

Next Step Fund Guidelines

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/or artistic achievement. Applicants may be at any stage in their career, but must demonstrate a history of activity in their artistic field. Individuals must have a primary residential address in Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, or Washington county.

This grant is designed to enable individual artists to learn new professional or artistic skills, conduct planning and research for creative projects, increase their public visibility or reach, and/or produce new work.

Contacts

Questions about **the grantmaking process in general** and **technical assistance** with the grant interface (such as trouble logging in), please contact us at mrac@mrac.org or 651-645-0402.

Questions and assistance related to **eligibility** and/or **preparing an application**: Please contact Jovan Rebollar (jovan@mrac.org or 651-523-6381).

Or, visit the Next Step Fund grant program page and fill out the [application request meeting request form](#) to schedule a time to meet with a staff member who can assist you. The assistance form will be available starting on November 16, 2021.

Please do your best to read these guidelines thoroughly before reaching out with questions.

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Important Dates

Deadline January 10, 2022

- October 2021: Guidelines are available on the website at [Next Step Fund](https://mrac.org/grants/next-step-fund) (<https://mrac.org/grants/next-step-fund>).
- November 15, 2021: Application is available in the grant interface, project proposals are accepted.
- November 15, 2021: Grant Information Webinar.
- November 16, 2021: Application request meeting request form is available for assistance from program directors.
- December 23, 2021 - January 2, 2022: MRAC is closed
- January 10, 2022 at 11:59 PM is the deadline. Applications must be received by this time. MRAC does not accept late applications. Staff assistance ends at 5pm on deadline day.
- Starting January 11, 2022: Applicant and project eligibility review by MRAC staff.

- February 2022: Round One of panel review takes place. Applications from eligible applicants will be scored.
- March 2022: Ratings from Round One panel reviews are collected, and finalists are determined. Finalists submit work samples for Round Two panel review.
- April 2022: Ratings from Round Two panel reviews are collected, and funding recommendations are drafted.
- May 17, 2022: Board of Directors review the funding recommendations and make funding decisions.
- May 18, 2022: Staff send out grant notifications via email to applicants.
- The earliest eligible Proposal Start Date is May 18, 2022. Each applicant determines their end date.
- After May 18, 2022: Grantees will receive a lump sum payment made to their individual name that appears on their W9 form along with a 1099 dated in 2022. The grant award may affect your individual taxes.

Preparing to Apply

MRAC wants to make sure the application process is accessible and available for you to share who you are and your project ideas. Here are some ways we are trying to make the process accessible:

Online Resources

Visit the [Grant Resources](https://mrac.org/grants/grant-resources) page (mrac.org/grants/grant-resources) to access technical how-tos for the grant interface, links to sites to find demographic information, and a glossary of terms.

Grant Information Webinars

MRAC offers grant application workshops to learn about the grant program and to discuss project ideas. Check the [online calendar](https://mrac.org/events) (mrac.org/events) for dates and times: mrac.org/events. Recorded workshops are also posted on the MRAC YouTube account and the Next Step Fund webpage.

Program Directors

Program directors are available to help with your application. To schedule a video or phone meeting with a program director, visit the main page for the grant program to fill out the [application request meeting request form](#) so we can follow up with you. You may also call or email the program director listed under [Contacts](#) above, or on the grant program page, and we will take down your information and follow up to schedule a meeting. There are three types of meetings you may request:

- Individual Eligibility/Project Ideas Check-in (early in the process)

- Application Eligibility Review (for when you have a draft ready for us to review for eligibility)
- Project Check-In (once you received a grant and want to discuss any project changes)

Please note: We will do some initial brainstorming/refining with you about ideas, and will review application materials for eligibility and completeness. We will not review content beyond eligibility.

Language Translation

The online grant portal allows for Google Translate to access the application in a variety of languages. With advance notice, MRAC can also contract a language interpreter to assist.

Accessibility

MRAC requests that all applicants apply online unless a disability prevents them from doing so.

MRAC works to ensure that grant guidelines, workshop presentations, and any other written materials are created with accessibility principles in mind. Additionally, we are happy to provide materials in Braille, Large Print, or other formats with advanced notice that varies according to format, from one week to on-demand, but even if the notice timeline has elapsed, we may still be able to accommodate the request.

On each grant webpage there is a link to the guidelines in a text format that is friendly to screen readers and text resizing. The company that makes the online application software MRAC uses, Foundant Technologies, suggests using [NVDA](#), a screen reader software compatible with Windows available for free download.

