



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

Frequently Asked Questions

(effective June 9, 2026)

ELIGIBILITY

1. Who are culturally rooted artists?

Culturally rooted artists are creators whose work is deeply influenced by their cultural heritage, traditions, and community experiences. These artists draw upon the stories, symbols, practices, and values of their cultural background to inform their art.

Their work often:

- Preserves or revitalizes traditions – keeping ancestral knowledge and practices alive through contemporary expression.
- Centers community voices – reflecting the lived realities, struggles, and triumphs of their cultural group.
- Bridges generations – connecting the past with the present, often passing on cultural knowledge through creative practice.
- Challenges dominant narratives – offering perspectives that counter mainstream or colonial representations of their culture.
- In essence, culturally rooted artists are not just creating art—they are also cultural stewards, storytellers, and change-makers.

2. My team operates multiple music businesses. Can we apply for funding for each one?

Teams that operate multiple businesses can request funding for only one business.

3. I live in an eligible Bay Area county, but members of my team do not. Are we eligible to apply?

For the 2026 grantmaking round, all team members must be full-time residents of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, or Sonoma County.

4. Some of the team members have received funding through other CCI grant programs. Are we eligible to apply for Zoo Labs: FUND support?

Funding through another CCI grant program does not affect the team's eligibility to apply for or receive grant funds through this opportunity.

5. Are alumni of past (2013-2025) Zoo Labs programs eligible to apply? What about previous Zoo Labs: FUND grantees?

Participation in a past Zoo Labs program does not affect the team's eligibility to apply for or receive grant funds through this opportunity. Similarly, previous Zoo Labs: FUND grantees may apply for funding as long as their final report and mentorship requirements has been fulfilled by the 2026 application deadline.

If you are unsure whether your grantee requirements have been fulfilled, please contact CCI staff at grants@cciarts.org (include Zoo Labs: FUND in the subject line) or call us at 415.288.0530.

6. What do you mean by “music business?”

By “music business,” we mean that the business’s key feature involves music as a product, program, service, or art form/cultural expression. We are open to a range of music businesses that conform to this description, such as groups/ensembles, recording studios, music festivals, vinyl record presses, record labels, music technology, music-based healing services, and music education nonprofits, to name a few examples.

7. My team is getting ready to *launch* a music business. Can we apply?

So long as all other eligibility criteria are met, then yes, you can apply! The Zoo Labs: FUND grant is open to businesses at all stages of development, including those that are nearing an official launch.

8. Just so I’m clear, who *isn’t* eligible for funding consideration?

Ineligible applicants include solo artists and individuals who have an idea for a music business, but no team. In addition, teams will be considered ineligible if they reside outside of the eligible nine Bay Area counties, do not include a culturally rooted artist team member, have a conflict of interest with Zoo Labs, CCI, or Intersection for the Arts, or submit an incomplete application. And remember, if any team members are 18 or younger, CCI must be contacted to discuss eligibility.

9. I’m a music producer/music production company representative who works with more than one team of artists. Can I be listed as a team member on more than one application?

Yes, you can be listed as a team member on more than one application. However, we recommend that each team identify *only* those members who are core to the business and its operations. To assess whether a member is “core,” the team can consider their response to the pitch video prompt, “Who are the team members, and why are their roles critical to the business?”

Additionally, per the Zoo Labs: FUND guidelines, teams (i.e., groups of the **same** two or more individuals) that operate multiple businesses may request funding for only one business. This does not apply to an individual (such as the example above) who is cited as a member of several different teams, as long as each team is composed of different members and represents a unique, standalone business.

AWARD TIERS

10. What are the award tiers?

Teams will choose the award tier—\$5,000, \$15,000, \$25,000, or \$50,000—to be considered for and will only be considered for the selected tier. In other words, if a team is not recommended for funding, it 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.

11. Which award tier should my team apply for?

Teams will select the award tier to be considered for based on their alignment with its accompanying criteria. Award tiers, their associated criteria, and the approximate number of awards available are:

- **\$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; 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.

12. If I resonate with the criteria of two different tiers, which one should I apply for?

In some cases, the business may align with some aspects of one tier and other aspects of a different one; this is normal. We encourage applicants to take some time to self-define and determine which tier resonates the most with them based on the criteria listed while reflecting on their current stage of business development and funding needs.

Remember that you will only be considered for the tier you select, so choose the one that best represents your current circumstances.

APPLICATION

13. We're a team of three people. Do we each apply for support?

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.

14. Is the application different for each award tier?

The application is uniform across award tiers with the exception of a handful of financial questions directed only at \$25,000 and \$50,000 applicants.

