

# Digital Changemaker Grant

## Bold Initiatives for Small & Midsize Arts & Cultural Organizations

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The Carl & Marilyn Thoma Art Foundation is pleased to announce a new grant program for Digital Changemaker in the Arts. Five grants will be disbursed among small and midsize cultural organizations in Arizona, Illinois, New Mexico, Oklahoma, or Texas. Each individual award of up to \$100,000 will support initiatives that reimagine the role and use of technology to achieve the organization's mission, and successful projects will be eligible for renewed funding.

This grant aspires not only to help organizations execute cutting-edge digital projects, but also to raise the bar on what is perceived as possible for smaller institutions to achieve by funding examples that inspire institutions nationwide. Because the Thoma Art Foundation views technology, wisely deployed, as a tool of equity and accessibility, we are seeking applications from a broad array of cultural organizations, including but not limited to museums, cultural heritage centers, tribal organizations, libraries, and local arts councils.

Funds can be used for myriad purposes, including but not limited to curating digital exhibitions, improving overall audience engagement with the organization, digitizing collections, and improving accessibility to content and services. All projects should set realistic, measurable goals, and have a concrete plan for evaluating their achievements. Successful projects will advance or facilitate institutional learning, incorporate digital and technological best practices, reach a broad public audience, and create a lasting impact. This is not an emergency grant; rather it is meant to help resilient cultural organizations meet the increasing demand for digital engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Grantees who achieve successful results and demonstrate efficient use of funding will be eligible to renew their grants, and to receive additional support of up to \$100,000.

The projects funded through this grant may help to refine or evolve an organization's existing digital strategy. Eligible applicants will already have a set of guidelines that details how the use of digital technologies advances the organization's broader mission and values. These guidelines may be part of an internal working document only or a piece of the organization's formal strategic plan.

The deadline for this grant is **March 11, 2021**, and applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis. This means that the sooner we receive your application, the sooner we will make a funding decision. Because the funding pool is limited, early applicants will have an advantage. The **application portal** will open on **November 17, 2020**.

Want to run an idea by us before submitting a full proposal? Email [grants@thomafoundation.org](mailto:grants@thomafoundation.org) and our grants team will be happy to workshop ideas with you.

## The Need

Cultural organizations that are not able to produce compelling digital content are increasingly being left behind during COVID-19 as limited in-person visitorship drives the demand for more digital access to art and culture outside of brick-and-mortar institutions. In a time of isolation and anxiety, digital content has kept core audiences connected and reduced barriers for new audiences to engage. Like the American Alliance of Museums, the Thoma Art Foundation believes that digital transformation will not end when the pandemic does, but that instead “we are moving into a new realm where digital and analog will co-exist as unique but parallel experiences.”

Most digital project grants are scaled for larger, well-resourced institutions. Small and medium organizations have found it more difficult to pilot nimble, efficient initiatives or to develop appropriate long-term digital strategies that will help them connect with audiences in new ways and achieve greater financial stability during this and future crises. Indeed, the Knight Foundation’s October 2020 Digital Readiness & Innovation report found that: “significant attention in the digital world is paid to large-scale marquee projects. The budget, staffing and resources for these projects set unrealistic benchmarks for many institutions and do not help smaller institutions grow capacity. Examples of digital strategies, effective project management, and strategies to build key capabilities specifically formulated for smaller institutions would support these institutions in taking the next step.”

## About

- 5 yearlong grants of up to \$100,000 each, with the possibility of a one-year renewal of up to another \$100,000
- Awarded to small and midsize nonprofits in AZ, IL, NM, OK, or TX to support digital initiatives that advance an organization’s larger digital strategy
- All projects should have a plan to facilitate learning, incorporate digital and technological best practices, reach a broad audience, and be sustainable.
- Applicants should demonstrate how the project relates to the organization’s mission and core strengths. Applicants should also be able to articulate how the success of the project will be measured and evaluated.
- Proposals should be future-oriented, feasible, and capable of impacting the larger field of arts-centered digital initiatives.
- Applicants should provide a realistic timeline for project completion. The successful grantee and the Thoma Art Foundation will collaboratively set interim benchmarks to evaluate progress toward project goals.
- Because this grant is targeted towards projects that are already conceptually developed and partially funded, we ask that applicants be able to commence work within 90 days of receiving a grant agreement. Grant funds will be disbursed starting at project kick-off.
- Submissions will be open to any qualifying organization (read below). We are intentionally casting a wide net with the hope of attracting a diverse field of applicants.

## Eligibility

We support arts and culture organizations that are:

- Operating at an annual budget between \$500,000 and \$10,000,000.
- Doing groundbreaking and essential work in the fields of art & culture.
- Cultural organizations including but not limited to museums, cultural centers, tribal organizations, libraries, and local art councils.
- Committed to equity in their hiring, leadership, programming, and institutional culture.
- Already integrating digital approaches into their overall strategy to reach new audiences, connect with visitors in new ways, and attain greater financial stability.
- Willing to share their successful research, initiatives, and findings with the broader arts community, including the cohort of other Digital Changemaker Grantees.
- Able to effectively leverage the Digital Changemaker Grant to secure additional funding from other sources.

## Criteria

The Thoma Art Foundation is very open to different ways of responding digitally to the current moment and preparing for a tech-integrated future. However, we prefer to fund projects that have already been conceptually developed and are merely lacking capital in order to succeed. These include:

- The development of a specific digital program or initiative. The project should include clear goals and a plan for evaluating its success.
- Staff positions designed to support digital initiatives, such as paid interns, graduate fellowships, postdocs, or permanent hires. Note that for staff-related requests you will need to show how the proposed position(s) will make a quantifiable and lasting impact on the institution. For permanent hires, please explain how the position will be financially sustainable beyond the grant period.
- Technology upgrades necessary to implementing your institution's established digital strategy.
- Technical support and professional development (i.e. setting up a new online platform; training for staff in new technology set-up and deployment).
- Digitization of collections, provided that this process will improve the organization's ability to connect with audience and stakeholders.
- A combination of some or all of the above.

## Application Guidelines

This grant *does not* support:

- Projects that only advance the goals of one department or aspect of your organization, or that lack a public-facing element. We value interdisciplinarity and will prioritize projects that boldly and broadly advance an institution's digital mindset.
- "Quick fix" thinking around digital projects (e.g., merely adding iPads to a gallery to make it "digital").
- For-profit organizations, commercial galleries, or individuals.
- Expenditures that have taken place before the grant period.
- Organizations exclusively devoted to the performing arts. Applicant organizations must engage with visual/material culture in a significant capacity.

## Contacts

### Grants Team

Christine Dong, Strategic Projects Associate  
Sarah Rovang, Program Officer  
[grants@thomafoundation.org](mailto:grants@thomafoundation.org)

### PR/Communications Inquiries

Nicole Danti, PR & Communications  
Specialist  
[communications@thomafoundation.org](mailto:communications@thomafoundation.org)

## Ready to Learn More & Apply?

### Thoma Art Foundation Digital Changemaker Grant

<https://grants.thomafoundation.org/grants-for-nonprofit-organizations/digital-changemaker/>

### Application Portal

<https://thomafoundation.smartsimple.com/>

Excited about this opportunity and ready to spread the word? Please mention us when you share this grant opportunity on social media and let us know about grant opportunity or Thoma Art Foundation listings on your website and directory. Add us to your announcement mailing list [communications@thomafoundation.org](mailto:communications@thomafoundation.org).



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