone, and Email
 - Reference #2 Name, Title/Org, Phone, and Email
 - Link to portfolio (if available): This is required for \$10k+ requests.
 - Letter of support (optional)

Application Components

- **Narrative Questions**

- **Project Vision & Feasibility:** What is this project and is it practically planned?
 - Project Title
 - Grant Amount Requested
 - For reference only, please enter the estimated amount for Venue Rental budgeted for this project.
 - Is this a new initiative or an expansion of an existing one?
 - Artistic concentration of event (music, dance, visual art, etc)
 - Programming Date(s)
 - Location(s)
 - Which Community Connector objective(s) does it address? (collaboration, development, well-being)
- Key Staff Involved: Describe qualifications and achievements of the key artistic personnel, including yourself, who are central to the event's success.
- Describe your proposed program and timeline. What is the primary goal of this project?
- (Optional) If requesting subsidized tickets, please provide a public-facing link or information on where to access this resource.



Application Components

- **Narrative Questions (cont.)**
 - **Impact & Community Need:** Who is this project for, and why does it matter?
 - Describe the community or audience you intend to serve and the community need this project responds to.
 - What makes this programming a standout, and why now?
 - **Community Engagement & Evaluation:** How will people participate, and how will you reach them?
 - Describe how community members will engage with this project, how you will promote it and build awareness (especially for communities with limited access), and what success will look like.
 - How will you know the project achieved its goals?
 - **Sustainability:** What happens next?
 - Describe how this project may continue, evolve, or inform your future work beyond the grant period.
 - What do you hope to learn from this project?



Application Components

- **Additional Access Questions (Yes/No)**
 - **Accessible Pricing:** Does the applicant offer the proposed programming at no cost, or through a public-facing subsidized ticket or scholarship program?
 - **Collaborative Partnerships:** Is the project developed and implemented in meaningful collaboration with one or more partner organizations or artists, with mutual benefit?
 - **Programmatic Expansion:** Does the project bring programming to a new community, neighborhood, or venue with demonstrated local interest or partnership?
 - **Audience Growth:** Does the project intentionally target a new audience demographic through specific, targeted marketing efforts?



Application Components

- **Project Budget & Documentation**

- **Budget Template:** All applicants must complete the same budget template. Failure to do so will disqualify an application.
- Describe how your team determined the budget you have included in this application. Include information about other funding sources and matching contributions that are included in the budget template.
- We encourage you to use this budget template as a **planning tool** for your anticipated project.
- Creative individual applicants may include **up to 20% of their total grant request** to compensate their own administrative, planning, and project management time. This may include activities such as project design, coordination with partners, outreach planning, scheduling, reporting, and overall project oversight.



Evaluation Criteria

Grant proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria (5 points each):

- **Project Vision & Feasibility (25%):** To what extent does the proposal present a clear, well-planned project with a realistic timeline that aligns with stated objectives and demonstrates the applicant's capacity to successfully implement the work?
- **Impact & Community Need (25%):** How effectively does the project respond to an identified public need, benefit the wider community, and demonstrate a strong plan for reaching its intended audience through thoughtful outreach, marketing, and communication?
- **Community Engagement & Evaluation (25%):** How intentionally does the project engage community members as active participants, and how clearly does the applicant define, measure, and evaluate success in ways that advance the organization's mission?
- **Sustainability (25%):** How clearly does the applicant articulate a plan for sustaining or building upon the project beyond the grant period, and demonstrate how the project will inform future programming or organizational growth?



Required Reporting

Most important to ASC is learning how your Community Connector Grant helped improve or grow your artistry and business.

All grantees will be **required** to submit a final report that describes the impact and outcome of the project. Final reports must be filed through the online process within 30 days of the activity's completion. More information will be made available if a grant award is received.

Timeline

- **Application opens: March 11th, 2026** at 12:00pm/noon.
- **Draft Review:** If you would like ASC staff to review a draft of your application and provide feedback, please email a draft to grants@artsandscience.org by March 27th at 5:00pm.
- **Application Deadline: April 8th, 2026** at 12:00pm/noon
 - All applicants must submit an application using our online application form by the published deadline.
 - ASC does not accept late applications.
- **Anticipated Award or Declination Notification: May 12th, 2026**

General Q&A

- **How will I receive funding, if awarded?**
 - ASC will make a one-time payment once the applicant has been awarded a grant and all necessary paperwork has been completed. All potential grant awardees will need to receive due diligence approval from the FFTC Finance department.
- **Other than the online application information, can I submit any additional support material?**
 - Applicants will submit all required and supporting documents using ASC's online application system (Blackbaud Grantmaking).
- **I have more questions. Where can I get help?**
 - ASC's Grants and Services staff is available to answer questions as you develop your application. Please direct questions about guidelines or applications themselves to grants@artsandscience.org.

Questions?

Thank you for your interest!

Micah Deer

VP, Community & Artist Support

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www.artsandscience.org



ARTS & SCIENCE COUNCIL