



Art & Soul Activation Grants

2026 Application Guidelines

Application Release

Tuesday, January 6, 2026, 10:00 a.m.

Application Deadline

March 1, 2026, 11:59 p.m.

Application Portal

indyarts.grantplatform.com

Overview

Funding is available to community arts and cultural organizations to compensate an Art & Soul Featured Artist participating in programs, festivals, and venues. **These activities must include Art & Soul Featured Artist alumni and/or 2026 Featured Artists.** Indy Arts Council will publicly promote funded activities in the Art & Soul 2026 schedule of events. Applicants may request \$500-\$2,000.

Timeline:

January 6, 2026: Invitation to apply at indyarts.grantplatform.com

March 1, 2026: Application deadline

Early March 2026: Award notification

April 2026: Schedule of events publicly promoted

September 30, 2026: All activities must be completed

October 17, 2026: Final report deadline

Contact

Anna Tragesser

317-624-2561, ext. 221

grants@indyarts.org

Eligibility

Eligible applicants:

- Have 501(c)(3) nonprofit status.
 - Organizations that are fiscally sponsored by a nonprofit entity are eligible.
 - Schools and universities are not eligible. Booster clubs, foundations, and organizations that exist for the sole purpose of fundraising are not eligible.
- Primarily produce activities in and are physically headquartered in the Indianapolis region.

Eligible activities:

- Proposed grant activities should meaningfully incorporate Art & Soul Featured Artists in arts and culture programs, festivals, and venues. Applicants are encouraged to speak with artists before submitting a proposal and align the activities with the artist's interests, skills and goals.
- Activities must take place between May 1, 2026 and September 30, 2026.
- Activities should be open to the general public, but exceptions can be made.

Which artists can be involved?

Proposed grant activities must include Art & Soul Featured Artist alumni and/or 2026 Featured Artists. Featured Artists are listed at the end of this document. If you need help getting in touch with them, contact us.

Request Amount: \$500 - \$2,000. All grant funds must be used to compensate Featured Artists.

Application Process

All applications must be submitted via indyarts.grantplatform.com by March 1, 2026.

This is an online, written application. If you prefer an alternate format (i.e. dictated responses, video responses, other languages), please reach out to grants@indyarts.org, and we'll do our best to accommodate.

Indy Arts Council staff and 2026 Featured Artists will review all applications and select those that best meet the priorities below.

Selection Priorities:

Applications that accomplish the following will be prioritized for funding:

- Activities are clearly described and are feasible in the timeline and budget. Artists are paid fairly.
- Activities use 2026 Featured Artists and match their goals and interests.

Additional Guidance

Indy Arts Council will publicly promote funded activities in the Art & Soul 2026 schedule of events and will provide marketing assets and tips to co-promote the activities. **Funded organizations must also promote their own activities.**

Indy Arts Council values fair pay to artists. Applicants should discuss compensation with artists before submitting an application and provide context in the application to demonstrate that the pay is fair.

Funded organizations are encouraged to establish a simple, mutually beneficial agreement with the artist that outlines deliverables and compensation. Indy Arts Council staff is available to support as needed.

2026 Featured Artists

Dr. Austin Dean Ashford (he/him) - Literary Arts, Music, Spoken Word, Theater

aashford@flannerhouse.org [@DrAustinDeanAshford](https://www.instagram.com/DrAustinDeanAshford) www.austindeanashford.com

"I build worlds that remix the past and reimagine the future, using Hip Hop as both a heartbeat and a blueprint for liberation. I'm a playwright, performer, and musician who believes creativity is both protest and prayer, a way to survive and transform the world around us."

Dr. Ashford has written and performed award-winning solo shows and currently collaborates with local organizations like Flanner House and IF Theatre to mentor dozens of emerging Black artists in theatre, music, and storytelling. His goal is to build a sustainable creative empire that uplifts Black stories across stage, screen, and community. He aims to build a professional foundation that allows him to tour, produce, and publish at a higher level while continuing to mentor others.

Kenn.Wav (he/him) - Music

kennwav@gmail.com [@kennn.wav](https://www.instagram.com/kennn.wav)

"My creative work blends gospel, soul, and R&B with contemporary and electronic influences, resulting in a sound that is both grounded and exploratory. Through every performance and project, my goal is to create work that is emotionally resonant, culturally rooted, and reflective of the vibrant communities that shaped me."

Kenn.Wav's musical collaborations have included Be. On It., Bashiri Asad, BL+K (Breon Lanier + Kenn), B. Slade, and Bluewater Kings. He has created and performed commissioned and featured pieces for organizations including Newfields, GANGGANG, and the Indiana Black Theatre Company. His goal is to strengthen the sustainability of his artistic practice by securing consistent opportunities for performances, commissions, and partnerships.

