



CALI CATALYST

Frequently Asked Questions

(updated June 9, 2025)

GENERAL

1. What is CALI Catalyst?

The California Art Leadership Investments (CALI) Catalyst grant program supports artists and arts workers whose frontline work to upend the status quo in the arts and culture sector is creating tangible change and moving the needle towards greater equity and inclusion. Through bold actions, these individuals are tangibly helping historically underrepresented communities—including Black, Indigenous, people of color, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, and those in rural areas—gain more influence and power within the arts and culture sector. We consider these bold actions to be “change-making” because they are *visibly* moving the needle for these communities to have more influence and power at an *industry-wide* level.

2. What happened to CALI Accelerator grants?

CALI Accelerator is part of a lineage of the evolving-with-the-times CALI program, which has been marked by different phases of grantmaking priorities since its launch in 2011. In its first years, CALI (fka, the NextGen program) was a professional development pipeline for young talent; then, when it was renamed CALI (California Arts Leadership Investments), it emphasized externally facing opportunities that prepared emerging arts professionals for managerial-level roles (i.e., workplace-specific skills and knowledge attainment). CALI Accelerator, offered from October 2018 to January 2021, prioritized activities aimed at helping grantees develop their leadership vision and voice while acquiring professional knowledge and skills as a means of preparing grantees to be influential in their organization, discipline, or larger arts and culture field.

In response to the changing dynamics of the field, CALI Catalyst emerged to support change-makers who are explicit about changing the arts and culture sector in ways that are needed by those whose voices have not been adequately heard. And, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge and give credit to the change-makers who helped to inspire CALI Catalyst, such as Alicia Rojas, who is working to preserve the history and contributions of overlooked artists through mural restoration, public art advocacy, and local policy engagement. In Los Angeles, Tatiana Vahan launched the Los Angeles Artist Census to better understand working conditions and economic realities faced by artists, using data to advocate for greater support and visibility. And in Vallejo, the Personal Space Gallery team has established an inclusive community art space that features exhibitions and programs reflecting the diversity of the region’s creative voices, with a focus on accessibility and equity for artists from a broad range of backgrounds.

3. What do you mean by “arts and culture sector?”

CCI is a nonprofit arts intermediary that supports individual artists and arts workers. In our work, we understand the “arts and culture sector” to encompass a wide spectrum of creative industries, artistic

disciplines and practices, cultural expressions, and areas of focus, all at varying scales. However, we're more interested in knowing how CALI Catalyst applicants self-define the "arts and culture sector" and, importantly, what aspect(s) of it they are trying to influence.

4. What do you mean by "status quo" and "entrenched systems and practices" in the arts and culture sector?

The "status quo" refers to the existing or current state of affairs—the commonly accepted norms, practices, and structures that shape how things are done. It encompasses the prevailing attitudes, behaviors, and systems that shape how things are done within a sector. In the arts and culture sector, this can include long-standing hierarchies, funding models, leadership pathways, and access to opportunities.

"Entrenched systems and practices" are the ways of doing things that have become deeply embedded in an organization, society, or culture, making them difficult to change, even when evidence or new ideas suggest a better approach. They can involve deeply ingrained biases, outdated methods, or established norms that resist innovation and progress. These systems and practices can show up in many ways, such as inequitable funding models, exclusionary hiring or leadership structures, Eurocentric definitions of artistic excellence, limited access for rural or disabled communities, and decision-making processes that prioritize tradition over inclusion.

CALI Catalyst supports individuals who are challenging these norms and systems in order to promote greater equity, inclusion, and representation across the field.

5. What do you mean by "tangible change/impact"?

"Tangible change/impact" refers to the visible and measurable outcomes or effects resulting from the change-making action. In the context of the arts and culture sector, tangible change or impact may include exposing discriminatory hiring practices, disrupting harmful philanthropic norms, and helping to make the field more accessible, welcoming, and equitable. In other words, the change-making action goes beyond raising awareness and has resulted in structural, policy, or systemic shifts that benefit the broader field.

Please note that Impact will be judged at the discretion of the CCI staff according to the program expectations and CCI's tax-exempt purposes.

6. What do you mean by "historically underrepresented communities"?

For this grant program, "historically underrepresented" refers to groups of people who have been systematically disadvantaged, excluded, or discriminated against over time based on various factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or other identity markers. These communities have historically faced structural barriers, oppression, and unequal treatment within society, including within the realms of arts and culture. Examples of historically underrepresented communities may include Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQIA+ individuals, people with disabilities, immigrants, those living in rural areas, and others who have been oppressed or disenfranchised due to their identities or social positions.

