



2026 McKnight Composer Fellowships

The American Composers Forum (ACF) is pleased to announce the 2026 McKnight Composer Fellowships. This program is made possible by the generous support of the [McKnight Foundation](#).

GUIDELINE INFORMATION

ONLINE APPLICATION DEADLINE: Wednesday, Dec. 17, 2025 (11:59pm PST)

Please note: ACF is intentional in its interchangeable use of the terms artist, music creator, and composer, as we recognize not everyone identifies themselves with one of these terms.

Program Description

- ACF will select four music creators based in Minnesota to support their continuing artistic practice.
- There are no restrictions on how each music creator uses the funds.

Awards

- Four fellowships of \$25,000 in unrestricted funds will be awarded. Awards are subject to state and federal income tax guidelines.
- Funds are distributed across four installments.
- Fellows can attend an artist residency program coordinated by the [Artist Communities Alliance](#) within two years of the fellowship program.
- Fellows will also have access to financial support of up to \$3,500 to develop works-in-progress
- Consultation, time, and resources from ACF.
- Consultation, time, and resources from [Springboard for the Arts](#)

The Purpose of the McKnight Artist and Culture Bearers Fellowship

The intent of the McKnight Artist and Culture Bearers Fellowship is to recognize and support artists and culture bearers who are beyond emerging and have sustained experience in their area of practice. Fellows demonstrate achievement, commitment, and high-level proficiency in artistic and/or culture bearer practice that contributes to their field and impacts and benefits people in Minnesota.

The addition of **culture bearer** acknowledges that the McKnight programs support creative leaders in Minnesota from cultures that don't use the word "artist" (such as Native American and Hmong), as well as those who center the transmission and preservation of cultural lifeways.

Eligibility: (you must check all boxes)

- You have or maintain Minnesota residency for at least one year prior to application and for the duration of the fellowship year.
- You must have a Social Security Number or Tax ID (such as an ITIN) for our program administrator to process financial awards.
- You are beyond early practice and have sustained experience in your discipline.
- You demonstrate achievement, commitment, and high-level proficiency in music creation practice.
- For former McKnight fellows applying after the five-year sit period: You demonstrate growth and ongoing artistry since your most recent McKnight Artist Fellowship.
- You are not applying to any additional McKnight Artist Fellowships, in any discipline, for the current program year.
- You have not received a McKnight Artist Fellowship within any artistic discipline in the last five award years. Recipients of 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 McKnight Fellowships in any discipline are not eligible. 2020 fellows are eligible to apply again for 2026 fellowship awards. Past fellows can search on the [McKnight Artists Fellowship webpage](#) to confirm their award year.
- You are not staff, board, or immediate family of the McKnight Foundation or fellowship administrative partners (including ACF). The partners are shown here: <https://www.mcknight.org/programs/arts-culture/the-mcknight-artist-fellowships/>
- You are not enrolled full-time in an academic program. (Low-Residency MFA students and Ph.D. and DMA candidates who have completed all requirements except their dissertation are not considered "full-time" students.)

Key Evaluation Criteria

ACF envisions a world where living music creators are celebrated as essential to human culture. We believe that our cultural, political, and social landscapes shape how we create, share, and receive art, and we see artmaking as a profound form of expression and engagement with the

world around us. We seek to support creators who intentionally engage with this larger context, especially those who have been historically excluded from funded opportunities.

Furthermore, we seek to deconstruct the historical concept of “composer,” as well as assumed definitions of who is “American.” We encourage applications from a broad range of musical perspectives, and we are committed to supporting projects that represent a diversity of creative approaches, ethnicities, races, genders, and perspectives.

Artists who are interested in applying are encouraged to attend our application information sessions on Nov. 10 and 11, 2025. Hosted by ACF Community Director Brian Dowdy and Executive Director Loki Karuna, these live sessions will walk through the online application process and share successful applications from previous winners.

The panelists will review your application and score the following:

Artistic craft:

- Strong sense of the creator’s voice
- Technical proficiency is necessary to achieve the desired results
- Quality of work samples

The applicant has clearly reached beyond early practice, as evidenced by the following:

- Significant body of work
- Creative achievement
- Sustained contribution to their artistic field and Minnesota’s arts ecosystem

Selection Process

A review panel of four music creators, artists, and/or advocates is selected for their familiarity with diverse musical approaches. The panel will review applications and select fellowship recipients.

Prescreening:

- ACF staff review all applications for eligibility and completeness.

Panel Review Phases:

- **Phase 1** – Independent Review:

In this phase, each panelists independently assess applications and scores them based on the six key evaluation criteria (see above).

1. Panelists will only listen to up to 5 minutes of **Work Sample 1** in this phase.

2. About 50% of the applications will be passed on to the next phase based on the panelists' combined scores and review of the list.

