

Government of Nashville and Davidson County requiring it.
Analysis

This resolution approves the criteria for Operating Support and Thrive grants for the Metropolitan Nashville Arts Commission (“Arts Commission”) for Fiscal Year 2025.

Tennessee Code Annotated section 7-3-314(d) states that arts commissions formed by metropolitan governments may fund nonprofit organizations “involved in the study, participation in and appreciation of” the arts without approval from the Metropolitan Council. Section 2.112.040(H) of the Metropolitan Code of Laws permits the Arts Commission to award funds appropriated by the Metropolitan Council to deserving nonprofit civic and non-profit charitable organizations.

Substitute Ordinance No. BL2024-373, the operating budget, appropriated \$3,263,200 to Arts and Arts Organizations for the purpose of funding grants to nonprofit organizations. The Arts Commission recommended that 60 percent of the appropriation be allocated to Operating Support grants and 40 percent of the appropriation be allocated to new Thrive program grants.

Metro Code Section 2.112.040(H) further requires that the criteria for awarding funds to arts organizations must be established by the Arts Commission and approved by a Council resolution. The Arts Commission voted to approve the criteria for Operating Support and Thrive grants on December 5, 2024.

Though it doesn’t require Council approval, the exhibit to the resolution includes criteria for Metro Arts Panelists to sit on community grant review panels and review grant applications. Panelists must live or primarily work in Davidson County, have a keen interest in the arts, not be an employee of the Metropolitan Government (including Metro Nashville Public Schools), not be an employee of an organization applying for grant funding, and have a basic understanding or previous experience in grant-making or previous grant panelist experience. Panelists are also reviewed based on their professional and personal experience, experiences related to equity and justice, and openness, collaboration, and flexibility in contributing to the process. Panelists are generally volunteers.

Operating Support Grants Criteria

The criteria provide that Operating Support grants will fund the general operations of arts-focused nonprofit organizations based in Nashville and Davidson County. Applicants must produce, present, or directly support artistic projects or work, have a primary mission to directly support the performance, exhibition, or instruction of art, and be chartered in the state of Tennessee and tax-exempt by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3). The organizations must have a business address and operate most of its programs in Nashville and Davidson County, have evidence of non-discrimination employment and personnel practices in place, and adopt an equity statement within the next two years. Grant funding is permitted to be spent for salaries, artist fees, program and project supplies, performance space and facility rental, marketing and promotion, consulting fees, equipment rental or purchase, and fundraising activities. Grant funds cannot be used for capital improvements, reduction of debts, activities and programs with religious practices or intent, political lobbying, or the purchase of real property.

Applications for Operating Support grants must have been submitted by January 29, 2024. The deadline for any updates to the applications has yet to be determined. All grant applications are reviewed for eligibility by Metro Arts staff. Applicant scores are then determined by a community grant review panel. Applications with scores of 70 to 100 percent will be awarded funds. Eligible organizations will receive awards based on their size and annual revenue as follows:

- Micro organizations will be awarded between \$3,000 and \$18,750.
- Small organizations will be awarded between \$3,000 and \$50,000.
- Medium organizations will be awarded a maximum of \$125,000.
- Mid-Size organizations will be awarded a maximum of \$120,000.

- Large organizations will be awarded a maximum of 1.8 percent of their operating budget with a maximum of \$200,000.

All Operating Support grant activities must take place and all awards must be spent between the time of award and June 1, 2025. Grant recipients must submit final funding reports to Metro Arts by June 15, 2025. Organizations may appeal to the Arts Commission to change its ruling if they believe a problem occurred with the grants process.

Thrive Grants Criteria

The exhibit to the resolution also contains eligibility criteria for Thrive grants to support Thrive Community Public Art projects, which are temporary artwork that exist in a space that is accessible to the public. These grants are meant to support artist-led, community-based art projects such as murals, sculptures, community art, and digital new media that include collaboration between artists and community partners and organizations. Applicants must obtain all permits, licenses, and permissions necessary for their project and comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

Funding is only available for artists living or working in Nashville and Davidson County, artist collectives based in Davidson County, and non-profit organizations based in Nashville and Davidson County. Applicants who are not registered Tennessee 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations must work with a fiscal agent to receive Metro Arts Thrive Project funding. Applicants may select their own fiscal agent or select a fiscal agent from a list of entities vetted by Metro Arts.

It is unclear from the criteria exhibit (see pages 17 and 21) whether new applications will be accepted or whether an applicant must have applied by the January 29, 2024, deadline to be eligible. But, the criteria does provide that applications must be *updated and resubmitted* by February 18, 2025. The Arts Commission expects a two-week training period to inform applicants of the changes in this Thrive grant cycle. Grantees will have four weeks total to edit and resubmit grant proposals.

The criteria for grant funding eligibility are drawn from Metro Arts' mission and Thrive goals and objectives. Successful projects should align with the mission, goals, and objectives by:

- impacting neighborhoods and communities,
- engaging residents in project planning, decision-making, and artmaking, and
- exhibiting and promoting cultural equity in project design, process and content.

All grant applications are reviewed for eligibility by Metro Arts staff. Applicant scores are then determined by a community grant review panel. The panelists' scores and recommendations are reviewed by the Arts Commission's Grants and Funding Committee and are used to determine which applications should be awarded funding. The full Arts Commission reviews all recommended grant awards and votes on whether to approve them. Thrive grants will be awarded up to a maximum of \$10,000.

All Thrive grant activities must take place and all awards must be spent between the time of award and June 1, 2025. Grant recipients must submit final funding reports to Metro Arts by June 15, 2025. Organizations may appeal to the Arts Commission to change its ruling if they believe a problem occurred with the grants process.