



TAC-CS DIGITAL SOLUTIONS INCUBATOR

2025 PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Application deadline: March 17, 2025

TAC is committed to equity and inclusion. We welcome and encourage applications from all Toronto artists, arts organizations and artist collectives. Specific equity measures or targeted programs are in place to ensure full access and participation by Black Artists, Indigenous artists, artists of colour, artists who are Deaf, have disabilities or are living with mental illness, artists who self-identify as 2SLGBTQIAP, newcomer and refugee artists, young and emerging artists and artists working outside the downtown core. Learn more about what we are doing to make TAC more accessible and inclusive in our [Equity Framework](#).

What does this program support?

This program was created through a partnership between TAC and The Creative School (CS) at Toronto Metropolitan University to encourage arts organizations to consider the creative possibilities unlocked using technology and design thinking. The partnership provides arts organizations with access to student expertise, to explore solutions to the challenges they face; the students receive practical, hands-on projects as part of the Creative School's Design Solutions Super Course. The Super Course is an educational experience that challenges students from different programs to work with external partners to conceive and develop solutions using a design thinking process.

Emphasis is placed on projects that:

- Address organizational challenges within the arts sector using digital-enabled approaches.
- Facilitate collaborative and unexpected solutions with the potential to benefit the arts sector.
- Provide arts organizations and artist collectives access to design and technological expertise.
- Enhance organizational capacity in the arts sector around digital technology

For the purposes of this grant, "digital" refers to any user-centered design process involving significant use of mobile, web, augmented/virtual reality, or computer-based technology.

The grant amount is \$15,000. As a guideline, please plan for approximately \$10,000 in fees for the project leads and \$5,000 for any materials and expenses related directly to the project. This grant is not intended to fund office computers, production equipment or any general operating expenses.

Successful proposals will articulate a challenge or pose a question pertaining to a current organizational challenge. The identified challenge may pertain to any aspect of operations including programming, administration, outreach, marketing, etc. Applications must acknowledge the relevance of their identified challenge to other members of their community, other arts organizations or the arts sector as a whole. Organizational leadership (if different than project leads) must be actively involved in the project, attending, and participating when appropriate.

The goal is to address a significant organizational challenge through digital technologies and creative design skills, in whatever form is appropriate. We are seeking to foster innovative ideas for the creation of

new capacity within Toronto arts organizations and collectives. The goal of this program is not to develop company websites, digital content or build digital communications plans for the applicant organizations.

TAC Accessibility grant

Projects involving Deaf artists and artists with disabilities may apply for an additional TAC grant by completing the Accessibility Expenses section of the application and including the requisite information in their budget. A TAC Accessibility grant will provide up to a maximum of \$5,000 towards accessibility costs for artists incurred during the project. Accessibility costs include but are not limited to: ASL interpretation, audio description, closed captioning, communications assistants, attendant care (including helpers for Elders), support workers and equipment rentals or other supports required to meet artists' accessibility needs).

When can the project happen?

The TAC-CS DSI funds an 8-month experience between September and April. The program is divided into two stages, corresponding with academic semesters.

First Stage: From September to December, successful applicant organizations will work 10-15 hours a month, meeting regularly with a team of Design Solutions Super Course 1 students to address their identified problem, with the aim of creating a prototype of the proposed solution. The prototype will be shared with the wider community during a “demo day” at CS which the whole team will attend.

Second Stage: From January to April, successful applicant organizations will continue in one of two ways:

- 1) Design Solutions Super Course 2: Teams selected to continue with Super Course 2 will have a chance to further develop their prototype with CS students.
- 2) Self-directed: Teams may be asked to continue development of their prototype with a partner of their choosing or on their own, independent of Toronto Metropolitan University CS.

Successful applicants are required to sign an agreement with CS before beginning the project and attend a program evaluation meeting to be scheduled in 2025. **Please see Appendix A for a description of the Design Solutions Super Course, past projects, and terms of intellectual property.**

Who can apply?

All applicants are encouraged to contact Programs Manager, Strategic Initiatives, Liza Mattimore, before applying.

