



OPERA GRANTS FOR WOMEN COMPOSERS: DISCOVERY GRANTS

Supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation

**2025–2026 GUIDELINES &
APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

operaamerica.org/Grants | Grants@operaamerica.org

OPERA America
National Opera Center
330 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001

Timeline

- Intent to apply deadline: December 18, 2025, 11:59 p.m. ET
Required for access to full application
- Application deadline: January 22, 2026, 11:59 p.m. ET
- Grantees notified: February 2026
- Grant period: April 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027

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 Grants Portal information, contact [Jenny Fornoff](#), senior manager for grants.

How to Apply

- Read the guidelines carefully before completing any application materials.
- All materials must be submitted online via the [Grants Portal](#).
- An intent to apply form is required for all applications and is due by December 18, 2025, 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 January 22, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. ET.
- Applications that are incomplete, late, or sent via mail, fax, or email will not be accepted.

Purpose

Through the generous support of the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, OPERA America offers two types of Opera Grants for Women Composers: Commissioning Grants available to Professional Company Members; and Discovery Grants available to individual artists. Both programs provide support for the development of new operas by women composers, advancing the important objective to increase gender parity and diversity across the field.

Discovery Grants support the exploration of opera as an artistic medium by women composers through such activities as:

- A Libretto Reading: a reading in which the devised literature is read aloud for evaluation.
- A Workshop: an informal performance of some or all of a work to obtain feedback on specific elements of the piece. Workshops might be performed with piano and/or instrumental accompaniment.
- Working Performance: a partial or full run-through of a work, with piano or

instrumental accompaniment, to obtain feedback for the further development of the piece. An audience may or may not be present.

The above are examples of typical developmental activities and are not meant to limit the goals of any application.

Projects may be given priority in funding selection if they are further along in the development process.

Definitions

Opera

OPERA America defines opera as a music-theater experience with a dramatic arc written for trained voice(s) of all genres and accompanied by instruments.

Composer/Librettist

In this document, the author of the music will be referred to as the composer, and the author of the text will be referred to as the librettist, although applicants may have prior experience as songwriters, poets, or playwrights.

Grant Awards & Project Scope

OPERA America expects to award 6–8 Discovery Grants. Grant recipients will receive:

- Up to \$15,000 per applicant to support costs associated with the production of a workshop, reading, or other performance-based developmental event;
- Complimentary registrations, transportation, and housing stipend (valued at \$2,250) for the applicant to attend OPERA America's 2026 and 2027 Opera Conferences;
- Access to mentorship and professional development programs for grant recipients;
- Recognition through *Opera America Magazine*;
- An OPERA America individual membership.

The applicant is responsible for ensuring the project's completion and providing all required financial and narrative documentation to OPERA America. If awarded a Discovery Grant, the composer may either serve as the fiscal agent for the project or may designate a single (1) partner to receive the grant funds. The composer and/or their designated partner is responsible for disbursing any funds received to their collaborators or vendors.

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 may not be applied to expenses incurred before April 1, 2026. Grant activities must be completed by June 30, 2027.

Grants may cover up to 100 percent of eligible expenses, not exceeding the amount of the grant award; no matching funds are required. Additional expenses to complete the project are the responsibility of the creators.

- **Eligible expenses include but are not limited to:**
 - Vocalist, instrumentalist, and other performer fees;
 - Music director/conductor;
 - Dramaturg;
 - Orchestrator, arranger, copyist;
 - Stage director;
 - Vocal coach;
 - Sound designer;
 - Rehearsal and workshop venue rental fees;
 - Stage manager;
 - Equipment rental (e.g., lighting, sound, instrumental cartage);
 - Costs associated with project recording, including venue rental, recording personnel, and technical support for audio-visual needs;
 - Costs incurred to create or prepare new musical materials, such as expanded or reduced orchestrations and copyist expenses for the creation of parts;
 - Childcare and/or eldercare while creators are in rehearsal or workshop;
 - Research materials (e.g., performance tickets, new work recordings, reference books);
 - Living expenses for the composer of up to 30% of the grant request; and
 - Transportation and housing for personnel related to creative meetings, rehearsals, and performances. (Airfare is limited to coach class.)
- **Ineligible expenses include:**
 - Commissioning fees to composers and librettists;
 - Set, costume, or properties construction or rental expenses for a fully staged production;
 - Institutional overhead expenses if partnering with an organization;
 - Expenses that are not connected specifically to a project, including general administrative expenses and competition or contest application fees;
 - Tuition expenses;
 - Professional development fees;
 - Fundraising expenses;
 - Ticket subsidies; and
 - Any other expenses incurred in relation to a fully produced premiere for public presentation.

Eligibility

- **Applicant Eligibility:**

- Applicants must be individual composers who identify as cis or trans women composers.
- Applicants must be United States citizens or permanent residents or possess Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status.
- Applications submitted on behalf of a project with more than one composer, and/or that represent the efforts of a collective, are allowed. However, for the purposes of this grant program, the applicant will be considered the sole representative of the project and the sole recipient of any grant award.
- Applicants must demonstrate their ability to write music and/or text by providing work samples.
- This program is open to creators from all performing arts disciplines.
- An artist can be a member of only one applicant team with one project.
- Applicants whose work received a Commissioning Grant from OPERA America in any previous cycle are not eligible to apply for a Discovery Grant.
- Previous recipients of Discovery Grants are not eligible to apply again.

