

Special Project Guidelines webpage: <https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/planning-and-economic-development/economic-development/sales-tax-revitalization-star-10>

Important Information

Application Deadline	Friday, March 13, 2026 4:00 p.m.
Applicant Interviews	April/May 2026
Earliest Project Start Date	August 1, 2026
Latest Project End Date	July 31, 2027

Important changes of note:

There will be only one application round this year and in future years.

- Eligible projects for this application round must take place between August 1, 2026, and July 31, 2027. Awards may not be approved until early to late fall, so there is a strong likelihood that some applicants will not know the decision around their grant request until after their project takes place.

Minimum grant request: \$5,000 (same as past years).

Matching fund requirement change: One-to-one funding match only required of grant requests of over \$50,000

Please review these guidelines carefully to determine whether your group and project are eligible for funding from the Cultural STAR Program, and to learn how to apply.

Contact our staff with questions and for support:

Program Coordinator: Jessica Larson Johnston
jessica.larson.johnston@ci.stpaul.mn.us, 651-266-8654

Program Management Assistant:

General Cultural STAR Email: ped-culturalstar@stpaul.gov

Program Description

Purpose, Funding Goals, and Strategies

The purpose of the [**Cultural STAR**](#) fund is to promote cultural vitality and economic growth, particularly in the downtown Cultural District, by strengthening the arts and culture community.

Cultural STAR dollars are intended to:

- Build and diversify audiences;
- Promote a broad range of cultural offerings;
- Produce a long-term impact; and
- Leverage additional financial support.

The Cultural STAR Program will achieve these purposes by making grants for projects and programs that:

- Attract audiences;
- Develop and improve cultural facilities; and
- Build capacity of artists and cultural organizations.

Geographic Focus

At least 80% of Cultural STAR funds will be awarded to nonprofit organizations that are located within the targeted area known as the Cultural District of downtown Saint Paul.

The remaining 20% of funds may be allocated to:

- For-profit businesses located in the Cultural District for projects that enhance visitor enjoyment of the Cultural District; or
- Nonprofit organizations located in Saint Paul but outside of the Cultural District.

The [**Cultural District**](#) is defined as the geographic area bordered by Interstate 94 to the north, the Lafayette Bridge to the east, Harriet and Raspberry Islands to the south, and Chestnut Road to the west.

Located in the **Cultural District** includes:

- An organization that is registered with the Minnesota Secretary of State with an address that falls within the Cultural District; or
- An organization which owns property in the Cultural District for purposes directly related to its Cultural STAR project; or

- An organization has secured a lease or rental agreement within the Cultural District for the purposes directly related to its Cultural STAR project; or
- An organization has secured a permit or contract for the use of Public Venues in the Cultural District for the purpose directly related to its Cultural STAR Project.

Located in **Saint Paul** includes:

- An organization that is registered with the Minnesota Secretary of State with an address that falls within Saint Paul; or
- An organization that owns property in Saint Paul for purposes directly related to its Cultural STAR project; or
- An organization that has secured a lease or rental agreement within Saint Paul for the purposes directly related to its Cultural STAR project; or
- An organization has secured a permit or contract for the use of Public Venues in Saint Paul for the purpose directly related to its Cultural STAR Project.

Special Projects Program Description

Special Project grants are made to groups wishing to offer quality arts activities, in any discipline, within the geographic boundaries of the City of Saint Paul. Grant requests may include costs for artists and other personnel, postage, supplies, printing, travel and other expenses necessary to carry out the project. Food and beverage are not allowable expenses, and the City will not reimburse expenses related to insurance coverage.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants may apply for only one of the following Cultural STAR funding types during each funding round: Special Projects Grant; Capacity Building Grant (formally Organizational Development Grant); or Capital Project Grant. Grants can be received only once per calendar year.

Saint Paul-based nonprofit arts and cultural organizations located outside of the Cultural District may apply twice per round and may receive funding up to two times per calendar year – once for projects taking place outside of the Cultural District and once for projects taking place in the Cultural District.