Applicants with disabilities wishing to use other means to apply can work with MRAC staff to adapt our typical processes to ensure you have equal opportunity to submit an application. Solutions we have previously implemented include filling out an adapted form in Microsoft Word, and providing verbal responses that MRAC will share via audio recording or transcription.

Contact us as early as possible to begin a conversation about how to make sure you have an equal opportunity to apply.

Individual Eligibility

Individuals applicants must be all of the following:

- Identify as an artist, working in any discipline, at any stage in their career, who has evidence of artistic output respective of their career stage.
- Have a primary residential address in Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, or Washington county for at least the 6 months prior to the application deadline (July 10, 2021 – January 10, 2022), and continue to reside in this region for the entirety of the project period. (Please note that projects do **not** need to take place within the seven-county metro area, but applicants **must** reside in the seven-county metro area.);
- Be at least 18 years of age on the grant deadline date (January 10, 2022).

Ineligible Individuals

The following applicants are **not** eligible for this grant program:

- Organizations/Groups, LLCs or any other incorporated entity. Applicants must be individuals. Grants will not be made to businesses.
- Individuals who are under the age of 18 on the grant deadline date.
- Individuals located outside of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, or Washington county.
- 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.

Project Eligibility

Individual artists may seek support for any of the following (or a combination of the following):

- Support to learn new skills that adapt, transition or expand their creative process or artistic practice. For example, participation in a training, master class or workshop (enrollment in a degree or certificate program is not eligible).
- Support to overcome a barrier to success, professionalize or increase artistic output or quality. For example, the acquisition of equipment to help an artist increase quality, diversify, or otherwise improve upon their artistic process or product.
- Research, produce or present new creative work.
- Support for development of a business plan, creation of promotional materials, and/or documentation of a creative portfolio.

Must Occur *Only* after the Eligible Proposal Start Date

All expenses must be *incurred* only after the eligible Proposal Start Date for the Next Step Fund. Including expenses incurred prior to this date may deem the entire application ineligible, or result in a reduction of a grant request amount.

- Incurred expenses are those that are confirmed debts and/or firm promises to pay, whether or not cash has changed hands. Performing artist fees, for example, would be an incurred expense at the time a contract is signed, even if payment happens later.
- The Proposal Start Date you enter in the application is the date on which you will begin incurring expenses for your project. The earliest eligible Proposal Start Date is May 18, 2022.
- There is no predetermined Proposal End 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.

Ineligible Projects and Ineligible Expenses

The following projects and expenses are ineligible:

- **Expenses incurred before the eligible Proposal Start Date.** MRAC grants cannot be used for reimbursement. All expenses included in the grant proposal must be incurred after the eligible Proposal Start Date. Including expenses incurred prior to this date may deem the entire application ineligible, or result in a reduction of a grant request amount.
- **Incurred expenses** are those that are confirmed debts and/or firm promises to pay, whether or not cash has changed hands. Performing artist fees, for example, would be an incurred expense at the time a contract is signed, even if payment happens later. (Additional examples: airline tickets, registration fees, venue fees, etc.)
- Projects where the applicant is applying on behalf of a duo, group, or organization. This grant 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 and activities designed to raise funds/regrant/donate funds on behalf of **another** person, organization, or cause. MRAC funds cannot be donated to another organization or person.
- 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.

- Projects where the community is the primary beneficiary. Next Step Fund projects must focus on the needs and development of the individual artist.
- Expenses related to a degree or certificate program are not eligible. (For example, enrollment fees, completion of a thesis or other course work, etc.)
- **Project expenses that are included in another MRAC grant.** Grant funds may not be applied to expenses already covered by a grant from MRAC, or for which you have already requested support in another pending application. If you include an expense in your project budgets, you may not include this same expense in any other grant proposal you submit to MRAC.

How many Next Step Fund Grants may an individual receive?

- Individuals may submit one Next Step Fund grant application per MRAC fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).
- Artists who received this award in FY19 and FY21, are not eligible to apply in this fiscal year (FY22).
- Next Step Fund grant recipients in FY18 or earlier are eligible to apply if their previously funded project is complete and their final report is submitted before the deadline.
- FY20 Next Step Fund finalists are eligible to apply if they did not receive a FY21 grant. If you have questions, please contact Jovan Rebollar at jovan@mrac.org.