Applicants of all identities are eligible to apply to CALI Catalyst. We are defining historically underrepresented communities to provide context, as the impact of actions that actively shift power and influence to these communities aligns closely with the review criteria.

ELIGIBILITY

7. Who is eligible to apply for a CALI Catalyst grant?

CALI Catalyst is open to individuals and teams of individuals (See Question 9 for additional information regarding “teams”).

To be **eligible** for consideration:

- Applicants must be artists or arts workers (e.g., arts administrators, cultural producers, culture bearers, creatives, cultural practitioners, teaching artists, or specialized technicians).
- Applicants (including all team members) must reside full-time in California.
- Applicants’ change-making action(s) must have taken place or started (i.e., the action is still in progress) on or after January 1, 2020.
- Applicant’s change-making action must have impacted the arts and culture sector in tangible and measurable ways at a local, regional, state, or national level.

The following are **ineligible** for funding consideration:

- Organizations (e.g., nonprofits, for-profits, fiscally sponsored organizations) requesting funding to support their operations*;
- Individuals or teams of individuals who describe a change-making action that started or took place before January 1, 2020;
- Individuals or teams of individuals who are requesting funding to support an organization;
- Past CALI Catalyst grantees describing the same body of work previously recognized by this program;
- Requests for funding to support a project that is in the beginning or developing stages;
- Incomplete applications or applications with inaccessible (e.g., password-protected, broken links) attachments; and
- Individuals or teams of individuals who have a conflict of interest (family or financial relationship) with the board, staff, or directors of the Center for Cultural Innovation.

*Individuals and teams associated with an organization can apply. However, their change-making must have been influenced and driven by the individuals within the organization and align with the review criteria. Additionally, if awarded funding, individuals or teams should direct funds to the individuals rather than to the operations of the organization. (See Question 12 for additional information regarding affiliation with an organization.)

8. If I’ve received funding through another CCI grant program, am I eligible to apply for CALI Catalyst support?

Yes, you are eligible! Funding through another CCI grant program does not affect your eligibility to apply for or receive funds through CALI Catalyst.

9. I am a past CALI Catalyst grantee. Am I eligible to apply again?

Yes, past CALI Catalyst grantees are eligible to apply again! However, you must either:

- Address a new body of work or change-making action, or
- Provide new tangible results or impacts from the same action you described in your previous successful application. In other words, if you choose to apply with the same project or change-making action, make sure to highlight any new achievements or impacts.

Please note that a final report must also be submitted and approved by CCI prior to the July 11, 2025, deadline. Lastly, per the program’s guidelines, first-time applicants may be prioritized.

10. What does CALI Catalyst funding support?

CALI Catalyst awards unrestricted grants of up to \$7,500 to individual artists and arts workers whose bold actions (enacted on or after January 1, 2020) are creating tangible impact within the arts and culture sector by shifting power and influence to underrepresented voices. Grant awards are not tied to the support of a project or a proposed outcome.

However, CALI Catalyst funding or any portion thereof is subject to certain 501c3 tax-exempt requirements, such as limitations on political activity and lobbying, private benefit (benefiting a person rather than furthering tax-exempt purposes), and private inurement (benefit to individuals affiliated with the organizations offering and managing this grant). In other words, funds cannot be used for political activity or lobbying, and they can't be used in ways that primarily benefit private individuals or businesses unrelated to the grant's purpose.

11. What do you mean that funding is unrestricted but subject to certain 501(c)(3) requirements?

CALI Catalyst grants are unrestricted, meaning you can decide how you'd like to use the funds. However, funds awarded must be used in support and furtherance of your artistic work and contribute to a broader public benefit.

Here are a few examples of how you may use funding:

- To cover living expenses while you're creating or performing your work
- To travel for artistic collaborations, exhibitions, or residencies related to your artistic practice
- For artistic training or coaching (like acting lessons, or professional development workshops that move your change-making work forward)
- To purchase equipment or materials used in your practice (e.g., instruments, software)
- To pay for health insurance during a creative period (such as payment for COBRA during a residency)

Please note that these are just some of the ways that funding can be used. If you have any questions or need further clarification, please reach out to CCI at grants@cciarts.org.

12. Can you share examples of expenses that are not allowed?

Yes. While this grant is flexible, some expenses are not allowed, including:

- Paying yourself for non-artistic work (e.g., unrelated freelance work)
- Hiring a general life coach or consultant not tied to your artistic practice or change-making work
- Buying personal items like a car, unless clearly for artistic use
- Using funds for work already completed
- Lobbying or in support of any political campaigns, voting efforts, or in a manner inconsistent with CCI's charitable purpose under IRS Section 501(c)(3).

