



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Guide to OAC Operating Programs

Starting in January 2026, the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) will offer one single operating program: the [Ontario Arts Operating Fund](#).

The information in this document applies to operating grants awarded in 2025-26 through OAC's previous operating programs.

Ontario Arts Council (OAC) operating grant programs support Ontario-based, not-for-profit organizations and for-profit book and magazine publishers that meet the assessment criteria for ongoing support.

This guide provides essential information on all OAC operating grant programs, including eligibility, the assessment process and granting policies. Be sure to review it prior to each application as information and policies are updated regularly and subject to change.

Further details on the eligibility for specific operating grant programs are available on each program's web page.

For information

An OAC program officer is the primary contact for any questions related to operating program eligibility, OAC policies on operating programs and the peer assessment process. For help with questions you may have while preparing an application in Nova, contact the program administrator. You will find their names and contact information on each operating program web page.

Eligibility requirements

To apply for operating support your organization must:

- be an Ontario not-for-profit corporation or a federal not-for-profit corporation with the head office in Ontario

- be led by professional personnel
- have completed at least two years of sustained, regular, ongoing programming in its community as of the application date
- An organization that does not meet this requirement may instead apply for project funding.
- have a range of revenue sources such as private and government
- be governed by a board of directors or an advisory body solely responsible for the organization
- have community support and involvement demonstrated through one or more of the following: membership, fundraising and volunteer involvement
- have proof of sound financial management
- be registered through the [Canadian Arts Database](#) / [Données sur les arts au Canada](#) (CADAC)
- submit verification of financial results of the last completed fiscal year. The type of financial statement we require depends on the amount of your grant, as follows:
 - Grants over \$50,000: audited financial statements required
 - Grants over \$25,000: review engagement (or, if available, audited financial statements)
 - Grants of \$25,000 and under: unaudited financial statements (or, if available, audited financial statements or review engagement)
 - Unaudited financial statements should be prepared using the format of the CADAC accounting template, which is to be found at www.cadac.ca, along with a guide to its use.

If you do not provide the type of financial statement required, OAC will reduce your grant request or awarded grant amount to an eligible level.

Eligibility criteria that differ from the above are used for for-profit book and magazine publishers. Refer to the [Publishing Organizations: Operating](#) program web page for details.

In addition to the above criteria, all operating program applicants must meet the program-specific criteria (see the program web page for details).

Note: Applicants must meet all eligibility criteria at the time they submit the application.

- Exception: Financial statements can usually be submitted after the deadline (see Financial Statements).

Annual and multi-year streams

The OAC's operating grant programs each have two streams: annual and multi-year. In year 1 of a program's three-year funding cycle, all applications are assessed by an advisory panel. In years 2 and 3, applications in the multi-year stream are reviewed by the program officer only, while applications in the annual stream are again assessed by an advisory panel.

Before each deadline, OAC determines which organizations will submit applications in each stream based on specific criteria. It then invites organizations to submit the corresponding application type in Nova. (Note that the invitation process happens every year, not just the first time an applicant requests funds from the program. This is to ensure that only eligible applicants can access the application in Nova.)

The program's current year is indicated on the program web page.

Invitations to apply in year 1

In year 1, organizations that meet **all** of the following criteria will be invited to apply in the **multi-year** stream.

- They have received OAC operating funding for the past three consecutive years.
- They have a long-term plan.
- They have a balanced budget. (If an organization applying in the multi-year stream has an accumulated deficit greater than 20 per cent of its last year's budget, or an unrestricted net asset deficiency greater than 35 per cent, the

organization must have a deficit reduction plan that reduces the accumulated deficit over the next three years.)

- They are not in a period of substantial flux. (The OAC considers an organization to be in substantial flux when significant changes or risks in artistic, financial and/or organizational plans threaten the organization's stability.)

Organizations not meeting all of these criteria will be invited to apply in the **annual** stream in year 1.

Invitations to apply in years 2 and 3

In years 2 and 3, organizations that meet **all** of the following criteria will be invited to apply in the **multi-year** stream:

- They applied in the multi-year stream in year 1 of the current cycle.
- They were assessed in rating group A, B+ or B in year 1 of the current cycle.
- They are not in a period of substantial flux.
 - The OAC considers an organization to be in substantial flux when significant changes or risks in artistic, financial and/or organizational plans threaten the organization's stability.

