



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CENTER FOR CULTURAL INNOVATION AND INTERSECTION FOR THE ARTS

Guidelines

(effective July 3, 2025)

Zoo Labs supports music creators whose work is rooted in bold innovation, lived experience, and community expression – empowering them to fully own and expand their creative paths. It bridges the worlds of music and business by providing artist-tailored entrepreneurial training. It also supports Bay Area creatives through unrestricted funding and a strong professional network, investing in their power to build lasting legacies that drive cultural vibrancy and economic growth. **In 2025, Zoo Labs: FUND will make available \$230,000 in unrestricted¹ grants to Bay Area culturally rooted artist teams with a music business.**

Zoo Labs: FUND is a grant and investment program designed to support Bay Area entrepreneurs who are building businesses that center music. By providing funding, mentorship, and educational resources, the FUND helps creative business owners in the Bay Area begin or scale their ventures in ways that contribute to cultural enrichment, economic empowerment, and community benefit.

The FUND prioritizes culturally rooted artists (i.e., artists whose work is deeply influenced by their cultural heritage, traditions, and community experiences, and who draw upon the stories, symbols, practices, and values of their cultural background to inform their art) who face challenges or structural hurdles to accessing capital and aims to create more opportunities in the local creative economy. Investing in these businesses fosters innovation, preserves cultural and artistic expression, and generates jobs. It also works against displacement by creating stable economic opportunities that enable individuals to thrive in the Bay Area. Through this support, Zoo Labs: FUND advances a fair and sustainable creative ecosystem for the public good.

Zoo Labs: FUND celebrates its fifth year of grantmaking in 2025. The application process and funding distribution will be administered in partnership with the Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI), a trusted nonprofit intermediary focused on the financial well-being of artists, arts workers, culture bearers, and creative entrepreneurs.

Zoo Labs: FUND welcomes additional support!

If you would like to help with a tax-deductible contribution, [click here](#) to donate online, or contact Stephanie Imah, Program Director, Grants, at imah@cciarts.org.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be considered for funding, applicants:

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).

- Must be teams of two or more people, with at least one culturally rooted artist member²;
- Must be launching or have an already established business with a focus on music³;
- Must reside full-time in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, or Sonoma County (this criterion applies to ALL team members);
- Can be any age; however, if any member of the team is 18 years old or younger, CCI staff must be contacted to discuss the team's eligibility;
- Can be a previous grantee⁴; however, first-time award recipients may be prioritized; and
- Cannot have a conflict of interest (family or financial relationship) with the board, staff, or directors of Center for Cultural Innovation, Zoo Labs, or Intersection for the Arts.

AWARD TIER CRITERIA

CCI will distribute unrestricted grants that support a team's ability to benefit their community and the Bay Area arts and culture ecosystem. Grants will be in the amounts (i.e., tiers) of \$5,000, \$15,000, \$25,000, and \$50,000. Teams will select the tier to be considered for based on their alignment with the tier's accompanying criteria, and will *only* be considered for the selected tier. In other words, if a team is not recommended for funding, they will not be rolled into a different tier for consideration. For example, teams that request \$25,000 will only be assessed against other teams that request \$25,000.

Award tiers, their associated criteria, and the approximate number of awards available include:

\$5,000 (approximately six awards available)

- **Seed Funding:** Teams that request \$5,000 are newly formed, have worked on the business for two consecutive (i.e., back-to-back) years or less, and earn little to no revenue from it.

\$15,000 (approximately five awards available)

- **Startup Funding:** Teams that request \$15,000 are starting to gain traction. They have worked together on the business for two to five consecutive (i.e., back-to-back) years and are earning little to no revenue from it.

\$25,000 (approximately three awards available)

- **Self-sustaining Funding:** Teams that request \$25,000 have traction. They are on the cusp of realizing self-sustaining, revenue-generating activities, have worked together on the business for five consecutive (i.e., back-to-back) years or more, and are earning some revenue from the business.

\$50,000 (one award available)

- **Next Level Funding:** Teams that request \$50,000 are established, ready to expand or further innovate, have worked together on the business for five consecutive (i.e., back-to-back) years or more, and are earning a steady stream of revenue from the business.

