



**Request for Proposals:
Creative Forces Community Engagement Grants Technical Assistance Contractor**

Deadline for Submission: December 3

Purpose

The intent of this RFP is to solicit proposals for the development and implementation of a Technical Assistance and Evaluation Plan for the Creative Forces Community Engagement Grant Program.

Background

Creative Forces®: NEA Military Healing Arts Network is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs that seeks to improve the health, well-being, and quality of life for military and veteran populations exposed to trauma, as well as their families and caregivers. Creative Forces is managed in partnership with Americans for the Arts, the Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine, and Mid-America Arts Alliance.

The program has three components:

CLINICAL—Creative Forces is placing creative arts therapies at the core of patient-centered care at military medical and Veterans Health Administration medical facilities, including telehealth delivery of care for patients in rural and remote areas. In clinical settings, creative arts therapists provide art, music, and dance/movement therapies, as well as therapeutic writing instruction, for military patients and veterans.

COMMUNITY— Since 2017, Creative Forces has invested in community arts engagement activities in order to advance our understanding of their benefits and impacts for military and veteran populations exposed to trauma. In 2021, the NEA announced the Creative Forces Community Engagement grants [LINK] to support emerging and established community-based arts engagement and/or non-clinical arts engagement projects.

CAPACITY—Creative Forces invests in capacity-building efforts, including the development of toolkits, training materials, and other resources to support best practices in serving the target populations. In addition, Creative Forces is investing in research on the impacts and benefits—physical, social, and emotional—of these innovative treatment methods. Visit Creative Forces' [National Resource Center](#) to learn more and to read all research associated with Creative Forces.

The Creative Forces Community Arts Engagement Grant promotes the health, well-being, and overall quality of life for targeted military connected populations through support of arts engagement activities designed to cultivate creative expression, increase social connectedness, improve resilience, and support successful adaptation to civilian life. A key component of Creative Forces Community Arts Engagement is the Creative Forces Community Engagement Grant.

The [Creative Forces Community Engagement Grant](#) is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in partnership with Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA). This grant program aims to improve the health, well-being, and quality of life for targeted military-connected populations through matching grants of \$10,000 to \$50,000 for emerging and advanced arts engagement projects that take place after July 1, 2022. Approximately 35 grants, up to two years in length, will be awarded on an annual basis.

Since 2017, Creative Forces has invested in community arts engagement activities in order to advance understanding of the benefits and impacts for military-connected populations who have been exposed to trauma. Creative Forces-supported community programs have involved a range of arts activities, including visual, written, and performing arts offered through single events, drop-in programs, and ongoing engagement led by artists in residence, teaching artists, or creative arts therapists. Program evaluation has examined the impacts of these activities. Such [findings](#) informed the development of the Creative Forces Community Engagement Logic Models and the Creative Forces Community Engagement Grant.

The Creative Forces Community Engagement efforts are supported by a two-tiered logic model: a National Level model to provide an overarching framework, aims and outcomes being pursued by the broader national initiative, and a Grantee Level model that provides a framework for grantees to identify organizational and participant outcomes being pursued via grant-supported activities. The logic model identifies key project outcomes for trauma exposed military connected participants and organizational applicants. The outcomes identified are as follows:

Participant Outcomes:

- **Creative Expression:** Participants have a better understanding of themselves and others by creating or engaging with art.
- **Social Connectedness:** Participants have supportive relationships in their lives and a sense of belonging to a community.
- **Resilience:** Participants feel they can rebound from stress, unexpected events, or life's challenges.
- **Independence and Successful Adaptation to Civilian Life:** Participants have both an individual and shared sense of purpose, as well a positive self-worth, that support adapting and readjusting to civilian life.

Grantee Outcomes:

- **Networked Organization:** Grantees build networks and partnerships that support the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs for military-connected participants leading to stronger outcomes for participants.

- **Strengthened Capacity:** Grantees build their capacity to design, implement, and evaluate programs that meet the needs of military-connected participants.
- **Increased Value of the Arts:** Grantee partnerships and activities lead to an increased understanding of the value and impact of the arts across local participating networks and communities.