Applicant groups must be one of the following:

- Nonprofit arts and cultural organizations that are located within the City of Saint Paul
- Informal and/or unincorporated arts-focused groups, individuals, and one-time arts projects that have associated with nonprofit arts and cultural organizations that are located within the City of Saint Paul and will serve as a fiscal and contract sponsor, provided that: (1) 100% of the project takes place in the [**Cultural District**](#); and (2) such nonprofit arts and cultural organization enter into a contract with the City of Saint Paul
- Non-profit arts and cultural organizations outside of Saint Paul with projects in the Cultural District of Saint Paul
- For-profit businesses in the [**Cultural District**](#) may apply for projects that enhance visitor enjoyment of the district
- City departments or divisions are eligible when in partnership with, or supported by, an eligible organization

The following are not eligible to apply:

- Churches or religious organizations
- Political parties and related political action groups
- Federal, state, and county agencies and departments
- Organizations (other than those that have associated with informal and/or unincorporated arts-focused groups, individuals, and one-time arts projects, to serve as fiscal and contract sponsor as described in these Guidelines) that have received Organizational Development and/or Special Project grants in three consecutive grant cycles (calendar years)
- For-profit businesses located outside the Cultural District
- If you are a previous awardee and are not under contract for an existing STAR award, you are ineligible to apply for another STAR award.

Project Funding – Eligible Expenses and Match Requirements

Funding Request Requirements

- The minimum grant request is \$5,000. It is unlikely that the Board will recommend funding any proposal for more than \$50,000.
- Grant requests of over \$50,000 must be matched dollar for dollar in the full amount of the award. For example, if the grant request is \$50,500, the total project cost outlined in the application budget section would need to show a

total at least \$101,000, with a one-to-one matching fund contribution of \$50,500 from other funding sources.

- The same or similar proposal cannot be submitted to more than one of the following programs in any one funding cycle (calendar year): the Capital Improvement Budgeting (CIB) program, the Neighborhood STAR program, and the Cultural STAR program.
- Organizations receiving grants must comply with all federal, state, and local laws, rules, and regulations in connection with the project, including but not limited to, the Saint Paul Vendor Outreach Program (VOP). **It is important to understand that compliance requirements may affect hiring practices and wage rates, so make no commitments prior to fully understanding these requirements.**

What this program funds / how you can use the grant funds:

- Any project cost that specifically pertains to the execution of the project:
 - Personnel
 - Artists
 - Employees
 - Contractors
 - Supplies
 - Printing and postage
 - Space and equipment rental *does not include regular, monthly rent.
 - Transportation and travel
 - Other expenses necessary to carry out the project

What this program does not fund:

- Activities located outside the City of Saint Paul
- Activities that have been completed prior to eligible project start date of August 1, 2026, or after the eligible project end date of July 31, 2027.
- Capital improvements or construction, purchase of real capital equipment or purchase of real property or endowments
- Activities that engage in political lobbying, serve the religious socialization of participants, or discriminate against persons or individuals
- Food or beverages
- Expenses related to insurance coverage
- Fundraising events

Disbursement of Funds / Match Requirements

- Upon execution of a grant agreement that outlines a finalized project budget and scope of work, 80% of the grant funds will be disbursed.
- Final payment of the remaining 20% will be made only after the project is completed and a final project report that includes the following documentation is received and approved:
 - Final narrative report
 - Documentation of expenses charged to Cultural STAR grant
 - Documentation of match funding
 - Documentation of project having taken place, including proof of proper recognition given to Cultural STAR program-support.
 - Grantees are expected to submit the final disbursement request and close out their grant within 90 days from the end of the contract period.
- If a project is completed prior to execution of a contract, then at the sole discretion of the Grantor, Grantor may elect to pay out 100% of the STAR funds at one time; provided that, Grantee must submit and comply all requirements for both the initial 80% disbursement and the final 20% disbursement.
- In their final report, grantees receiving over \$50,000 in Cultural STAR grant funds for Organizational Development or Special Projects should demonstrate that the full amount of Cultural STAR grant funds were matched dollar for dollar.
 - At least 70% of the match for Special Projects and Organizational Development projects must be in dollars.
 - Up to 30% of the match may be in-kind goods and services, such as personnel, professional services, office space, supplies, volunteer labor and sweat equity.
 - Volunteer labor and sweat equity are valued at \$15.00 per hour.
 - Private, county, state and federal funds may be used as a match.
 - The Cultural STAR Board has the discretion to recommend approval of other matching contributions on a case-by-case basis. The Cultural STAR Board may consider exceptions to the match requirement in highly unusual cases.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals submitted to this program will be evaluated on the following four criteria, each worth 5 points, for a total possible score of 20 points:

Impact (5 points) – Excellent proposals will convey how the project will benefit Saint Paul – increasing access to different art forms and cultural offerings, addressing cultural needs, and reaching audiences.