² Teams may consist of artists, content creators, producers, developers, engineers, managers, advisors, and other supporting roles.

³ Music as a product, program, service, or art form/cultural expression must be the **key** feature of the business. We are open to a range of music businesses such as groups/ensembles, recording studios, music festivals or events, vinyl record presses, record labels, music technology, music-based healing services, and music education nonprofits, to name a few examples. Business types may include sole proprietors, or organizations including certified small businesses, Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (DVBES), 501(c)(3) organizations, and private for-profit organizations.

⁴ Previous grantees must submit an approved final report and fulfill their mentorship requirements prior to the application deadline in order to be eligible for funding consideration.

The number of awards available in each tier may be adjusted commensurate with the number of eligible applications received. In addition to receiving an unrestricted cash grant, Zoo Labs: FUND recipients will have access to a suite of mentorship resources through [Zoo Labs: LEARN](#), including on-demand entrepreneurial courses, virtual group learning and networking sessions, and a curated pairing with a business mentor. Grantees who are awarded \$25,000 or \$50,000 will also have access to a strategy session with Zoo Labs Co-Founder and entrepreneur, Vinitha Watson.

Only one application will be accepted per team (i.e., individual team members cannot submit separate applications). Teams will identify a lead applicant, who will serve as the primary contact for the application. Information about the other team members will be collected in the application. Additionally, teams that operate multiple businesses may request funding for only one business.

The online application ([click here for full preview](#)) is uniform across tiers, with the exception of a handful of financial questions directed only at \$25,000 and \$50,000 award tier applicants.

APPLICATION

Applications will be accepted online from May 19 - July 7, 2025, and all applicants will be notified about their funding status on September 8, 2025, by 5:00 p.m. PT. All teams will need to provide contact information, details about the business and funding request, and optional demographic survey responses, as well as the following required items, which will inform external grant panelists' assessment of applications against the evaluation criteria:

- **Budget & Budget Notes:** A budget and brief budget notes are requested to help panelists understand how funds will be used and provide insight into the team's decision-making process and prioritization.
- **Pitch Video:** The entire team is required to create a two-minute "pitch" video. The video will address specific prompts that illustrate the business' mission, team members, audience, positive contributions to the community, and how the intended use of the funds produces benefits to their community. (See the application preview and FAQs for specific prompts.)
- **Business Matrix:** Teams must describe their business and its positive contributions to the Bay Area arts and culture ecosystem using the [provided one-page matrix template](#) (available as a .docx and as a fillable .pdf on CCI's website). Responses should be brief—they may be incomplete sentences—but should be clearly understandable.
- **Work Sample:** Only one work sample will be accepted. Panelists will review up to 5 minutes total of an audio or video sample OR up to 5 pages of text/image-based materials.

NEED HELP WITH THE PITCH VIDEO OR BUSINESS MATRIX?

Visit [Zoo Labs: LEARN](#) for in-depth guidance on preparing these application components.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

CCI will invite panelists who reflect diverse cultural, gender, and experiential backgrounds to review eligible applications and make award recommendations. Panelists will evaluate applicants' Pitch Video, Business Matrix, Budget/Budget Notes, and Work Sample against the following criteria:

- **Group Strength:** The team members, through their individual roles and as a collective, are critical to sustaining the business.

- **Artistry & Craft:** The business reflects or furthers the team’s artistic, creative, craft, or cultural practice.
- **Entrepreneurship:** The team has a feasible business plan (emerging enterprises) or business model (already established enterprises) and is creating traction for the business.
- **External & Internal Impact:** The business has a public benefit and makes a positive contribution to its community and the Bay Area’s arts and culture ecosystem, in addition to the grant funding arriving at a critical juncture.
 - a. **External Impact:** *How this is realized will be relative to the individual business and its mission. For example, the business may create economic opportunities, bring accessible educational experiences to young people, help audiences heal, or center marginalized voices.*
 - *The application will ask businesses to identify the field in which they are having an impact. Field options include: Animal Rights; Arts & Culture; Community/Economic Development; Democracy/Political Activities; Disability Rights; Education; Environment & Climate Justice; Food & Agriculture; Gender Equity; Health & Healthcare; Housing/Homelessness; Human & Civil Rights; Immigration & Refugee Rights; Indigenous Communities, Culture, & Rights; LGBTQ+ Rights; Public Safety/Criminal Justice/Restorative Justice; Racial Justice & Healing; Religion; Science & Research; Youth Development & Engagement. See the **Application Preview** for more information.*
 - b. **Critical Juncture & Internal Impact:** *The team is at an inflection point where an infusion of capital has the potential for short- or long-term internal impact, such as seeding a business’ launch, propelling a business’ growth, supporting the business’ sustainability, or investing in the untapped potential of an established business.*