15. What is the business matrix?

Teams **must** use the [provided one-page matrix template](#) (available as a fillable .pdf and as a .docx on CCI's website, and can be uploaded to Submittable as a .doc, .docx, or .pdf file) to describe their business. The provided template is a helpful tool for organizing multiple aspects of your business in a clear and concise way. Responses should be brief—they may be incomplete sentences—but should be clearly understandable. In addition, an 11-point font or larger must be used, and the completed matrix cannot exceed one page.

If you do not have Microsoft Word, we recommend using [Google Docs](#) to prepare the business matrix. Alternatively, we have prepared a fillable .pdf version. To use this template, you must have Adobe Reader, which can be downloaded [here](#).

NEED HELP WITH THE PITCH VIDEO OR BUSINESS MATRIX?

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

16. What is the pitch video, and how do we prepare it?

The pitch video is another tool for communicating aspects of your business in a clear, concise, and compelling way. For the Zoo Labs: FUND application, the pitch video cannot exceed two (2) minutes in duration and can be recorded on a phone, tablet, camera, or even through a platform like Zoom if the team is unable to be in the same physical location together.

The entire team must participate in the video, and one or more members will need to address the following prompts in the order provided:

1. What is the name of the music business, and what does it do?
2. Who are the team members, and why are their roles critical to the business?
3. How does the business reflect or further the team’s artistic, creative, craft, or cultural practice?
4. Who does the business serve?
5. Has the business had traction?
6. How does the business contribute to the Bay Area’s arts and culture ecosystem in positive ways?
7. How is this moment a critical juncture for the business, and how will funding be used?

The prompts must be answered in the order listed above since each question helps provide context for the following one and allows panelists to follow along more closely.

17. Do you have any tips for preparing a compelling pitch video?

We’re glad you asked. Teams are encouraged to visit [Zoo Labs: LEARN](#) for in-depth guidance. We also recommend avoiding the use of promotional content in the video if it replaces responses to the required prompts.

18. Some of the team’s members go on a temporary hiatus, then return to the business. Should we include them in the pitch video? Also, our team has 15 members! Do we need to include and introduce each person?

The team members referenced in the pitch video, et al., should be core to the business and its operations. If itinerant members fit this description, then please include them in the pitch video and any other applicable areas.

For large groups, please have all team members involved as best you can. Teams might have each member say their name and role only, or the lead team member might cluster roles, e.g., "Joining me are Musicians A, B, C; Producers D & E; and Manager F." Contact CCI if this is a challenge—we’ll figure out a solution!

19. What kind of budget and budget notes are required?

Applicants are asked to provide proposed budget allocations for the following expense categories, along with contextual notes:

- Team Compensation
- Independent Contractors
- Equipment/ Materials
- Venue / Hospitality / Travel
- Merchandise/ Manufacturing
- Business Development / Other (fees, subscriptions, conferences, marketing & advertising)

The budget allocations should total the team’s funding request. Applicants are encouraged to provide budget notes for each category to further elaborate on what expenses each line item will cover based on the business’ current needs and goals. Budget notes will give the panelists insight into the business’

priorities. Budget notes can be bulleted or in a narrative format—whichever is easier—so long as the concept is clear and easy to understand.

We highly encourage applicants to compensate themselves, as well as any collaborating artists, staff, designers, contractors, et al., with a fair living wage. Resources for considering appropriate rates and ranges are available at the [Teaching Artists Guild Pay Rate Calculator](#), [Working Artists and the Greater Economy \(W.A.G.E\) Fee Calculator](#), and [MIT's Living Wage Calculator](#).

We also understand that budgets are not set in stone and that budget allocations may change as projects develop.

20. What if I have an expense that does not fall into the budget categories listed above?

There is a budget note field where you will have the opportunity to provide additional contextual notes and details that you would like panelists to consider.

21. How many work samples are required, and what types are accepted?

Only one work sample will be accepted. **We strongly recommend submitting a video work sample, unless audio/text-based work is the best representation of the team's work.** A video work sample is often the most effective way for panelists to understand the group's artistic and business practices in action—it can convey team dynamics, the energy of a live experience, or the nuance of a creative process in a more engaging way. Like the pitch video and business matrix, the work sample is another format for presenting information about your business in a compelling and dynamic way.

Panelists will review up to 5 minutes total of an audio or video sample OR up to 5 pages of text/image-based materials. Like the pitch video and business matrix, the work sample is another format for presenting information about your business in a compelling and dynamic way. In general, it is best to select examples of recent work (2020 or later) and to avoid samples that have poor visibility or audio quality. For lengthy samples, you may opt to cue your work to a specific starting point or edit it. Finally, the work sample must include a one to two-sentence description. If applicable, include playback instructions in the description.