As a part of the Creative Forces Grant Program, grant recipients are expected to participate in a robust structure of technical assistance designed to build organizational capacity and confidence in implementing projects that promote the health, well-being, and overall quality of life for targeted military-connected populations through support of arts engagement activities designed to deliver impact and benefits aligned with the targeted participant outcomes. Over the course of the grant program, grantees will collect data both on performance measurement and program evaluation as outlined in the Creative Forces data collection plan to monitor outputs and outcomes of the grant program.

To that end, key elements of the technical assistance provided to grantees will be:

- Working with grantees to administer data collection through approved NEA forms and gather other data in alignment with the Creative Forces data collection plan.
- Assisting grantees in understanding the Creative Forces Logic Models and development of their own project or program logic model.
- Assisting grantees in understanding data collected from previously developed performance measurement instruments (program feedback surveys and audience feedback surveys) and how to apply them for evaluation and continuous process improvement purposes, excluding the measurement of individual-level outcomes

Please note that the White House's September 9, 2021 Executive Order requiring Covid-19 vaccination for Federal contractors will likely apply to the entity awarded this contract if the total cost of the proposal exceeds the Simplified Acquisition Threshold (\$250,000 or more). More information regarding the applicability of this Executive Order to this contract will be provided in the future.

Project Statement of Work

This RFP involves two (2) distinct phases of work:

- Phase I (time of the award through June 30, 2022): Needs Assessment, development of a Technical Assistance Plan, and development of a Performance Measurement and Evaluation Support Implementation Plan. **The proposed budget for Phase I should not exceed \$150,000.**
- Phase II (anticipated to begin July 1, 2022): Implementation of Technical Assistance, Performance Measurement, and Evaluation Support Plan. The budget for Phase II will be negotiated depending on the results of the Needs Assessment completed in Phase I.

While both Phase I and II are within the scope of this RFP, **only Phase I shall be awarded at the time of award.** The funding and implementation of Phase II is at M-AAA and the NEA's discretion and will be decided during the life of the contract. Phase II shall be funded and implemented in increments aligned

with Creative Forces Community Engagement Grants awarded on an annual cycle. Phase 2 includes grants with periods of performance starting on July 1, 2022; July 1, 2023; July 1, 2024; and July 1, 2025.

It is anticipated that if Phase II is implemented, it shall begin immediately upon the conclusion of Phase I or shortly thereafter. It is possible that Phase II may be implemented/funded in part or not implemented at all.

All activities within Phase I and Phase II should:

- Provide capacity building around funded grantee activities as outlined in the [Creative Forces Community Engagement Grant Guidelines](#), evaluations, and studies.
- Provide data collection, measurement, evaluation, and learning in support of the Creative Forces Community Engagement Grant Data Collection Plan, Logic Models, and Measurement Framework developed under previous and current Creative Forces cooperative agreements.
- Work towards facilitating grantee organizational capacity and confidence in implementing projects that promote the health, well-being, and overall quality of life for targeted military connected populations through support of arts engagement activities designed to cultivate creative expression, increase social connectedness, improve resilience, and support successful adaptation to civilian life.
- Take into account and address that the grant program has two distinct tiers: Emerging and Advanced. Grants in each tier will be awarded annually. Details on each tier, including funded activities and anticipated technical assistance, are outlined in the [Creative Force Community Engagement Grant Guidelines](#). While it is anticipated that some organizations starting in the emerging tier may move to the advanced tier, it is not a requirement that grantees start in the emerging tier, prior to applying for an advanced tier.

Phase I:

Phase I provides the foundation for the work to be conducted in Phase II and consists of a Needs Assessment, development of a Technical Assistance Plan, and development of a Performance Measurement and Evaluation Support Implementation Plan.

- **Task 1 - Needs Assessment:** Conduct a needs assessment for technical assistance to support Creative Forces Community Engagement grantees in building organizational capacity and confidence in implementing projects that promote the health, well-being, and overall quality of life for targeted military-connected populations through support of arts engagement activities designed to cultivate creative expression, increase social connectedness, improve resilience, and support successful adaptation to civilian life. The needs assessment shall gauge the need for

specific topics and trainings, including but not limited to: program design and implementation, identifying needs of the local military-connected populations, military cultural competency, understanding the value and impact of art engagement, the design and implementation of logic models, project performance measurement, evaluation for continuous process improvement, and data collection in support of the Creative Forces Community Engagement Data Collection Plan. The needs assessment should also gauge interest in particular modes of assistance such as webinars, virtual networking events, social media platforms, in-person convenings, templates and toolkits, and one-on-one technical assistance. In addition, the Contractor shall work to assess any differential needs between grantees in the emerging and advanced tiers and grantee organizational types (i.e. non-profit organization, veteran/military assistance organization). Activities to be conducted by the contractor as a part of the needs assessment include, but are not limited to:

- Consultation with grantees. Possible methods for gathering grantee feedback may include but are not limited to: developing and implementing a needs assessment survey, conducting focus groups, and individual conversations with grantees.
- Review grantee application materials.
- Review relevant findings from evaluation studies on Creative Forces–funded community engagement projects, previously commissioned Creative Forces literature review on community engagement and military family needs assessment, and consult additional literature on community-based arts engagement with military and veteran family populations using appropriate search criteria to provide an evidence base for the analysis.
- Conduct a debrief on perceptions of arts organizations’ needs with the Creative Forces Community Engagement Manager and the Creative Forces Community Metrics & Evaluation Manager. Under a separate Cooperative Agreement between the NEA and Americans for the Arts, the Creative Forces Community Engagement Manager and Community Metrics & Evaluation Manager provided technical assistance and measurement, evaluation, and learning support to organizations implementing pilot projects providing community arts engagement to military-connected populations.

The contractor shall submit a draft needs assessment for review by M-AAA and NEA team. Following receipt of feedback from the NEA (up to two rounds), the contractor shall prepare and submit a final needs assessment.

- **Task 2 - Technical Assistance Plan:** Develop a Technical Assistance plan based on the approved needs assessment to provide technical assistance for Creative Forces Community Engagement grantees. The Technical Assistance plan should include, but is not limited to the following:
 - Identified topics and activities that serve as the basis of the technical assistance to be provided to grantees, recommended formats for delivery, and detailed schedule for delivery that includes timeframe and communication methods. We anticipate the

Technical Assistance will utilize both individualized technical assistance and Peer to Peer facilitation. The Technical Assistance plan should outline the approach for individualized TA with grant recipients and, if applicable for peer-to-peer strategies based on cohorts, include details on how the cohorts should be broken out and anticipated interactions between cohorts. Materials and topics in the technical assistance must align with funded grant activities and technical assistance topics outlined in the Creative Forces Community Engagement Grant Data Collection Plan, Logic Models, and Measurement Framework developed under previous and current Creative Forces cooperative agreements.

- A community of practice (CoP) for the grantees that facilitates mutual exchange of best practices, learnings and insights, and peer support. The CoP should also support asynchronous and synchronous communication and provide for document sharing. The implementation plan should include requirements and recommendations for electronic services and products for implementation of the CoP, to include the role and requirements for the Creative Forces National Resource Center as it relates to technical assistance.
- Include a minimum of one in-person convening. Intended purposes for convening(s) could include providing opportunities for grantees to interact with each other and other stakeholders (as applicable), and/or provide grantees an uninterrupted opportunity for them to strategize and think deeply about their projects.
- Identify services and products to be delivered electronically, including but limited to toolkits, best practice guides, videos, or slide shows to include the identification of an initial set of free, federal and non-federal, research and evidence-based, readily available resources for grantees. The Creative Forces National Resource Center and Creative Forces Related Resources on M-AAA's website include information on and links to findings from previous commissioned work and other material related to creative arts engagement with military-connected populations and military cultural competency.

The contractor shall submit a draft Technical Assistance plan for review by M-AAA and NEA team. Following receipt of feedback from the NEA (up to three rounds), the contractor shall prepare and submit a final technical assistance plan.