If you have any questions, please reach out to CCI at grants@cciarts.org.

13. I work closely with a team of collaborators. Can we submit a joint application?

If applying as a "team," only one application will be accepted per team (in other words, individual team members cannot submit separate applications for the same action). Teams will therefore need to select a single team member to apply, and if funding is approved, this individual will be responsible for fulfilling the grant requirements, such as final reporting and providing a completed W-9. If the grant recipient wants to share their award with a team of collaborators, they may do so; however, CCI will not assume responsibility for any further due diligence regarding the team's membership.

That being said, although only one application may be submitted per team, CCI has enabled the submitter collaboration tool, which enables groups of applicants to work together on collective applications. For information about how to utilize this tool, visit Submittable's knowledge base [here](#).

14. I work at an organization. Can I apply?

CALI Catalyst is a grant program for *individuals*, and funding is meant to support the *person(s)* who are enacting change in the arts and culture sector. If you are seeking funding to support the operations of an organization, such as a 501(c)3 nonprofit, fiscally sponsored project, cooperative business, or for-profit entity, to name a few, or to fund a future project or program, then this program is not for you. Note that simply engaging with DEI efforts does not align with the program's goals.

That being said, individuals or teams employed by or members of an organization can apply. However, their change-making must have been influenced and driven by the individuals within the organization and align with the review criteria. Additionally, if awarded funding, individuals or teams should direct funds to the individuals rather than to the operations of the organization.

15. I have an *idea* for a change-making action. Can I apply?

CALI Catalyst will only consider applications from applicants whose action took place or started (i.e., the action is still in progress) on or after January 1, 2020. We are prioritizing this timeframe as these individuals may be suffering an immediate financial fallout as a result of catalyzing industry-level shifts in the arts and culture sector.

16. My change-making action is in progress. Can I apply?

The status (i.e., completed or in progress) of the change-making action does not impact our decision as long as it began on or after January 1, 2020. However, applicants who can point to their actions' impact in *tangible and measurable ways* will be more aligned with the grant review criteria than applicants whose actions are described as having the *potential* for impact.

17. My work isn't targeted at shifting practices or power within the arts and culture sector, but it does aim at having an impact on social issues. Can I apply?

We recognize that many artists and arts workers work at the intersection of arts, culture, and activism to address and bring visibility to important areas like racial justice, climate justice, gender equity, economic security, labor protections, and more. We see you, and we acknowledge the value of your work. However, CALI Catalyst focuses on effecting tangible changes in the *arts and culture sector* so that entrenched inequities within the sector itself are upended. For this reason, applications that describe change-making work in relation to sectors other than arts and culture will be considered outside of the program's current scope and will not be competitive.

18. I know an individual or team who would be a great candidate for funding. How can I help this potential applicant?

The best way to help potential applicants is to share this opportunity with them and, if needed, support their application preparation. This may mean helping the applicant compose narrative responses, select support materials, or identify references. You might also support the applicant by reviewing their application for clarity and completeness or reaching out to CCI staff on their behalf with questions.

APPLICATION

19. How do I apply for funding?

Applications will be accepted online ONLY through CCI's Submittable platform. Applicants MUST create an account in Submittable before they can access the grant application. Learn more about using Submittable [here](#).

The application can be accessed at: <https://centerforculturalinnovation.submittable.com/>.

20. When are applications due? When will I learn about my application status?

CALI Catalyst will offer two open application rounds in 2025. These are:

- **Round #1**

Applications will be accepted from May 27, 2025, at 9 a.m. PT through July 11, 2025, at 11:59 a.m. PT. Notifications will be sent via Submittable on August 25, 2025, by 5 p.m. PT.

- **Round #2**

Applications will be accepted from June 30, 2025, at 9 a.m. PT through August 15, 2025, at 11:59 a.m. PT. Notifications will be sent via Submittable on October 3, 2025, by 5 p.m. PT.

CCI will host an information session on **Tuesday, June 3, 2025, from 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. PT** that will provide an overview of the application, helpful tips, and a live Q&A. You must pre-register [HERE](#) to attend the information session. If you are unable to attend, a recording will be available upon request.

In addition, CCI will host three **virtual "Office Hour" sessions for applicants to ask questions and receive answers from staff in real time** on:

- June 10 from 5:00-6:00 p.m. PT ([Register Here](#))
- June 18 from 10:00-11:00 a.m. PT ([Register Here](#))
- July 1 from 12:00-1:00 p.m. PT ([Register Here](#))

21. What should I prepare for the Support Materials section? And, are there file format or length specifications?

Applicants must upload a brief résumé, bio, or CV that references their current role(s) in the arts and culture sector and is no longer than two (2) pages (.pdf, .doc, and .docx formats accepted).