File Formats

- **Audio:** .aiff, .wav, .m4a, and .mp3 files accepted. If your sample is more than 5 minutes, include the desired start/end times in the work sample description. If none are provided, panelists will listen to the first 5 minutes of the sample.
- **Video:** .avi, .mp4, .mov, and .mpg files accepted. If your sample is more than 5 minutes, include the desired start/end times in the work sample description. If none are provided, panelists will view the first 5 minutes of the sample.
- **Text/Image-Based Materials:** .doc, .docx, and .pdf files accepted. Up to five (5) letter-size (8.5 x 11 inches) pages of ephemera may be combined to create a single text/image-based work sample. Examples of this work sample type include marketing materials, press, and presentation decks.

Regardless of file type, the work sample must be uploaded directly to the Submittable platform. We will not accept a document that links to an outside platform such as Vimeo, YouTube, Issuu, etc., nor will we review samples that are password-protected.

EVALUATION

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

Grant review panels of established music practitioners, entrepreneurs, and community arts leaders will be convened following the application deadline to make recommendations to CCI on final grant recipients. Additional field experts may be used to advise on technical proposals or to assess artistic practice, context, or work settings.

23. How are applications evaluated?

Panelists will evaluate applicants' Pitch Video, Business Matrix, Budget & Budget Notes, and Work Sample against the review criteria listed in the [grant guidelines](#), which we encourage you to review closely.

In addition, panelists will aim to ensure that recommended grantees 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, and arts and cultural form/tradition represented.

24. What makes a competitive application?

The most competitive applications are clearly written, concise, and to the point, and demonstrate a strong alignment with each evaluation criterion. For application support, we encourage you to visit [Zoo Labs: LEARN](#) for in-depth guidance.

Additionally, we recommend that applicants:

- **Provide metrics/specificity whenever and wherever possible.** For example, instead of stating that you had a "successful year," quantify the activities that rendered the year successful, such as generating \$X amount in sales, hiring X# of individuals, increasing your digital audience to X amount from Y amount, and so on.
- **Focus on impact.** As part of the evaluation criteria, Zoo Labs: FUND supports businesses that contribute to the Bay Area's arts and culture ecosystem in positive ways and that impact your business internally.
- **Have a defined business versus a one-time "project."** Your business may be getting ready to launch, in the early stages of development, more established, or an anchor institution. These stages are all competitive for funding and are reflected by Zoo Labs: FUND's award tiers. However, if your work is more project-like, such that it is not meant to exist beyond a certain outcome (e.g., a team of artists who need support for a one-time collaborative project), it will not be competitive.

Lastly, we recommend applicants provide measurable data to back up any claims made in the business matrix. Applicants can use social media metrics such as followers, engagement rates, reach, and impressions, along with sales, revenue, streams (if applicable), ticket sales, and audience numbers to reinforce any information shared under impact, audience, and challenges. For businesses in the early stages, we recommend breaking down expenses ("cost-outs") such as operating costs, production costs, marketing expenses, and any other relevant financial details to help inform your business matrix.

25. Our team is working on many projects. How do I make sure to include the full range of what we do?

In the business matrix, teams should focus on a few projects and/or products and services that are integral to the business and that funding will support, rather than including a laundry list of things that the team may focus on. We understand that artists and businesses often feel that they need to "do a lot with a little." But rather than continue to perpetuate this myth, teams are encouraged to be more intentional, focused, and to go deeper.

26. What do you mean by external impact? How can our team effectively communicate the external impact of our business?

We understand that impact can look and manifest itself in many ways and that it may be difficult to clearly communicate this. We encourage applicants to think about the external impacts that the business is having on the Bay Area's arts and culture ecosystem. Since impact may look different from business to business, here are a few examples of what external impact could look like:

- Creation of new jobs (full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees, contractors)
- Mentorship opportunities
- Creation of accessible and inclusive spaces
- Preservation of a cultural practice rooted in music
- Providing a platform for emerging artists
- Access to educational experiences for young people

These are only a few examples and are not indicative of the range of impact possible. Applicants who share their impact without explaining how it is being achieved will not be as competitive.

To further help teams start to think about their business and its public benefit to the community, we recommend taking some time to reflect on the following questions:

- How do you understand the impact of your business on your community?
- In what ways has your business positively influenced the lives of people in your community?
- What changes have you noticed as a result of your business, and how do you think these changes should be measured or evaluated?

27. What do you mean by "critical juncture" and internal impact? How can our team effectively communicate the internal impact funding could have on our business?

When we say "critical juncture," we mean that the team is at a pivotal moment where the infusion of capital can have significant short or long-term internal impact such as seeding the launch of a business, propelling a business' growth, supporting the business' sustainability, or investing in the untapped potential of an established business. We encourage applicants to consider how funding could support the growth, sustainability, and scalability of your business.

