Next Step Fund Application Questions and Explanations

About This Document

This document presents all the parts, sections, and questions in MRAC's 2026 Next Step Fund grant and describes the reasons behind many of the questions. The instructions and explanations are also on Submittable.

This is not the Next Step Fund application. You cannot upload this document to Submittable and MRAC staff will not accept it via email.

This document is for your personal use to review the application questions. Listed in parentheses throughout is each question's input type, such as textbox or dropdown.

If you are considering applying, we **highly encourage** you to make an account and review the application in Submittable. Familiarizing yourself with the Submittable interface can be useful when you are ready to fill out the information there!

You can log into [MRAC's Submittable interface](#) to get started.

Application Instructions

1. You must fill out every question marked "required."
2. Some application instructions are listed **underneath** answer input boxes. Please review each item carefully.
3. The **Next Step Fund Grant Program Overview and Application Instructions** document provides full details about this program if you have questions while you work on your application. Head to the [Next Step Fund webpage](#) to view or download.

If you have questions, please reach out to us at nextstepfund@mrac.org.

For technical assistance with Submittable, check out the [Submittable Help Desk](#) first.

Part 1: Individual Applicant Information

In Part 1, you will enter your personal contact information and identify your primary area of interest in the arts. Except for your **Public-facing name**, your **Pronouns** (if provided), **county of residence**, and your **artistic discipline**, the information in this part is not shared with review panelists.

Section 1: General Information

Information in this section is reviewed by program staff to determine application eligibility.

Legal name (required) (textbox)

Provide your legal name. This is the name we are required to use when addressing checks or delivering mail and must match the name provided on your IRS W-9 form should you receive an award.

Public-facing name (required) (textbox)

Write your public-facing name here. This may be the same as your legal name or a preferred name, nickname, or artist name different from your legal name. This is the name that will be made available to review panelists and the public in grant award announcements.

Pronouns (optional) (textbox)

If desired, provide your pronouns.

Phone number (required) (textbox)

Email (required) (textbox)

MRAC will communicate with you about this grant via Submittable. In case we are not able to reach you via Submittable, MRAC will follow-up our communications using email and/or the phone number provided here.

Headshot (required) (file upload)

Provide an image of yourself from the shoulders up. File must be no larger than 5MB. If you are awarded a Next Step Fund grant, this image will be used on our website, in announcements, and for press purposes.

Primary residential address (required) (textbox)

Please enter your primary residential address. P.O. boxes are not acceptable.

Applicants must have a primary residential address in Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, or Washington county, have resided in this region for at least six (6) months prior to the application deadline, and continue to reside in this region for the entirety of the proposed funding period. If you have temporary or unstable housing, please enter your most recent address.

County of residence (required) (dropdown)

Please select the county of your primary residential address. It must match the address provided above and be in one of the seven metro counties.

How would you describe the main objective of your grant proposal? (required) (checkbox)

Sustain the trajectory of your artistic career
Overcome a barrier to success
Leverage a beneficial career opportunity
You may select up to three (3). This is used by MRAC staff to understand applicant goals and refine grant purpose.

Section 2: Demographic Information

In the following section, you may indicate whether you identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or a person of color (BIPOC); and/or a person with a disability; and/or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ+). This information allows MRAC to track our funding distributions as well as meet and maintain our goals for equity in grantmaking.

Individual identity: race/ethnicity (required) (dropdown)

Select your race/ethnicity.

Additional identities (required) (checkboxes)

Select any of the identities that apply to you.

Part 2: Proposal Narrative

In Part 2, you will describe the proposal for which you are seeking funding. The answers to these questions are provided to review panelists.

Each textbox will display a character limit (**inclusive** of letters, numbers, spaces, and paragraph breaks).

Do not include hyperlinks in narrative text boxes, as reviewers will be limited to the content of your application. Any hyperlinks will be deleted by program staff.

Section 1: General Proposal Information

You will provide general information about your proposal, including start and end dates.

