

Cultural Festivals Funding Program

2026-2027 Program Guidelines



Program Overview

The Cultural Festivals Funding Program (CFFP) provides financial support to recurring cultural festivals whose programming supports community-building, focuses on engaging with the people of Toronto, serves Toronto residents across the city, and promotes opportunities for emerging artists, Indigenous artists, and artists from other groups. A significant programming component must occur in the public realm and be free to the public or offered at a nominal fee (less than \$5.00 per person). Recognizing the importance of ensuring access to culture across Toronto, the City particularly encourages applications from organizations running festivals, small or large, that take place outside of the downtown core to apply.

The decision to fund all or part of an applicant's request will depend on the festival's alignment with City of Toronto's current strategic priorities, assessment criteria and overall demand for funds in the program.

Definitions

For this program, a **cultural festival** is defined as a concentrated collection of arts and cultural activities with a common theme, presented over a minimum of a one-day period and no longer than one month. A festival may be devoted to one or more artistic discipline and be produced annually or once every two years. The cultural festival is primarily free to the public or offered at a nominal fee (less than \$5.00 per person), takes place in the public realm, has general appeal and a public profile.

The **public realm** is defined as the publicly owned places and spaces that belong to and are accessible by everyone. These can include municipal streets, lanes, squares, plazas, sidewalks, trails, parks, open spaces, waterfronts, conservation areas, and indoor public locations such as community centres.

The **Downtown Core** is defined by Toronto City Planning as the area between Bathurst Street, the Rail Corridor and Rosedale Valley Road, the Don Valley Parkway and the Waterfront.

Equity deserving groups include women, racialized groups, people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, undocumented individuals, 2SLGBTQ+ people, people of low income and other groups the City identifies as historically underrepresented.

Indigenous-led organizations are broadly defined as organizations with a mandate to serve Indigenous communities, operate under Indigenous governance models, have executive and senior management who identify as Indigenous, are primarily staffed by Indigenous community members and/or follow an Indigenous service model.

Cultural festival programming includes performing arts, visual arts, literary arts, interdisciplinary arts, craft, design, and expressions of cultural identity.

Community partner is defined as a group or organization that has positive and meaningful ties to the community in which the festival serves. Affiliation with these partners enriches the festival's cultural mission and provides opportunities for the community to participate in the festival. A community partner can be for- or not-for-profit, a local business, a community, programming and/or cultural organization.

Accessibility is defined as the practice of making information, activities, and/or environments sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible. An accessibility policy helps organizations set goals to make themselves more accessible by identifying barriers that prevent people with disabilities from accessing the organization's goods, services, or facilities and to determine how those barriers can be prevented or removed.

Emergency planning refers to the organization's capacity to plan and respond to emergency situations that may occur during their event. Components to the plan include: public safety, identifying hazards, mitigating and managing risks, security personnel, roles and responsibility, training, contingency plans, inclusion of the City's emergency services into the plan, communications plan, etc.

Financial controls refer to how the organization manages its finances. This can be explained through policies and procedures in the pre-planning stage and the approach to spending and cash-handling (as applicable) during the festival.

Program Structure

There are three streams: Project Funding, Annual Operating, and Multi-Year Operating.

Project

Minimum Requirements

- Applicant has been an incorporated not-for-profit organization for two years or more. Unincorporated collectives must apply in partnership with a not-for-profit organization.
- Business Improvement Areas (BIA) may apply to this category.
- Applicant can demonstrate a history of successful festival programming and operation.

Eligible for

- Project funding
- Maximum grant: Up to 50% of eligible festival expenses to a maximum of \$25,000 annually
- Type: Grant

Annual Operating

Note: Applicants must consult with City of Toronto staff prior to applying for Annual Operating Funding. Applicants can request an appointment by emailing cftp@toronto.ca.

Minimum Requirements

- Applicant has been an incorporated not-for-profit organization for at least two years and has paid staff.
- Delivering the festival is a core part of the organization's mandate
- Applicant has a history of sustained festival programming and operation over at least two years.
- Audited financial statements demonstrating festival revenue of between \$100,000 and \$1 million.
- First-time applicants for Annual Operating funding must have received a minimum of two

project grants from the Cultural Festivals Funding Program in past years.

