Performing Arts Grant Program

Panelist Handbook and Scoring Guide

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1. Quick Reference Starter Guide

Phase	What Happens	Estimated Timing
Orientation	Virtual orientation session and review of guide and materials	October 2025
Application Review	Review and score assigned applications online	October - November 2025
Mid-Point Scoring Review Meeting	Group check-in with staff and Commissioners for calibration and Q&A	November 5 or 7, 2025
Final Scoring Submission Deadline	Submit all final scores to staff	November 18, 2025
Cultural Affairs Commission	Cultural Affairs Commission recommends scores and awards	December 2025
City Council Approval	Final grant awards approved	January 2026
Applicant Notification	Applicants notified of results	February 2026

Top 5 Panelist Responsibilities

1. Participate in Orientation – Attend the virtual session and review all materials before scoring begins.

2. Review and Score All Assigned Applications – Carefully read applications, watch videos, review budgets, view attachments. Assess up to 25 applications using the 1–6 scoring scale.

3. Attend the Mid-Point Scoring Review Meeting – Participate in the check-in session to align on criteria and scoring standards.

4. Submit Final Scores on Time – Return all of your scores by the stated deadline to ensure they are included in the review process.

5. Maintain Confidentiality and Integrity – Follow all policies regarding bias, conflicts of interest, and communication.

What You'll Need

- A reliable internet connection and a device with audio/video capability

- Time set aside to review approximately 25 applications (~30 minutes each)

- This guide, scoring forms, and access to the online portal

Scoring Scale at a Glance

Score	Meaning	Description
6 – Exemplary	Fully achieves the program's purpose	Meets all review criteria and project requirements to the highest degree
5 – Strong	Significantly achieves the program's purpose	Meets criteria and requirements to a high degree
4 – Good	Sufficiently achieves the program's purpose	Meets most criteria and requirements
3 – Fair	Moderately achieves the program's purpose	Meets most criteria but may lack depth or detail
2 – Marginal	Minimally achieves the program's purpose	Meets some criteria but lacks substance or clarity
1 – Weak	Does not achieve the program's purpose	Inadequately meets criteria or is not appropriate for funding

**See Pages 12-15 of this guide for detailed instructions
about the scoring system and evaluation criteria.**

Who to Contact

City of Culver City, Cultural Affairs Division

Lee.Lawlor@culvercity.gov

310-253-5772

Staff are available to support you throughout the process and will respond promptly, including evenings and weekends during review periods.

2. Welcome and Program Overview

Welcome. We are grateful for every panelist's commitment to reviewing and ranking grant applications for the Culver City Performing Arts Grant Program. Independent panelists, with expertise in performing arts, play a vital role in equitably distributing Culver City's grant funds. Thank you for making the significant commitment of time and energy required for this service. These grants are for dance, music and theatre performances that take place within Culver City. The awards are approved by City Council, based on recommendations from the Cultural Affairs Commission. Applications are managed by the City Manager's Office of Economic and Cultural Development (Cultural Affairs).

If you have ANY further questions, needs, or special circumstances regarding these instructions or any part of the process, Cultural Affairs staff is available to you. We understand that you may be reviewing applications during office hours, after hours and weekends. If you cannot reach us immediately, we will respond as soon as possible.

3. Role of a Panelist

Responsibilities

- Review and evaluate all assigned grant applications carefully and objectively.

- Apply the scoring rubric consistently and in alignment with program goals.

- Participate in required meetings.

- Maintain confidentiality and neutrality.

- Disclose conflicts of interest promptly.

Your thoughtful participation ensures that public funding reaches the most impactful and equitable projects.

Time Commitment

- Review up to 25 applications (~30 minutes per application)

- Attend one orientation and one mid-point meeting

- Submit final scores by the deadline

Ethical Standards

Panelists are entrusted with a public responsibility. Approach all reviews with openness, respect for diversity, and avoidance of bias.

Emphasize impartiality. Panelists act on behalf of the public

and should focus on application content, not prior knowledge.