Organizations not meeting all of these criteria will be invited to apply in the **annual** stream in years 2 and 3, as long as they received a grant from the program the previous year.

- If they did not, they must wait until the next year 1 to request an invitation to reapply (see "New applicants" below).

Program transfers

- OAC may decide that an organization should be transferred to a different operating program.
- OAC will consider any developments or changes to an organization's mandate and programming to determine if a transfer is appropriate.

- Organizations may request a transfer to a different operating program. Such transfer requests should be made more than two months before the deadline of both your current and proposed programs.
- Generally, OAC will transfer an organization to a different program when that program is in year 1 of the funding cycle of the new program.

New applicants

New applicants may only apply in the first year of a program's multi-year cycle and are only eligible to apply in the annual stream.

Organizations are considered "new applicants" if they are:

- first-time applicants to an OAC operating program

or

- past OAC operating grant recipients that did not receive an operating grant in the previous year

New applicants must:

- have at least \$75,000 in total revenues for the last completed year, and in projected revenues for the current and request years
- meet the program-specific criteria outlined on the program web page
- contact the program officer at least one month before the deadline to request approval to apply
 - This process will involve one or more discussions between OAC and the potential applicant to determine its eligibility to and fit with the program, what grant amount to request, and other particulars.

Operating program restrictions

- The OAC does not accept operating grant applications from the following organizations: municipalities; universities and colleges; school boards; First

Nations; schools administered by a First Nation and Indigenous administered schools.

- Arts organizations are eligible to receive only one OAC operating grant. An organization cannot apply to another OAC operating grant program unless they have been notified that their application was not successful.
- Operating grant recipients may apply to the following project program: [Touring and Circulation Projects](#). They may also be eligible to apply to other project programs. Refer to the project program web pages for details.
- Operating grant recipients may receive a maximum of two project grants in a year. The two-grant limit is based on the date of the application deadline, not on the date the grant payment is received.
 - Check project program web pages for more information on project grant eligibility for organizations that receive operating grants.
 - If you submit two project applications during the year, you cannot submit a third until you have received notification that one of your applications has not been successful.
 - If you have already received one project grant in a year, you may apply for only one other project grant at a time.
 - Grants awarded through the [Accessibility Fund: Project Support](#) do not count towards a recipient's two-grant limit.
- OAC operating funds cannot be spent on major capital expenditures, including buying, leasing or renovating buildings and purchase of major equipment.

Operating grant online applications

Grant applications are submitted through OAC's online granting system, Nova. Approximately two months before an operating program deadline, applicants will receive an email from Nova inviting them to complete and submit an application. All application material and related subsequent documents and information must be submitted in Nova unless otherwise requested.

Your application includes:

- answers to standard questions related to the program assessment criteria
- staff and board/governing body lists
- lists of programming activities for the current and request year
- support material
- financial and statistical information (see below)

Note: To work on an organization's application, an individual must create a Personal Profile in Nova, and link it to the organization's profile. See the [Nova User Guide](#) for step-by-step instructions on how to set up profiles, start applications, and more.

Financial and statistical application information

Applicants must submit financial and statistical information, and upload their financial statements, through the [Canadian Arts Database / Données sur les arts au Canada](#) (CADAC). CADAC is a national web-based database for the collection, dissemination and analysis of financial and statistical information about Canadian arts organizations (www.cadac.ca).

New applicants must register for an account in CADAC if they do not already have one. You can do this only after you have discussed your eligibility with the program officer and have been invited to apply.

Note: Applicants to OAC's [Publishing Organizations: Operating et Édition – fonctionnement](#) programs do not use CADAC. They upload financial and statistical information directly in their application in Nova.

The financial and statistical portion of the application includes:

- Financial information for your organization's:
 - last completed fiscal year
 - current year

- request year
- request year 2 (year 1 multi-year applications only)
- financial statements for the last completed year
- statistics for the last completed year

Note: Current and request year financial and statistical information must be updated in CADAC no earlier than 60 days before the deadline.

Financial statements

- If an applicant's financial statements are not available on the deadline, they must be uploaded to CADAC as soon as possible, and no later than six months after the organization's year-end.
- Your OAC grant(s) must be listed separately in your financial statements or in the notes to the financial statements.
- Financial statements of not-for-profit applicants must be signed by two members of the Board. Financial statements of for-profit organizations must be signed by the appropriate signing authority.

