



IDEA Opera Grants (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility)

*Supported by the
Charles and Cerise Jacobs Charitable Foundation*

2025 Guidelines and Application Procedures

Important Dates and Deadlines

- Intent to apply deadline: March 20, 2025
Required for access to full application
- Application deadline: April 24, 2025
- Adjudication: June 2025
- Grantee announcement: No later than June 30, 2025
- Grant activity period: July 1, 2025 – September 30, 2026

Important Links

[OPERA America Website](#)

[OPERA America Grants Portal](#)

Individual applicants only need to log into OPERA America's Grants Portal, which requires a different username and password than OPERA America's website.

For Grants Portal information, contact [Jenny Fornoff](#), senior manager for grants.

OPERA America
National Opera Center
330 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001
operaamerica.org

Over the past five decades, OPERA America has awarded \$23 million to opera companies and artists across North America. Since 1984, OPERA America has been committed to increasing the quality and quantity of North American opera, providing financial support to Professional Company Members in such areas as new work and audience development, civic practice, co-productions, innovation, and gender parity in key artistic leadership roles.

Since 2009, OPERA America has offered grants directly to composers and librettists from all performing arts disciplines who may be new to the opera field. The emphasis of individual artist grants is on advancing the careers of women composers and creators from the global majority.

OPERA America believes that different perspectives, cultural histories, life experiences, and personal stories enrich the operatic repertoire. OPERA America is dedicated to supporting creators who reflect the diversity of the nation.

How to Apply

- Read the guidelines carefully before completing any application materials.
- All materials must be submitted online via the [Grants Dashboard](#).
- An intent to apply form is required for all applications and is due by March 20, 2025, at 11:59 p.m. ET. Only applicants who submit an intent to apply may submit a full application.
- Applicants will receive notification if the intent to apply form has been advanced to the application stage.
- Submit a complete final application, including all supplemental materials, by April 24, 2025, at 11:59 p.m. ET.
- Applications that are incomplete, late, or sent via mail, fax, or email will not be accepted.

Purpose

IDEA Opera Grants (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility) are OPERA America's first grant program designed with a racial equity lens. Initiated in 2019, IDEA Opera Grants are generously supported by the Charles and Cerise Jacobs Charitable Foundation, a family foundation committed to promoting equal rights and social justice through education, music, and the law. This annual grant supports the promotion and development of new works by artists who identify as one or more of these racial and ethnic heritages, which have historically encountered barriers in opera: Asian, Black/African American, Indigenous/Native American, Latiné/Hispanic, Middle Eastern or North African, and Pacific Islander.

IDEA Opera Grants support the exploration of opera as an artistic medium through such activities as:

- A Libretto Reading: a reading in which the devised literature is read aloud for evaluation.
- A Workshop: an informal performance of some or all of a work to obtain feedback on specific elements of the piece. Workshops might be performed with piano and/or instrumental accompaniment.
- Working Performance: a partial or full run-through of a work, with piano or

instrumental accompaniment, to obtain feedback for the further development of the piece. An audience may or may not be present.

The above are examples of typical developmental activities and are not meant to limit the goals of any application.

Projects may be given priority in funding selection if they are further along in the development process.

Definitions

IDEA

- **Inclusion:** authentic representation, empowered participation, and a true sense of belonging, beyond numerical diversity.
- **Diversity:** breadth of representation; it can mean different races and ethnicities, gender identities, ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, geographies, budget sizes, or works presented.
- **Equity:** acknowledging that not everyone is starting from the same point, actively ensuring that everyone has the resources and opportunity to succeed, and working to achieve fairness with consideration of current and historic barriers to participation in opera.
- **Accessibility:** equitable admittance to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience.

Opera

OPERA America defines opera as a music-theater experience with a dramatic arc written for trained voice(s) of all genres and accompanied by at least one instrument.

Composer/Librettist

In this document, the author of the music will be referred to as the composer, and the author of the text will be referred to as the librettist, although applicants may have prior experience as songwriters, poets, or playwrights.

Artist Identity

IDEA Opera Grants are available to individual composers and/or librettists who identify with one or more of the following racial or ethnic heritages, which have historically encountered barriers in the opera industry:

- **Asian** — includes those who identify with nationalities or ethnic groups originating in Asia, including East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, including the Indian subcontinent.
- **Black/African American** — includes those who identify with nationalities or ethnic groups originating in any of the Black ethnic groups of Africa, including African American and Caribbean.

