

Next Step Fund Guidelines

The Next Step Fund grant is designed to help artists complete a project focused on their individual artistic and/or professional development goals within an artistic discipline. Projects should outline strategies that will help the artist overcome barriers to success, sustain the continued success of their artistic career, and/or help them leverage an opportunity.

The Next Step Fund is made possible with support from the McKnight Foundation and provides project grants up to \$5,000 to artists in any arts discipline. Applicants may be at any stage in their career, but must be able to provide work samples of their own artwork. Individual artists must have a primary residential address in Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, or Washington county.

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 15, 2022.

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

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Important Dates

Deadline January 9, 2023

- July 2022: 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 14, 2022: Application is available in the grant interface, project proposals are accepted.
- November 14, 2022: Grant Information Webinar.
- November 15, 2022: [application request meeting request form](#) is available for assistance from program directors.
- December 23, 2022 - January 2, 2023: MRAC is closed
- **January 9, 2023 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 10, 2023: Individual and project eligibility review by MRAC staff.

- March - May 2023: Panel reviews take place. Applications from eligible individual artists will be scored and ranked.
- June 2023: Funding recommendations are drafted by MRAC staff based on panel scores.
- June 27, 2023: Board of Directors review the funding recommendations and make the funding decision.
- June 28, 2023: Staff send out grant notifications via email to applicants.
- The earliest eligible Proposal Start Date is June 28, 2023. Each applicant determines their end date.
- After June 28, 2023: Grantees will receive a lump sum payment made to their individual name that appears on their W9 form along with a 1099 dated in 2023. 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.

The [Next Step Fund](#) program page also has resources to help you apply, such as the Panel Rating Guide that will be used to review your application and a selection of sample applications that have been successfully funded in past rounds

Grant Information Webinars

MRAC offers grant application workshops to learn about the grant program and to discuss project ideas. Check the [Next Step Fund](#) program page (mrac.org/grants/next-step-fund/) for dates and times. 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 collect 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. This is intended to provide general guidance ahead of submission; final eligibility determinations depend on a variety of factors and are made only after an application is submitted.

Language Translation

These guidelines and the Next Step Fund Application Template are translated in Spanish and available on the Next Step Fund webpage. MRAC's website can also be translated into Spanish by clicking the language button in the top left corner.

Additionally, the online grant portal allows for Google Translate to access the application in a variety of languages. With advance notice, MRAC can contract an interpreter and/or translator to assist during the application process. Individuals may apply in their preferred language.

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 must be all of the following:

- Identify as an artist, working in any discipline, at any stage in their career, who have evidence of artistic output respective of their career stage.
- Individual artists must be able to submit work samples of their own artwork. Artists should have had decision-making authority over the artwork depicted in the work samples.
- Have a primary address in Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, or Washington county for at least the 6 months prior to the application deadline (July 9, 2022 – January 9, 2023), 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 or Minnesota, but applicants MUST reside in the seven-county metro area.);
- Be at least 18 years of age on the grant deadline date (January 9, 2023).

Ineligible Applicants

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/practice as a professional artist outside of their educational program.
- Creatives who cannot demonstrate a history of producing original artworks.

Project Eligibility

Must Occur *Only* after the Eligible Proposal Start Date

- 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 credited college/university program is not eligible).
 - Support to overcome a barrier to success, professionalize or increase artistic output and 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.

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 June 28, 2023.
- 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.

- **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. (Examples: airline tickets, registration fees, etc.)
- 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 June 28, 2023.
- 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 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.
- Enrollment in a degree seeking or credited college/university program is not eligible.
- **Project activities and expenses that are included in another MRAC grant.** Next Step Fund grants may not be applied to activities and expenses already covered by an awarded or pending grant from MRAC.

How many Next Step Fund Grants may an individual receive?

- Individuals may submit one Next Step Fund grant application in an MRAC fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).
- Artists who received this award in FY19, FY21, and FY22 are not eligible to apply in this fiscal year
- 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 FY19, FY21, or FY22 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 activities and/or expenses that are included in another MRAC grant, pending or awarded, 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 submitted to the Artists' Futures program

If you have applied to the Artists' Futures cohort program, you **are eligible** to submit an application in Next Step Fund.

I have an open MRAC grant in another program

If you have an open grant from another MRAC program, or are affiliated with an organization/group that has an open grant in another MRAC program, you **are eligible** to submit in Next Step Fund. Remember, 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 submitted a grant or will submit a grant in another FY23 MRAC grant program

If you have a pending grant application or are affiliated with an organization/group that has a pending grant application in another MRAC grant program, 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. Remember, 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 (except those specifically designated for work samples), as the panel review will be limited to the content of your application.
- 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](https://mrac.org/grants/next-step-fund) website (<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 your artistic vision, your body of work, 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 work 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 as an artist? Where are you in meeting those goals?
3. How will this grant help you reach the goals described in Question 2?

