

Creative Futures Program FAQs (round 3)

Why did the Vermont Arts Council (VAC) create this grant program? This program supports the recovery of Vermont's creative sector from the COVID-19 pandemic and sets a path for growth. It is a one-time program made possible by a grant from the State of Vermont through the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Department of Economic Development.

What state legislation provided the money and how much money is available?

[Act 183](#) allocated: \$9 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to the Vermont Arts Council for Creative Economy grants to cover monthly operating costs, including rent, mortgage, utilities, and insurance, to creative economy businesses and nonprofits that have sustained substantial losses due to the pandemic.

I applied in Round 1 (Sept. 15–Nov. 1, 2022) but was not funded. What next?

Your application will automatically move for consideration for Round 3, however, we need you to update your application with current financial information including:

- Any filed tax return not already included in your application
- Management-prepared financial statements for year-to-date of the current fiscal year (and any prior year for which a tax return is not yet filed)
- Your information regarding other pandemic relief has changed (For example, you have since applied for or received funds from the VEDA forgivable loan program)
- Other substantial changes in your circumstances make the information submitted in your application inaccurate.

We sent an email to the email address listed in your application with instructions on updating your application for Round 3.

I applied in Round 2 (Jan. 5–Feb. 28, 2023) but was not funded. What next?

Your application will automatically move for consideration for Round 3. No action is required on your part unless:

- You have since filed a tax return for your most recently completed fiscal year
- Your information regarding other pandemic relief has changed (For example, you have since applied for or received funds from the VEDA forgivable loan program)
- Other substantial changes in your circumstances make the information submitted in your application inaccurate.

We need to reopen your application if you would like to make changes. Reach out to us at creativefutures@vermontartscouncil.org or 802.402.4409 to have the application reopened.

Eligibility

Am I part of the creative economy?

The following segments make up Vermont's creative economy:

- Culture & Heritage
- Design
- Film & Media
- Literary Arts & Publishing
- Performing Arts
- Specialty Foods
- Visual Arts & Crafts

My organization incorporates some creative sector activities in our work, but it is not our primary activity. Can I still apply?

Unfortunately, no. This funding was approved to support Vermont's creative economy specifically. While we respect and appreciate your organization's incorporation of some creative activities, we cannot award grants to organizations, collaboratives, and businesses that are not predominately creative in purpose. Types of organizations that are not eligible for this funding include senior centers and social service organizations that conduct some cultural programming (Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, etc.). The Vermont Arts Council and Vermont Humanities Council have other grant programs that may support your cultural projects.

How do I know if my business or organization is specifically part of the creative economy for this program?

Applicants will choose a business code based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) to indicate their place in the creative economy. For-profit businesses can find this code on their tax return under "principal business activity code." Nonprofit organizations will have to search and choose a code.

Please consult our list of NAICS codes that are part of Vermont's creative economy for this program ([click here for a list of NAICS codes](#)). Contact staff with questions about eligibility or choosing a code before starting the application process. We reserve the right to make final judgments on eligibility.

I am a humanities organization, not specifically an art organization, am I eligible?

Most likely. Eligible humanities organizations include museums, libraries, historical societies and historic sites, and civic and social organizations designed to support the cultural or artistic needs of underserved population.

What types of organizations and businesses are eligible?

This opportunity is open to nonprofit and for-profit businesses with fewer than 500 employees in Vermont's creative economy including:

- C Corporation
- Cooperative Associations
- S Corporation
- Limited Liability Corp
- Limited Liability Partnership
- Sole Proprietorship (meeting certain qualifications)
- Nonprofit
- Unincorporated nonprofit using a fiscal agent

What are the requirements to be eligible as a sole proprietor?

- be 18 years of age or older
- own an unincorporated business
- file a Schedule C as a part of federal tax returns

I am registered as an LLC with the State of Vermont, but I file taxes as a sole proprietor. How should I identify my business?

Apply as an LLC if you registered as one with the State of Vermont.

My cultural organization does not have official tax-exempt status, am I eligible?

