

TORONTO ARTS _ COUNCIL

CREATIVE ENQUIRY LAB,

(formerly TAC-CS Digital Solutions Incubator)

2026 PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Application Deadlines: August 17, 2026

TAC is committed to equity and inclusion and welcomes applications from diverse cultural and geographic communities within the City of Toronto. 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 encourages arts organizations and collectives to consider the creative possibilities unlocked using an exploratory design process alongside students in the Creative School's Design Solutions Super Course at TMU. The Super Course challenges students from different programs to work with external partners to conceive and brainstorm ideas using a design thinking process (a creative, user-focused way of solving problems.) The program provides arts organizations/collectives access to design thinking knowledge and the combined expertise of students from various academic backgrounds (transdisciplinary collaboration), to explore an organizational challenge and prototype solutions.

Successful proposals will articulate a challenge or pose a question pertaining to a current organizational problem or issue. 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. Organizational leadership (if different than project leads) must be actively involved in the project, attending, and participating when appropriate.

The grant amount is \$15,000. Applicants are not required to submit a budget. As guidance, please plan for approximately 2/3 of costs in fees for the project leads and 1/3 for any materials and expenses related directly to implementing the project.

The goal is to address a significant organizational challenge using design methodologies, to give students hands on experience and enhance arts organizational knowledge and skills. We are seeking to foster innovative ideas for the creation of new capacity within Toronto arts organizations and collectives.

TAC Accessibility grant

Projects involving Deaf artists and artists with disabilities may apply for an additional TAC Accessibility grant that 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.

Starting in 2026, the grant recipients can apply for an Accessibility Grant at any time during their project. The [Accessibility Grant](#) is available to grant recipients as a separate application.

When can the project happen?

The Creative Enquiry Lab funds an 8-month experience between January and August. The program is divided into two stages. Participants will receive a program schedule after notification in November.

Included in the schedule is an introductory session for grant recipients with course instructors, to gain a foundational understanding of the concepts students will explore. This session will be scheduled with recipients and conducted in December, in advance of the program start.

From January, successful applicant organizations will work 10-15 hours a month, meeting regularly with a team of Design Solutions Super Course students to address their identified problem, with the aim of creating a first version or draft (prototype) of the proposed solution. Participants will be invited to some class sessions including the first day, to meet students, build understanding, and pitch their projects to student groups. In April, the prototype will be shared with the wider community during a “demo day” at TMU’s Creative School (CS).

From April to August, organizations will continue development of their prototypes independently. Recipients will be invited to form a working group (cohort,) managed by the Program Manager with several peer-to-peer sessions exploring their projects’ next steps and supporting one another with implementation. Dates for cohort meetings will be determined together with participants.

Successful applicants are required to sign an agreement with Creative School before beginning the project and may be asked to attend a program evaluation session. **Please see the program page for an FAQ and a video 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 Creative Enquiry Lab 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
- 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 may also be 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 and students 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

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, just like the application. Future applications will not be accepted unless reports on previous funding have been received and approved by TAC.

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

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