- **Phase 2 – Panel Review:**

In this phase, panelists will listen to applicants' music together and have conversations in which they will make comparative judgments about each applicant.

Round 1: Panelists will adjust scores on the key evaluation criteria as needed and select between ten and fifteen applications to proceed to the next round.

- The panelists may revisit **Work Sample 1**, this time collectively. If you wish for the panelists to listen to different sections of the same work, you can indicate alternative cue times for this review stage (always up to 5 minutes).
- Panelists will listen to up to 10 minutes of **Work Sample 2 (and Work Sample 3, if applicable)**.

Round 2: Panelists will provide an overall score and select the four awardees, alternates, and honorable mentions.

- Panelists will revisit **all work samples as needed**.

Past panelists have included Carmina Escobar, Troy Rogers, Jess Rowland, Mychal Fisher, Pascal le boeuf, Mary Prescott, J.E. Hernandez, Andrea Reynolds, Maria Chávez, Texu Kim, inti figgis-vizueta, Matthew Evan Taylor, Forbes Graham, Sarah M. Greer, Ritika Ganguly, Danny Clay, Jannina Norpoth, Carlos R. Carrillo.

The ACF staff members who oversee the McKnight Fellowship program do not contribute to the decision-making process or the selection of the McKnight Composer Fellows. The staff's role is to provide clarity for the review process and ensure that the panelists' review and discussions proceed according to program guidelines.

Notification

The panelists' decision is final and will be announced in March 2026. Results will be posted on ACF's website, and applicants will be notified by email. After the 2026 McKnight Composer Fellowships are announced, all applicants can set up a 15-minute feedback session with an ACF staff member.

How to Apply

The applicant completes or uploads the following in the Online Application Form via the SlideRoom Application System. The online application can be found [HERE](#).

1. Composer's Personal Information:

Name, Pronouns, Address, Phone, Email Address, Webpage

2. Questions Regarding Eligibility & Past Participation:

A series of questions to confirm your eligibility for this program and past participation

3. Work Samples:

In this section, you will provide 2-3 work samples of your music. Together, the work samples should demonstrate the depth of work in your creative practice, including high-level proficiency in your artistic and/or culture bearer practice and your contributions to the field.

• General Guidelines

- Submit up to 15 minutes (total) of your original music in audio or video format.
- Include at least one sample of work created in the past five years.
- If you've previously received a McKnight Fellowship, focus on work completed since your last award.
- Work sample 3 is optional and should be included only if you haven't reached the total limit of 15 minutes of music.
- Excerpts are accepted as work samples.

• Recommendations

- Work Sample 1 makes the most critical impression on the panelists and should represent your most distinctive and compelling musical example.
- Work Samples 2 and 3 should each be a complementary, complete work.
- Regardless of the linked or uploaded media duration, you will indicate start and end cue times.
- Ensure links remain accessible and unchanged until February 9, 2026.
- Provide active web links (SoundCloud, YouTube, Vimeo, Google Drive, etc.) to your work samples.
- For private samples, make them unlisted so the committee can still access them.

Instructions for creating unlisted links:

- SoundCloud: Click [HERE](#)
- Vimeo: Click [HERE](#)
- YouTube: Click [HERE](#)
- Google Drive: Click [HERE](#)

- **Documentation**

Each work sample must clearly connect to the Artistic Statement you provide in this application. An additional written description of each work is crucial for helping the panel understand the significance of each sample as it connects to your Artistic Statement.

- Please provide a written description (max of 3000 characters) of your work sample, illustrating how the sample reflects your vision, commitment, and role within your body of work.
- Include any other supporting materials that provide insight into your creative process and role in the work.
- If relevant, provide PDFs of notated scores (up to 10MB file size limit). For larger files, include a web link.
- If your work includes lyrics, provide lyric sheets.
- Acceptable sonic representations include video, spectrograms, waveforms, and graphics.

Note: Panelists cannot access music notation or specialized software directly.

- **Instructions for Submission**

For each sample, provide:

- Cue Start and End Times
- Title
- Full Duration
- Year of Completion
- Ensemble/Name(s) of Performer(s)
- Instrumentation
- Description of the Work

5. Artist's statement: Link to video (6 minutes max) OR typed answer (max. length: 4000-character, or ca. 600 words)

The artist statement may take any of several directions at your discretion: information about your background, the development of your work, your interests as an artist or your aesthetic position, your future artistic direction, your career status, self-assessment, or any other information you would like to present to the panel.

6. Insights into your artistic experiences (4000-characters max, or ca. 600 words):

This can be a biography, a list of 10 artistic experiences that have shaped you as a musician, or a resume. We would like this document to enhance your artistic statement and provide further insights into your music creation. If you choose to list 10 artistic experiences, please go deeper into details on two of the most important experiences.

7. A complete works list (PDF only – up to 10MB file size limit):

For each of your works, include the title, year created, approximate duration of work, instrumentation, year of the premiere, and performer or ensemble that premiered the work.

