



THINK – EXPLORE – SHARE: Creative Community Response Grants

THINK – EXPLORE – SHARE offers grants to enable arts organizations with operating expenses under \$800,000 - or collaborative groups of arts organizations - to identify and test what they can do in the here and now to adapt to challenges posed by COVID-19, or challenges that hampered them before the pandemic (e.g., lack of equity and accessibility for artists of color and artists with disabilities, declining ticket sales). Challenges identified for support can be managerial, production, technological, fiscal planning, and artistic. (If you are seeking a grant for an artistic project, the project should be in service of the organization as a whole, versus in support of a specific piece of work, and have a social engagement goal or address a community issue or need). The goal is to cultivate unconventional thinking to address the immediate challenges of COVID-19 and devise more effective ways for arts organizations to meet their desired outcomes.

Think grants (up to \$15,000) give arts organizations the time and space to think through a question, analyze challenges and opportunities, and develop plans or small tests of change. Competitive proposals will demonstrate how and why the organization selected the challenge or the questions to be examined and how they will structure their exploration. Priority will be given to groups of organizations working together to share and explore answers.

Explore grants (up to \$25,000) provide arts organizations who have fully developed ideas with the resources to test and implement the concept. These grants hope to foster the creativity and risk-taking that is essential to creating new and better ways of operating in the current COVID-19 world and addressing some of the aspects of arts organizations that were not working well before the pandemic. Priority will be given to projects that have maximum potential benefit for the organization and the field.

Share is a component of both Think and Explore grants. Grant recipients are asked to share their project ideas, progress, and lessons learned via a minimum of three blog posts on the Arts Work Fund's AWFFConnect listserv. We are looking for genuine sharing of lessons learned, and we expect that some projects and strategies will prove failures. Blog posts will replace a final report for the grant and will be scheduled around specific dates with each grantee organization.

Examples of questions a grant applicant might ask:

- What would we need to do to shift our organization to one that better supports our artistic creation?
- How might we incorporate anti-racist practices, pay our artists fairly, and produce our best work?
- How might we build an arts organization that is resource stable, without relying on recruiting a board of wealthy, connected individuals?
- How do we stay connected with audiences and communities in the context of current COVID-19 restrictions?
- What strategies ensure continued revenue without programming?
- How might we shift our work to better support our community?

- What will change if we use our talents and artistry to become a more just organization and to create a more just world?
- What would change if we broke the mold of a multi-show theater or exhibition season, and as a result, increased impact and improved our business model?
- What would change if we had a financial plan that accounted for opening, closing, reopening, and trying to ascertain how and when our audience or students will be willing to return?
- How might we become a more vibrant and sustainable organization with a strategic partnership or merger?

Grant Process

1. At least 65% of grant dollars will be allocated to arts organizations by, for, and about people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQ people, and women.
2. A review panel of artists, arts leaders, and AWF funders will make funding recommendations. People associated with organizations that are eligible for this grant opportunity are ineligible to serve on the review panel.
3. In the past, AWF only offered funding to underwrite the cost of organizational consultants. This is no longer the case. The review panel will look for budgets that reflect the work being proposed.
4. Applicants do not need to present a new idea. Funds can support an existing effort or be used as part of a larger effort that has funding from several sources. In these instances, the review panel will consider how an AWF grant helps propel the project forward.
5. Organizations decide whether to apply for a THINK or EXPLORE grant. An organization can apply for an EXPLORE grant without having received a THINK grant.
6. Collaborative applications are encouraged. Collaborative proposals can include organizations that fall outside AWF's budget guidelines but must show how they advance the work of eligible organizations. For collaborative projects, prepare a budget that provides for equitable resource distribution for all partners.
7. Cross-sector proposals (working with a non-arts organization) are eligible for funding. For cross-sector proposals, describe the benefit to the arts organization and prepare a budget that ensures the arts organization benefits from most of the funding provided.

Grant Eligibility

1. The applicant organization must have an arts-based mission.
2. A current IRS 501(c) (3) public charity designation determination letter.
3. Annual operating expenses under \$800,000, as reflected in the most recently filed I.R.S. Form 990 or audit.
4. Located in and serving Chicago and Cook County.
5. If a former Arts Work Fund grant recipient, you must have submitted a final report for previous grant activities.

Criteria for THINK grants:

- Clear identification of the question to be addressed.
- A case for why the question is important to the organization right now.

- A clear and appropriate plan for exploring potential answers to the question and quickly test possible solutions.
- Appropriateness of the proposed budget.
- A system for assessing the effectiveness of the project, with effectiveness defined by the organization.
- The potential impact on the organization(s).

Criteria for EXPLORE grants:

- Clear identification of challenges to be address.
- A clear and appropriate plan that informs implementation.
- Appropriateness of the proposed budget.
- The capacity of the organization to carry out the project.
- Methods for tracking process and progress.
- A system for assessing the potential impact on the organization(s).
- Potential to impact the organizations(s).
- Potential to inform the field.

Ineligible Costs: Debt retirement; Endowments, Capital campaigns; Lobbying activities; Purchase of computers, software, equipment, furnishings; Website and database upgrades; Annual audits; Conference/workshop fees; Printing/general material costs; Reimbursement for work completed before a grant award.

How to Apply:

To apply for a THINK grant, click [here](#).

To apply for an EXPLORE grant, click [here](#).

Application Deadlines

Proposal Deadline	Decision
September 30, 2020	November 2020
December 30, 2020	February 2020
March 30, 2020	May 2020