



# SAN JOSÉ CREATIVE ECONOMY FUND

## Frequently Asked Questions

*(effective April 28, 2025)*

### ABOUT

#### 1. What is the San José Creative Economy Fund?

The San José Creative Economy Fund is an initiative of the City of San José Office of Economic Development and Cultural Affairs (OEDCA) in partnership with the Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI).

The Creative Economy Fund will award project grants to arts, cultural, and creative-based commercial businesses located in the City of San José and involved in the production or distribution of the arts, including manufacturers, service providers, presenters, and designers, among others. Funding will support projects and activities aimed at building successful arts, cultural, and creative-based small businesses in San José.

The goals of the Creative Economy Fund are to:

- Enhance San José's creative economy.
- Bolster the growth and financial resilience of small arts, cultural, and creative-based businesses in San José.
- Provide financial support to artists and creative entrepreneurs (across all disciplines in both the non-commercial and commercial arenas).

A total of \$40,000 is available for the 2025 funding round, and grants of up to \$8,000 will be awarded through a competitive grant application process.

#### 2. What happened to the Creative Industries Incentive Fund?

From 2013 – 2020, OEDCA partnered with Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI) to administer the Creative Industries Incentive Fund (CIIF), which supported projects aimed at sustaining or building successful small arts businesses in San José and arts businesses in San José serving as cultural anchors and catalysts in their neighborhoods. Over eight rounds of funding, CIIF awarded \$327,000 to 69 recipients. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CIIF went on a brief hiatus. The San José Creative Economy Fund is a new iteration of CIIF that reignites the City's investment in its creative entrepreneurs and their small businesses.

### ELIGIBILITY

#### 3. Who is eligible for funding consideration?

To be eligible for Creative Economy Fund consideration, businesses must meet the following criteria:

- Be a commercial enterprise, including small businesses (defined by the City of San José as businesses with 35 employees or less) and sole proprietorships (Note: businesses do not have to be brick and mortar; they can be online storefronts or nomadic enterprises);
- Be based in San José;
- Primarily provide a cultural, creative, or arts-related service or product;

- Be in good standing with the City of San José, evidenced through possession of an active San José business tax certificate (aka business license, business permit)\* and fulfillment of OEDCA or any other City department’s funding requirements, if applicable; and
- Cannot have a conflict of interest (family or financial relationships) with CCI or OEDCA’s boards, staff, and directors.

*\*Applicants must upload a copy of their active San José business tax certificate. To register your business or renew your business tax certificate, visit the City of San José’s website [here](#). If you recently registered your business and are waiting to receive a copy of your tax certificate, you may upload documentation that confirms the business’ successful tax payment. For your reference, you can find a SAMPLE tax certificate [here](#).*

**4. What do you mean by “arts, cultural, or creative business?”**

By “arts, cultural, or creative business,” we are referring to commercial (i.e., for-profit) enterprises that primarily provide or are involved in the distribution of a cultural, creative, or arts-related service or product, including manufacturers, service providers, presenters, and designers, among others.

Please note that the enterprise must focus on a cultural, creative, or arts-related service(s) or product(s).

**5. What kinds of projects does the Fund support?**

The Creative Economy Fund supports arts, cultural, and creative-based small businesses whose proposed projects:

- Contribute to San José’s cultural vibrancy;
- Show evidence or “signs of readiness” for project launch or implementation;
- Grow and achieve greater financial resilience; and
- Demonstrate an economic impact (e.g., attracting visitors, generating sales tax, creating jobs) in the City of San José.

Examples of eligible projects and activities (Note: You define your creative business needs; projects are not limited to these examples):

- Storefront or other commercial space improvements that enhance a business’s curb appeal, safety, and/or economic vitality
- Seed money for a marketing launch for a particular arts-related service or product
- Hiring additional staff/team members for support during the holiday season
- Purchase of a new HVAC system to address safety protocols
- Hiring a mentor, coach, or consultant for capacity-building, strategic/business planning, or marketing support to grow an enterprise or build financial resilience
- Purchase of equipment or technology products to bring the business to the next level
- Production of pop-ups, festivals, or other events that center local artists/arts-based micro businesses

**6. I live in San José, but my business is registered in another City. Am I eligible to apply?**

To be eligible for Creative Economy Fund consideration, businesses must be in good standing with the City of San José, evidenced by possession of an active San José business tax certificate (aka business license or business permit) and fulfillment of OEDCA or any other City department’s funding requirements, if applicable.