A competitive application will also highlight any improvements or developments within your team or business that will result from receiving funding, such as enhanced entrepreneurial skills, increased access to resources, or expanded networks, to name a few.

28. If grant funding is unrestricted*, why are you requesting a budget and budget notes?

Although Zoo Labs: FUND provides unrestricted funds that can be applied in whatever way is most needed by the team and their music business, a budget and brief budget narrative are requested to help panelists understand how funds will be used and provide an insight into the team's decision-making process and prioritization.

If awarded a grant, receipts will not be requested. However, the final report will request a financial report explaining how funds were spent using the categories listed. While receipts and other documentation are not requested, we encourage you to keep records of these for accounting purposes.

**Funding 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).*

NOTIFICATIONS

29. 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 October 13, 2026, by 5:00 p.m. PT 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.

30. 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, through one-on-one phone calls with applicants, or through a short write-up sent via email. Details will be provided when notifications are shared on October 13, 2026, by 5:00 p.m. PT.

GRANTEES

31. How can grant funding be used?

Grant funding is unrestricted and can be applied in whatever way is most needed by the team and their music business. However, grant 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.

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

Zoo Labs: FUND provides unrestricted grants, which means you and your team get to decide how to use the funds and that they are not attached to a specific project or outcome. However, funds must be used in ways that support and strengthen your music business, and in a way that provides a public benefit and makes a positive contribution to your community.

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

- To hire additional staff, collaborators, and engage artists on behalf of the music business
- To purchase gear, equipment, or any other materials needed to support the music business
- To market/promote the services or projects of the music business

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.

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

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

- Paying yourself or other team members for work not related to the music business
- Buying personal items like a car, unless they are clearly meant to support the music business
- 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.

34. If my team is awarded a grant, what will be required of us?

If awarded a grant, the full team is required to participate in a grantee orientation meeting, to be held virtually on November 4, 2026, at 6 PM PT, wherein grantees will meet one another and learn more about Zoo Labs. The full team is also required to participate in a 1-hour, one-on-one session (virtually or in person) with a business mentor. Mentor pairings will be curated by Zoo Labs staff based on each team's needs, interests, and availability.

As a final requirement, the lead team member must complete a brief final report that describes the impact and use of funding, along with a financial accounting broken down by the following categories:

- Team Compensation
- Independent Contractors
- Equipment/ Materials
- Venue / Hospitality / Travel
- Merchandise/ Manufacturing
- Business Development / Other (fees, subscriptions, conferences, marketing & advertising)

Reports will be due in November 2027. CCI will provide further instructions, including how to submit the report through Submittable, in the grant agreement.

35. If my team is awarded a grant, how will payment be made?

If recommended and approved for a grant, the team will designate a recipient for the funds (i.e., the "grantee"). The recipient may be the lead team member, another member of the team, the business (i.e., a nonprofit or for-profit), or another entity such as a fiscal sponsor. This information will be collected in the application to support CCI in preparing the grant contract and processing the award payment. 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.

We understand that fund disbursement may impact disability-related community support or other social benefits; therefore, we will structure options that work for each grantee's unique financial situation. CCI cannot, however, make payments to multiple team members, nor will CCI assume responsibility for any due diligence regarding the team's membership. Please contact CCI at 415.288.0530 or grants@cciarts.org (include Zoo Labs: FUND in the subject line) to determine a plan that works best for you.

36. Are grant awards considered taxable income?

Zoo Labs: FUND grant awards may be taxable as ordinary income. We recommend that you consult a qualified tax advisor for further information.

37. Will you announce the names of grantees?

The names of Zoo Labs: FUND grantees will be announced via a press release that is shared on CCI's website (issued no later than December 1) and in CCI's Annual Report, an online publication produced each fiscal year (July 1 - June 30) and made available for download on our website. In addition, grantees may be highlighted through CCI's and Zoo Labs' communication platforms, including each organization's e-newsletters, social media channels, and websites.

38. Our team received a 2026 Zoo Labs: FUND grant! We have a few questions; do we contact CCI or Zoo Labs staff?

Congratulations on your award! Depending on the type of question you have, you'll contact either CCI or Zoo Labs staff.

For questions regarding the grant contract, payment processing, or status, tax forms, communications and announcements, or final report, contact CCI 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 are trained in making and receiving these calls.

For questions regarding the award's mentorship component (e.g., virtual grantee orientation, mentor pairings, or on-demand content), contact Zoo Labs staff at hello@zoolabs.org with the subject heading, "FUND mentorship".

SUPPORT

39. 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.

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

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.