

## Next Step Fund Guidelines

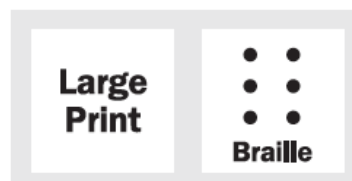
Fiscal Year 2021 (July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021)

### Deadline:

January 11, 2021

### Program Director:

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Review our guidelines, and contact MRAC with questions or for support. Alternative formats and translation available. MRAC will need 10 business days to obtain translation services.

**McKNIGHT FOUNDATION**

### Funded By:

The McKnight Foundation's arts program is founded on the belief that Minnesota thrives when its artists thrive. The McKnight Foundation supports working artists to create and contribute to vibrant communities.

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## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Next Step Fund, funded by the McKnight Foundation, provides project grants up to **\$5,000** to artists in any discipline for the purpose of research, career development and artistic achievement. Applicants may be at any stage in their career, but must demonstrate achievement in their artistic field and have a history of public presentation or community contribution.

Successful projects will communicate a clearly defined set of activities that address a compelling challenge or respond to a specific opportunity for the individual applicant. Projects should be designed with the intent to raise the individual's professional or artistic skills, increase the artist's public visibility, learn or implement new methods of creating or engaging that responds to current social realities, or produce new work that helps the artist take the 'next step' in their artistic career.

MRAC awards approximately 35 to 40 Next Step grants (about 8% of total submissions) annually, making it a highly competitive program.

Stronger proposals will accomplish one or more of the following:

- Help an artist adapt or transition their creative process to address current social realities,
- Help an artist overcome a barrier to success, professionalize, or increase artistic output and quality,
- Complete a project that marks a significant milestone in their career, and/or

- Reach a new community or market.

The following are some **examples** of potential projects:

- The acquisition of equipment to help an artist increase quality, diversify, or otherwise improve upon their artistic process or product.
- The development of a business plan, creation of promotional materials, or an artist portfolio.
- The development of new methods of sharing artistic creations and staying connected to audiences (e.g. new or expanded websites, virtual galleries or stores, implementation of web-streaming technology, new marketing or social media strategies, etc.)
- Participation in a training, master class or workshop that will enhance the artist's abilities (enrollment in a degree or certificate program is not eligible).
- The production or presentation of a significant work that represents a milestone in an artist's career.
- The production or presentation of a work that expands an artist's community or market (e.g. geographic region, cultural community, galleries, curators, professional network, etc.).

Projects where the community is the primary beneficiary are not compelling Next Step projects as the focus needs to be on the individual artist's needs.

## IMPORTANT DATES

<b>MRAC Fiscal Year July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021</b>	<b>Application Deadline</b>	<b>Panel Review</b>	<b>Earliest Grant Expenditure Date</b>
Next Step Fund	January 11, 2021 11:59 P.M.	March-May	May 19, 2021

## BEFORE APPLYING - RESOURCES

The Metropolitan Regional Arts Council is a hands-on grantmaker and we want to help you prepare an application that is eligible and ready for panel review. Assistance is provided in the following ways:

1. **Online Resources** - Visit the [Grant Resources](http://mrac.org/grants/grant-resources) page (mrac.org/grants/grant-resources) to access templates, technical how-tos

for the grant interface, links to sites to find demographic information, and a glossary of terms.

2. **Grant Application Workshops** - MRAC offers virtual grant application workshops to learn about the grant program and to discuss project ideas. Check the online calendar ([mrac.org/events](http://mrac.org/events)) for dates and times. Recorded workshops are also posted online before the deadline.

3. **Program Directors** - MRAC Program Directors are available for questions on eligibility and program intent, project idea development, and will, when possible, review your application materials for eligibility in advance of the deadline. We encourage you to reach out to the program director before you submit an application, especially if you are a first-time applicant to MRAC.

## APPLICATION ACCESSIBILITY

The Metropolitan Regional Arts Council does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its services, programs, or activities. We at MRAC strive to provide accessibility services and accommodations proactively, and are committed to finding solutions to ensure people of all abilities are included. These PDF guidelines are made to be accessible to screen reader software, and a web page version of the [text of the Next Step Fund guidelines](http://mrac.org/next-step-fund/nsf-text-guidelines) ([mrac.org/next-step-fund/nsf-text-guidelines](http://mrac.org/next-step-fund/nsf-text-guidelines)) is available in a format accessible to screen reader software and translation programs. MRAC staff is available to assist with adapting our typical processes to ensure that people with disabilities have equal opportunity to submit an application. Please email Scott Artley, Accessibility Program Director, at [scott@mrac.org](mailto:scott@mrac.org) or leave a message at 651-523-6384 to connect about your needs. You may also contact the MRAC's main number at 651-645-0402 or [mrac@mrac.org](mailto:mrac@mrac.org). Office hours are generally 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

## HOW TO APPLY & ELIGIBILITY

MRAC grant applications **must** be submitted online by **11:59 p.m. on Monday, January 11, 2021**. We do not accept incomplete or late applications. Avoid last minute issues with the online submission by submitting early. Please read guidelines thoroughly to ensure eligibility.