- **Task 3 - Performance Measurement and Evaluation Support Implementation Plan:** Build a Performance Measurement and Evaluation Support Implementation Plan for the grant program. The Implementation Plan should utilize the Creative Forces Community Engagement Grant Data Collection Plan including NEA approved forms and surveys, the [Community Engagement Grant Guidelines](#), the Creative Forces National and Program-level Logic Models, and Creative Forces Measurement Framework. The Implementation Plan should include:

- a strategy for ensuring consistent collection of data from all grantees following the program's data collection plan and using approved NEA forms;
- a plan for analysis and reporting of the data from provided NEA forms: supplemental application forms and final report forms completed by grant recipients and program feedback survey and community event survey completed by participants. Findings should be reported to individual grantees, M-AAA, and the NEA.
- a plan to provide grantees access to their own data very quickly after collection. This could include, but is not limited to a grantee-level dashboard.
- updating the Creative Forces Logic Models, and measurement framework, data collection plan, and other associated measurement, evaluation, and learning resources as needed based on performance measurement work.
- a strategy for documentation of additional activities, insights, and outcomes as needed to complement work of the grantees:
- recommendations on how data and findings from performance measurement and associated resources can be shared on the Creative Forces National Resource Center in a form that informs and supports the work of grant recipients, stakeholders in the arts health and military field, Creative Forces stakeholders, and the public.

The contractor shall submit a draft implementation plan for performance measurement and evaluation support for review by M-AAA and NEA team. Following receipt of feedback from the NEA (up to three rounds), the contractor shall prepare and submit a final implementation plan for performance measurement and evaluation support.

- **Task 4: Management**

- Within 5 days of contract award, conduct a meeting with M-AAA and representatives from the NEA. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the goals of this project, review key target dates and deliverables, and other issues related to the conduct of work. Contractor will provide a memorandum summarizing discussions and decisions made 5 working days after the meeting.
- Provide M-AAA with a management plan that identifies contractor responsibilities and program staff responsibilities
- Submit Monthly Progress Reports. The Monthly Progress Reports should summarize the major work performed and accomplishments, by task, during the reporting period and provide information for each project task and activity regarding contract-related significant findings and events, problems encountered, and suggested resolutions. The contractor shall specify in the report the extent to which the project is on schedule and provide an overview of the major activities for the next reporting period.
- Conduct a twice monthly teleconference with M-AAA and representatives from the NEA to discuss the contractor's overall progress, items in the monthly progress report, and any other pertinent issues and/or problems. The contractor is responsible for submitting a draft agenda 2 business days prior to the teleconference.

Phase II:

Phase II of this RFP is the implementation with grantees of the Technical Assistance Plan and the Performance Measurement and Evaluation Support Implementation Plan as developed and approved in Phase I.

- Task 1: Implement the approved Technical Assistance plan developed in Phase 1 to include the establishment of a community of learning and practice among grantees for mutual exchange of best practices, learnings and insights, and peer support.
- Task 2: Conduct performance measurement and evaluation support for the grant program as outlined in the approved implementation plan for performance measurement and evaluation support from Phase 1 of the contract
- Task 3: As applicable, make updates to the Technical Assistance Plan and Performance Measurement and Evaluation Support Implementation Plan
- Task 4: Management
 - Within 5 days of contract award or Phase II, conduct a meeting with M-AAA and representatives from the NEA. The purpose of the meeting is to review and discuss key target dates and deliverables, and other issues related to the conduct of work. Contractor will provide a memorandum summarizing discussions and decisions made 5 working days after the meeting.
 - Provide M-AAA with a management plan that identifies contractor responsibilities and program staff responsibilities
 - Submit Monthly Progress Reports. The Monthly Progress Reports should summarize the major work performed and accomplishments, by task, during the reporting period and provide information for each project task and activity regarding contract-related significant findings and events, problems encountered, and suggested resolutions. The contractor shall specify in the report the extent to which the project is on schedule and provide an overview of the major activities for the next reporting period.
 - Conduct a monthly teleconference with M-AAA and representatives from the NEA to discuss the contractor's overall progress, items in the monthly progress report, and any other pertinent issues and/or problems. The contractor is responsible for submitting a draft agenda 2 business days prior to the teleconference.
 - Submit supplemental resources developed for each grant cycle (e.g. video documentation of lessons learned, community engagement and evaluation resource developed specifically for the individual grantees) communicating lessons learned, methodologies that emerged, and frameworks that were developed to inform the awardees, the stakeholders in the arts health and military field, Creative Forces stakeholders, and the public

- Create a Final Report at the conclusion of each grant cycle, yearly progress reports.

