



Robert L.B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize

Supported by the Tobin Theatre Arts Fund

2024–2025 Guidelines and Application Procedures

Important Dates and Deadlines

- Guidelines available: July 2024
- Intent to apply deadline: September 6, 2024, 11:59 p.m. ET
Required for access to full application
- Application deadline: October 4, 2024, 11:59 p.m. ET
- Applications adjudicated: November 2024
- Grantees notified: December 2024
- Showcase presentation: May 2025 in Memphis, TN

Important Links

[OPERA America Website](#)

[OPERA America Grants Portal](#)

The OPERA America website and Grants Portal require different usernames and passwords.

If you need to reset your password for OPERA America's website, go [here](#).

For information on the Grants Portal, contact [Diana Hossack](#), director of grantmaking.

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.

The Robert L.B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize was launched in 2009. It was OPERA America's first grant to provide direct support to artists. Now, grants are available for 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 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.

Purpose

The Robert L.B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize is a biennial program offered as part of OPERA America's continuing effort to foster emerging opera artists. The program is intended to bring new talent to the forefront and connect directors and designers early in their opera careers with those who are in a position to advance their work. Designer- or director-driven teams must select a work that deeply resonates with the team from an OPERA America-approved list of operatic works (page 4). Original submissions will translate the team's meaningful response into a unique concept and design for the selected work. Four teams will be invited to turn speculative ideas into a full design presentation.

Grant Awards

Grant recipients will receive:

- \$2,000 to support costs associated with more fully rendering the proposed design project;
- Presentation of the project at the Director-Designer Showcase at Opera Conference 2025 in Memphis, attended by general, artistic, and production directors;
- An online video broadcast of the Showcase available on the conference hub and archived for the team's future use;
- A six-month installation of the project in the National Opera Center exhibition gallery at a mutually scheduled time during the two-year period from July 2025 through June 2027;
- An assigned advisor to coach the team in preparation for the final presentation;
- Exhibition space in the Exhibit Hall for the duration of Opera Conference 2025 to display the team's work and marketing materials;
- Access to professional development programs for artists, including the Opera Entrepreneurship Workshops.

- Recognition for the team and project in *Opera America Magazine*, as well as follow-up coverage when the project is exhibited at the National Opera Center.
- An OPERA America individual membership for all members of the team.

In support of the presentation at Opera Conference 2025 in Memphis, awarded teams will also receive complimentary:

- Conference registrations for all members of the team;
- Round-trip travel to/from Memphis for two members of the team;
- Two nights lodging for two members of the team.

Teams will receive no additional cash award.

The work of each applicant remains the property of the director-designer team.

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.

Funding Parameters

Supported activities include, but are not limited to:

- Conducting further research and/or team meetings to inform the production concept development;
- Purchasing supplies for the creation of more complete renderings and models;
- Creating print or digital marketing materials to promote the production concept for a showcase presentation at Opera Conference 2025 and an exhibition display at the National Opera Center.

Grants will cover up to 100 percent of eligible expenses, not exceeding \$2,000; no matching funds are required. Additional expenses to complete the project are the responsibility of the creators.

Eligibility

- The program is open to emerging designer-director teams in opera regardless of their OPERA America membership status.
- Members of the team must be early in their careers in opera. This program does not fund artists who already have a significant body of work in the field of opera.
- Each team must comprise a minimum of one stage director and a minimum of two creative designers.
- Each application must indicate a team representative who will serve as the project's fiscal agent and as OPERA America's primary contact.

- At least 50 percent of team members must have United States citizenship, permanent residence, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status.
- Applicants may only be affiliated with one proposal per application cycle.
- Team members of projects awarded a Director-Designer Prize may not reapply for a Director-Designer Prize in subsequent cycles.

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 September 6, 2024, 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 October 4, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. ET.
- Applications that are incomplete, late, or sent via mail, fax, or email will not be accepted.