New applicants:

- may wait until they are notified that they are awarded an operating grant before undertaking an audit or review engagement. At the deadline, they must submit, at minimum, unaudited financial statements.

OAC staff may contact the organization to follow-up on financial and statistical questions and required changes. This may include cases where significant and material errors or omissions are discovered.

CADAC's role is to reconcile the financial statements for an organization's last completed year with the financial data in CADAC. CADAC staff will contact the organization directly if the figures do not match.

The [CADAC Accounting Template](#) is a tool that can help you align your chart of accounts, internal financial reporting system, CADAC financial report, and financial

statements. There are extensive resources on the CADAC website, in the [Organization Training](#) section. You may also call the CADAC help line: 1-866-249-0296.

Note: Other funders to whom you may apply will also have access to financials and statistics through CADAC.

Application deadlines

Operating grant applications are accepted no later than 1 p.m. ET on the deadline date.

- This includes all components:
 - Completed application and support material in Nova
 - Financial and statistical forms in [CADAC](#) (or in Nova, for applicants to the Publishing Organizations: Operating and *Édition francophone – fonctionnement* programs)
- Nova will prevent you from submitting an application after 1 p.m.
- Once an application is submitted, no updates, changes or additions can be made, unless requested by OAC or CADAC.
- Applications, as well as financial and statistical forms, will go forward to assessors exactly as they appear at the deadline.
- Under extenuating circumstances only, OAC may consider requests from operating program applicants to submit an application after a deadline. Requests should be made in writing to the program officer. The OAC may require documentation in some circumstances. Extension requests require Director approval and may not be approved.

Withdrawing an application

Reasons for withdrawing an application

- The applicant does not meet the program eligibility.
- The application is incomplete.

- The applicant has requested that the application be withdrawn.

Timing for withdrawing an application

- Applications will only be withdrawn after a program deadline has passed.
- Applications can be withdrawn at any time in the assessment process.
- It may take up to five business days for OAC to respond to a request for withdrawing an application.
- Applicants will be notified by OAC if their application is withdrawn.

French language services

The OAC is committed to providing services in French according to the requirements of the French Language Services Act.

Applications submitted in French other than to the Francophone Arts section are translated into English by accredited translators prior to assessment. The OAC does not translate works of art (for example, film scripts) or written material not required in the application.

Advisory panel meetings in programs outside the Francophone Arts section are held in English. If there are French-language applications in those competitions, at least one assessor is francophone.

You may request in writing the English translation of your submissions in French, for information only, after results have been announced.

Assessment and decision-making process

Assessment of applications

Organizations are assessed on the following criteria:

- Artistic and/or service quality (25%)
- Contribution to the quality of life of Ontarians (15%)

- Contribution to the careers of artists and arts workers (15%)
- Contribution to OAC priority groups (25%)
- Administrative and financial viability (20%)

Applicant organizations are evaluated in the context of their stated mandate, the scale of their operations and the geographic and cultural environments in which they work.

See the [Guide to OAC Assessment](#) for information on the role and responsibilities of assessors and program officers, conflict of interest policies, etc.

See the [Guide for Operating Grant Applicants and Recipients on Engagement With Social Issues](#) for an overview of this specific topic, summarizing existing information from several OAC guides and policies.

Assessors use the [Evaluation Rubric – Operating Programs](#) based on the assessment criteria to assist in their evaluation of the application.

They assess each criterion using a five-point rating system:

- 5 = excellent
- 4 = very good
- 3 = good
- 2 = below average
- 1 = serious concerns

Rating groups

Assessors' ratings are converted into combined scores out of 100, and into five groups:

- A = 90–100
- B+ = 80–89
- B = 70–79
- C = 60–69

- D = under 60

Economic scores

OAC operating funding contributes not only to equity, the careers of artists and arts workers, and the quality of life of Ontarians, but also provides a positive net investment for a strong provincial economy. For this reason, in addition to their **peer assessment score**, organizations also receive an **economic score**.

This score is calculated as a ratio, with recent financial information divided by the size of the organization's annual grant from OAC (to offer a reasonable comparison for organizations of all sizes). The calculation uses three economic indicators – consumer behaviour, labour market investment, and organization finances – as demonstrated through an organization's revenue generation and expenditures on labour costs. For most organizations, this year's economic score will use financial information from their fiscal year ending in 2023.