Auboni Essence (she/they) - Literary Arts, Spoken Word, Theater

bookingauboni@gmail.com [@auboni_essence](https://www.instagram.com/auboni_essence)

"I now have a repertoire of page poems, slam poems, short stories, and plays that connect with a diverse set of audiences. Today, I allow my pen to take me where it wants to go and I wrestle with the truths, the ideas, and the ideologies that present themselves to me. I carefully package them for others to see and stake my hope on them leaving inspired, delighted, and/or stimulated."

Recently, Auboni competed nationally with a slam poetry team, headlined That Peace Open Mic, and facilitated a 6-week youth poetry workshop and showcase. Auboni's goals include: Become a three-time published author (poetry book, short-story collection, and novel), win a Grammy for her poetry anthology album, and become a prominent arts and culture curator and educator in Indianapolis (and beyond!).

D'yshe Mansfield (she/they)- Music, Theater

dyshe.mansfield@gmail.com [@dyshe.official](https://www.instagram.com/dyshe.official)

"I am a multihyphenate singer, songwriter, actress and performer committed to helping communities feel and heal through music and storytelling. While music allowed me to process emotion, theatre allowed me to create new worlds which proves to be helpful along my journey of sharing stories through song."

An Indianapolis native, D'yshe pursued training at American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York City. She is actively performing at local venues, teaching with Asante Art Institute, directing and acting with local theatre companies, and working on a debut EP. D'yshe's goal is to build a multidisciplinary career that positions her for an EGOT (Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, Tony)-centering her work in music/vocal performance, theatre, and film. She aims to expand visibility, seek performance/tour opportunities, and strategically market herself as a singer, songwriter, and performer.

Featured Artist Alumni

Although many artists have participated in Art & Soul experiences in various ways since the program began in 1996, the Featured Artist opportunity began in 2009.

If you need help contacting any of these artists, please reach out to grants@indyarts.org.

Monique Burts (MoGio), Wearable Art, 2025
Brandon Lott, Music, 2025
Akili Ni Mali, Music, 2025
Kierra Ready, Visual Art, 2025
Boxx the Artist, Visual Art, 2024
Dexter Clardy, Music, 2024
Austin "Sirlimitless" Day, Dance, 2024
jus Will, Spoken Word, 2024
Brandon Douthitt, Music, 2023
Adge Jackson, Dance, 2023
Jamichael Kyng Pollard, Visual Art, 2023
Crystal Rhodes, Literature, 2023
Karome Bennett, Dance, 2022
Chantel Massey, Spoken Word, 2022
Marrialle Sellars, Music, 2022
Shayla Williams, Visual Art, 2022
PsyWrn Simone, Music, 2021
Matthew Cooper, Visual Art, 2021
Yadin Kol, Music, 2021
Christopher Pitts, Music, 2021
Josh Betsey, Multimedia, 2020
Manón Voice, Spoken Word, 2020
Okara Imani, Music, 2020
Teneh Karimu, Musical Theatre, 2020
Lalah Hazelwood, Dance, 2019
Joshua Thompson, Music, 2019,
Allison Victoria, Music, 2019,
Shamira Wilson, Visual Art, 2019,
Ryan Bennett, Theatre, 2018
TOO BLACK, Spoken Word, 2018
Lauren Curry, Dance, 2018
Gary Gee, Visual Art, 2018
Carrington Clinton, Music, 2017
Devon Ginn, Spoken Word, 2017
Taylar Green, Dance, 2017
Tiffany Parker, Visual Art, 2017

Derrick Carter, Visual Art, 2016
Mariah Ivey, Spoken Word, 2016
Nick Owens, Dance, 2016
Jared Thompson, Music, 2016
Matthew Davis, Literature, 2015
Zakk Knight, Music, 2015
Kassim Norris, Film, 2015
Ronne Stone, Dance, 2015
E'Jaaz Cardiar, Music, 2014
Myah Evans, Music, 2014
Kristina Sharpe, Music, 2014
Ash Robinson, Visual Art, 2014
Rusty Redenbacher & Mr. Kinetik, Music,
2013
Blair Clark, Music, 2013
Tasha Beckwith, Visual Art, 2013
Lee'a Ro, Music, 2012
Tony Styxx, Music, 2012
Michael Jordan, Visual Art, 2012
Rob White, Music, 2011
Donna Edmond, Music, 2011
Lobyn Hamilton, Visual Art & Music, 2011
Bashiri Asad, Music, 2010
F!ghting Words an'NEM, Music & Spoken
Word, 2010
Shederick Whipple, Music, 2010
LaShawnda Crowe Storm, Visual Art, 2010
Gabrielle Patterson, Literature, Poetry, and
Spoken Word, 2009
Herman Whitfield III, Music, 2009
(deceased)
Temara Payton, Theatre, 2009
Denise Tichenor-Collins, Music, 2009
Synergy, Music & Poetry, 2009
Mike Graves, Visual Art, 2009