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4. Orientation and Review Process

Orientation and Training Attend orientation meeting and read the Panelist Guide. Review Avoiding Bias in Arts Grant Selection flyer. Sign Panelist Agreement and Conflict of Interest Statement, before you begin reviewing.

Mid-Point Scoring Review Meeting This meeting is crucial—it helps us ensure you are supported, informed, and tracking smoothly through your assigned applications.

During this scoring review meeting, Cultural Affairs Staff will discuss guidelines, criteria, and scoring scale. Members of the Cultural Affairs Commission will describe the grant-making goals, proposed projects, and context within Culver City. Panelists will have an opportunity to share questions to ensure their scores are in line with the grant guidelines, goals and scoring criteria.

Technology Needs Meetings are held virtually via Webex. Applications, artistic video samples, and supporting documents are reviewed electronically. Please ensure you have a reliable computer with audio/video capability. You'll need a stable internet connection and a stable power supply, so keep those chargers handy.

Reviewing Applications Serving as a panelist means carefully reviewing every application assigned to you. You will be reviewing and scoring up to 25 applications. Applications deserve appropriate consideration, taking about 30 minutes each. Panelists will watch sample videos, review application questions and answers, analyze budgets, and read supporting documents. It takes time and energy, so plan accordingly.

You will review applications using a confidential link sent to you by Culver City and record your scores on the provided forms. You will use the 6-point ranking system (1=Weak, 6=Exemplary) for each review criterion.

> **Review at least half of your assigned applications**
> **before the mid-point scoring review meeting.**

Goal before the meeting: Please aim to review and score **at least half** of your applications prior to the **Scoring Review Meeting**. You will be able to change your scores before final submission.

Final Scores You must submit your final scores by returning completed Scoring Forms to Culver City staff by the stated deadline.

Applicant Eligibility and Application Errors

Cultural Affairs staff support the organizations that apply. Applicants have been encouraged to seek assistance from staff as they determine their projects and prepare applications. Each application is screened for eligibility as defined in the program guidelines before it is assigned for panelist review. If panelists identify errors in the application or have concerns about the applicant's ability to complete the proposed project, those factors should be considered while scoring.

5. Policies: Conflict of Interest, Equity, and Conduct

Conflict of Interest

We rely on you to read the form and identify any potential conflicts of interest as soon as possible. A conflict could be a Direct Conflict (like a family relationship, recent employment, or financial benefit) or an Apparent Conflict (where you feel unduly biased).

As professionals with experience in Los Angeles, panelists are likely to have relationships and familiarity with the applicants. However, panelists have a primary responsibility to represent the public's interests during the process. Having a conflict of interest does not mean that a panelist cannot serve; it simply means that the panelist may not rank the application with which the conflict exists. If you find that a conflict arises while reviewing a particular application, please let staff know that you will be unable to score that application.

Providing each application with a fair review has racial equity implications. Having time to review each application thoughtfully helps to unearth any biases or assumptions panelists may bring that could influence scores. See guidance in the attached flyer, Avoiding Bias in Arts Grant Selection, based on a similar flyer generated by California Arts Council. When panelists bring awareness and care to reviewing every application, we can strive for more representative grant funding throughout the arts community and Culver City.

Maintaining Neutrality

Please assess applications based on the information the applicant provided. Any outside research on applicants for background or clarification should be extremely limited. To ensure a fair and unbiased scoring environment, please do not communicate with fellow panelists outside of the review meetings.

Panelists should not meet or speak with applicants if it relates to a grant application or program. However, this does not preclude panelists from participating as audience members or attendees of applicant events or interacting with applicants for other purposes.

Racial Equity and Anti-Bias Practices

As a panelist, your decisions help shape the cultural landscape of Culver City. It is therefore essential to approach each application with fairness, intentionality, and an awareness of how unconscious biases can influence judgment. Even the most experienced reviewers are susceptible to subtle assumptions or preferences that can unintentionally affect scoring. By recognizing and actively mitigating these biases, panelists help ensure that grant funding reflects the diversity, creativity, and breadth of voices within our arts community.