Eligible for

- Annual operating funding
- Maximum grant: Up to 35% of eligible festival expenses, to a maximum of \$150,000 annually
- Type: Contribution Agreement

Multi-Year Operating

Note: Applicants must consult with City of Toronto staff prior to apply for Multi-Year Operating Funding. Applicants can request an appointment by emailing cffp@toronto.ca.

Minimum Requirements

- Applicant has been an incorporated not-for-profit organization for at least five years and has paid staff.
- Delivering the festival is a core part of the organization's mandate
- Applicant has a history of sustained festival programming and operations for at least five years.
- Applicant has received funding from the City of Toronto before
- Audited financial statements demonstrating festival revenue of \$1 million or more.
- Applicants must have received Annual Operating funding from the Cultural Festivals Funding Program for at least the past two years.

Eligible for

- Multi-year operating funding (2 or 3-year cycle)
- Maximum grant: Up to 35% of eligible festival expenses, to a maximum of \$650,000 annually
- Type: Contribution agreement

Application Timeline

There is one application intake for all funding streams for 2025-26.

Projects, Annual and Multi-Year Operating

Applications close: February 13, 2026, 4:00 pm

Notification of funding: April 2026

Funds released: April – May 2026

Eligibility Criteria – Organizations & Activities

Eligible Organizations

To be eligible, applicants **must**:

- Have a head office and operate in the City of Toronto (except for Band Councils, Tribal Councils or other Indigenous governments).
- Be one of the following:

- An incorporated not-for-profit organization
- A local band council, a local tribal council or other local Indigenous government (First Nations, Inuit or Métis) or equivalent authority
- A Business Improvement Area (eligible for Project stream only)
- An incorporated not-for-profit community organization partnering with unincorporated individuals or collectives producing a cultural festival (eligible for Project stream only)
- Have successfully organized a prior edition of the festival that meets the eligibility requirements of CFFP
- Be in good standing with City of Toronto grants programs

Please note: Only one application for CFFP per organization, per intake cycle is accepted.

Ineligible Organizations

- Funded through any of the City of Toronto's annual operating grant programs
- Receive operating funding from the Toronto Arts Council (TAC)
 - Note: if your organization receives TAC project funding, please disclose the type and amount in your application. CFFP will not fund the same component of a project already supported by TAC.
- City of Toronto Agencies, Boards or Commissions
- Educational institutions (including school boards), sports organizations, and agencies of the provincial government (including hospitals)
- Public libraries
- Unions

Please note: Incomplete applications are not eligible.

Eligible Festivals/Activities

- Take place in the City of Toronto
- Are held annually for a minimum of one (1) day, to a maximum of 30 days (consecutive days or within a 30 day period)
- Take place between April 1, 2026, and March 31, 2027
- Offer programming that is primarily free, or at a nominal fee (less than \$5.00 per person)
- Are open to the general public without a requirement for membership in a club or group
- Take place in the public realm
- Cultural programming must be the focus of the festival
- Online programming is eligible, but it must be free and be offered in addition to in-person festival programming

Ineligible Festivals/Activities

- Take place outside the City of Toronto, except for festivals being delivered by urban off-reserve Indigenous-led organizations, that yield direct benefits for the urban Indigenous communities of Toronto
- Take place primarily indoors and in private venues. Indoor festivals will only be considered if the venue is fully accessible to the public at all times, such as in a community centre.

- Primarily ticketed with a value of more than \$5.00 per person
- Sporting and recreational events
- Food festivals
- Artist residencies
- Competitions, contests, award shows
- Trade shows, awards shows, business events, conventions and conferences
- Fundraising events
- Religious and political events, including celebrations of historical events of other countries
- Historical re-enactments
- One-time only festivals
- Exclusively online
- Primarily commercial or marketing-driven
- Any festival that would not comply with the City of Toronto's Anti-Harassment and Discrimination Legislation and Policies

Eligibility Criteria - Expenses

Eligible Expenses

Eligible Cash Expenses Include, but are not limited to:

- Artists fees (it is expected that artists will be paid and/or will have the opportunity to sell their work)
- Production and technical costs related to artistic programming
- Marketing costs
- Festival-related administrative and overhead costs such as rent, telephone and communication, computers, utilities, and insurance
- Permanent and contract staff salaries and fees – prorated to reflect their time working on planning the festival, and during the festival
- Volunteer program development, equipment, and training
- Development and execution of health & safety and accessibility plans
- Equipment and staffing related to operations and logistics

Note: all expenses must be incurred between April 1, 2026, and March 31, 2027

Ineligible Expenses

Ineligible expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Incurred outside of the eligibility period of April 1, 2026, and March 31, 2027
- Activities that do not contribute to the festival for which the application was submitted
- Volunteer hours or gifts
- Alcohol
- Capital costs/equipment purchase

Available Funding

Funding decisions will be determined by the number of applications received and the funds

within the Cultural Festivals Funding Program budget. **The City of Toronto cannot guarantee funding to all eligible applicants, nor can the City ensure that the total amount requested will be awarded to successful applicants. Annual Operating or Project Funding received in a previous year does not guarantee funding in subsequent years.** The decision to fund all or part of an applicant's request will depend on its alignment with City of Toronto strategic priorities, assessment criteria and overall demand for funds in the program.

Assessment Process

Applications will be reviewed and scored by an advisory committee comprised of cultural sector representatives. Eligible applications will be assessed against the General Assessment Criteria outlined below. Funding recommendations will be made by the advisory committee until all available funds have been allocated in a ranked manner. It is possible that festivals may be recommended for funding but may not receive funding due to lack of available funds. Please note that all decisions concerning eligibility and funding amounts are final and there is no appeal process.

General Assessment Criteria

Applications will be assessed against four program priorities:

- Cultural vitality
- Public impact and citizen engagement
- Organizational capacity, resiliency, and public health
- Financial sustainability

When submitting the application, please be as thorough and concise as possible on how the festival meets the following criteria.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Grant Applications

It is recommended that applicants wishing to use generative AI tools to assist in writing their application do so cautiously. The City understands that AI technologies can be an effective access tools that may support applicants to navigate the application process with greater ease through streamlining workflow. However, applicants are encouraged to also consider potential risks associated with these technologies which may include data protection and intellectual property breaches, bias, and the submission of identical answers between different applications. If using generative AI tools, please be sure to revise the content to ensure the application still reflects your organization's unique proposal and that the language used is adjusted to be tailored to the needs of your festival. Applicants must ensure that the information included in their grant applications is accurate, true and that content derived from outside sources are appropriately acknowledged.

Project Funding Criteria

Cultural Vitality (35%)

- The applicant has a clear, compelling, and meaningful cultural mission for the festival, as evidenced by the number of artists and the budget allocated to artist fees and expenses.
- The artists represent Toronto's diversity and the festival has inclusive policies to support

Indigenous artists and artists from equity deserving communities; the festival offers opportunities for emerging artists and/or artist development and exposure to new audiences.

- The cultural mission is evident throughout the festival programming and is reflected in the festival description, cultural mandate, programming, the community partnerships, and planning.
- Description of programming is clearly articulated.
- The number and contributions of artists are clearly articulated, and artists are compensated at or above industry standard as evidenced by the number of artists presented and the budget allocated to artist fees and expenses (industry standards can be obtained by reaching out to the organizations below).
- The applicant submits their policies around equity, diversity and inclusion for the organization and for the festival.
- Online programming, while not mandatory, enriches the festival programming.

Public Impact and Citizen Engagement (35%)

- The festival program enhances and citizen engagement to benefit all Torontonians. There are opportunities for participation by equity deserving groups, people of all ages, abilities, sexual orientation, gender identities, ethnicities, cultural background, religion, language, and socio-economic conditions.
- The impact to the community and inclusion of the community is clearly articulated
- The festival has an effective and publicly available accessibility plan.
- Festival programming is expected to attract a large attendance; a significant portion of activity is free or offered at a nominal entry fee (less than \$5.00 per person).
- The community in which it serves is engaged in meaningful and authentic ways.
- Community engagement is demonstrated by the support of local business and community partners. There is a mix of for- and not-for-profit community partner organizations.
- There is a viable and well-resourced volunteer program; the volunteers participate in and contribute to the planning and realization of the festival.
- There is a method to measure approximate attendance.