Applicants must upload a copy of their active San José business tax certificate; therefore, you must register your business in the City of San José. To register your business or renew your business tax certificate, visit the City of San José’s website [here](#). If you recently registered your business and are

waiting to receive a copy of your tax certificate, you may upload documentation that confirms the business's successful tax payment.

For your reference, you can find a SAMPLE tax certificate [here](#).

**7. My business is incorporated in another City/State. Am I eligible to apply?**

You are eligible to apply as long as you meet the Fund's other eligibility criteria and your business operates in the City of San José.

Note that the application asks for your business address. We are not asking for the address where the business is incorporated. Rather, we are requesting the address where the business conducts its operations in San José. For online or nomadic businesses like "pop-ups," you may enter your residential address if this is where your operations are concentrated in San José. For questions, please contact CCI at [grants@cciarts.org](mailto:grants@cciarts.org).

**8. I've received funding through the OEDCA. Am I eligible to apply for Creative Economy Fund support?**

So long as you and your business are in good standing with OEDCA (i.e., funding requirements have been fulfilled, if applicable), you are not requesting support for a project that OEDCA already funds, and you meet all other eligibility criteria, then you are eligible to apply to the Creative Economy Fund.

**9. I received a Creative Industries Incentive Fund grant. Am I eligible to apply to the Creative Economy Fund?**

Previous Creative Industries Incentive Fund recipients can apply to the Creative Economy Fund if they have submitted an approved final report to CCI. Submission of an approved Creative Industries Incentive Fund final report is also necessary to be in good standing with OEDCA.

**10. I am a current Creative Economy Fund grantee. Am I eligible to apply for the 2024 round?**

Current Creative Economy Fund grantees are eligible to apply if a final report has been submitted to and approved by CCI prior to the June 20, 2025, deadline. Please note that first-time applicants may be prioritized.

**11. I operate two arts-based businesses. Can I submit one application for each business? Or should I submit a single application for both businesses?**

Neither. Businesses can apply only once. In other words, businesses cannot submit multiple applications for different projects. Similarly, individuals who own or operate multiple businesses may apply only once for only one business. We will not accept multiple applications from the same proprietor. This is so we can support as many unique applicants as possible in a competitive application process.

**12. Just so I'm clear, who/what *isn't* eligible for funding consideration?**

The following are ineligible for funding consideration:

- Nonprofits;
- Individuals, organizations, or projects that will use a fiscal sponsor to receive grant funds if funding is approved;
- Businesses that are not arts, cultural, or creative-based;
- Projects that are currently funded through another OEDCA grant program;
- Projects that have already taken place (funding can only be applied to expenses accrued during the grant period); and
- Incomplete Creative Economy Fund applications.

**13. 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.

The online grant application can be accessed at:

<https://centerforculturalinnovation.submittable.com/submit>

**14. How much funding should I request?**

Applicants may request \$1,000 – \$8,000. We encourage you to ask for what you need to fully realize the project, as partial funding may be awarded. Note that the amount requested will not affect the application’s evaluation.

**15. What do I need to prepare for the application?**

The online application collects contact information and basic details about the business. A required narrative section includes prompts related to the business, the proposed project, and the team that will help realize the project. In addition, a project budget and at least one, and no more than three, supporting materials are required. A complete application preview is available [here](#).

**16. How many support materials are required, and what types are accepted?**

Only one support material is required; however, applicants can submit up to three. Panelists will review materials for up to five (5) minutes in total. If you upload text or image-based materials, five pages equate to 5 minutes. Please note that if you are submitting more than one type of support material, you cannot submit the recommended total for each type. For example, you can submit 3 minutes of video and two pages of text or image-based materials, but NOT 5 minutes of video and five pages of text/image-based materials.

Generally, it is best to select recent support materials (2020 or later) and, if applicable, materials related to your project. We also recommend avoiding support materials with poor visibility or audio quality. For lengthy videos, you may opt to cue the video to a specific starting point or to edit it. Finally, a one to two-sentence description of the support material must be included. If applicable, include playback instructions in the description.