Applicants must also upload documentation that reflects the change-making action was public-facing and provides further context for the action's direct impact and results. The most helpful materials will demonstrate that the action and its impacts were visible in the community, region, or field and documented in a publicly accessible way, such as press, social media posts that have amassed some attention, official records (e.g., meeting minutes), etc. Examples of support materials that provide context may include relevant URLs, press, screenshots, or photo/video documentation.

You can upload a minimum of one and no more than three support materials. Acceptable file formats are .pdf, .doc, .docx, .jpg, .png, .mp4, .mov, .avi, and .wmv. Individual samples have no page or time limits.

The materials provided will not be used to assess artistic "merit" or "excellence," as neither is relevant to the CALI Catalyst program.

Please check your uploaded support materials to ensure functionality. Applications with inaccessible uploads, such as corrupted or password-protected attachments, will not be reviewed.

EVALUATION

22. What makes for a strong application?

In general, the most competitive applications are the ones that are clearly written, brief, and to the point, and demonstrate a strong alignment with each criterion. In the case of CALI Catalyst, competitive applications will describe an action or actions that directly resulted in tangible changes or impacts within the arts and culture sector and will clearly describe the status quo that the change-making action(s) have challenged and the historically underrepresented communities that were positively impacted.

Please note: while we welcome applications from change-makers who are working in varying ways and contexts, we discourage applications that describe having issues with any particular person, as these conditions may have an impact within an organization but are too isolated to be felt industry-wide.

23. How are applications evaluated?

Applications will be evaluated based on their ability to establish the following:

- **Impact on the arts and culture sector.**
 - a. Has the applicant's change-making action led to visible, measurable, and lasting improvements in the arts and culture sector (e.g., museums, theater, public art, etc.)? *Meaning, the change-making action goes beyond raising awareness and has resulted in structural, policy, or systemic shifts that benefit the broader field.*
 - b. Is the applicant helping historically underrepresented communities gain more power and influence within the arts and culture sector in tangible and measurable ways? *This could happen by expanding leadership, access, or other opportunities to communities that have historically been underrepresented or excluded from the decision-making table.*
 - c. Did the applicant play a causal role in the change-making action and its impact? *In other words, was the applicant directly involved in driving the change-making action and its effects?*
 - d. Impact will be judged at the discretion of the CCI staff according to the program expectations and CCI's tax-exempt purposes.
- **Intention to enact greater inclusion, access, diversity, and equity within the arts and culture sector.**
 - a. Is the change-making action clearly motivated by a desire to make the arts and culture sector more inclusive, participatory, and responsive to the needs of diverse communities?
 - b. What was the catalyst for the change-making action? *In other words, why did the applicant decide to take action?*
- **Informed perspective.**
 - a. Does the applicant bring firsthand knowledge of the arts and culture field through their lived, professional, or creative experience?
 - b. Does the applicant's perspective reflect a deep understanding of structural barriers or inequities within the sector?

24. Who reviews the applications?

Applications will be reviewed internally by a diverse team of CCI staff who have varied experiences with sector discrimination and exclusionary practices. Additionally, CCI will contact the references of top funding candidates and call on individuals in the field of a competitive applicant's work to verify the impact of their change-making action(s) on the communities meant to benefit from this work.

25. Whom should I use as a reference, and what information do you need?

We suggest choosing references who can attest to the applicant's demonstration of the review criteria, have knowledge of the change-making action and its impact, and are able to speak on behalf of the communities the change-making action has benefited. **References cannot be family members, spouses/partners, or long-time friends, nor should they be engaged in an active financial relationship with the applicant.**

Regarding the information needed, applicants will need to provide contact information (phone number and email) for both references and indicate the nature of their relationship and their language preference. References must be able to commit to a 15-minute phone conversation with CCI staff at a mutually agreed-upon time. Currently, staff can only accommodate phone conversations in English and Spanish. References who are not fluent in English or Spanish are welcome to have a translator on the call.

Please note that CCI staff will *only* contact the references of top candidates for funding. CCI may also call on individuals in the field of a competitive applicant's work so that the people directly meant to benefit will influence the adjudication process.

Please note that reference calls do not guarantee funding approval.

NOTIFICATIONS

26. The notification date has passed, and I haven't heard from CCI. Does this mean I didn't receive a grant?

All applicants will be notified regarding their application status via Submittable. If you haven't heard from CCI by the promised notification date and time, check your spam folder. You can also view your application status by logging into your Submittable account.

To ensure the timely delivery of all communications, please safelist notifications@email.submittable.com. See [here](#) for instructions by email service provider.