Organizational Capacity, Resiliency, and Health and Safety (15%)

- The applicant has the financial and human resource capacity to plan and execute the festival.
- The marketing plan is comprehensive and appropriately scaled and budgeted for the size of the festival.
- Comprehensive emergency plans
- Your board, management, and staff reflect the population of Toronto, and measures are in place to ensure diversity on the Board, staff, and volunteers.
- The ability of the festival organizer to successfully plan and execute the festival is clearly articulated.

Financial Sustainability (15%)

- Applicant's proposed budget is detailed, appropriate based on the festival's history (bearing in mind the impact of global challenges in the festival production industry), specific to the festival, and balances. Any excess or deficit are explained.
- Applicants must submit a budget of a previous festival for comparison.
- The organization has a revenue generation strategy and diverse revenue sources.
- Internal financial controls are in place.

- Funds are allocated towards health & safety and accessibility measures.
- The strategy behind the funding request is clearly explained and in line with the financial health and proposed budget.

Multi-Year and Annual Operating Funding Criteria

Cultural Vitality (35%)

- The applicant has a clear, compelling, and meaningful cultural mission for the festival demonstrating that arts and culture are core festival elements.
- The cultural mission is evident throughout the festival programming and is reflected in the festival description, cultural mandate, programming, the community partnerships, and planning.
- Description of programming is clearly articulated.
- The number and contributions of artists are clearly articulated, and artists are compensated at or above industry standards as evidenced by the number of artists presented and the budget allocated to artist fees and expenses
- The artists programmed represent the diversity of the community that the festival serves, and the festival has inclusive policies that support Indigenous artists and artists from equity deserving communities; the festival offers opportunities for emerging artists and/or artist development and exposure to new audiences.
- Cultural programming partners associated with the festival are well established, bring value added to the programming and include diverse and under-represented communities.
- The applicant can demonstrate how the festival's programming fosters creativity and cultural opportunities in the local community.
- The applicant submits their policies around equity, diversity and inclusion for the organization and for the festival.
- Online programming, while not mandatory, enriches the festival programming.

Public Impact and Citizen Engagement (30%)

- The festival program enhances citizen engagement to benefit all Torontonians. There are opportunities for participation by equity deserving groups, people of all ages, abilities, sexual orientation, gender identities, ethnicities, cultural background, religion, language, and socio-economic conditions.
- The impact to the community and inclusion of the community is clearly articulated.
- The festival has an effective and publicly available accessibility plan.
- Festival programming is expected to attract a large attendance; a significant portion of activity is free or offered at a nominal entry fee (less than \$5.00 per person).
- The community in which it serves is engaged in meaningful and authentic ways.
- Community engagement is demonstrated by the support of local business and community partners. There is a mix of for- and not-for-profit community partner organizations.
- There is a viable and well-resourced volunteer program; the volunteers participate in and contribute to the planning and realization of the festival.
- There is a method to measure approximate attendance.
- Tourism and economic impact is measured.

Organizational Capacity, Resiliency and Public Health (15%)

- The applicant has the financial and human resource capacity to plan and execute the

festival.

- The marketing plan is comprehensive and appropriately scaled and budgeted for the size of the festival.
- Comprehensive emergency plans.
- Your board, management, and staff reflect the population of Toronto, and measures are in place to ensure diversity on the Board, staff, and volunteers.
- The ability of the festival organizer to successfully plan and execute the festival is clearly articulated.

Financial Sustainability (20%)

- The organization is financially stable and demonstrates the potential for growth and/or sustainability, based on previous iterations of the festival.
- Applicant's proposed budget is detailed, appropriate based on the festival's history and scale (bearing in mind the impact of global challenges in the festival production industry), specific to the festival, and balances. Any excess or deficit are explained.
- Applicants must submit a budget of a previous festival for comparison.
- Funds are allocated towards health & safety and accessibility measures.
- The organization has a revenue generation strategy and diversified revenue sources.
- Internal financial controls are in place.
- The strategy behind the funding request is clearly explained and in line with the financial health and proposed budget.