### **Applicants must meet *all* of the following requirements:**

- Emerging, mid-career and established artists, working in any discipline, who have evidence of artistic output respective of their career stage.
- Have resided in the seven-county metro area during the six months prior to the deadline (July 11, 2020 – January 11, 2021). Projects do NOT need to take place within the seven-county metro area but applicants MUST reside in the seven-county metro area.
- Recipients must live in the seven-county metro area for the entirety of the contract period.
- 18 years of age or older.

### **Applicants *cannot* be:**

- Individuals seeking to begin a career as an artist, or make a professional transition to the arts.
- Individuals whose portfolio only reflects client or freelance work.
- Artists currently enrolled in a degree or certification program in their respective art form, unless the applicant can demonstrate they maintain a career as a professional artist outside of their educational program.
- Arts administrators seeking support for their administrative profession.

### **This program does *not* fund:**

- Projects where the applicant is applying on behalf of a duo, group, or organization. This program provides support for the professional and artistic development of an artist independent from their organizational identity. For example, a choreographer may apply for an independent study, but not to produce or stage a work marketed as a production of their dance company. MRAC has other grant programs to fund arts projects of groups and organizations.
- Projects that include expenses that will be paid or incurred before the earliest grant expenditure date (May 19, 2021). Examples: airline tickets, registration fees, etc.
- Activities that engage in projects that attempt to influence any state or federal legislation or appropriation, serve the religious socialization of participants, or discriminate against persons or groups.

## How many Next Step Fund Grants may an individual receive?

- Individuals may submit one Next Step grant application per MRAC fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).
- Artists who received this award in FY18 and FY19 are not eligible to apply in this fiscal year
- Next Step grant recipients in 2018 or earlier are eligible to apply if their previously funded project is complete and their final report is submitted before the deadline

## STAGE ONE: PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL NEXT STEP FUND APPLICANTS

### Completing the Online Application Form

*Tip:* The online application form allows you to periodically save your work. Once saved, you may log off and return at a later time to complete the application. The “**Save As Draft**” button is located at the bottom of the form.

### Checklist of Requirements

- **Project Description:** Provide a *brief* description of your project (e.g. first solo exhibition, creation of a business plan, purchase a new kiln, etc.). This information will only be used as a quick reference for panel reviewers and MRAC staff.
- **Amount Requested:** Amount requested may not exceed \$5,000.
- **Location of Permanent Residence:** Applicants must have resided in Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, or Washington County during the six months prior to the deadline and for the entire grant contract period.
- **Artistic Discipline:** Select the discipline that best describes your work as an artist. This is for internal use to determine if this grant program is reaching all types of artists and is not shared with panelists.
- **Project Expenditure Date:** Activities and expenses described in the proposal may not begin before May 19, 2021.
- **Project End Date:** There is no requirement that projects be completed by a predetermined date. The date you provide will determine when your final report is due. Final reports are due two months after the conclusion of the project's activities. Projects with extended timelines (i.e. over one year from date of award) may be required to submit an interim report.
- **Criteria:** The Artist and The Project (see details below)

- **Demographic Information** (Optional — only used internally, not shared with panelists)
- **Certification Signature** (electronic check box)  
You must certify that the statements contained in this application and the information detailed in your resume are true and correct to the best of your knowledge and belief. You also certify that you are at least 18 years of age as of January 11, 2021, and were a permanent resident of the seven-county metro area between July 11, 2020 – January 11, 2021.

## Criteria

The narrative portion of the application is the foundation for the panel's review of your application. Each criterion will be submitted as a text field on the online application form. You may prepare your responses in another software program (e.g. Microsoft Word or Google Docs), and cut-and-paste your responses. **Please note, the 5,000 maximum character limit includes spaces.**

### **The Artist** (No more than 5,000 characters)

Use this section to describe your artistic vision, your body of work, and your professional goals. This section may be very similar to an artist statement, but should emphasize a self-reflection of your artistic and professional accomplishments to date, particularly as they relate to a clearly defined path towards the future. Be sure to answer all four required questions listed below.

