

**State of Illinois**

JB Pritzker, Governor

**Illinois Arts Council**

Nora Daley, Board Chair

Joshua Davis-Ruperto, Executive Director

# Creative Accelerator Fund

Fiscal Year 2026

Opens: February 26, 2025

Deadline: April 9, 2025

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### Accessible Guidelines

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To obtain accessibility information regarding applications and written materials contact the Illinois Arts Council’s ADA/504 Access Coordinator. Please be aware staff is working remotely and it is recommended to reach out to them via email. If you prefer more direct communications send an email that contains your preferred contact telephone number and general timeline of when you are available.

#### **IAC 504/ADA Coordinator**

Teresa Davis

Email: [Teresa.N.Davis@illinois.gov](mailto:Teresa.N.Davis@illinois.gov)

Tel. 312-814-6753

TTY 888-261-7957

#### **IAC 504/ADA Specialist**

Danielle Heal

Email: [Danielle.Heal@illinois.gov](mailto:Danielle.Heal@illinois.gov)

Tel. 312-793-1060

TTY 888-261-7957

# Illinois Arts Council Staff Contacts

For specific information on this grant, contact the appropriate program staff. Please be aware staff are working a hybrid model and it is recommended to reach out to them via email. If you prefer more direct communications send an email that contains your preferred contact telephone number and general timeline of when you are available. To determine your Program Director please visit IAC's Program Director finder tool: <https://arts.illinois.gov/about-iac/staff/grant-staff-locator.html>

## Jackie Banks-Mahlum

Director of Programs

Phone: +1 (312) 814-4990

Email: [Jackie.Banks-Mahlum@illinois.gov](mailto:Jackie.Banks-Mahlum@illinois.gov)

## Susan Dickson

Program Director

Eastern Region / Chicago Metro 3

Phone: +1 (312) 814-6740

Email: [Susan.Dickson@illinois.gov](mailto:Susan.Dickson@illinois.gov)

## John Gawlik

Program Director

Southern Region / Chicago Metro 2

Phone: +1 (312) 793-1043

Email: [John.Gawlik@illinois.gov](mailto:John.Gawlik@illinois.gov)

## Jerome Grand

Program Director

Western Region / Chicago Metro 4

Phone: +1 (312) 814-6766

Email: [Jerome.Grand@illinois.gov](mailto:Jerome.Grand@illinois.gov)

## Angelique Grandone

Program Director

Central Region / Chicago Metro 5

Phone: +1 (312) 814-4991

Email: [Angelique.Grandone@illinois.gov](mailto:Angelique.Grandone@illinois.gov)