Application Requirements

- Completed and signed Application Form (through the City's application portal, TGRIP)
- Completed and signed City of Toronto Declaration of Non-Discrimination Policy Form
- Completed Organizational Profile (through TGRIP)
 - Non-profit organizations and Business Improvement Areas should attach:
 - Proof of organizational status (e.g. Letters Patent, Constitution, By-Laws)
 - List of Board of Directors/Executive and Senior Staff
 - Band council, local tribal council or other local Indigenous government (First Nations, Inuit or Métis) should attach their status documents.

All applicants intending to apply for either Multi-Year Operating or Annual Operating Funding streams must complete a separate budget form outside of TGRIP. Applicants must contact City staff at cffp@toronto.ca to receive a copy of this form.

How to Apply

Applications must be submitted through the City of Toronto Grants, Rebates and Incentives Portal (TGRIP). The following are some high-level tips for using TGRIP and establishing your account:

- All applicants must complete an Organization Profile before they can apply to the CFFP or other City programs. You only need to complete this once.
- Please create the Organization Profile and complete the application using an email affiliated with your organization
- You can save drafts of your Application or Organization Profile forms and return to finish later. You do not have to complete your application in one sitting.

- Your account allows you to access your saved and submitted applications at any time.
- Others in your organization with an account can also view and edit the application before it is submitted.
- An account also allows us to send you an email confirming receipt of your application and to notify you if additional information is required to process your application.
- Please do not provide any personal information about yourself or other individuals (such as: name, address, telephone number, email, etc.) in any of your responses, unless they are affiliated with your festival.

The Organization Profile form requests information under seven sections (organized under tabs across the top of the page). **You are required to complete all sections to be eligible for funding.** Please note that this information is for your organization as a whole and not specific to the service areas, demographics etc. of your festival application.

The TGRIP user guide is appended to these guidelines. It is recommended that you review this as you are completing your contact information, organization profile and the application itself.

For **technical** questions related to the online application, please send an email to tgrip@toronto.ca using an email that is affiliated with your organization.

For **program** questions related to the Cultural Festivals Funding Program please email program staff at cffp@toronto.ca using an email that is affiliated with your organization.

All applicants for the Multi-Year or Annual Operating Funding streams must consult with City staff prior to applying for CFFP. The City also recommends that first-time applicants for project funding speak to staff about their festival plans prior to completing an application. Please email cffp@toronto.ca using an email that is affiliated with your organization.

Recipient Obligations

If an application is successful, the recipient organization will be required to:

- Sign an agreement with the City of Toronto, outlining the terms and conditions of the funding in accordance with these guidelines
- Sign the City of Toronto Declaration of Non-Discrimination Policy Form
- Carry appropriate liability insurance
- Obtain prior written consent from grant staff for any change to the festival once funding is approved
- Comply with all federal, provincial, and municipal laws and regulations
- Report back to CFFP grant staff per the below reporting guidelines

Reporting Guidelines

All funding recipients are required to submit a final report six months after the completion of the festival which should include the following.

1. An overview of festival programming and operations
2. Key results, achievements and impacts
3. Statistical information
4. Final budget (including breakdown of how the funding was used)

Guidelines and a template for the report will be provided.

Note that if you received funding in 2025, you must submit a final report before applying for funding in 2026-27.

Acknowledgement of Support

If you receive funding, you are required to acknowledge the support of the City on any materials, reports, events, signage, or publicity using the City of Toronto wordmark.

Application Deadline

The deadline for applications is **Friday, February 13, 2026, at 4:00 pm Eastern Standard Time**. Any applications received after that time will not be considered.

Summary & Checklist

- ✓ Review this entire guideline document and ensure that your festival meets the minimum requirements to apply
- ✓ Log into/register for TGRIP
- ✓ Complete/update the Organizational profile (all questions to all sections are mandatory)
- ✓ Complete the application for one (1) of the three (3) streams
- ✓ Submit the application by the deadline
- ✓ Check your email for an acknowledgement from TGRIP that your application was submitted