The following guidance, adapted from widely accepted best practices in arts grantmaking, highlights common forms of bias and offers strategies to reduce their impact throughout the review process.

Avoiding Bias in Arts Grant Selection

As an arts grant selection panelist, it is essential to be aware of common biases that may unconsciously influence your evaluation of applicants. Bias can impact fairness, equity, and the diversity of voices supported through grant funding. Here are five types of bias to watch for during the review process, with definitions and arts-specific examples:

1. **Implicit Bias**
Definition: Unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that affect decisions without our awareness.
Example: Assuming an artist's work will be less innovative based on their age, race, or gender without evaluating the actual proposal.

2. **Confirmation Bias**
Definition: The tendency to favor information that confirms your existing beliefs.
Example: Focusing only on aspects of an application that support your initial impression of an artist, while overlooking contrary evidence in their work samples or history.

3. **Reputation Bias**

Definition: Allowing an artist's past reputation-positive or negative-to overly influence your current judgment.

Example: Advancing a well-known artist simply because they have received prior awards, without assessing the merit of their current proposal.

4. **Presentation Bias**

Definition: Being influenced more by how information is presented than by its actual substance.

Example: Scoring a proposal higher because it has polished writing and professional photography, even if the artistic concept is weaker than others.

5. **Proximity Bias / Familiarity Bias**

Definition: Giving preference to people or work that feels more familiar or closer to you.

Example: Favoring artists from your city or cultural background over those from different communities, even when all applications meet the criteria.

6. Scoring System and Evaluation Criteria

Panelists will score applicants on a scale of 1-6 for each category. Please score using whole numbers only. (ex. Select 5 or 6 rather than 5.5)

Note: Be as consistent as possible throughout the review process. For example, if you score a certain review criterion for improvement, be consistent with that same scoring method across all applications. Do not worry if your scores are not like other panelists. Just be consistent within your own scoring and judgement.

Artistic Excellence and Cultural Merit (45%)

Summary: This category evaluates the caliber of the artists and the quality of the project, including technical execution, artistic depth, and the engaging presentation of the work. Artistic excellence may be demonstrated through mastery of technique, creative innovation, emotional impact, or the authenticity of cultural expression, as appropriate to the discipline and context. The project should also demonstrate a connection to the organization's mission ensuring that the project is aligned with their overarching values. Projects that demonstrate artistic mastery and interpretive depth—whether in traditional, popular, or experimental forms—are equally valued.

• 1-2: The project lacks artistic merit and is poorly executed, with minimal attention to technical skill or artistic depth. The artistic vision is unclear, and there is little effort to honor artistic tradition or offer new interpretations. The connection to the organization's mission is weak or unclear.

• 3-4: The project demonstrates competent technical execution, with a solid artistic vision. It shows an understanding of the artistic form, though the creative or interpretive aspects may be underdeveloped. The project connects to the organization's mission, but the connection may not be fully developed or clear.

• 5-6: The project demonstrates exceptional artistic quality with high-level technical execution and an engaging, well-developed artistic vision. The project is connected and clearly aligned to

the organization's mission. The project may involve artistic risk-taking and a depth of expression that reflects mastery of the form, within the organizations discipline.

Culver City Outreach and Engagement (20%)

Summary: Assesses the clarity and effectiveness of the community engagement plan, including outreach strategies, audience development, and the potential cultural impact on Culver City. The project should aim to connect with a diverse range of local residents and communities, including historically underserved groups, while ensuring economic accessibility through pricing, free programming, or tiered access. Impact may be demonstrated through depth of engagement, cultural relevance, or community resonance.

• 1-2: The project lacks clear strategies for community engagement and outreach. There is little evidence of targeting Culver City residents or attracting local audiences. The project has minimal impact on the local cultural life and does not address economic accessibility.