Panelists will aim to ensure that recommended grantees align with the evaluation criteria and represent the Bay Area’s diverse arts and culture ecosystem. To that end, the panel will seek to balance the final grantee pool across factors, which include: communities served, geography, business focus, benefit(s) imparted, arts and cultural form/tradition represented, and other descriptive demographics.

HOW TO APPLY

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.

Access the online grant application at:
<https://centerforculturalinnovation.submittable.com/submit>

CCI will host an information session on **Wednesday, May 28, 2025, 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 to attend the information session. If you are unable to attend, a recording will be made available on CCI’s website.

In addition, CCI will host three **virtual “Office Hour” sessions for applicants to ask questions and receive answers from staff in real time** on May 28 from 12:00-1:00 p.m. PT, June 13 from 10:00-11:00 a.m. PT, and June 26 from 5:00-6:00 p.m. PT. The drop-ins will not be formal presentations, nor will they be recorded.

TIMELINE

Application Opens	May 19 at 9:00 a.m. PT
Information Session	June 4 from 12:00-1:00 p.m. PT. Register Here <i>If you're unable to attend, a recording will be posted on CCI's website, along with a copy of the presentation deck.</i>
Office Hours	June 18 from 12:00-1:00 p.m. PT. Register Here June 25 from 5:00-6:00 p.m. PT. Register Here July 2 from 10:00-11:00 a.m. PT. Register Here <i>Please note: 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. We ask that you review the grant guidelines, application preview, and Frequently Asked Questions in advance to ensure everyone's time is used efficiently.</i>
Application Deadline – EXTENDED	July 7 at 11:59 a.m. (morning) PT July 11 at 11:59 a.m. (morning) PT
Panel Review	Week of September 1
Funding Notification	September 8 by 5:00 p.m. PT
Grantee Orientation (virtual)	October 15 at 6:00 p.m. PT
Period of Support	September 2025 – September 2026

GRANTEE REQUIREMENTS & OPPORTUNITIES

If awarded a grant, the full team is required to participate in the following:

- **A Virtual Orientation on October 15, 2025, at 6 p.m. PT.** During this convening, grantees will have the opportunity to meet one another and learn more about Zoo Labs and its mentorship resources.
- **A 1-hour, one-on-one session with a business mentor.** These sessions can be conducted virtually or in person, and mentor pairings will be arranged by Zoo Labs staff based on the specific needs, interests, and availability of each team. Zoo Labs staff will also assist with mentorship logistics and scheduling.

As a final requirement, the lead team member must complete a brief final report that describes the impact and use of funding. Reports will be due in September 2026. CCI will provide further instructions, including how to submit the report through Submittable, in the grant agreement.

While not required, grantees who are awarded \$25,000 or \$50,000 will also have access to an optional strategy session with Zoo Labs Co-Founder and entrepreneur, Vinitha Watson.

Lastly, our creative ecosystem thrives on knowledge sharing. As part of this effort, recipients of \$25,000 and \$50,000 grants are invited to serve as voluntary Zoo Labs mentors. This provides an opportunity to contribute to and strengthen the Zoo Labs and Bay Area music community. Participation is optional.

QUESTIONS & SUPPORT

CCI staff are here to help and listen. Please email us at grants@cciarts.org (include Zoo Labs: FUND in the subject line) or call 415.288.0530 for assistance. 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. They aim to respond within 24 business hours.

For additional application support, please see the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) and [Submittable Quick Tips](#).