**Requirements**

- Only one support material is required; however, applicants can submit up to three.
- Support materials must be uploaded directly to Submittable. We will not accept documents that link to an external platform. Failure to upload support materials directly to Submittable will result in your application being marked as incomplete and, therefore, ineligible for funding consideration.
- There is a size limit of 400 MB per uploaded file and 800 MB for the complete application submission. If uploading a video, cue the video to the desired start time or include playback instructions, if applicable, in the support material description.
- We strongly advise all applicants to test their support materials for functionality before uploading. Corrupted, password-protected, or otherwise inaccessible support materials will render the application incomplete and ineligible for review.
- Each uploaded support material must be accompanied by a one- to two-sentence description that includes contextual information and viewing/playback instructions if applicable. For example, “Contractor bid per signage replacement, 2023” or “Promotional video for a woman-owned business pop-up that I produced as part of the February 2022 XYZ Festival. Start sample at 00:05:03 and play until 00:08:18.”

We will accept the following file formats:

- **Video:** .avi, .mp4, .mov, and .mpg files accepted. If your video is more than 5 minutes, include the desired start/end times in the work sample description. We recommend the MPEG4 (H.264) format with a minimum 640x480 resolution and MP3 audio. Resizing your video to these specifications before uploading it will help your video look better.
- **Text/Image-Based Materials:** .doc, .docx, .png, and .pdf files accepted. Up to five (5) letter-size (8.5 x 11 inches) pages of ephemera are accepted. We recommend combining individual ephemera into a single document. Examples of text/image-based materials include marketing materials, press, letters of support, letters of commitment, project bids, brochures, or other collateral.

Support materials must be uploaded directly to the Submittable platform regardless of file type. We will not accept a document that links to an external platform such as Vimeo, YouTube, Issuu, etc., nor will we review password-protected materials.

## EVALUATION

### 17. What will the review process be like? Who reviews the applications?

Project support will be awarded to San José-based businesses through a competitive application process with a peer review panel. CCI and OEDCA will invite panelists with various backgrounds and expertise in the arts, arts-based business development, and related fields in San José to review eligible applications and make award recommendations. Along with the invited peer reviewers, a representative of CCI will serve as a panelist. The panel may also include a member of the San José Arts Commission.

### 18. How are applications evaluated?

Panelists will evaluate businesses and their proposed projects by their ability to:

- Contribute to San José's cultural vibrancy;
- Show evidence or "signs of readiness" for project launch or implementation;
- Grow and achieve greater financial resilience; and
- Demonstrate an economic impact (e.g., attracting visitors, generating sales tax, creating jobs) in the City of San José.

Panelists will also aim to ensure that recommended grantees reflect the City's diverse cultural communities and creative-based commercial landscape. To that end, the panel will seek to balance the final grantee pool across factors, which include: geography, disciplines, communities served, and cultural form and tradition represented.

### 19. I am a "solopreneur," how can I articulate the economic impact of my project?

We recognize that "solopreneurs" or individual artists may find it difficult to effectively articulate their economic impact. We recommend focusing on the following to draft strong narrative answers and submit a competitive application:

- **Local Impact:** Emphasize how your work contributes to San José's cultural vibrancy and impacts the local economy by way of attracting visitors, generating sales tax, and creating job opportunities, to name a few examples.
- **Specific Economic Impact:** Quantify your economic impact with concrete examples, such as increased sales, job opportunities for local gig workers, and the impact on your own financial resilience. *Meaning, how will the success of the project impact the financial resilience/growth of your practice and business?*
- **Unique Contributions:** Highlight what makes your artistic practice or project distinct and how it contributes to San José's diverse cultural landscape.

- **Budget and Expenses:** Clearly outline your budget's income and expenses to demonstrate a clear link between your project and its economic impact.

## 20. What makes a competitive application?

The most competitive applications are the ones that are clearly written, generally brief and to the point, and demonstrate a strong alignment with each evaluation criterion. For application support, we encourage you to review all grant ephemera in addition to attending the San José Creative Economy Fund Information Session on Wednesday, May 14, 2025, from 12-1 p.m. PT ([Register Here](#)). For those unable to attend, a recording will be available on CCI's website by May 9, 2025, at 5 p.m. PT.