Narrative Statements

Applicants are required to submit written narrative statements describing the proposed production, including responses to the prompt questions. **Applicants must be able to articulate the concept broadly and provide details of the implementation plan that would be helpful for the adjudication panel.**

Each team must create a production proposal for one of the works on the following list:

Breaking the Waves
Mazzoli/Vavrek

La hija de Rappaccini
Catán/Tovar

Die Fledermaus
Strauss/Haffner and Genée

La traviata
Verdi/Piave

Der Rosenkavalier
Strauss/von Hofmannsthal

Samson and Delilah
Saint-Saëns/Lemaire

Idomeneo
Mozart/Varesco

The Sound of Music
Rodgers/Hammerstein

Missing
Clements/Current

X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X
A. Davis/T. Davis

(Reference scores are available upon request. Please contact Noelle Deutsch at NDeutsch@operaamerica.org if you would like to access these for research.)

The proposal should include a complete production concept, including an explanation of the staging approach; ideas and initial research for scenery, props, costumes, and personnel to be involved (chorus, extras, etc.); and suggestions for adaptations and/or editing, if relevant.

The concept should be executable in the theater described in the guidelines section, taking into account size and technical capabilities. Identifying and addressing technical challenges for the design execution is required in the narrative. Production costs are to remain reasonable, but an itemized budget is not required.

Work Samples

In addition to the narrative response to the prompt questions, OPERA America requests supplemental materials, including work samples. Samples that best represent the work should be the prevailing factor in an applicant's choice. No preference is given to video samples; static images are equally acceptable. Please submit the following:

- A ground plan and section to the specifications provided. Address sightlines and any technical barriers (e.g., breaking the proscenium) that may be part of the design.
- Samples of preliminary image ideas, renderings, and/or video. Basic illustrations (research images and designer sketches) are required, but fully developed designs or models are not necessary or accepted at this stage.

Clarity and brevity are strongly encouraged. Please be judicious with the supplementary materials. Suggested guidelines include:

- Materials should be (20) twenty 8.5" x 11" pages or less, including all images and additional narrative.
- PDF files are preferred for static supplementary materials. All files must be uploaded as one document submission, including sketches and renderings.
- Label work sample materials clearly and concisely.
- YouTube and Vimeo are preferred hosts if submitting video samples or digital submissions. Please provide passwords for any private sites.

Any applications that do not comply with these guidelines may be declined for noncompliance. The program staff may remove excess materials without consulting the applicant.

Application Review

All final applications for the Director-Designer Prize 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, representing diverse disciplines involved in directing, designing, and producing opera. 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 concept and presentation.
- **Robust Partnership/Collaboration:** Applications will demonstrate a team dynamic and collaborative spirit by articulating the ways project participants will collaborate in planning and design.
- **Feasibility:** Each application must convey that the production is executable according to venue capacities, as well as industry technical and safety standards.

Award Announcement

- 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.
- All award agreements will contain a start date and an end date for the grant period.
- 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.
- Advances of up to 75 percent 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 conference presentation.
- Director-Designer Prizes are restricted to the project described in the application. Funds advanced to the awarded team by OPERA America must be repaid in the event the approved project is not carried out.
- The receipt of a grant at any stage of a project or activity does not guarantee continued support from OPERA America.
- The Director-Designer Prize is intended for the awarded team only and is not transferable to any other artist or organization.

Reporting Requirements

Successful applicants will receive an award agreement explaining the prize terms and conditions.

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.

All reporting requirements must be completed before the grant will be fully paid.

Awardees are required to acknowledge OPERA America and other funders, including the Tobin Theatre Arts Fund, in the manner described by OPERA America in the prize agreement. Recognition of the awarded project is required in all print and digital materials distributed to the press and general public. Recipients of the Director-Designer Prize must maintain OPERA America's logo, including a hyperlink to OPERA America's website, in a prominent location on their websites.

Periodic reports and career updates from awarded artists may be requested by OPERA America during the two years following the Showcase presentation at Opera Conference 2025.

Director-Designer Prize 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.

Contact Information

For more information, contact Diana Hossack, director of grantmaking, at DHossack@operaamerica.org or 646.699.5236. You may also schedule a 15-minute grant consultation by using this [Calendly link](#).

Funder

The Robert L.B. Tobin Director-Designer Prize is made possible through the generosity of the Tobin Theatre Arts Fund.