## Danielle Heal

Program Director

Northern Region / Chicago Metro 1

Phone: +1 (312) 793-1060

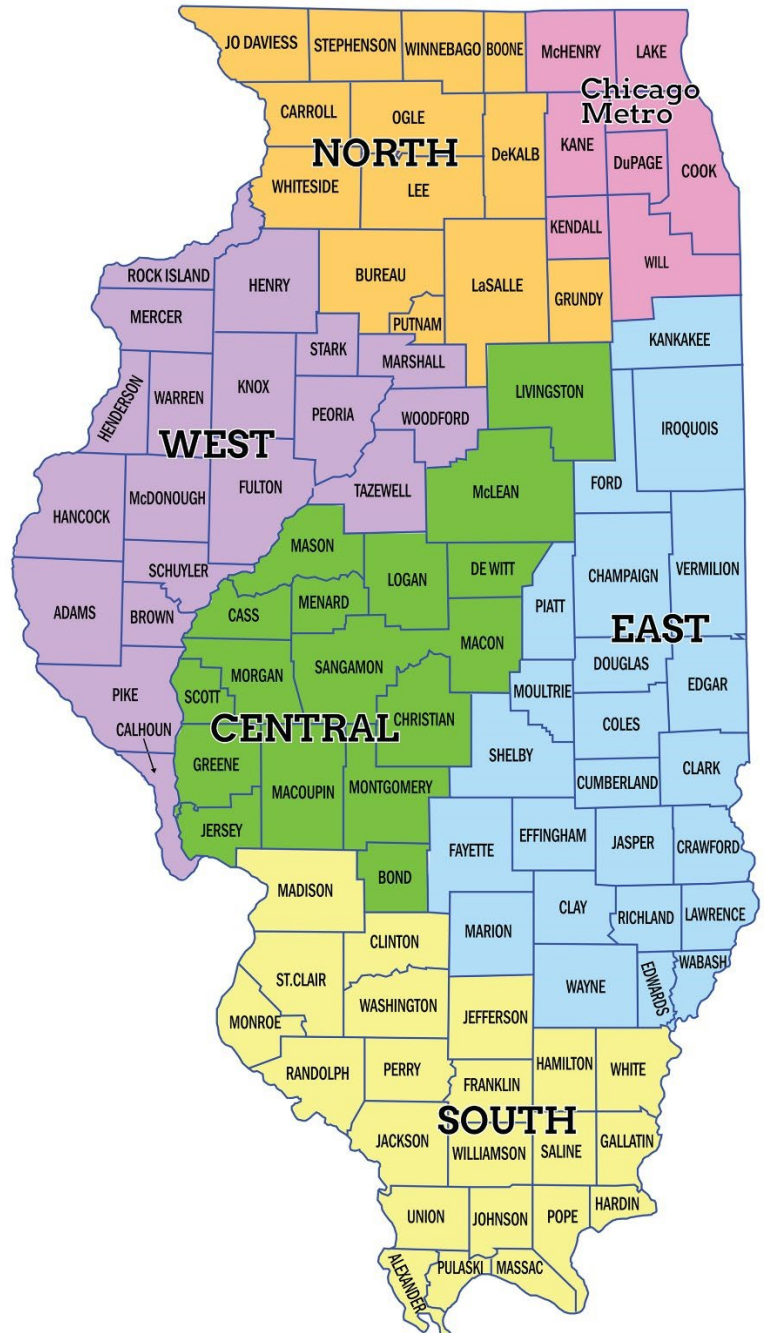
Email: [Danielle.Heal@illinois.gov](mailto:Danielle.Heal@illinois.gov)

## Jasmine Roberson

Program Representative / Technical Assistance

Phone: +1 (312) 814-2178

Email: [Jasmine.Roberson@illinois.gov](mailto:Jasmine.Roberson@illinois.gov)



# Creative Accelerator Fund Summary

The Illinois Arts Council's (IAC) Creative Accelerator Fund (CAF) provides crucial support to artists with a goal of strengthening the creative workforce that composes a significant portion of Illinois' economic activity.

CAF selection is determined by a regional randomized selection process in partnership with Illinois State Lottery. FY25 CAF recipients are not eligible to apply for FY26 CAF.

## Who's Eligible

- Individual artists with an active and sustained practice. (see full definition page 4)
- At the time of application artists must:
  - Be age 21 or older.
  - Be established as an Illinois resident prior to April 9, 2024.
  - Be able to include a work sample created by you during 2023-2025.
  - Be able to include a work sample created by you during 2022 or prior.
  - Not be currently enrolled in a degree-obtaining program, including a college or university in any undergraduate or graduate program. Ph.D. candidates need to have completed their course work by the application deadline to be eligible.

## Award Amount

- \$10,000 award
- This award is taxable income

## Application Information

- The application requests information about your artistic practice and the benefit a CAF award would have on that practice. The narrative may be submitted as a written document or short video or audio recording.
- Applicant must agree to specific assurances regarding residency, age, willingness to engage with IAC communications, etc.

## Key Dates:

### Application Deadline:

- Wednesday, April 9, 2025, at 11:59pm

### Grant Period:

- September 1, 2025, to August 31, 2026

# Creative Accelerator Fund Details

For the purpose of CAF, IAC defines “Individual Artist with an active and sustained practice” as:

- An individual working in arts, crafts, design, dance, digital media, film/video, literature, music, performance, photography, theater, visual arts, folk and traditional arts, or community-based arts.

By “active and sustained,” we mean that you are currently committing time to practicing your art form that you have practiced since at least 2022. You do not necessarily need to derive significant income from your work in the arts (though it’s also fine if you do). It is also acceptable if your art form has changed over those years. The first submitted work sample needs to have been completed in 2023, 2024, or 2025. The second submitted work sample needs to have been completed in 2022 or prior.