- Indigenous/Native American — includes those who identify as Indigenous peoples, American Indian/Native American, Alaska Native, First Nations, and/or Native peoples of the Americas and Australia with tribal affiliation or community attachment.*
- Latiné/Hispanic — includes those who identify with nationalities or ethnic groups originating in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, and other Latin nations.
- Middle Eastern or North African — includes those who identify with one or more nationalities originating in the Middle East, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and neighboring territories.
- Pacific Islander — includes those who identify with nationalities or ethnic groups originating in Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

The above is not an exhaustive list but is meant to provide clarity and context for the purpose of the IDEA Opera Grants.

** If awarded an IDEA Opera Grant, individuals who identify themselves as Indigenous/Native American will be asked to provide proof of their enrollment in a federally recognized tribe, if applicable.*

Grant Awards & Project Scope

A total of three grants will be awarded. Grant recipients will receive:

- \$18,000 per team to support costs associated with the production of a workshop, reading, or other performance-based event and to create a high-quality video of the work in development.
- Complimentary registrations, transportation, and housing stipend (valued at \$2,250) for both members of the awarded teams to attend OPERA America’s Opera Conference and New Works Forum.
- Access to professional development programs for artists, including the Opera Entrepreneurship Workshops or equivalent programming.
- Recognition for the composer/librettist team through *Opera America Magazine*.
- An OPERA America individual membership for the composer(s) and librettist(s) identified in the application of the awarded projects.

Each application must indicate a team representative who will serve as the project’s fiscal agent, disbursing all awarded funds and providing all required financial and narrative documentation. The fiscal agent will receive a 1099 tax form at the end of the calendar year(s). This is for tax purposes. Awardees should consult a tax professional as necessary.

Grants will cover up to 100 percent of eligible expenses, not exceeding \$18,000; no matching funds are required. Additional expenses to complete the project are the responsibility of the creators.

- Eligible expenses include but are not limited to:

- Vocalist, instrumentalist, and other performer fees;
 - Music director/conductor;
 - Dramaturg;
 - Orchestrator, arranger, copyist;
 - Stage director;
 - Vocal coach;
 - Sound designer;
 - Rehearsal and workshop venue rental fees;
 - Stage manager;
 - Costs associated with the project recording, including venue rental, recording personnel, and technical support for audio-visual needs;
 - Equipment rental (e.g., lighting, sound, instrumental cartage);
 - Graphic design, web design, and programs for project;
 - Childcare and/or elder care while creators are in rehearsal or performance;
 - Research materials (e.g., performance tickets, new works recordings, reference books);
 - Transportation and housing for personnel related to creative meetings, rehearsals, and performances (Airfare is limited to coach class.); and
 - Living expenses for the composer/librettist team (up to 30% of grant request).
- Ineligible expenses include:
 - Commissioning fees to composers and librettists;
 - Set, costume, or properties construction or rental expenses for a staged production;
 - Institutional overhead expenses if partnering with a producing organization;
 - Expenses that are not connected specifically to the project, including general administrative expenses and competition or contest application fees;
 - Tuition expenses;
 - Professional development fees;
 - Fundraising expenses;
 - Ticket subsidies; and
 - Any other expenses incurred in relation to a fully produced premiere for public presentation.

Project Timeline

- Funding may not be applied to expenses incurred before July 1, 2025.
- Grant activities must be completed by September 30, 2026.
- Advances of up to 75% of the grant amount are typically extended upon request after submitting a signed award agreement and revised budget and participating in an orientation interview.
- The balance of the grant will be paid upon satisfactory completion of the narrative and financial reporting requirements and a final interview with OPERA America staff.

Eligibility

- Applicants must be individual artists who identify as composers and/or librettists.
- All applicant team members must identify with a racial or ethnic heritage as described on pages 3–4.
- Applicants must demonstrate their ability to write music and/or text by providing work samples.
- This program is open to creators from all performing arts disciplines.
- Although it is anticipated that creative teams will consist of both a composer and a librettist, the composer may also serve as the librettist and apply as a sole applicant. Projects involving more than two creators (e.g., one composer and two librettists) are also eligible.
- Each application must indicate a team representative who will serve as the project’s fiscal agent, disbursing all awarded funds and providing all required financial and narrative documentation.
- The team representative may be either the composer or the librettist.
- All team members must be United States citizens or permanent residents or possess Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status.
- An artist can be a member of only one applicant team with one project.
- Applicants may only be affiliated with one proposal per application cycle.
- Recipients of IDEA Opera Grants may not reapply for an IDEA Opera Grant in a subsequent cycle.