27. If my funding request is declined in round 1, can I reapply in round 2?

Unless a new body of work is being addressed or enough progress has been made that resulted in a tangible impact, applicants who are declined in round 1 may not reapply to round 2.

28. Do you offer feedback?

We are unable to provide feedback on individual CALI Catalyst applications. However, staff are available to schedule a 15-minute phone call with declined or prospective applicants to review grant guidelines and review criteria. Please contact us at grants@cciarts.org (include CALI Catalyst in the subject line) to coordinate.

GRANTEES

29. How many grants will you make?

Year Three (2025) of CALI Catalyst's three-year award cycle has \$112,500 in available funding, which will support approximately 15 grantees.

30. If I am awarded a grant, how will I receive the funds?

If awarded a grant, the payment will be processed via ACH (i.e., direct deposit) through Tipalti.com—CCI's secure, third-party accounting software platform. **CCI will issue the award in two payments:** The first installment will be 90% of the grant funds, which will be paid once the grant agreement is signed and returned. The remaining 10% will be paid once all grant requirements have

been met and a final report has been submitted and approved by CCI. Processing times will depend on the grantee's return of an electronically signed grant agreement and any other requested documents, such as the W-9 Form.

Grantees *do not* need a fiscal sponsor or other 501(c)3 nonprofit intermediary to receive funding. However, they do have the option to use their fiscal sponsor or an incorporated 501(c)(3) nonprofit to contract with CCI and receive the awarded funds. For teams, the lead team member will be responsible for completing all grant and payment processing requirements. If the grant recipient decides to share their award with a team of collaborators, they may do so; however, CCI is not responsible for any due diligence or disbursement of funds to different team members.

We understand that fund disbursement may impact disability-related community support or other social benefits; therefore, we will structure options that work for each person's unique financial situation. Please contact CCI at 415.288.0530 or grants@cciarts.org (include CALI Catalyst in the subject line) to determine a plan that works best for you.

31. If I am awarded a grant, is it considered taxable income?

Please be aware that grant awards may be taxable as ordinary income. As CCI cannot offer legal or tax advice, grantees are advised to consult with an accountant, tax expert, and/or a benefits specialist.

We understand that fund disbursement may impact disability-related community support or other social benefits and are willing to structure options that work for each person's unique financial situation. Please contact CCI at 415.288.0530 or grants@cciarts.org (include CALI Catalyst in the subject line) to determine a plan that works best for you.

32. If I am awarded a grant, will I need to submit a report? Are there any other requirements?

If you are awarded a grant, you must complete a brief final report describing the impact and use of funding (i.e., line item expenses). Reports will be due within 12 months of signing the grant agreement. CCI will provide further instructions on how to access the final report form through Submittable in the grant agreement. In addition, grantees must submit a final report that is approved by CCI before they are eligible to reapply for CALI Catalyst funding.

In addition, CCI will host one or more virtual community-building gatherings for the 2025 CALI Catalyst grantees in January 2026. This will be an opportunity for grantees to connect, learn about each other's work, and be part of a values-aligned network. More details will be provided in the CALI Catalyst grant agreement.

33. How often may I receive funding through CALI Catalyst?

Individuals may receive one CALI Catalyst grant per calendar year. If you are a current grantee, you must submit your final report to CCI for approval before you can be considered for funding again. Additionally, please be aware that CCI prioritizes first-time CALI Catalyst applicants.

34. Will you publicize the names of grantees?

The names of CALI Catalyst grantees may be included in CCI's communication channels, including our e-newsletter, social media accounts, website, and press releases, as well as future CALI Catalyst guidelines.

35. If I am awarded a CALI Catalyst grant, does that mean that CCI and its funding partners agree with or endorse my change-making action?

CCI and its funding partners do not take a position on the sentiments or actions expressed by CALI Catalyst applicants and grantees. This ensures that the adjudication and award processes remain focused on sector and community impacts and not on individual institutions or actors.

SUPPORT

36. I'm having issues with Submittable (e.g., lost password, error messages, trouble uploading) and need help. Who do I contact?

For technical assistance (e.g., password or upload issues), request support at:

<https://www.submittable.com/help/submitter/>. Submittable's business hours are 9 am – 5 pm MT.

They aim to respond within 24 business hours.

37. I still have questions. What should I do?

CCI staff are here to help and listen. For assistance, please email us at grants@cciarts.org (include CALI Catalyst in the subject line) or call 415.288.0530. You may also schedule a time to speak [here](#). For Deaf applicants and those with hearing loss, contact CCI using the [California Relay Service](#)—our staff is trained in making and receiving these calls.