- 1 Describe your work and your artistic vision. Describe any significant accomplishments that demonstrate achievement in your artistic field.
- 2 What are your career goals, both professional and artistic? Where are you in meeting those goals?
- 3 What significant barriers are you currently facing? These barriers may be related to COVID-19 and/or social change realities of today.
- 4 What unique opportunities exist that would help you in achieving your goals, or staying visible/relevant to your audiences?

### **The Project** (No more than 5,000 characters)

This section should focus on the project for which you are seeking funding. Be as specific as possible, and be sure to make a strong connection between the proposed project and your unique needs as an artist. Stronger projects are those that support your goals and vision outlined in the Artist section. Be sure to answer all three required questions listed below.

- 1 Describe the project for which you are seeking funding. Please be specific. Not all panelists will be familiar with your discipline – be sure to avoid technical jargon or assume familiarity with projects of this type.
- 2 How will this project help you advance and/or adapt artistically and professionally? Please be sure to relate this discussion to your artistic and professional goals. The panel's evaluation will focus on the project's potential impact on **you as an individual artist**, as opposed to an external community or broader audience.
- 3 Outline your project budget. Projects should be manageable in scope relative to the \$5,000 award.

### **Budget** (No more than 1000 characters)

List the major expenses of your project with dollar amounts; do not include in-kind expenses like scholarships and items/services that do not have an actual cost. Your project may be larger than the amount requested in this grant program. In the text box, provide simple explanations for the expenses.

Expense descriptions might appear like this:

\$3000 equipment: laptop, printer, and desk

\$1000 artist stipend (\$50 (hr) x 20 hrs)

\$500 child care (\$25 (hr) x 20 hrs.)

\$500 studio assistant (\$25 (hr) x 20 hrs.

If more than \$5,000 is required, what additional sources of income will be secured?

## **Reviewing Your Application**

**It is highly recommended that you review your application before submitting.** To do so, click on the **"Application Packet"** button at the top of the Application page. This will download a PDF of your application including all uploaded files. Please check that all information is correct and all uploaded files are included. If an uploaded file does not appear on the application packet PDF, please contact your program director, as applications with incorrect or missing file uploads are ineligible. You may save this file for your records.

## **Submitting Your Completed Application**

When finished, click the **"Submit Application"** button located at the bottom of the page.

**IMPORTANT!** Your application will not be eligible if you do not officially submit your application by 11:59 p.m. on the day of the deadline. Please note that MRAC technical assistance is only available until 5:00 p.m. on deadline day. Once you click "Submit Application" you will no longer be able to edit



your application. However, if you find that you accidentally submitted an application before it was ready and it is before the deadline, you may contact MRAC staff to revert the application to draft so you can continue to work.

An automated submission confirmation email will be sent to your login email address from administrator@grantinterface.com.

## STAGE ONE: REVIEW & DECISION PROCESS

- MRAC staff reviews all applications for eligibility. Applications that are incomplete (e.g. missing responses to required questions) may be deemed ineligible.
- A peer review panel reviews applications based upon the program criteria. Panelists will rate each application on a scale of 1-10 (10 being high). Scores are available to applicants upon request; there are no additional comments collected at this stage of review.
- Applicants will be notified around March 15, 2021 whether or not their applications will advance to the next stage.

## STAGE TWO: PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS FOR FINALISTS

### Work Samples (required *only* of finalists)

1. Only those applicants who are invited to the second round of review will be asked to submit a work sample. **Finalists will have about 2 weeks to submit work samples.**
2. Your narrative response to the grant criteria will remain the foundation for the panel's review of your request.
3. All work samples must be submitted electronically through the MRAC Dropbox account. Dropbox is a file hosting service that allows MRAC to manage files in a web-based folder. Detailed instructions as to how to submit using Dropbox will be sent to finalists.
4. Specifics about formats for work samples will be sent to all finalists.

### Retention of Work Samples

- All work samples remain the property of the artist.
- Work samples will be deleted from the MRAC Dropbox once the MRAC board has approved panel recommendations.

## STAGE TWO: FINAL REVIEW PROCESS

- 1. Panel:** A peer review panel reviews all final applications remotely via MRAC's grant interface. Feedback from the panel will be available by request starting Wednesday, May 19, 2021.
- 2. MRAC Board of Directors:** The panel submits its recommendations to the MRAC board of directors who make the final decision on funding.
- 3. Appeal:** Appeals should be made in writing within 30 days of the notification of the board decision. Contact MRAC for a copy of the appeal process. Applications that have been reviewed by a panel and declined funding by the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council's Board of Directors may be appealed based on an alleged procedural error in the process.