Excellent (5 points), Good (4 points), Adequate (3 points), Questionable (2 points), Needs improvement (1 point)

- What cultural need does this project address? How was this determined?
- How will this project build audiences in Saint Paul?
- Describe your target audience(s) and the community from which it is drawn. What is your expected attendance?
- How will this project provide increased access to art forms and cultural offerings in Saint Paul?
- What type of long-term impact will this project have on Saint Paul?
- How will STAR dollars leverage additional financial support in Saint Paul?

Quality (5 points) – Excellent proposals will describe strong goals and a plan to achieve them to have a successful project.

Excellent (5 points), Good (4 points), Adequate (3 points), Questionable (2 points), Needs improvement (1 point)

- What are your artistic and/or cultural goals for this project? How will you measure them?
- Who are, or will be, the artists and project leaders? How were, or will, they be selected?
- What background or experience do your group, artists, and project leaders bring to this project to ensure quality?
- In what ways will your project be artistically or culturally challenging for your group, the artists, the audience, or all three?

Ability (5 points) – Excellent proposals will describe projects that are clearly defined with a realistic plan that could include timeline, personnel, publicity and financial support that demonstrates that the project will be implemented successfully.

Excellent (5 points), Good (4 points), Adequate (3 points), Questionable (2 points), Needs improvement (1 point)

- Describe the planning process for your project.
- In what ways will your board of directors or advisory committee be involved?
- What experience does your organization have that demonstrates the capacity for successfully completing this project?
- What is the timeline for your project?
- How will you promote your project?
- What other financial support do you expect for this project?

Diversity (5 points) – Excellent proposals will describe a project that will be accessible to and inclusive of audiences and add to the artistic and cultural diversity of offerings in Saint Paul.

Excellent (5 points), Good (4 points), Adequate (3 points), Questionable (2 points), Needs improvement (1 point)

- How will this project add to the diversity of cultural offerings in Saint Paul?
- Considering diversity in its broadest sense (e.g., geography, age, gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) describe in what ways your project will attract, and more fully embrace, diverse audiences.
- As you consider your project's goals and targeted audiences, describe how diversity is represented in your project (e.g., among your board of directors or advisory committee, project personnel, and/or artists).

Review Process

Cultural STAR Board

The nine-member [**Saint Paul Cultural STAR Board**](#) serves as the formal review body that recommends to the mayor grants from the cultural portion of sales-tax funds. The mayor then forwards a recommendation to the City Council for its approval. The Board consists of nine Mayoral-appointed, City Council-approved members.

Review Process

The selection process for proposals is highly competitive. The number and size of grants made is dependent on the quality of the proposals and the availability of funding. The review process is as follows:

- City Staff will review applications for eligibility. Ineligible applications will be removed from further consideration, and the applicant will be notified.
- The Board will invite each eligible applicant to an interview. Applicants will be notified by email of the time and location of the interview. While not mandatory, failing to appear for an interview may impact your score.
 - Cultural STAR interviews are public meetings, but no public testimony will be taken. Individuals wishing to comment on applications are encouraged to submit their comments in writing to City staff prior to the application deadline.
- The Board will review the proposals based on program guidelines, evaluation criteria described above, and fund availability and make funding recommendations to the Mayor and City Council.
- The mayor will present final recommendations to the City Council.
- The City Council will approve, deny, or amend the mayor's recommendations.
- The mayor will sign the Council Resolution.

The entire process usually takes about three months from the application deadline to the signing of the resolution by the mayor but may take longer.

Expectations of Grant Recipients

Project Development and Implementation

- Grant recipients must comply with state, federal, city, county, and civil rights laws and ensure nondiscrimination in programs and services receiving City funds.
- After the City Council approves the mayor's recommendations, staff will notify each Cultural STAR applicant if their project was awarded funding, and if so, for what amount. They will also notify awardees of an orientation meeting and other pertinent contracting information.
- Prior to the implementation of an applicant's project, the City of Saint Paul will enter into a contract. Contracts should be fully executed within six months of approval by the City Council. Failure to do so may result in cancellation of the award. The contract will contain, at a minimum, a scope of services to be performed by all parties, a budget section outlining all funding sources and uses, an implementation timeline, and any matching fund requirements outlined in a Statement of Work. The contract will be signed in accordance with City policy. Contract requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Carrying general liability insurance that insures the City of Saint Paul as an additional insured, requiring a \$1 million per occurrence and \$2 million general aggregate limits. It's important to make sure your insurance covers all dates within your project scope.
- Verification of Workers Compensation and Employers' Liability coverage, or a form indicating why the organization is exempt.
 - Adherence, where applicable, **to federal, state and local regulations and policies pertaining to the use of funds, such as prevailing wage standards, affirmative action, and targeted vendor programs.** The amount of the award and the nature of the project (capital, special project, or organizational development) determine which regulations apply. Staff will hold a compliance meeting prior to implementation of the contract to identify applicable regulations.