Unincorporated arts, humanities, or cultural groups without official nonprofit status may apply using a fiscal agent provided they are otherwise eligible. A fiscal agent must be a charitable nonprofit organization incorporated in Vermont as a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

- The fiscal agent becomes the legal applicant of record, redistributes the funds to the intended recipient, and is entirely responsible for all published requirements of the grants program. The Council recommends that a fiscal agent enters into a formal agreement with the applicant implementing the project, outlining the working relationship between the two parties. A sample letter of agreement is available [here](#). This [completed fiscal agent form](#) should be submitted as an attachment to the grant application.
- Applicants will need to provide financial statements from 2019 (in lieu of tax returns).

How do you define "Vermont based"?

"Vermont based" means being located in Vermont or having Vermont employees and eligible monthly operating revenue and operating costs related to only Vermont operations.

I opened a business or started working as a creative sector sole proprietor after the pandemic started. Am I eligible?

Maybe. This program is primarily for businesses that were in operation or had taken substantial steps toward becoming operational by March 13, 2020.

Exceptions:

- If you have documentation of work to create the business before March 13, 2020
- If you opened a creative sector business after March 13, 2020, as a response to pandemic challenges (i.e. job loss, organization closing, etc.), and you can document income from qualifying creative sector work

Do I have to offer programming to the public to be eligible?

No, your business or organization does not have to offer programming to the public. This is not a programming grant.

Funding

What can I use Creative Futures funds for?

These funds are for regular operating expenses, including but not limited to payroll and benefits, utilities, rent, mortgage, and insurance.

How much money am I eligible to receive under this grant program?

Awards range from \$5,000 to \$200,000. Businesses and organizations over \$50,000 will receive between 7% and 15% of their 2019 operating revenues with a cap of \$200,000. Please refer to the chart in the [guidelines](#) for your organization's funding level.

How will my past sources of pandemic financial relief affect the amount I receive?

Your past and pending pandemic relief will be considered by reviewers as they determine the "severity of pandemic harm." It will not affect or result in a reduction of the grant amount offered. Grant funding size, if offered, is based entirely on the organization's 2019 fiscal year operating revenues.

Is there a matching requirement?

No, there is no matching requirement for this grant.

Do I have to describe a specific project for the application?

No, because the funds are operating-focused, they are not tied to a specific project.

Will the funds be dispersed in a lump sum or on a reimbursement basis?

Funds will be dispersed in one lump sum. Submission of receipts is not necessary. Grantees will be required to complete a simple final report detailing how the money was spent.

Does receiving this grant make me ineligible for future Vermont Art Council grants?

No, receiving this grant will not impact your organization's future eligibility for other Vermont Arts Council grant programs.

When do the funds need to be spent?

Funds for this program must be spent by December 31, 2024. You will need to submit a simple final report by January 30, 2025. We encourage grantees to submit their final report shortly after the funds are spent for ease of closing out the grant.

Applying

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What materials do I need to apply?

- An organization account in the Vermont Arts Council's [grant portal](#)
- A completed application that includes descriptions of your business or organization, its significance and economic impact in your community and Vermont, and the pandemic harm experienced past and current
- Tax and revenue documents for 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 (see list in guidelines)
- List of all COVID relief funding including amounts received or pending

How do I get the application?

Register in our grant portal: <https://vac.spectrumportal.net/accounts/register>.

NOTE: All Creative Future applicants (including sole proprietors who are already in our system as individual artists) **MUST** register as an **Organization Applicant**.

How do I know if my organization already has an account?

Organizations or businesses:

You can check if you already have an account by entering the grants portal and choosing to register as an Organization Applicant. Once this option is selected a search box will appear where you can enter your organization's name. If you find your name by searching, you can continue to apply for the grant. Please make sure your information in the grant system is current. If you do not find your organization, click the "Create New Organization" button to start making a profile and apply.

Sole Proprietors:

For this grant, sole proprietors will need to create a new organization account even if you already have an individual account in the VAC from past grant opportunities. You **MUST** register as an ORGANIZATION for this opportunity.

When you enter the grant portal, you will be given the option to register as an Individual Artist or Organization Applicant. Please choose Organization Applicant. Once that option is selected a search bar and a button to "Create New Organization" will appear. Ignore the search bar and click the button to create a new organization and proceed to create a profile.

What does VAC mean by fiscal year?