There are numerous fields that benefit from creativity that we are not able to support with CAF. We value the creative energy you bring to this work. However, this program’s funding was approved by Illinois Arts Council’s governor-appointed Council to support individuals working in artistic disciplines. So, while we recognize your creativity in your respective field, we cannot provide CAF awards to this work.

Below are examples of both eligible, and ineligible, art practices. If you have any questions about whether your work is eligible for CAF please [contact us](#).

Examples of *eligible* art practices include, but are not limited to:

- |                                 |                                  |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| actors                          | musicians                        |
| performance artists             | composers                        |
| theater designers and directors | conductors                       |
| puppeteers                      | creative writers of all genres   |
| choreographers                  | visual artists                   |
| dancers                         | muralists/public artists         |
| filmmakers/videographers        | community-based artists          |
| media artists                   | community-based teaching artists |

Examples of *ineligible* art practices include, but are not limited to:

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| therapeutic arts of any kind | cosmetology                                     |
| software development         | fitness   |
| computer engineering         | martial arts                                    |
| curators                     | producers (festival, venue, events, film, etc.) |
| culinary                     |   |

For the purpose of CAF IAC defines “Work Sample created by you” as:

Creative work should be:

1. Entirely created by you, or
2. Created with a substantial contribution by you.

If the latter, please explain in the Work Sample Description what your part in the work’s creation is. For example, if you were the cinematographer for a film scene that was written/directed/performed by others, you’ll need to specify your contribution was the cinematography.

Collaborative applications will not be considered for CAF. It is expected that if both artists are eligible for CAF they would submit their own separate applications.

If artificial intelligence (A.I.) was used as a tool in the creation of your work, that needs to be explained in the Work Sample Description. You may not submit any work entirely generated by an A.I. program as your own.

**Applicants must:**

- Apply utilizing a Salesforce grant portal account registered to the applicant.
- Submit all required application materials prior to the deadline.

**Making Arts Accessible to All**

Accessibility in the arts provides inclusive participation of people with disabilities in all cultural and creative spaces. Recipients of IAC funds are expected to make reasonable efforts for any public art activities and programs to be as accessible as possible. For further information and resources on how to do this please see the [Accessibility Resources](#) page on the IAC website.

**Applicant Restrictions**

- Applicants may only submit one application per fiscal year.
- IAC Board and staff members are prohibited from applying.
- FY25 CAF recipients are not eligible in FY26.

**Deadline**

The FY26 CAF deadline is Wednesday, April 9, 2025. The application must be successfully submitted by 11:59 PM CST to the [IAC's Salesforce grant portal](#).

Please note that all draft applications will be removed from the IAC system 30 days after the deadline.

**Unallowable Expenses**

CAF is holistic support to individual artists; we trust you know the best way to invest and sustain your artistic practice.

However, as a state agency there are some expenditures that are not allowable with state funds including:

- subsidizing an individual's academic study or projects associated with that academic study
- political activities such as contributions, lobbying, or fundraisers

# Creative Accelerator Fund Review Criteria

The review of CAF applications is based on successful evidence of the answers to the following application requirements:

- 1. Does the application demonstrate the individual artist has an active and sustained practice?**
  - Artist has provided a work sample from 2023-2025.
  - Artist has provided a work sample from 2022 or prior.
  - Artist has described their art practice and how CAF may benefit them as an artist.
  
- 2. Is the application complete?**
  
- 3. Is the artist eligible to receive funds from the State of Illinois?**
  - Applicant can show proof they have been an Illinois resident prior to April 9, 2024.
  - Applicant has submitted a valid State ID or Driver's License.
  - Applicant is compliant with all IAC requirements.
  - Applicant is not on the Illinois Stop Payment List. Individuals may be placed on the Illinois Stop Payment List for not being in compliance with all state agencies. Examples include owing money to another state agency or not being up to date with reporting on state grants.