An organization's economic score is then compared to the five-year average of all operating organizations and calculated to produce an economic score out of 100. If an organization's economic score is higher than its peer assessment score, the two will be combined into a slightly higher **overall score**. In some cases, this will result in a higher overall rating group.

Grant recommendations

The program officer recommends grant amounts to the director of granting, the CEO and, for grants over \$30,000, the OAC board of directors. Recommendations are based on:

- the advisory panel's assessment
- the [operating funding framework](#) for the current year (returning applicants only)
- the available budget

New applicants

For a new applicant to receive operating funding, it must:

- receive an overall rating group of at least B

- be assessed in at least group B+ for its Contribution to OAC Priority Groups
- be assessed in at least group C in each of the other criteria

Grant amounts for new organizations are determined as follows:

- If a new applicant has not received an OAC operating grant within the last three years, its base grant will reflect those of comparable organizations of similar scale currently funded by the same operating program, as permitted by the program budget.
- If a new applicant has received an OAC operating grant within the last three years, its base grant will not exceed the last operating grant awarded, and may be a lower amount based on the program budget and on the grant amounts of comparable organizations of similar scale currently funded by the same operating program.

Returning applicants

As outlined above (see [Annual and multi-year streams](#)), all eligible returning organizations are invited to apply in the multi-year stream in year 1. However, whether these applicants stay in the multi-year stream for the remainder of the program's current assessment cycle depends on the advisory panel's assessment.

- Organizations assessed in groups A, B+ and B stay in the **multi-year** stream. This means their applications will only be reviewed by the program officer in years 2 and 3 of the current program cycle.
- Organizations assessed in groups C and D return to the **annual** stream. Their applications will be reviewed by peer assessors in years 2 and 3 of the current program cycle.

Exception: An organization that is in a period of substantial flux can be moved to the annual stream at any time and regardless of assessment results.

For how returning applicants' grant amounts are determined, see next section.

Operating funding framework 2025-26

The OAC's operating funding framework is informed by its strategic plan, *Reset. Renew. Revitalize*, especially by the first strategic direction and its four outcome-based funding priorities:

- equity
- the careers of artists and arts workers in Ontario
- the quality of life of Ontarians
- the economy

The first three of these are firmly integrated into the operating evaluation rubric, while benefit to the economy is measured separately through financial data. See [Assessment and decision-making process](#) above for more information on economic scores and rating groups.

The OAC is continuing its commitment to long-term Indigenous arts infrastructure by maintaining or increasing all well-assessed Indigenous arts organizations' operating grant amounts in 2025-26. All other returning organizations will see their base grant levels maintained, increased or decreased as described below.

Funds freed up through program budget reductions and grant reductions will enable new organizations to enter operating programs. This in turn will promote the ongoing renewal and sustainability of the arts ecosystem, at a time when OAC's allocation from the provincial government remains set at \$60 million.

For more information on the funding framework, see [FAQ – Operating funding framework 2025-26](#).

Determining grant amounts for returning applicants

Each returning applicant's overall rating group will determine the minimum and maximum percentages by which OAC may increase or decrease its grant amount this year.

- Organizations in higher rating groups will have the possibility of a maintained or increased grant amount.
- Organizations in **all** rating groups will have the possibility of a reduced grant amount.
- Organizations in lower rating groups will have the possibility of steeper reductions, up to and including being denied a grant, depending on the number of previous reductions they have had in the last four years.

The program officer will recommend a specific grant amount for each organization within the range set by its rating group.

Finding out about a grant decision

When grant decisions are made, approximately five months after the deadline, OAC will inform you by email that the results of your application are available in Nova. Applicants must log in to their profile in Nova to view and acknowledge the grant notification letter. Please do not call or email OAC for this information. It is your responsibility to share operating grant results with your board of directors or governing body.

Grant notification letters include, as applicable:

- Status of the grant: Awarded, Denied or Withdrawn
- Recommended grant amount
- Overall rating group
- Funding stream (annual or multi-year)
- Conditions that must be met to release the grant payment(s), including a deadline for meeting conditions

If you are awarded a grant, you must complete the following tasks in Nova:

- Verify the organization's mailing address
- Acknowledge the notification letter

These must be done before the grant cheque can be issued.