A fiscal year is a one-year period that companies and governments use for financial reporting and budgeting. (Fiscal years are referenced by their end date such as "FY 2020", "FY20", or "fiscal year ending September 30, 2020".) We understand that fiscal years vary by organization. We are requesting tax returns for your fiscal years that end in 2019, 2020, and 2021. The oldest tax return that you submit should reflect a full 12 months before the pandemic.

Our FY2022 tax documents are not ready, what do we submit instead?

If you do not yet have your FY22 tax documents (or any other year), you can submit management-prepared financial statements (Profit and Loss statement for the year and Balance Sheets from the beginning of the fiscal year).

I do not have a Profit and Loss (P&L) statement or the balance sheets requested. What should I do?

All entities (including sole proprietors) are required to submit a Profit and Loss statement for the current fiscal year, even if it is brief. (Templates and examples of P&L statements are available for free online, including in Microsoft Word and Excel.) E

Note: Entities with revenue under \$50,000 **do not** need to include balance sheets.

I'm concerned about sharing my social security number.

We don't need your social security number on your tax returns. Please remove or redact all social security numbers. If you need help, please reach out to us at creativefutures@vermontartscouncil.org or 802.402.4409

Do I have to submit my application online?

Yes, however, if you require an alternate format or assistance to access the application, please contact the program managers at creativefutures@vermontartscouncil.org or Michele Bailey, accessibility coordinator by email at mbailey@vermontartscouncil.org.

Who should I contact if I am having problems using the online application system?

Please contact us at creativefutures@vermontartscouncil.org or 802.402.4409

Timeline

What are the dates of the three funding rounds?

- ~~Round 1: open Sept. 15–Nov. 1, 2022; notifications by mid-December [closed]~~
- ~~Round 2: open Jan. 5–Feb. 28, 2023; notifications by mid-April [closed]~~
- Round 3: open May 1– June 30, 2023; notifications by late-August

Can I apply again if I am not funded in the first or second rounds?

All applicants who meet eligibility criteria who were not funded in Rounds 1 and 2 will automatically move for consideration for Round 3.

- Round 1 applicants must update their financials and will be contacted by staff.
- Round 2 applicants do not need to act unless:
 - You have since filed a tax return for your most recently completed fiscal year
 - Your information regarding other pandemic relief has changed (For example, you have since applied for or received funds from the VEDA forgivable loan program)
 - Other substantial changes in your circumstances make the information submitted in your application inaccurate.

If any of the above circumstances apply to you, please contact us to reopen your applications at creativefutures@vermontartscouncil.org or 802.402.4409

Are grants first-come, first-served?

No. Grants will be reviewed following the grant deadline dates: Nov. 1, 2022; Feb. 28, or June 30, 2023. All grants will be reviewed as a group. There is no priority given to applications received before the grant deadline. With that said, we encourage you to start the application process early to allow time to gather necessary financial information and ask questions.

Evaluation Process

Who will review my application?

Applications will be reviewed for eligibility by VAC staff and then sent to an outside panel for evaluation.

What will the panelist be judging?

The panel will score each application on three main factors. Your organization's:

- severity of pandemic harm
- cultural and community impact
- economic impact

How are Special Consideration groups factored into panelist scoring?

Entities that are owned, serve, or are led by members of communities traditionally under-resourced in the arts and humanities will receive additional points in scoring.

How do I know if I am part of a Special Consideration group?

With the Special Consideration group priority, VAC would like to reach businesses or organizations that serve or are led by groups that have historically not received government funding. This includes but is not limited to:

- People of color or indigenous people
- People who identify as LGBTQ+
- People who live in rural areas
- People with disabilities
- People who identify as immigrants or refugees
- People whose first (or only) language is not English

Question 3 of the application narrative asks you to explain how your entity supports or is led by underrepresented and under-resourced groups.

My business or organization is not in a Special Consideration group, should I still apply?

Absolutely. While VAC is prioritizing the funding of these Special Consideration groups, there is funding available for entities to whom this does not apply.

Are Vermont Arts Council staff members available for questions?

Yes. You can learn more by:

- Attending a grantseeker workshop on May 11, 2023, at 10am or May 23, 2023, at 4pm
- Watching the recorded grantseeker workshops once posted on the website
- Making an appointment to [talk one-on-one with program staff](#)
- Emailing staff at creativefutures@vermontartscouncil.org
- Calling staff at 802.402.4409