# CAF Process, Notification, and Compliance

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## Review Process

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- When the application is created, the Salesforce grant portal will issue an application number that will be used in future communication regarding that application.
  - Applications which have been ruled ineligible or incomplete will not be reviewed.
  - Applications are reviewed based on the review criteria (see page 6).
  - Final award determination will be determined via randomized selection. Randomized selections will be grouped according to IAC region and are done in partnership with the Illinois State Lottery.
  - The final recommendations are presented to the IAC board for their consideration and approval.
  - A record of the review process is maintained for all reviewed applications.
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## Notification

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All applicants will be notified of funding decisions once the IAC has reviewed and approved funding recommendations. Applicants approved for funding will:

- Receive, via email, instructions regarding requirements to accept and claim the award (see Award Acceptance section below).
- Disbursement needs may be requested at this time. Disbursements must take place within the grant period as detailed within the grant agreement. Artists with a disability are encouraged to look at services provided by [IL ABLE](#) to assist with managing award funds.
- Once all documents have been returned via the IAC Salesforce grant portal and all requirements met, including the completion, and filing of all previous fiscal year Final Reports, the award will be processed, and the payment voucher will be sent to the Illinois State Comptroller for payment.
- **Once the payment voucher has been received by the Illinois State Comptroller payments can take two to six months.**

Recipients can check the status of the grant payment through the Illinois State [Comptroller's vendor website](#), or sign-up to be notified about the payment via email, text, or both. Recipients can also sign up for direct deposit from the Illinois Comptroller if they have received a payment from the Illinois State Comptroller's Office within the previous 24 months. Otherwise, the check will be mailed to the address on file. Please contact the Illinois State Comptroller's Office at (217) 557-0930 if you would like to set up direct deposit.

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## Compliance

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### Award Acceptance

For awards to be processed all acceptance documents must be submitted to the IAC Grants Office. Award acceptance is a multi-step process that requires uploads to the Salesforce grant portal and email exchanges. It is the responsibility of the applicant to read all emails carefully and follow the instructions.

The documents to be submitted via the IAC Salesforce grant portal include:

- Completed and signed W9 form.
- Artist biography, of 300 words or less, that notes your preferred name for public communications.
- Headshot or work photo that may be used in public communications. Photo should be in jpeg format with photo credit/meta tag (image no larger than 750px x 750px, 20MB)
- Award acceptance document signed and dated by the Applicant.



Applicants approved for funding will be requested to upload a W9, biography, and headshot to [IAC's Salesforce grant portal](#). Following the upload of these documents the Applicant will be sent a link to sign the award acceptance document agreement via Formstack.

### **Report**

All FY26 CAF recipients will be required to complete and submit a report no later than September 30, 2026, as stated on the grant agreement.

The final report for CAF award will ask:

- How did the CAF award benefit you as an artist
- Optional quote on the impact of the award and/or photo with photo credit

# Grant Portal Overview & Applicant Information

IAC utilizes an [online grant portal](#), powered by Salesforce, to accept applications. The IAC CAF online application consists of form field components and the uploading of required documents. Each component must be completed and submitted in the required format by the deadline.

For instructions go to the [Using Salesforce](#) section of the IAC website. There is also a [user manual](#) for the online grant portal on our website to help guide the application process. Please review this carefully and use as a reference.

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## Accessing Your Account

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The online grant system can be accessed at <https://arts-illinois.my.site.com/>

- If you already have a user account, use your existing account information to login.
- If you do not have a user account, create a new account by clicking “Not a member” and complete the form with name, email and password.

Applicants should use Chrome as the online browser when accessing Salesforce, as the system will not operate properly in other browsers.

If you have difficulties accessing your account (e.g. password reset not working or cannot create an account), email Program Representative, Jasmine Roberson at [Jasmine.Roberson@Illinois.gov](mailto:Jasmine.Roberson@Illinois.gov) for assistance.

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## Applicant Information

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Once logged in all applicants should first click on the Applicant Information tab from the top header in Salesforce.

- New applicants should add an individual applicant account, complete and save all required form fields.
- Returning applicants should make sure all information is saved and is up to date on their individual applicant account.

Information requested for an individual applicant account includes:

- Individual Name
- General Contact Information, including a drop-down selection of zip-code and county.
- Primary Discipline Selection – select one
- Any additional disciplines reflected in artistic practice – select as many as applicable
- Checkboxes if individual identifies as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) or has a disability.

If you have an account for organization you oversee, or founded, you will still need an individual account to apply for CAF. Applications from organizations will be made ineligible.

Please note the information in the applicant information tab may be updated at any time. Please keep the information current to ensure communications from IAC reach you.

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## Grant Program Selection and Completion

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After the Applicant Information is completed, applicants should click on the Grant Programs tab to access the application.