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 project.

The 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. (Not all panelists will be familiar with your discipline – be sure to avoid technical jargon or assume familiarity with projects of this type.)

1. Describe the project for which you seek funding. Describe the major activities or tasks that take place between the start and end dates of your project.
2. What are the goals of this project?
3. In what ways does this project align with or advance your artistic goals, related to your 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.

Work Samples

Work samples **will** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application.

Work samples should align with and embody the details that you described in the Artist section of your application. Work samples will not be scored independently,

rather, they should provide the panelists with examples of ways in which you have explored creating work that expresses your artistic vision and how your work reflects where you are in your artistic journey.

Work Sample Requirements

Work sample materials may not exceed the limitations described in the format specific sections below.

Lists of titles and a description of the work are required. Depending on your medium, a description may include, completion or performance date, materials, dimensions, etc. or (1000 characters limit). Work sample descriptions may not include additional narrative about your project.

Allowable Formats

- Audio
- Video
- Digital Image
- PDF
- URL (must comply with formatting rules for the above methods)
- Artists working in time-based disciplines must submit using a respective audio or video format.
- Artists working in multiple formats – Materials submitted may not exceed 5 minutes, images, or pages cumulatively. Ex. 1 pdf page of double-spaced text, 2 mins of video, 1 digital image, 1 min of audio is acceptable.
- Allowable files for upload are: doc,docx,pdf,jpg,png,tif,rtf,jpeg,wav,aiff,mp3,aac

Audio and Video

Submit one work sample of up to 5 minutes in length, or up to five work samples that do not exceed 5 minutes total. Work samples must already be cued to the start point.

The file upload size may be up to 5 MiBs.

URL must be in an unprotected format or provide a password.

(For audio and video, if you are performing with others, describe yourself to help the panel identify you. For example, “I am playing the violin” or “I am the performer in the green costume.”)

Digital Image

Submit up to five (5) digital images.

Formatted as a jpeg (.jpg) file.

Formatted to open directly to the proper viewing orientation (vertical or horizontal).

Files may not exceed 5MiBs.

Do not embed images in PowerPoint, MS Word, or Adobe.

Images that cannot be opened, or are formatted improperly, will not be viewed by the panel.

PDF

Written material must be submitted as a .pdf file.

Maximum of five (5) full length pages.

Formatted, double-spaced on 8 1/2" x 11" paper with a minimum one-inch margin on all sides.

Font size must be 12 pt. or larger.

Files may not exceed 5MiBs.

URL

The URL address must be submitted as a live link embedded in a .pdf file.

The URL link must comply with the formatting rules of allowable work sample mediums (Audio, Video, Digital Image, PDF).

Panelists will spend no more than 5 minutes reviewing the URL.

URLs that cannot be opened, or are formatted improperly, will not be viewed by the panel.

Retention of Work Samples

All work samples remain the property of the artist.

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 in 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.
- The Total Project Cash Expenses must be the same number as Total Project Cash Income.
- **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 to individuals complete the budget sections of the proposal, 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**.

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, June 28, 2023.

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.

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

How do you identify in race/ethnicity?
Select your race/ethnicity from the list below.

Asian / Asian-American
African / Black / African-American
Hispanic / Latinx / Chicanx
Middle Eastern / North African
Mixed Race / Multi - Racial Individuals
Native American / American Indian / Native Alaskan
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander

White
None of the above
Not disclosed

Intersectional Identities

How do you identify in the following intersectional identities?

- BIPOC (not LGBTQIA2+, without disabilities)
- BIPOC LGBTQIA2+ (and without disabilities)
- BIPOC with disabilities (and not LGBTQIA2+)
- BIPOC, LGBTQIA2+ and with disabilities
- White (not LGBTQIA2+, without disabilities)
- White LGBTQIA2+ (and without disabilities)
- White with disabilities (and not LGBTQIA2+)
- White, LGBTQIA2+ and with disabilities
- None of the above
- Not disclosed

Additional Identities

If you identify as the following, please select:

- Adult older than 60
- Veteran

Artists Name and Headshot

Type your preferred artist name, if different from your legal name and upload a headshot or image representative of your artwork.

This information will **not** be provided to panelists as part of their review of your application. If awarded, it will be used on our website, in announcements and for press purposes.

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.

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
- Hennepin county
- Scott county
- 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 Minnesota State Arts Board.

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.

Review & Decision Process

1. MRAC staff reviews all applications for eligibility. Applications that are incomplete (e.g. missing responses to required questions, and/or missing work samples) may be deemed ineligible.
2. A review panel evaluates applications based upon the grant criteria. Panelists will rate each application on a scale of 1-5 (5 being the highest). Scores are available to applicants upon request; comments and additional feedback are optional from panelists and if available will be shared with applicants.
3. MRAC staff submits the panel scores to the MRAC Board of Directors who make the final decision on funding.
4. 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.