What is the title of your proposal? (required) (textbox, limit: 50 characters)

Provide a short description of your proposal. (required) (textbox, limit: 200 characters)

In the textbox above, summarize your proposal. The content of this answer may be used and/or lightly edited by MRAC's communications team for announcements should you receive an award.

Select the discipline that best represents your artistic work (required) (dropdown)

Proposal start date (required) (date selector)

Enter the date on which you will begin grant-related activities. This date must be on or after June 29, 2026.

Proposal end date (required) (date selector)

Enter the date by which all grant-funded activities will be completed, all grant funds spent, and all expenses incurred. This date must be on/before June 29, 2028.

If the application is awarded a grant, the Final Report will be due **one (1) month** after the Proposal End Date.

Your answer is reviewed by program staff to determine application eligibility.

How will you submit your responses to the proposal narrative questions? (checkbox) (required)

By typing my responses into the textbox
By uploading an audio recording

Section 2: About You

Answer all the questions below. This section may be very similar to an artist statement but should include your artistic and professional accomplishments, particularly as they relate to clearly defined artistic and career goals.

About You: Questions (required) (textbox, limit: 4000 characters, or audio upload, limit: 10 mins.)

- **Describe your work and your artistic vision.**
- **Describe any significant accomplishments that demonstrate achievement in your artistic field.**
- **What are your artistic goals, related to your development or career as an artist?**
- **What opportunities or strategies are you currently using to meet those goals?**

Textbox displays the character limit (**inclusive** of letters, numbers, spaces, and paragraph breaks). **Do not include hyperlinks** in narrative text boxes, as reviewers will be limited to the content of your application. Any hyperlinks will be deleted by program staff.

Section 3: Your Proposal

Answer all the questions below. Be as specific as possible and make a strong connection between the proposal and your individual needs as an artist. Please note not all panelists will be familiar with your discipline, so avoid technical jargon and don't assume familiarity with proposals of this type.

Your Proposal: Questions (required) (textbox, limit: 3000 characters, or audio upload, limit: 10 mins.)

- **Describe the proposal you are seeking funding for. What are the goals of this proposal?**
- **How does this proposal align with or help you achieve the artistic goals you describe in the About You section?**
- **Describe the major activities or tasks that take place between the start and end dates of your proposal.**
- **If you are working with other individuals during your proposal activities, describe their involvement. How does their participation serve to help you meet your artistic or career goals?**

Textbox displays the character limit (**inclusive** of letters, numbers, spaces, and paragraph breaks). **Do not include hyperlinks** in narrative text boxes, as reviewers will be limited to the content of your application. Any hyperlinks will be deleted by program staff.

Part 3: Budget Plan

In Part 3, you will show your planned budget and expenses.
Your request for MRAC funds **may not exceed $6,000**. You may request less than $6,000 if that will cover your expenses. There is no advantage or disadvantage to asking for an amount smaller than the maximum. Budget expenses should clearly align with your proposal narrative.
Your Budget Plan Spreadsheet is provided to review panelists.
List only expenses that the MRAC Next Step Fund grant will cover.
Some examples of eligible expenses include: Artist compensation/stipends (for yourself and/or other artists), individual taxes, contracted artists, professional fees/consultants, supplies/equipment purchases, space/equipment rental, accessibility-related costs (be specific), child/elder care, travel expenses.

The Budget Plan Spreadsheet includes columns for Expense Description and Dollar Amount. Please note:
1. **Do not use dollar signs ($)**. You may include commas, but it is not necessary: you can enter values as either 1000 or 1,000 for example.
2. Use the Expense Description column to describe your expenses, such as "proposal leader compensation" or "equipment rental."
3. If the Total Grant Request field is not automatically updating, click on it before moving on to more input rows.

Budget Plan Spreadsheet (required) (input answers in spreadsheet)

Part 4: Work Samples

You will **upload up to five (5) work samples**. All work samples remain the property of the artist.
You **may not provide** URLs/hyperlinks to view samples online.