- Select the “Creative Accelerator – 2026” grant program and click apply
  - The system will prompt you to select an applicant. For CAF this must be an individual.
- Complete the form fields in the application (see page 11) and click save
- Upload or link to all required attachments (see page 11)
- Certify and submit the application to IAC Salesforce grant portal.
  - Please note this is a two-step process. Once the application is complete click the Submit Button in the lower left-hand corner. A pop-up will require certification of eligibility and application content.
  - After certification there is a submit button which must be clicked to complete the application in the IAC Salesforce grant portal. The application will not be successfully submitted until the second submit button is clicked.

### General Online Application Information

- Please note that after any application is started it will appear on the home screen in the Salesforce grant portal.
- Once the application is started the applicant can revisit the application at any time before the deadline to continue working on the application.
- Within the grant application the requirements/sections will be listed along the left-side of the screen.
- There is no need to click on the financials tab. That is not required for the CAF application, it is part of the architecture of Salesforce and is used for other grants. If you do click on it, simply click the Return button at the top left of the screen.

# Application Overview

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## Application Components

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### 1. Form Fields

Below are the form fields to complete after clicking Apply for the Creative Accelerator – 2026 grant program:

Click checkboxes to provide assurance that:

- The Applicant Information tab has been updated
- You are an active artist during 2023-2025
- You are a sustained artist with activity from 2022 or prior
- You have been established as an Illinois resident prior to April 9, 2024.
- You are legally able to receive taxable income in the U.S. (e.g., U.S. citizen, permanent resident, and/or any other person who can provide a W9 and SSN or ITIN).
- You are 21 years of age or older.
- You are not currently enrolled in a degree-obtaining program.
- You acknowledge that recipients are determined by randomized selection in partnership with the Illinois State Lottery.
- IAC may use images of your work samples in our communications and outreach.
- You consent to a potential interview with IAC’s communications team. The IAC regularly connects with its grantees to help promote the work they do and to celebrate arts and culture in Illinois. IAC outlets include the Muse newsletter, website, and social media.

If any of the checkboxes listed above are left blank the application will be made ineligible and not considered for funding.

Also complete the following form fields:

- Number of years as a practicing artist outside of a degree obtaining program
- Title of Work Sample 1
- Year of completion for Work Sample 1 (must be between the years of 2023-2025)
- Title of Work Sample 2
- Year of completion for Work Sample 2 (must be 2022 or prior)

### 2. Supporting Documents

The supporting documents to be provided are:

1. Application Narrative
2. Work Sample 1: Completed 2023-2025
3. Work Sample 2: Completed 2022, or prior
4. Valid Illinois Driver’s License or State ID
5. One-year Residency Verification

Please refer to the “Supporting Documents” section for full descriptions.

# Supporting Documents

Supporting Documents utilizing video or audio files submitted via a link (ex. YouTube, Vimeo, SoundCloud, etc.):

- Have no size restriction
- Must be public and without password protection. Work sample must remain without password protection until applicant receives CAF selection communication.
- May not link to sites that require an account (e.g., Instagram)

Supporting Documents submitted via upload:

- May be no larger than 25 MB in size.
- Salesforce will accept the formats listed below:
  - Audio acceptable formats are: mp3, .wav, .ogg.
  - Video acceptable formats are: .vi, .mov, .mpeg, .mpg, .swf
  - Document Files acceptable format is: .pdf

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## 1. Application Narrative

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The narrative is limited to one page or a two-minute video or audio recording answering the following:

### Tell us about your art practice

- What art form(s) do you practice
- Describe the community area(s) of Illinois where you practice your art
- How the award would benefit your art practice

If narrative is submitted as a recording, the recording must be made for this application specifically answering the bullets listed above. Applicants should not be concerned with the production quality of the recording.

If uploading a file, it should be named: Applicant Name\_Narrative

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## 2. Work Sample 1: Created 2023-2025

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The first work sample must be from a work created by you in 2023, 2024, or 2025. The work sample submitted may not be from work created for a degree-obtaining program.

Each work sample has a corresponding field to describe it in a maximum of 1,000-characters. In the Work Sample Description field, applicants may provide any additional details pertaining to the work they think are pertinent.

If your work sample does not list the date of completion in the description the application will be ineligible.

If uploading a file, it should be named: Applicant Name\_Work Sample 1

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### **3. Work Sample 2: Created 2022, or prior**

The second work sample must be from a work created by you in 2022 or prior. The work sample submitted may not be from work created for a degree-obtaining program.