Work Samples

Applicants are required to submit work samples that best represent their voices and creative styles. Work samples need not be classical or operatic. Samples that demonstrate the creator’s aptitude for theatrical storytelling are recommended.

Composers: two samples (hosted audio or video on sites like YouTube, Vimeo, Dropbox, and SoundCloud) with at least one sample featuring voice(s) (not digitally generated).

- Combined samples must be no longer than 20 minutes. Neither sample should exceed 10 minutes in length.
- Scores or other forms of visual representation of a musical work are optional.

Librettists: two samples (written and/or audio or video) that demonstrate storytelling abilities. These can include but are not limited to poetry, short stories, and excerpts of plays, operas, or music-theater works (score optional).

- Combined written samples should be no more than 20 pages in length.
- If submitting audio-video samples, combined samples must be no longer than 20 minutes. Neither sample should exceed 10 minutes in length.
- Scores or other forms of visual representation of a musical work are optional.

Narrative Statements

Applicants are required to submit written narrative statements providing:

- Information about the work’s creative team;

- A personal statement;
- Explanation of the proposed work; and
- Description of the grant project.

Budget

Applicants are required to submit a budget for the proposed project, listing anticipated expenses and any revenue. OPERA America provides an Excel worksheet outlining many possible expenses for your consideration. You do not need to complete every line. There are five “Other” lines in each budgetary section to add other expenses if necessary.

Application Review

All final applications for the IDEA Opera Grants are reviewed by an independent panel of experts approved by the board of directors of OPERA America. The panel will consist of professionals of varied races and ethnicities, as well as gender identities, with relevant expertise and experiences. Panelists are also selected to reflect geographic diversity.

No current OPERA America board member or employee may serve on the panel. Individuals who stand to benefit from a grant are also ineligible to serve.

All panel decisions are final.

Using the following criteria, panelists evaluate the applications through a cultural humility lens, which is a practice of honoring the cultural values and perspectives of the applicants while self-reflecting on how one’s own background and the background of others impact the review of applications.

- **Artistic Ability:** The artistic quality of the creative team and the proposed work based on the application and samples provided.
- **Quality and Distinction in Concept and Planning:** The appropriateness, effectiveness, and thoroughness of the planning process guiding the proposed activity.
- **Evaluation:** The articulation of realistic and achievable goals for evaluating the proposed project.

Terms, Payment Schedule, and Reporting Requirements

All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their requests after the panel completes its review. Applicants who do not receive an award may schedule a 15-minute call with OPERA America staff to receive application feedback.

Successful applicants will receive an award agreement explaining the grant’s terms and conditions, including required narrative and financial documentation.

The first payment installment, which may not exceed 75% of the total grant, may be requested after the awardee uploads to OPERA America's Grants Portal a signed award agreement and an updated budget and participates in a 15-minute orientation call with the OPERA America staff.

All reporting requirements must be completed before the grant will be fully paid; this includes uploading a final narrative and budget documentation and participating in a final interview. All reports will be reviewed by the OPERA America staff.

IDEA Opera Grant recipients may be asked to submit additional documentation or cooperate with OPERA America in sharing the results of their projects with the field both during and after the grant period. Applicants may be invited to provide information on the results of projects, even when not supported by an IDEA Opera Grant.

Awardees are required to acknowledge OPERA America and other funders, including the Charles and Cerise Jacobs Charitable Foundation, in the manner described by OPERA America in the award agreement. Recognition of the awarded project is required in all print and digital materials distributed to the press and general public. Proof of these acknowledgments is necessary for the final payment of the grant to be processed. Recipients of IDEA Opera Grants must maintain OPERA America's logo, including a hyperlink to OPERA America's website, in a prominent location on their websites.

Money not expended at the end of the grant period will revert to OPERA America unless an extension of the grant period is secured. Requests for extensions must be made in writing.

IDEA Opera Grants are restricted to the project described in the application. Funds advanced to the grantee by OPERA America must be repaid in the event the approved project is not carried out.

The IDEA Opera Grant award is intended for the named awardee(s) only and is not transferable to any other artist or organization. The receipt of a grant at any stage of a project or activity does not guarantee continued support from OPERA America.

Contact Information

For more information, contact Jenny Fornoff, senior manager for grants, at Grants@operaamerica.org or 646.699.5258.

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IDEA Opera Grants are made possible through the generosity of the Charles and Cerise Jacobs Charitable Foundation.