How Work Samples Are Used by Reviewers
Work samples will not be scored independently of your narrative. The work samples you choose should clearly demonstrate your artistic discipline and stage of artistic development. They should align with the artistic vision and career development goals described in the About You section.
If you feel fewer works samples will adequately represent your practice, then you do not need to submit five samples. Please note that application reviewers will spend a limited amount of time looking at work samples.

Work Sample Identification
For each work sample, you will provide a title, medium, date, description, and your role in the creation of the work. Depending on your medium, the identification could also include completion or performance date, dimensions, duration, or other relevant information. (Limit: 300 characters each sample)

Work Sample Files Sizes, Lengths, and Formats

Work samples must fit within the following parameters. Work samples in different formats, exceeding allowable file size or length, or otherwise outside the allowable formats may be deemed ineligible and/or will not be looked at by reviewers.

The maximum file upload size is 400MB per work sample. The entirety of your work samples may not exceed 800MB. Each upload must represent **only one (1) artwork**. You **may not submit files containing multiple works**.

- **Audio/music files**: An audio file may not exceed 5 mins. Allowed audio/music file types: .aac, .flac, .mp3, .wav
- **Digital image files**: Images must open in the proper viewing orientation (vertical or horizontal). Allowed image file types: .gif, .jpg, .png, .tif. Recommended file size: 5MB or 1200 pixels on the longest side.
- **Film/video files**: A film/video file may not exceed 5 mins. Allowed film/video file types: .avi, .mov, .mp4, .wmv.
- **Text files**: A text file may not exceed five (5) double spaced, 8 1/2 x 11 in pages. Font size must be 12 pt or larger. Allowed text file types: .doc, .docx, .pdf, .rtf

Work Sample 1 (required) (file upload)

Upload a file. Acceptable file types: .doc, .docx, .pdf, .rtf, .gif, .jpg, .jpeg, .png, .tif, .tiff, .aac, .flac, .mp3, .wav, .avi, .mov, .mp4, .wmv.

Each upload must represent **only one (1) artwork**. You may not submit files containing multiple works.

Work Sample 1 Identification (required) (textbox, limit: 300 characters)

Provide a title, medium, date, description, and your role in the creation of the work. Depending on your medium, the identification could also include completion or performance date, dimensions, duration, or other relevant information.

Examples:
- A Painting, oil on canvas, 25 x 36 in., 2025, a painting of a vase of flowers. Part of a series I created between 2024 and 2025.
- My Life, HD video, 3 min., 2025. A short documentary work I created for an important event.

Would you like to submit an additional work sample? (required) (checkbox)*

*If you select yes, you will be prompted to upload an additional sample and add the work identification. After each upload, you will be asked if you would like to upload an additional sample. The application allows for up to five (5) work sample uploads.

*If you submit the maximum five work samples, you will be prompted to select "Take me to the Final Agreement." **You must select this option to sign your application before submitting**.

Part 5: Final Agreement

You must agree to the following statement to submit your application.

I certify that I have read the 2026 Next Step Fund Grant Overview and Application Instructions document and all information in the submitted application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Further, I resolve to carry out the proposal as it is described in the submitted application if funding is awarded by MRAC.

Additionally, I agree to supply additional documents and/or update the application if requested by MRAC staff.

By selecting "I agree," you will certify the statement above. (required) (checkbox)

This application is due by **12 noon CST on March 16, 2026**. Late applications will not be accepted.

Before submitting, be sure to double check all your answers, answer every question marked "required," and confirm budget amounts and totals. You cannot make changes or updates after submitting.

To avoid technology and connection errors, do your best to **submit well ahead of 12 noon deadline**.

After submission, applicants should check the email associated with their Submittable account regularly, as MRAC staff may reach out with questions or request additional information. If we do not hear from you within the timeframe in the email, we may make your application, or a portion of your proposal, ineligible.