• 3-4: The project outlines basic strategies for community engagement, but they may be somewhat general or lacking in detail. There is some potential for the project to engage local audiences and have a positive cultural impact, though its accessibility to all income levels may be limited or not well-developed.

• 5-6: The project demonstrates strong, clear, and detailed engagement strategies that are specifically targeted to Culver City's diverse communities. The project ensures economic accessibility offering clear strategies for attracting a broad and diverse audience, with a measurable impact on local cultural life.

Realistic Project Budget and Funding (20%)

Summary: Evaluates the feasibility and clarity of the project's budget, including the financial plan, matching funds, and overall financial transparency. The budget should be realistic, well-organized, and aligned with the goals of the project. The applicant should demonstrate a sound approach to securing necessary funding and maintaining financial responsibility. The project

should also consider accessibility to all income levels in its pricing and accessibility structures. Budgets should be evaluated relative to the organization's size, scope, and capacity.

• 1-2: The budget is poorly detailed or unrealistic, with unclear expense and income projections. The funding plan lacks credibility, with insufficient detail on matching funds and financial stability. Economic accessibility is not meaningfully addressed.

• 3-4: The budget is generally realistic, but it may lack some detail or clarity in areas like expense justification or income projections. The funding plan is credible but could be strengthened with more information on matching funds and other financial support. Economic accessibility is somewhat addressed but could be improved.

• 5-6: The budget is well-detailed, realistic, and clearly aligned with project goals. The funding plan is robust, with well-documented matching funds and other financial contributions. The applicant demonstrates financial transparency and responsibility. The project has a clear plan for economic inclusivity, ensuring it is accessible to people across different income levels.

Contribution to Cultural Equity and Inclusion (15%)

Summary: This category evaluates how the project contributes to diversity, inclusion, and cultural equity in the performing arts. It considers representation in leadership, programming, and artist selection, as well as strategies for engaging diverse communities and fostering equitable participation. Projects may demonstrate cultural equity by elevating historically underrepresented communities or by preserving and presenting artistic traditions that are themselves underrepresented or at risk of marginalization. The evaluation also considers efforts to ensure economic accessibility for underserved or low-income audiences.

• 1–2: The project provides minimal evidence of efforts to promote inclusion or cultural equity. There is little or no representation of underrepresented voices, and few strategies are presented to engage diverse communities or ensure accessibility. The project does not demonstrate awareness of its cultural context or equity considerations.

• 3–4: The project reflects some consideration of diversity, equity, or inclusion, either through its programming, artist selection, audience engagement, or access strategies. Representation may be limited, but the applicant shows an understanding of cultural equity and offers meaningful rationale, such as the preservation of an underrepresented art form or tradition. Economic accessibility is addressed but may need further development.

• 5–6: The project actively promotes cultural equity through inclusive programming, artist representation, and audience engagement. It demonstrates a clear commitment to diversity and access—whether through demographic representation, engagement with underserved communities, or preservation of artistic traditions that are culturally underrepresented. Economic inclusivity is clearly integrated into the project's design.

7. Post-Review Process

Confidentiality Agreement

Panelists agree not to disclose participation until the recommendations are presented to the Cultural Affairs Commission and City Council. At that time, the panelist names and professional affiliations are included in public reports. Panelists should not disclose any individual scores or personal comments, including their own.

Honorarium

Culver City is happy to provide a total honorarium of $500 to each panelist. This is a gift of gratitude for your panel participation, not a Fee for Service. We will request your legal name and mailing address. Checks are mailed approximately four weeks after the scoring deadline.

Grant Awards

Following the panelist scoring, the Cultural Affairs Commission will consider and recommend ranking and awards to the City Council. After City Council votes on the final grant awards, notifications are sent to all applicants. Panelist scores are averaged, and comments are summarized. The period between panel review and Council approval of awards will take several months.

> **Any questions received by panelists about applications**
> **or notifications should be directed at the Culver City staff.**