Already Have Another MRAC Grant Award? Or Submitted/Will Submit an Application in Another Program?

Project expenses that are included in another MRAC grant are always ineligible. The following information is about whether you are eligible to submit an application.

Next Step Fund grants may not supplement a project or program that has an awarded or pending MRAC grant.

I have a previous (pre-FY21) MRAC grant in another program

If you are affiliated with an organization/group that has an Arts Project Support, Arts Learning, Organizational Development, Capital, Access Improvement, Management

Consulting Fund, Management Training Fund), you **are eligible** to submit in Next Step Fund. Project expenses that are included in another MRAC grant are ineligible, so your proposal must outline activities and expenses for a project distinct from a previous grant.

I have an Equity Response grant from FY21

If you are affiliated with an organization/group that has an active Equity Response grant awarded to you between July 2020 and June 2021, you **are eligible** to submit in Next Step Fund. Project expenses that are included in another MRAC grant are ineligible, so your proposal must outline activities and expenses for a project or program distinct from a previous grant.

I have a Flexible Support grant from FY21

If you are affiliated with an organization/group that has an active Flexible Support grant awarded between July 2020 and June 2021 **are eligible** to submit in Next Step Fund. Project expenses that are included in another MRAC grant are ineligible, so your proposal must outline activities and expenses for a project or program distinct from a previous grant.

I have submitted a grant or will submit a grant in FY22 Flexible Support

If you are affiliated with an organization/group that has applied or will apply in Flexible Support, you **may be eligible** to submit in Next Step Fund. Next Step Fund grants may not supplement a project/program that has an awarded or pending MRAC grant. Project expenses that are included in another MRAC grant are ineligible, so your proposal must outline activities and expenses for a project distinct from a previous grant.

I have an Arts Impact for Individuals grant

If you have received an Arts Impact for Individuals grant you **are eligible** to submit in Next Step Fund. Project expenses that are included in another MRAC grant are ineligible, so your proposal must outline activities and expenses for a project distinct from a previous grant.

I will submit a grant in the Arts Impact for Groups grant program

If you are affiliated with an organization/group that will apply in Arts Impact for Groups, you **may be eligible** to submit in Next Step Fund. Next Step Fund grants may not supplement a project/program that has an awarded or pending MRAC

grant. Project expenses that are included in another MRAC grant are ineligible, so your proposal must outline activities and expenses for a project distinct from a previous grant.

Proposal Application Tips

- You will type your application into text boxes online in the MRAC grant interface.
- Text boxes include maximum character counts which are inclusive of letters, numbers, spaces, and paragraph breaks. There is no formatting (bold or italics).
- You may find that you do not need all the characters allotted.
- Do not include hyperlinks in text boxes, as the panel review will be limited to the content of your application. Hyperlinks to portfolios or other supplemental materials not requested in the MRAC application will be removed.
- The MRAC grant interface will auto-save your work every few minutes, and there is also a “save” button at the bottom of the screen page.
- Some applicants may wish to work in another document and paste in your answers once written. We provide templates on the [Next Step Fund website](https://mrac.org/grants/next-step-fund) (<https://mrac.org/grants/next-step-fund>) for working on your proposal before uploading it to the online form.

Proposal Narrative

Project Name (100 characters maximum)

In a few words, what is the name or title of your project?

The information submitted here **will** be provided to panelists.

Project Description (200 characters maximum)

Provide a very brief (1-2 sentence) summary of your project, beginning with the phrase "Funding to..." or "Funding for..."

The information submitted here **will** be provided to panelists. It will also be used to publicize the grant award via press releases and on the MRAC website if the proposal is funded. MRAC staff may edit for consistency.

The Artist (4,000 characters maximum)

You will provide your answer to each question in a text box. Use this section to describe the art you make, your artistic vision, and your professional goals related to your artistic practice. 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 three required questions listed below.

1. Describe your artwork and your artistic vision. Describe any significant accomplishments that demonstrate achievement in your artistic field.
2. What are your artistic goals, related to your artistic development or career goals as an artist? Where are you in meeting those goals?
3. How will these funds help you reach your art career goals?

The information submitted here **will** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application. Stronger proposals will help panelists understand how your artistic and/or career goals align with your proposed project.

Project (3,000 characters maximum)

You will provide your answer to each question in a text box. 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. Be sure to answer all four required questions listed below.

