



SAN JOSÉ CREATIVE ECONOMY FUND

Investing in the success of small arts, cultural, and creative businesses in San José

Guidelines

(effective May 12, 2026)

The Creative Economy Fund will award project grants to arts, cultural, and creative-based commercial businesses that are 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. A total of \$65,000 is available.

Grants of up to \$8,000 will be awarded through a competitive grant application process. Competitive applicants will contribute to the City's cultural vibrancy, demonstrate readiness for project implementation, grow and achieve greater financial resilience, and demonstrate economic impact in San José. Competitive applicants will also reflect the City's diverse cultural communities and creative-based commercial landscape.

The Creative Economy Fund is an initiative of the City of San José Office of Economic Development and Cultural Affairs (OEDCA). The Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI), a nonprofit intermediary focused on the economic security of individuals in the arts, is partnering with OEDCA to administer it.

BACKGROUND & GOALS

The [City of San José Office of Economic Development and Cultural Affairs](#) (OEDCA) is the lead agency for supporting the development of a rich arts and cultural environment for this diverse city's one million residents and its many visitors. The arts and culture are essential elements in the character and quality of life in the vibrant San José community. As the largest city in northern California and the capital of Silicon Valley, San José is the hub of a wide array of arts and cultural opportunities.

Through public art, grant opportunities, special events, and cultural facilities, OEDCA fosters the City's cultural and creative vitality. Among its initiatives is the Creative Entrepreneur Project (CEP), which enhances support for creative entrepreneurs and the commercial creative sector in San José. Under this initiative, from 2013 – 2020, OEDCA partnered with 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 a total of \$327,000 to 69 recipients.

After a hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, OEDCA re-ignited its investment in creative entrepreneurs and their small businesses through the Creative Economy Fund in 2023. In 2026, a fourth round of the Fund will be offered to continue supporting the City's creative economy.

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).

ELIGIBILITY

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 provides 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 the boards, staff, and directors of CCI or OEDCA.

*Applicants will be required to 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](#).

In addition, 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.

Past CIIF grantees, along with past and current Creative Economy Fund grantees, are eligible to apply if a final report has been submitted to and approved by CCI prior to the deadline of June 26, 2026. Please note that first-time applicants will be prioritized.

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, culture, or creative-based;
- Projects that are currently funded through another Office of Cultural Affairs 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.

AWARD DETAILS

Award Range: \$1,000–\$8,000

Funding Available: \$65,000

Period of Support: October 2026–October 2027

The Creative Economy Fund will support arts, cultural, and/or 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 competitive 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

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

To learn more about previously supported San José creative entrepreneur projects, you can read the [2025 Grantee Press Release here](#).

REVIEW PROCESS & CRITERIA

Project support will be awarded to San José-based businesses through a competitive application process that includes 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 to review eligible applications and make award recommendations.

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/or tradition represented.

APPLICATION

To inform the panelists’ assessment of the review criteria, the following application sections are required:

- 1. Business Information
- 2. Primary Contact Information
- 3. Proposal Details
- 4. Narrative
- 5. Budget
- 6. Support Materials
- 7. Award Administration Information
- 8. Application Certification

A full **Application Preview** is available [here](#) (.doc and .pdf versions available), and we encourage you to review this in advance to prepare your narrative responses and the requested materials. The application preview includes important details such as word limits, work sample instructions, and accepted file types.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications will be accepted from May 12, 2026, at 9 a.m. PT through June 26, 2026, at 11:59 a.m. (morning) PT. Complete applications must be submitted by the deadline—no exceptions will be made. In addition, applications with missing or inaccessible content (e.g., corrupted or password-protected files) will not be reviewed.

Access the Creative Economy Fund online application at:
<https://centerforculturalinnovation.submittable.com/>

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](#).

Businesses with more than one owner, principal, et al., will select a single representative (i.e., a lead applicant) to create a Submittable account and apply. If funding is approved, this individual will be responsible for fulfilling the grant requirements.

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 a.m. – 5 p.m. MT. They aim to respond within 24 business hours.

TIMELINE

Application Opens	May 12 at 9:00 a.m. PT
Information Session	May 14 from 12:00-1:00 p.m. PT. Register Here <i>If you were unable to attend, email us to access the session's recording and presentation deck.</i>

Office Hours	<p>May 27 from 12:00-1:00 p.m. PT. Register Here</p> <p>June 16 from 4:00-5:00 p.m. PT. Register Here</p> <p>June 23 from 3:00-4:00 p.m. PT. Register Here</p> <p><i>Please note: These are not formal presentations, nor will they be recorded. The 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!</i></p>
Application Deadline	June 26 at 11:59 a.m. (morning) PT
Panel Review	Week of August 10
San José Arts Commission Meeting <i>(per approval of recommended grantees)</i>	September 21
Notifications	September 29 by 5:00 p.m. PT
Period of Support	October 2026–October 2027

GRANTEE DELIVERABLES

Grantees must complete a brief final report describing the impact and use of funding (i.e., line item expenses) and provide documentation of the activities supported, such as high-quality images, URLs to relevant press, or video recordings. Reports will be due in November 2026 through Submittable. Further details will be provided in CCI’s grant agreement.

QUESTIONS & SUPPORT

Answers to **Frequently Asked Questions** are available [here](#). CCI staff are here to help and listen. Please email us at grants@cciarts.org (include Creative Economy 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.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Creative Economy Fund is an initiative of the City of San José Office of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the Center for Cultural Innovation.

