



CALI CATALYST

Guidelines

(effective May 27, 2025)

CALI Catalyst provides unrestricted¹ grants of up to \$7,500 to California changemakers who are creating tangible impact within the arts and culture sector by shifting power and influence to underrepresented voices.

The California Art Leadership Investments (CALI) Catalyst program launched in 2021 to provide financial support and validation to individuals 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. We can look to recent CALI Catalyst grantees and their work to see these ripple effects within the sector. In Santa Ana, Alicia Rojas 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.

When individuals take bold steps to challenge entrenched systems or practices, they risk sacrificing their jobs, social status, and reputation, and more often than not, their hard labor goes unpaid. CALI Catalyst recognizes that this is precisely the time when the arts and culture sector needs to support these changemakers who are ensuring that historically underrepresented communities, such as BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and people with disabilities, and those in rural areas, continue to be represented and included. By speaking out and taking action, such as exposing discriminatory hiring practices or disrupting harmful philanthropic norms, these individuals make the arts and culture field better for everyone. The CALI Catalyst grant program aims to support such leaders financially, recognizing that the fear of financial risk can silence voices and discourage meaningful change.

To help ensure that the momentum for field-wide change continues undeterred, CALI Catalyst will support artists and arts workers who are on the frontlines of making the field more accessible, welcoming, and representative of the communities they serve. Since 2021, CCI has had the honor to support 64 individuals and teams whose bold and inspiring actions are creating tangible change in the arts and culture sector we want and need.

¹ Subject to certain 501c3 tax-exempt requirements, such as limitation 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).

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

CALI Catalyst applicants can be individuals or teams of individuals.² To be **eligible** for funding 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 operations³;
- 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.

AWARD DETAILS

- Unrestricted grants of up to \$7,500 will be awarded to support a grantee's ability to benefit their community.
- Year Three (2025) of CALI Catalyst's three-year award cycle has \$112,500 in available funding, which will support approximately 15 grantees.
- Grantees will be invited to one or more virtual gatherings in winter 2026 to connect with other CALI Catalyst award recipients.

CALI Catalyst will prioritize grant support for the following:

- Applicants whose bold change-making actions (**2020 or later**) are upending the status quo and creating **tangible change** in the arts and culture sector, shifting it towards greater equity and inclusion, and helping historically underrepresented communities, including Black, Indigenous, people of color, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, and those in rural areas, gain more influence and power at industry-wide levels. By "tangible change," we are referring to actions that resulted in visible, measurable, and concrete impact or results.

² Only one application will be accepted per team (i.e., individual team members cannot submit separate applications that describe 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. Review the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more details.

³ 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. Review the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more details.

- Applicants who played a causal role in the change that took place (i.e., they decidedly influenced change at an industry/sector level).
- Applicants who reside in a non-metropolitan region.
- Applicants who have not previously received CALI Catalyst funding.

REVIEW PROCESS & CRITERIA

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.

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?

CCI does not take a position on the sentiments or actions expressed by CALI Catalyst applicants and grantees. This ensures that the adjudication process focuses on sector and community impacts and not on individual institutions or actors.

APPLICATION

In addition to answering the application's narrative and demographic questions and providing support materials (**Application Previews** in both .doc and .pdf formats available [here](#)), applicants must provide the names and contact information of two references who can speak to the impact of their change-making action(s) and the review criteria above.

*References cannot be family members, spouses/partners, or long-time friends, nor should they be engaged in an active financial relationship with the applicant. CCI will **only** contact the references of top candidates for funding, and we strongly suggest references who can speak on behalf of the communities the applicant has positively impacted.*⁴ In addition, CCI may call on individuals in the field of a competitive applicant's work. For more information, review the [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

HOW TO APPLY

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](#))

Office Hours are not formal presentations and will not be recorded; you must pre-register to attend.

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](#).

Access the CALI Catalyst online application at:
<https://centerforculturalinnovation.submittable.com/>

If you need 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.

GRANTEE REQUIREMENTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Grantees must complete a brief final report describing the impact and use of funding (i.e., line-item expenses—no receipts required). Reports will be due within 12 months of signing the grant agreement. Additional details are available in the **Frequently Asked Questions** [here](#).

⁴ Please note that reference calls do not guarantee funding approval.

CCI will also host one or more virtual community-building gatherings in winter 2026 for the 2025 CALI Catalyst grantees. These gatherings will be an opportunity for grantees to connect, learn about each other's work, and be part of a values-aligned network. The CALI Catalyst grant agreement will provide more details.

QUESTIONS & SUPPORT

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.

If you need 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, and they aim to respond within 24 business hours.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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