8. Questions regarding social media, information sessions, and how you learned about this opportunity

9. Acknowledgement of McKnight Artist Fellowship Community Values

10. Acknowledgement of Terms and Conditions

By applying, you attest:

- You have carefully reviewed the 2065 McKnight Composer Fellowships application guidelines.
- Information supplied in the application is accurate.
- Application materials submitted are the applicant's sole and original work.
- You understand the purpose and conditions of the McKnight Composer Fellowship program and accept them should you be selected as a Fellow.
- You are eligible for the program and will notify the Community Director if you become ineligible before the call for applications concludes.
- Providing false or misleading information on this application or failing in any other way to comply with the rules will subject you to disqualification and forfeiture of the fellowship.
- You understand that your application must be completed by the online application deadline of Wednesday, December 17 (11:59 PM PST). ACF / McKnight Composer Fellowship program takes no responsibility for applications that are not in "Submitted" status at the deadline.

11. Music Creator's Demographic Form

Our [commitment to racial equity](#) includes, but is not limited to, diverse races, gender identities, musical approaches/perspectives, ages, (dis)abilities, cultures, religions, backgrounds, sexual orientations, and broad definitions of "American."

*Sharing your information is optional, but it helps us evaluate the impact of our efforts to invite and welcome a broad range of artists. **It will not be shared publicly or with funders/third parties with your name unless explicitly approved by you.***

Instructions:

What you share in the 2026 Demographic Information form as part of your SlideRoom application for this program will be included in your application and seen by curators. If you prefer to keep your answers separate/anonymous, please use [THIS LINK](#) to complete the form: Not sharing your information will not negatively impact your application.

1. I identify as:

- BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person Of Color), ALAANA (African, Latinx, Asian, Arab, Native American), Mixed Race, or Global Majority (Black, Asian, Brown,

dual-heritage, Indigenous to the global south, people that have been racialized as 'ethnic minorities')

- White

2. Which of the following regions do you identify with? (check all that apply)

- African descent/Diaspora
- Southern African descent
- Central African descent
- East African descent
- North African descent
- West African descent
- Caribbean descent
- North American descent
- Central American descent
- South American descent
- Central Asian descent
- East Asian descent
- South Asian descent
- Southeast Asian descent
- Middle Eastern/Southwest Asian descent
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Island descent
- European descent
- Decline to State

3. Please share the words you use to more fully communicate your identity and experiences. You may include specific race, ethnic, region, national group, and/or tribal/band affiliations you identify with. (Examples: Alaskan Native, Dakota-Shakopee Mdewakanton, Honduran, Azeri/Persian, Puerto Rican, Nigerian, Hmong, Thai, Scots-Irish, Russian Jewish descent, Laotian, Chicano, Italian, Rural/Remote resident, Yupik, Haitian and Creole, Norwegian, decline to state, I don't know, etc.)

4. Which gender(s) do you identify with? (check all that apply)

- Non-binary/non-conforming
- Woman
- Man
- Prefer to self-identify (use the open field in the next question)
- Decline to state

5. Open field for the question above: which gender(s) do you identify with?

6. Do you identify as transgender?

- Yes
- No
- Decline to State

7. Do you identify as disabled or as a person with a disability?

- Yes
- No
- Decline to state

8. Do you identify as neurodivergent?

- Yes
- No
- Decline to State

Information Sessions

ACF staff will offer two 60-minute 2026 McKnight Composer Fellowship Application Information Sessions online to review the application process. During these sessions, there will be time to ask questions about the application process and its components.

- These sessions will be offered online via Zoom. You must register to receive the link.
- We will record the sessions and post them [HERE](#) the following week.
- Video tutorials on how to use the Zoom online meeting system can be found [HERE](#).

Session 1: Monday, November 10, 2025 - 5:30-6:30 PM Central Time

Topic: Review all guidelines and walk through the application process in SlideRoom

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Session 2: Tuesday, November 11, 2025 - 5:30-6:30 PM Central Time

Topic: Examine previous awardees' applications as case studies

[REGISTER HERE](#)

If you need one-on-one assistance with your application, please email Brian Dowdy at bdowdy@composersforum.org to schedule a meeting.

Additional Information

- Entries must be submitted electronically on or before 11:59 PM PST on Wednesday, December 17, 2025.
- There will be a 24-hour grace period to accommodate any issues submitting your application by the deadline, but your application must have been started before the deadline. After the grace period, late applications will not be considered under any circumstance.
- Entries submitted by mail or means other than the provided online application process will not be eligible for consideration.

Questions

The American Composers Forum encourages applicants to contact ACF staff to ask questions and discuss potential applications. For general questions regarding the McKnight Composer Fellowship program applications, please contact Brian Dowdy, Community Director, at bdowdy@composersforum.org.

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