- **Project Eligibility**

- Applicants may only submit one proposal per cycle.
- Applicants may only submit the same work for consideration for three cycles of this granting program. Applicants who have applied unsuccessfully in two cycles with the same piece must articulate the substantive changes made since the last cycle in their intent to apply. Changes may include but are not limited to:
 - Rewriting of the text and/or music;
 - Restructuring of the dramatic arc; and
 - Change in librettist or other key personnel.
- Funding may not be applied to expenses incurred before April 1, 2026.
- Grant-funded activities must be completed by June 30, 2027.
- A piece that has already had its premiere may only be considered for a Discovery Grant if the submission represents a **substantial** reworking of the piece.

Work Samples

Applicants are required to submit two work samples that best represent their voices and creative styles. The most competitive applications will include examples of recent compositions that demonstrate the composer's ability to compose theatrical works for the trained voice and instrumental ensemble. Work samples need not be classical or operatic.

Samples that demonstrate the creator's aptitude for theatrical storytelling are recommended. At least one sample must feature voice(s) (not digitally generated).

All samples should be:

- Hosted audio or video on sites like YouTube, Vimeo, Dropbox, or SoundCloud.

- Combined samples must be no longer than 20 minutes. Neither sample should exceed 10 minutes in length.
- It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure samples are accessible to the review panel until they are notified of the outcome of their application.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit excerpts of the work for which funds are being requested, if possible. If work samples from the proposed work are not available, be prepared to explain how the submitted sample(s) are stylistically related to the proposed work.

Scores or other forms of visual representation of a musical work are optional.

Narrative Statements

Applicants are required to submit written narrative statements providing:

- Information about the work's creative team;
- A personal statement;
- Explanation of the proposed work; and
- Description of the grant project (e.g., the workshop, reading, or working performance for their work in progress).

Budget

Applicants are required to submit a budget for the proposed project, listing anticipated expenses and any confirmed or prospective revenue. OPERA America provides an [Excel worksheet](#) outlining many possible expenses for your consideration.

You do not need to complete every line. You may add lines for additional expenses as necessary.

Application Review

All final applications for the Opera Grants for Women Composers: Discovery Grants are reviewed by an independent panel of experts approved by the board of directors of OPERA America. The panel will consist of professionals of various racial, ethnic, and gender identities, with different areas of expertise and experience with diverse musical styles, as well as producers from OPERA America member companies. 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.
- **Distinction in Concept and Planning:** The appropriateness, effectiveness, and thoroughness of the planning process guiding the proposed activity.
- **Evaluation:** The articulation of realistic and achievable goals for evaluating the proposed project, as well as the development process during the grant period.

Terms, Payment Schedule, and Reporting Requirements

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.

Grant recipients are not employees of OPERA America, and awarded composers do not hold a contract with the organization. This funding is a gift from OPERA America to welcome grant recipients into a community of support and encouragement in order to further their careers in opera. The work of each applicant remains the property of the composer.

Successful applicants will receive an award agreement explaining the grant's terms and conditions, including required narrative and financial documentation.

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 and an updated budget and participates in a 15-minute orientation call with the OPERA America staff.

The applicant must serve as the fiscal agent for the project or may designate a single (1) partner to receive the grant funds. The composer must apply for the grant, ensure all received funds are disbursed, and provide 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.

All reporting requirements must be completed before the grant will be fully paid; this includes uploading a final narrative and budget documentation and participating in a final interview. All reports will be reviewed by the OPERA America staff.

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.

Opera Grants for Women Composers: Discovery Grants are restricted to the project described in the application. Funds advanced to the grantee by OPERA America must be repaid in the event the approved project is not carried out.

The Opera Grants for Women Composer: Discovery award is intended for the named awardee(s) only and is not transferable to any other artist or organization. The receipt of a grant at any stage of a project or activity does not guarantee continued support from OPERA America.

Opera Grants for Women Composers: Discovery Grant 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. Applicants may be invited to provide information on the results of projects, even when not supported by an Opera Grants for Women Composers: Discovery Grant.

Awardees are required to acknowledge OPERA America and other funders, including the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, in the manner described by OPERA America in the award agreement. Recognition of the awarded project is required in all print and digital materials distributed to the press and general public. Proof of these acknowledgments is necessary for the final payment of the grant to be processed. Recipients of Opera Grants for Women Composers: Discovery Grants must maintain OPERA America's logo, including a hyperlink to OPERA America's website, in a prominent location on their websites.

Contact Information

For more information, contact Jenny Fornoff, senior manager for grants, at Grants@operaamerica.org or 646.699.5258.

Funder

Opera Grants for Women Composers: Discovery Grants are made possible through the generosity of the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation.

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Over the past five decades, OPERA America has awarded over \$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.

Since 2009, OPERA America has offered grants directly to 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 composers 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.