- To apply to this program, applicants must be either an incorporated non-profit arts organization or an unincorporated artist collective operating on a not-for-profit basis.
- A collective is defined as two or more artists working together under a group name, either on a single project or on an ongoing basis.
- Organizations and collectives must be located in the City of Toronto. A Post Office Box address cannot be used to meet this requirement. Organizations with a regional Toronto office must have operated in the City of Toronto for at least one year prior to the deadline.
- Collectives must have a bank account in the name of the collective.
- For collectives of two artists, both must be City of Toronto residents. For collectives of more than two artists, the majority of members must be City of Toronto residents.
- Artists must be professional. A professional artist is someone who has developed their skills through training and/or practice; is recognized as such by artists working in the same artistic tradition; actively practices their art; seeks payment for their work; and has a history of public presentation.
- TAC recognizes that due to systemic barriers within the broader arts community (e.g. limited mainstream presentation opportunities for artists from equity-seeking communities) that some flexibility may be required in interpreting eligibility criteria to take into account equivalent

professional experience and contexts. Potential applicants from equity-seeking communities are encouraged to discuss their eligibility with the Program Manager in advance of submitting an application.

- Applicants may receive a grant through the TAC-CS DSI only once every two years.
- **TAC has two distinct funding envelopes:** 1) Arts Discipline funding (e.g. discipline-specific project grants and operating grants) and 2) Strategic funding (e.g. Animating Historic Sites, Animating Toronto Parks, Artists in the Library, etc.). **Eligibility exception:** you are able to receive a grant from this program in addition to one other grant from the Arts Discipline envelope and one other grant from the Strategic funding envelope per calendar year.
- Applicants are not eligible if they have an outstanding Final Report in any other program within the Strategic funding envelope (e.g. Animating Historic Sites, Animating Toronto Parks, Artists in the Library, etc.)
- If Toronto Metropolitan faculty or staff (full or part-time) are employed by/members of your organization or collective, you are not eligible to apply.

This Program does not fund:

- Activities included in TAC operating grants
- Activities included in other TAC project grants
- Capital projects or expenses
- Renovations or repairs
- Research or feasibility studies
- Projects previous funded through another TAC grant
- How do I apply?

Applicants register and submit the application through *TAC Grants Online* (<https://tac.smartsimple.ca>).

Applications must be submitted no later than 11:59 pm on the deadline dates. TAC does not accept applications by any other means of delivery. You will receive a confirmation email when your application is submitted. Check your spam/junk mail folder if it doesn't arrive in your in-box.

Application Accessibility Support for Deaf Persons Or Persons With Disabilities

Applicants who are Deaf or have a disability and need support to complete their grant applications can apply for funds to cover the costs of assistance from Application Support Service Providers. Up to \$500 is available per eligible applicant in each calendar year. Please contact your Grant Program Manager at least six weeks before the grant program deadline to determine eligibility, request application support funding, and to review the process for payment to be made to your Service Provider. Requests for application support require approval from the Grant Program Manager.

What do I need to prepare?

The main part to the application is the *Project Description*

The *Project Description* asks applicants to summarize the challenge they are facing and the impact a possible solution could have on the wider arts community. Statements and bios from the Project Leads are also required.

How is my application assessed?

This is a competitive program. Applicants should be aware that meeting the general eligibility requirements does not guarantee that a grant will be recommended.

Funds are awarded on a competitive basis by an independent review panel of peers. Peer assessors are practicing professional artists and arts workers selected based on their familiarity with and specialized

expertise in a broad spectrum of artistic practices and to reflect the range of applicants and represent diverse mediums, genders, and cultural communities. A representative from Toronto Metropolitan University's Creative School is also included on the panel. The grant review panel's recommendations are approved by TAC Directors.

The grant review panel evaluates all eligible applications in a comparative context and makes funding decisions based on the availability of funds, the program objectives, and the following assessment criteria:

- The capacity of the applicant to undertake the project.
- The potential of the project to benefit the applicant organization and the Toronto arts sector.
- The suitability of the project leads to the project
- The extent to which the project will help the applicant to better use, interact with and gain confidence working with digital technologies.

Included in TAC's [Equity Framework](#) is an **Equity Priority Policy**, which states that if there are multiple well-assessed applications of equal merit in an adjudication round but insufficient funds in the grants budget to support all deserving candidates, applications proposed by applicants that self-identify as belonging to one of Toronto Arts Council's equity priority groups will be prioritized.

Decisions of the grant review panel are final.

How do I find out the application results?

TAC will send you an email when the results are available and you will log in to TAC Grants Online to receive the results. Notification will be received within four months of the deadline date.

What do I do when I have completed the project?

Recipients are required to file a final report on their project. The final report is filled out and submitted online through TAC's granting portal. The due date for the final report will be included in the grant notification letter. Future applications to TAC Strategic Projects Programs* will not be accepted unless reports on previous funding have been received and approved by TAC.

*Exceptions include TAC Leaders Lab, Newcomer & Refugee Artist Mentorship, and TAC-CS Digital Solutions Incubator programs. Contact a TAC Program Manager if you have questions about these exceptions.