Each work sample has a corresponding field to describe it in a maximum of 1,000-characters. In the Work Sample Description field, applicants may provide any additional details pertaining to the work they think are pertinent.

If your work sample does not list the date of completion in the description the application will be ineligible.

If uploading a file, it should be named: Applicant Name\_Work Sample 2

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### **4. Valid Illinois Driver's License or State ID**

CAF is funded by state taxes and therefore requires a minimum of one year of residency in the State of Illinois.

Your residency verification requires your valid Illinois Driver's License or Illinois State ID. A valid Illinois Driver's License or Illinois State ID will need to expire on, or after, April 10, 2025. If it expired on, or before April 9, 2025, it is not valid.

If the issue date is prior to April 9, 2024, this is the only residency document required to upload.

If the issue date is after to April 9, 2024, you must also submit One-Year Residency Verification detailed below.

IAC maintains a Personal Identity Protection Policy which can be found on our website:

<https://arts.illinois.gov/personal-identity-information-protection-policy.html>

Submit a picture of the front of your Illinois Driver's License or Illinois State ID as a PDF file named: Applicant Name\_Residency

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### **5. One-Year Residency Verification**

If the issue date of your Illinois Driver's License or Illinois State ID is after April 9, 2024, you must also submit one of the following additional pieces of residency verification to show you have lived in Illinois for more than one year:

- Your previous Driver's License or State ID
- A utility bill in your name from prior to April 9, 2024
- A W2 or 1099 from 2023

If your application does not meet the residency verification it will be ineligible.

Submit this document as a PDF file named: Applicant Name\_Additional Residency

# Creative Accelerator Checklist

Applicants may use the checklist below as a tool to assist in preparing their CAF application. Applicants should always read the guidelines for full details on the application requirements.

Should I apply?

- I have been practicing a CAF-eligible artform since at least 2022
- I am currently practicing a CAF-eligible artform
- I can provide current proof of Illinois residency since at least April 9, 2024, using IAC's required documentation
- I am 21 or older
- I am not in a degree-obtaining program

If all the above are checked, move on to preparing the application materials.

To complete the application in Salesforce I will need:

- A user account to login to the Salesforce grant platform
- A current Individual Applicant account in Salesforce to use when applying for CAF.
- A Narrative document or video answering the questions on page 12 in the guidelines
- Work sample 1: created in 2023, 2024, or 2025
- Year work sample 1 was created: \_\_\_\_\_
- Title for work sample 1: \_\_\_\_\_
- Work sample 2: created in 2022 or earlier
- Year work sample 2 was created: \_\_\_\_\_
- Title for work sample 2: \_\_\_\_\_
- Illinois Driver's License or State ID
  - The Illinois identification muse expire on, or after, April 10, 2025.
- If the Illinois Driver's License or State ID was issued after April 9, 2024, I also need one of the following:
  - My previous Driver's License or State ID
  - A utility bill in my name from prior to April 9, 2024
  - A W2 or 1099 from 2023
- To submit the complete application in Salesforce by the deadline: April 9, 2025 at 11:59pm

NOTE: This page is not part of the application. It is intended as an optional tool to prepare for the application.

**For general information contact:**

Illinois Arts Council

115 S. LaSalle St., Suite 2202

Chicago, IL 60603

312-814-6750

Toll free in Illinois 800-237-6994

TTY 888-261-7957

Email: [iac.info@illinois.gov](mailto:iac.info@illinois.gov)

Web site: [www.arts.illinois.gov](http://www.arts.illinois.gov)



Visit the [Illinois Arts Council Board Members](#) page for a complete list of current board members.



The IAC acknowledges continuous support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

It is illegal for the Illinois Arts Council or anyone receiving assistance from the Illinois Arts Council to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, non- binary and gender non-conforming employees, sexual harassment, national origin, ancestry, citizenship status, physical or mental disability, political affiliation, beliefs, age, order of protection status, any other non-merit status, marital status, pregnancy, arrest record, military status, veterans status or unfavorable discharge from military service. Any individual who has been subject to such discrimination may file a complaint with the Illinois Department of Human Rights at +1 (312) 814-6200 or TTY +1 (312) 263-1570.