In addition, CCI will host virtual office hours\* on the following dates:

- May 21 from 12:00-1:00 p.m. PT. ([Register Here](#))
- May 28 from 10:00-11:00 a.m. PT. ([Register Here](#))
- June 9 from 5:00-6:00 p.m. PT. ([Register Here](#))

*\*Please note that these are not formal presentations, nor will they be recorded. Office Hours are an opportunity to have your questions addressed by CCI staff in real time. So that everyone's time can be used efficiently, we ask that you review the grant guidelines, application preview, and Frequently Asked Questions in advance!*

## NOTIFICATIONS

### 21. 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 on Tuesday, August 19, 2025, by 5:00 pm PT. Check your spam folder if you haven't heard from CCI by the promised notification date and time. 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](mailto:notifications@email.submittable.com). See [here](#) for instructions by email service provider.

### 22. If I'm declined for funding, will you offer feedback on my application?

Depending on the volume of applications, CCI may provide feedback through a webinar that addresses panelists' general application observations or through one-on-one phone calls with applicants. Details will be provided when notifications are shared on August 19, 2025.

## GRANTEES

### 23. What kinds of projects does the Creative Economy Fund support?

The Fund supports many different types of projects. You can learn more about the 2024 grantees and their supported projects in the [Press Release here](#) and about the 2023 CEF Grantees in the [Press Release here](#). Before 2023, the program was known as the Creative Industries Incentive Fund (CIIF). You can learn more about the last cohort of CIIF Grantees in the [2020 Press Release here](#).

### 24. How can grant funding be used?

Grant funding is restricted to the project identified in your application and the expenses itemized in the project budget (see below for examples of project expenses). Further, project expenses must be accumulated during the grant period of support and cannot be applied retroactively. Finally, grant funding, or any portion thereof, may not be used for lobbying, political campaigns, voting efforts, or in a manner inconsistent with CCI's charitable purpose under IRS Section 501(c)(3).

Examples of Project Expenses:

- Artist, collaborator, and designer fees at or above a living wage

- Space improvement costs or capital expenditures
- Equipment, fixtures, signage
- Salaries and benefits for project-related staff
- Project-related administrative costs
- Professional services (e.g., strategic planning, bookkeeping)
- Marketing, public relations, and promotions
- Accessibility costs, such as language translation or disability supports

**25. What are the grantee requirements?**

Grantees are required to complete a brief final report that describes the impact and use of funding (i.e., line item expenses). Reports will be due in August 2025. CCI will provide further instructions in the grant agreement, including how to submit the report through Submittable.

**26. How will payment be made if I am awarded a grant?**

You may receive the funds directly or through your business if recommended and approved for a grant. This information is being collected in the application to support CCI’s preparation of the grant contract and processing of the award payment, and will not factor into the application’s evaluation.

Regarding the payment method, grantees can receive payment via ACH (i.e., direct deposit) through Tipalti.com—CCI’s secure, third-party accounting software platform—or through a mailed check. In either case, CCI will issue the award in two payments: The first installment will be 90% of the grant funds. The remaining 10% will be paid upon receipt and approval of the final report by CCI. Processing times will depend on the method of payment chosen and, in the case of the first installment, the grantee’s return of an electronically signed grant agreement.

**27. Are grant awards considered taxable income?**

Grant awards may be taxable as ordinary income. We recommend that you consult a qualified tax advisor for further information.

**28. Will you announce the names of grantees?**

The names of the 2025 San José Creative Economy Fund grantees will be announced via a press release that is shared on CCI’s website (issued on or around October 1). In addition, grantees may be highlighted through CCI’s and OCA’s communication platforms, including each organization’s e-newsletters, social media channels, and websites.

**SUPPORT**

**29. I’m having issues with Submittable (e.g., lost password, error messages, trouble uploading) and need help. What should I do?**

For technical assistance (e.g., password or upload issues), request support from Submittable 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.

**30. 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](mailto:grants@cciarts.org) (include SJ Creative Economy Fund 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.