What are the rules or requirements for this funding?

- Successful applicants will receive a Letter of Understanding. The Letter of Understanding will detail the terms and conditions of the funding. The Letter of Understanding must be signed and uploaded to TAC Grants Online before funding can be released. The Letter of Understanding also describes situations that would require grant repayment.
- Grant recipients are required to acknowledge the support of Toronto Arts Council in all written materials relating to the activities for which funds are granted. The TAC logo is available on our website; specifications for the size and placement of the logo should be commensurate with that of other donors or sponsors that have provided similar financial support. In lieu of the logo, the recipient may use the phrase "produced with the support of the City of Toronto through Toronto Arts Council."
- Toronto Arts Council has moved to electronic payments. If your application is approved, you will be required to enter the bank account information of the grant recipient that corresponds to the Applicant Name on your Notification Letter. Bank information is submitted along with your Letter of Understanding and other Notification Letter Requirements.
- The City of Toronto requires that all organizations and individuals adopt a policy of non-discrimination as a condition of receiving a grant from the City. All successful applicants will be required to submit a signed Declaration of Compliance with Anti-Harassment/Discrimination

Legislation and City Policy. A copy of the following City documents can be [downloaded from reference documents page on TAC's website](#): Anti-Racism, Access and Equity Policy Guidelines, Hate Activity Policy and Procedures and Human Rights and Harassment Policy and Procedures.

- TAC staff attends client performances and events. Grant recipients are required to send TAC information on any public performances or events presented in the context of their grant-supported projects. This information should be emailed to the Grant Program Manager.
- In addition to the aforementioned general conditions of funding, TAC reserves the right to place other conditions on the release of the grant (such as confirmation of venue, programming, other sources of funding, etc.). Any specific conditions will be contained in the Letter of Understanding.

Further questions

Liza Mattimore, Programs Manager, Strategic Initiatives

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APPENDIX A:

What is the Toronto Metropolitan CS Design Solutions Super Course?

In the Design Solutions Super Course, multi-disciplinary teams of students work on real-world problems presented by industry and community partners in a practice-based, knowledge-building environment. Working across disciplinary boundaries, student teams employ a design-thinking process to address partners' needs with innovative and creative approaches to a solution. Students are supported in their proposed solutions with industry, community and academic mentorship.

Through Super Course 1 (September-December) and Super Course 2 (January-April), student teams will collaboratively move from problem identification, to solution visioning, to solution concept -- culminating in the creation of a working prototype by each team that addresses a meaningful social, economic or policy challenge.

The Super Course presents students with unparalleled opportunities to solve a real challenge, with the tools of their discipline, strategic thinking, and the collaboration of diverse peers from design, media, computer science, and communications. Students from all schools at CS are represented including: Fashion, Interior Design, Media Production, Image Arts, Professional Communications, Creative Industries including students both past and present from Engineering, Computer Science, Business and Entrepreneurship.

At the end of Super Course 1, projects will be reviewed by members of CS faculty, the applicant organization and the TAC Grant Program Manager. The decision to move a project to Super Course 2 will be based on factors including: interest and availability of both the applicant organization and the student teams; and viability of the prototype in the wider arts sector.

What kinds of projects have Super Course participants worked on in the past?

Toronto Metropolitan CS Design Solutions Super Course students have worked with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation on a video-game version of the Driver's Education Handbook, and a personal concierge app for hotel guests that allows them to access concierge services at their convenience. Arts projects have included the following:

A community-engaged arts collective asked for help maintaining digital and in-person connections with their volunteer staff. Students interviewed volunteers and prototyped a retreat process, monthly support sessions, and an online tool for sharing updates and information among their volunteer community. One of the students was then hired by the collective outside of the course to coordinate community involvement and communications.

An arts service organization identified the need for emerging artists to document their work in an archival, longer-lasting format above and beyond more transient online representations. The student team interviewed organizations and emerging artists and designed an awareness campaign. The organization then hired a graphic design and marketing team to implement the campaign.

Intellectual Property

Intellectual property arising from the funded project will be owned by the people who created it. Intellectual property that is jointly created by the successful applicant organization and students or faculty of Toronto Metropolitan University will be jointly owned. Successful applicants to this program will be granted a non-exclusive, royalty-free right to use the results of the funded project for non-commercial purposes, including sharing the results with other Toronto-based not-for-profit arts organizations on a non-commercial basis. Any activities involving the sale or licensing of the results of the funded project will require an additional legal agreement.