Cultural STAR applicants are strongly cautioned to not make any commitments until compliance requirements and funding regulations are fully understood.

- Implementation must progress as projected in the application. Lack of progress is grounds for withdrawing funding.
- Projects should be completed or self-sustaining within the period specified in the agreement. Requests for contract extensions are discouraged.
- Upon execution of a grant agreement that outlines the finalized project budget and scope of work, 80% of the grant funds will be disbursed.
- Final payment of the remaining 20% will be made only after the project is completed and a final project report that includes the following documentation is received and approved:
 - Final narrative report
 - Documentation of expenses charged to Cultural STAR grant
 - Documentation of any matching funds, as applicable
 - Documentation of project having taken place, including proof of proper recognition given to Cultural STAR program-support
- At the time of completion of all activities contained in the agreement or upon expiration of the agreement, project fund balances will be returned to the Cultural STAR Fund.

- A final project report is required to determine the extent to which the project was successful. Project success will be measured against expected project outcomes and the overall objectives of the STAR Program. Organizations will not be eligible for future Cultural STAR funding until all required documentation, including this final project report, are submitted for the most recently closed projects.

Application Process

Applications must be submitted through the online application website Zoomgrants by 4:00 p.m. on the deadline date. Applications not received by this time will not be accepted.

- Be sure to read all sections of the Zoomgrants application, including instructions, requirements, etc.
- Your application must include all required materials. All questions must be answered. Incomplete or inaccurate materials may result in your application being ineligible.

Information Sessions will be held at the beginning of each application round to provide program information to prospective applicants. Check the website for dates and locations: www.stpaul.gov/culturalSTAR

City staff can provide technical assistance to applicants to help ensure a complete and viable application, if requested. Once applications are submitted, no changes or amendments to applications will be accepted.

Fiscal Sponsorship Requirements

The Cultural STAR Program accepts applications from informal and / or unincorporated arts-focused groups using a fiscal sponsor. A fiscal sponsor is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization that receives Cultural STAR grant monies and manages the financial aspects of the project on behalf of a group that does not have tax-exempt status. Groups or artists in the district that are incorporated as for-profit entities (LLC, etc) MUST apply directly to the Cultural STAR program, without a fiscal sponsor.

Fiscal Sponsorship guidelines:

- 100% of the applicant's project must take place in the Cultural District.

- The fiscal sponsor must be a 501c3 nonprofit arts organization located in Saint Paul.
- The applicant must have a board of directors or advisory committee (not the board of the fiscal sponsor) that provides input on, and oversight of, the project.
- The applicant must provide a letter of agreement from the fiscal sponsor regarding the application to the STAR program. The letter must include the amount or percentage of the fiscal sponsorship fee (if any).
- The applicant should include the fiscal sponsorship fee (if any) as part of their project budget.

A 501c3 may serve as fiscal sponsor for multiple projects in any STAR round; the board will consider the project, organization or group and its advisory board with the same criteria as all other STAR applicants.

Glossary

Closed project – A STAR-funded project that has taken place, and where all reports and documentation have been submitted and approved, and all eligible grant funds have been paid out to the grantee

Cultural District – A City of Saint Paul-defined geographic area of downtown Saint Paul within which the Cultural STAR program is targeted by requiring that 80% of the funds be granted in this area

Fiscal sponsor – A nonprofit, tax-exempt organization that receives Cultural STAR grant monies and manages the financial aspects of the project on behalf of a group that does not have tax-exempt status

Project Start Date – The date of the project event or performance, and the date on or after which incurred expenses that are charged to the Cultural STAR grant are allowed

Project End Date – The date by which the project has been completed and no additional expenses that are charged to the Cultural STAR grant are incurred

Statement of Work – A form filled out by the grantee and reviewed and approved by City staff that is attached to the grant agreement and that outlines the approved project's scope of work, timeline, location and budget