Note:

- To avoid unnecessary conditions, make sure you have entered all required financial and statistical information in CADAC, including any changes requested by CADAC and OAC staff.
- Your grant will be conditional if your financial information for your last completed fiscal year has not been reconciled by CADAC.

Grant payment

The payment of the grant will be held if the organization has a final report for a previous grant in any of the following statuses:

- Overdue
- Revisions required
- Not approvable
- Submitted
 - Submitted reports have not yet been reviewed by OAC staff and this may take a number of days. In this case, no action is required from you.

The payment will be released shortly after you acknowledge the notification letter, unless it is blocked by conditions or final reports.

The OAC sends grant cheques by regular mail.

- If conditions are not met, the organization's operating grant will be forfeited and not paid.

Assessment feedback

All applicants should request a verbal summary of the organization's assessment from the program officer.

If you get a grant

If you receive an operating grant, you must:

- publicly recognize OAC funding by reading and following the [Recognition Requirements for Operating Grant Recipients](#)
- produce financial statements based on the grant amount awarded (see [Eligibility Requirements](#))
 - Your financial statements must specifically identify the OAC grant, either in the body or in the notes.
- complete and submit an operating application at the next year's program deadline
 - The application includes a report on the last completed year.

See the [Terms and Conditions for receipt of OAC operating grant funds](#).

Frequently asked questions

How much should our organization request?

If your organization is a new applicant, you will discuss this with the program officer in the months leading up to the deadline.

If your organization was awarded an operating grant last year, your grant amount this year will be based on last year's amount. Any changes to the amount will be determined by this year's funding framework and, if applicable, your peer assessment. For this reason, Nova will automatically set your request amount to the amount you received last year.

As a new applicant, can we apply for an operating and project grant in the same granting section in case the operating grant is not successful?

Yes. However, if you are awarded both grants, you may not be able to keep both. It depends on whether the proposed project activities would take place during the fiscal

year covered by the operating grant. Contact the operating program officer for guidance based on your specific situation.

Does our organization need to receive revenue from a variety of sources before applying to OAC?

Yes. An OAC grant cannot be the sole source of revenue of any applicant. The OAC expects an organization to have other financial supports. These may include other government contributions and/or self-generated income.

If your organization has an accumulated deficit, you must discuss your financial viability with the program officer before applying to the program.

Why do we have to submit financial and statistical information?

The financial and statistical data provides important information for the assessment of your application. It also provides funders with information to help them advocate effectively on behalf of the arts.

If our organization is denied an operating grant, how can OAC support our programs?

If your organization does not receive an operating grant, you may continue to seek and receive project grants for which your organization is eligible.

An organization may apply to only one OAC project program for a specific activity unless the organization has received notification that its first application was not successful.

Multi-year applications

Our small organization does not have detailed long-term plans, nor are we proposing much growth in operations or programming. Will this have a negative effect on our assessment?

Your planning will be assessed according to the goals you set for your organization. For example, you may decide that your two-year plan will centre on a single goal, such as adding only one more staff position or adding only one more play to your theatre season. If so, explain what your organization must do to realize that goal.

If your organization is in the middle of a long-term plan when you are filling out your OAC multi-year application, state where your organization is in that planning process, what you have accomplished to date, and what targets have not been met.

How do we summarize the changes planned during the two years if we are not planning any changes?

Your plans may not mean doing more or making changes, but may be about improving on what you already do.

Example: We are not planning to change our activity or structure in the next three years. However, we plan to have professional development for our two staff members, including mentoring, so that we'll be better at what we do.

Definitions

An **audited financial statement** is the process of engaging an independent public accountant to examine the accounting records and other evidence supporting the financial statements; to prepare financial statements; and to render a professional opinion that the financial statements present a fair picture of the organization's financial position and its activities during the period in which the audit was carried out.

A **review engagement** is the process of engaging an independent public accountant to prepare financial statements on a review basis. The accountant will not express an opinion on the fairness of the financial statements, but will only provide a limited assurance that the financial information is plausible and conforms to generally accepted accounting principles.

Unaudited financial statements lack this testing and certification but will include a statement of net assets, revenues and expenses, and other statements as requested by the organization.

The costs vary for each type of financial statement; an independent public accountant's rates differ between audited financial statements, a review engagement, and unaudited statements.

All financial statements must include net assets, revenues and expenses, and other statements for the organization's last two years of annual operations.