1. Describe the project for which you seek funding. Not all panelists will be familiar with your artistic discipline – be sure to avoid technical jargon or assume familiarity with projects of this type.
2. What are the activities that will take place? Where will the activities take place? Describe the major activities or tasks that take place between the start and end dates of your project.
3. What are the goals of this project?
4. In what ways does this project align with or advance your artistic goals, related to your artistic development or career goals as an artist?

The information submitted here **will** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application. Stronger projects are those that support your goals and vision outlined in the Artist section.

Proposal Budgets

Project Budget Expenses (1,000 characters maximum)

List the major cash expenses of your proposal with dollar amounts and short descriptions. Do **not** include in-kind expenses or ineligible expenses. Please carefully review [Project Eligibility](#) and [Ineligible Projects & Ineligible Expenses](#) sections above to ensure your application is not deemed ineligible.

Examples of eligible cash expense items (this is not a complete list; you may request expenses that are not on this list):

- Artist stipends
- Contracted artists
- Professional fees/consultants
- Supplies
- Space rental and/or equipment rental
- Accessibility-related costs (be specific)
- Equipment purchases
- Individual taxes
- Childcare
- Travel expenses

The information submitted here **will** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application. Stronger proposals will help panelists understand how the project's expenses align with the goals and activities of the project.

Total Project Cash Expenses

Enter a number.

- Enter the Total Project Cash Expenses (rounded to the nearest dollar). In-kind items may not be included in this figure.
- Your Total Project Cash Expenses listed here must be the same as the sum of all items listed in the Project Budget Expenses field above. MRAC staff will tabulate all items, so please double-check your math in both fields.
- Note: You may not request more funding from MRAC than the project costs, so all expenses must total at least or more than the MRAC grant amount you are requesting. However, your project may cost more than the maximum MRAC grant amount.

The information submitted here **will** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application.

Amount Requested

Enter in a number. You may request up to \$5,000.

Ask for the amount of money, up to the maximum request amount, that you need to do your project. There is no advantage or disadvantage to asking for a smaller or larger amount.

The information submitted here **will** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application.

Sample Budgets

All MRAC grant proposals fall under one of the following funding scenarios:

- MRAC is the *only* funding source for the project/program
- MRAC is one of *multiple* funding sources for the project/program

Sample budgets for each scenario are provided below, followed by a check-list. These are sample budgets only; you may request expenses for different types of projects or for similar projects with different expenses.

Example 1: Proposals where MRAC is the *only* funding source for the project

Application Field	Example Entry
Project Budget Expenses	\$2,000 Artist fee \$1,500 Assistant \$500 Materials and supplies \$500 Equipment \$500 Individual taxes Total: \$5,000
Total Project Cash Expenses	\$5,000
Amount Requested	\$5,000

Checklist when MRAC is the *only* funding source for the project:

- ✓ **Project Budget Expenses** are \$5,000 or less.
- ✓ **Total Project Cash Expenses** must be the same number as the total of the items listed in the Project Budget Expenses.

- ✓ **Amount Requested** must be the same number as Total Project Cash Expenses.

Example 2: Proposals, where MRAC is one of *multiple* funding sources for the project:

Application Field	Example Entry
Project Budget Expenses	\$5,000 Artist fee \$1,000 Assistant \$1,000 Graphic/Web designer \$1,000 Individual taxes \$2,000 Equipment purchase Total: \$10,000
Total Project Cash Expenses	\$10,000
Amount Requested	\$5,000
Additional Income	\$5,000 GoFundMe

Checklist when MRAC is one of *multiple* funding sources for the project:

- ✓ **Total Project Cash Expenses** must be the same number as the tally of the items listed in the **Project Budget Expenses**.
- ✓ **Amount Requested** must be \$5,000 or less and be less than **Total Project Cash Expenses**.
- ✓ **Additional Income** must account for any remaining funds needed to cover your total **Project Budget Expenses**.
- ✓ Tally the **Amount Requested** and **Additional Income**. Be sure the total matches the exact amount of the **Total Project Cash Expenses**.

Project Information

Project Discipline

Choose from a dropdown list:

Discipline Code - Project: Select one category that best represents the project described in your application.

The information submitted here will **not** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application.

Project Timeline: Proposal Start Date

What is the earliest date that you will incur expenses covered by MRAC funds for this proposal? You may not incur expenses covered by MRAC funds before the announcement date, May 18, 2022.

The information submitted here will **not** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application. This information is used by MRAC staff to determine project eligibility.

Project Timeline: Proposal End Date

The date at which all the grant funds have been spent and all project activities are completed.

The information submitted here will **not** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application.

Individual Information and Data

Identity

The information submitted here will **not** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application. Your answers do not have any bearing on your application being reviewed.

You may choose not to disclose this information by choosing the Not disclosed option.

This information is shared in aggregate (meaning, all of the numbers from applicants are added without associating identities) and shared with the MRAC Board of Directors to track distribution of funds.

Race/Ethnicity Identity

From the following list below, please share how you identify. If you identify with more than one racial/ethnic identity, please choose all that apply or the Mixed – More than one race/ethnicity fields.

- Asian / Asian-American

- African / Black / African-American
- Hispanic / Latinx / Chicanx
- Middle Eastern / North African
- Mixed Race / Multi - Racial Individual
- Native American / American Indian / Native Alaskan
- Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander
- White /Non-Hispanic
- None of the above
- Not disclosed

Gender Identities

From the following list below, please share how you identify.

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Trans
- Not disclosed
- Please specify if not listed

Age

- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-59
- 46-59
- 60+

Pronouns

Please indicate your gender pronouns. Examples include, but are not limited to She/her; He/Him; They/Their; She/Her/They/Them; prefer not to answer

This information **will** be shared with panelists who will use this information when writing comments on your application.

Additional Identity

From the following, please share how you identify.

- First generation immigrant
- Second generation immigrant
- Jewish
- LGBTQIA2+
- Muslim
- Person with a disability
- Retired
- Veteran
- Not disclosed
- Please specify if not listed

County of Residence

Select the part of the region in which you are located. Use the primary address of the individual to make this selection. You must have lived in the region for the 6 months preceding the application deadline, and if awarded funds, must continue to live in the region during the entirety of the project period.

- Anoka county
- Carver county
- Dakota county
- Minneapolis
- Saint Paul
- Scott county
- Suburban Hennepin county
- Suburban Ramsey county
- Washington county

This information is shared in aggregate (meaning, all of the numbers from applicants are added without associating identities) and shared with the MRAC Board of Directors to track distribution of funds.

The information submitted here will **not** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application.

This information is used by MRAC staff to determine individual eligibility for these funds.

Additional Individual Information

Choose from a dropdown list:

- **Discipline Code - Individual:** Select the discipline that best describes your primary area of interest in the arts.

The information submitted here will **not** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application. This information is shared with the McKnight Foundation.

Other Information

Application Assistance from MRAC

Please select the types of support you used to help you prepare this application, and if you are a first-time applicant.

Choices (checklist)

- Attended live online workshop
- Viewed recorded workshop on YouTube
- Extended meeting on video or phone with an MRAC staff member
- Email support from an MRAC staff member
- Other kinds of assistance
- I have never applied for a MRAC grant before

The information submitted here will **not** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application. MRAC uses the information to understand the benefits of its services and assistance.

Certification

This is the last question of the application!

By clicking "I Agree", you certify the following statement: "I certify that all information in the submitted application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. Further, I resolve to carry out the activities and/or program/project as it is described in the submitted application if funding is awarded by MRAC."

The information submitted here will **not** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application.

Round One: Review & Decision Process

1. MRAC staff reviews all applications for eligibility. Applications that are incomplete (e.g. missing responses to required questions) may be deemed ineligible.
2. A review panel evaluates applications based upon the grant criteria. Panelists will rate each application on a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest). Scores are

available to applicants upon request; there are no additional comments collected at this stage of review.

3. Applicants will be notified around March 21, 2022 whether or not their applications will advance to the next stage.

Round Two: Requirements for Finalists

Work Samples (required only of finalists)

- Only those applicants who are invited to the second round of review will be asked to submit work samples. Finalists will have about 2 weeks to submit work samples.
- Your narrative response to the grant criteria will remain the foundation for the panel's review of your request.
- All work samples must be submitted electronically through the MRAC grant interface. Detailed instructions as to how to submit will be sent to finalists.
- Specifics about acceptable formats for work samples will be sent to all finalists.

Retention of Work Samples

All work samples remain the property of the artist.

Stage Two: Final Review Process

1. Panel: A review panel evaluates all final applications remotely via MRAC's grant interface. Feedback from the panel will be available by request starting Wednesday, May 19, 2022.
2. MRAC Board of Directors: MRAC staff submits the panel scores 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.