M-AAA & NEA responsibilities

- Interact and partner with the contractor.
- Organize logistics (to include identifying location, venue, lodging) and provide travel support for grantees, NEA Staff, and M-AAA personnel for any in-person convenings.
- Participate and attend virtual and/or in-person meetings between the cooperator, Creative Forces Project Director, and technical assistance team.
- Support the contractor by joining them on grantee sites when appropriate.
- Co-produce, edit, and have final approval of final work products as defined through the Technical Assistance plan and Performance Measurement and Evaluation Support Implementation Plan at M-AAA and NEA direction.

Proposals

The proposal shall be no more than five pages, single spaced, in 12-point font. This page limit is exclusive of resumes, appendices, and all other attachments and supplemental materials.

As part of the RFP process, the Contractor shall submit a high-level work plan and project timeline for accomplishing the tasks of the contract. The proposal shall also include a draft needs assessment strategy that includes methodological detail and personnel involved, anticipated timing of deliverable submissions, M-AAA/NEA review periods, and proposed project meetings related to the initial needs assessment.

Submissions shall include, at a minimum, each of the following:

- Understanding of the project through a discussion of the rationale and purpose of the project.
- Technical approach to completing each component of the Technical Assistance and Evaluation Plan in terms of:
 - Description of intended work under each component, and
 - Identification of potential challenges and strategies for addressing them.
- Management plan, including:
 - Illustration of staff assignments by task and distribution of person hours spent on each task;
 - Other existing commitments for each proposed staff member;
 - Work schedule by component, including timeline for deliverables, and
 - Qualifications for proposed personnel, including subcontractors. Names and qualifications of key project personnel, including the lead project manager(s). Resumes for all key personnel must be submitted.

- Organizational capacity and experience, including the demonstration of organizational experience with projects of a similar scope and magnitude to what is described in the statement of work.
- Budget for Phase I only.

Evaluation Factors: For each evaluation factor, a point scoring system will be used to rank all proposals, using a rating scale of 50 points. The evaluation will include five (5) major areas:

1. **Understanding of the Project (10 points):** The contractor demonstrates a thorough understanding of the policy and programmatic context for the project, as shown through discussion of the rationale and purpose for the project. The contractor provides evidence of a clear understanding of community-based arts programming for military-connected populations. The contractor demonstrates knowledge of existing research and data on the topic of community-based arts programming for military and veteran populations, including how existing data and/or previous studies may provide insights into the current project. The contractor does not simply repeat the statement of work, but shows an independent understanding of the issues and context inherent to evaluations with a focus on community-based arts programming for military-connected populations.

2. **Technical Approach (10 points):** The contractor's approach is succinct and logical in format, consistent with the tasks to be accomplished, and fully addresses the purposes described in the statement of work. The proposed technical approach clearly specifies and describes the intended work under each task. The proposal presents clear plans for gathering the information needed to effectively address the project scope, identifying relevant individuals to contact, using appropriate methods to analyze and synthesize data from all sources, and communicating findings. The proposal discusses the contractor's proposed approach to all deliverables, including the structure and contents of the technical assistance plan and program evaluation plan. The contractor identifies potential challenges to the project's success and presents strategies for addressing them. Overall, the technical approach is of a high quality and demonstrates broad knowledge of the assessment of implementation and outcomes associated with community-based arts programming for military-connected populations, planning for performance measurement and evaluation, and thorough technical proficiency with the methodologies that will be effective in addressing the project scope.

3. **Management Plan (10 points):** The management plan clearly explains how the project will be managed, and includes each of the following: an organization chart of the proposed project team; an indication of lead staff for each task; an illustration of staff assignments by task and distribution of person hours to be spent on each task; other existing commitments for each proposed staff member and a work schedule by task that includes a timetable for deliverables. If subcontractors are to be used for any portion of the work, the management plan should describe their roles, responsibilities, and time commitments. The management plan should also contain a clear description of the contractor's plans for overseeing subcontractors.

4. **Personnel Qualifications, Organization Capacity and Experience (10 points):** The contractor demonstrates that the proposed personnel, including subcontractors (if applicable), possess experience

developing technical assistance and evaluation plans, and provides evidence of having conducted tasks similar to the work outlined in the RFP (with examples cited). The proposal provides evidence of the overall competency of the proposed team in the methodologies required, including relevant experience of the proposed lead project manager and other key staff in understanding programmatic issues, identification and analysis of program information, and communicating research findings through quality project reports. The proposed lead project manager has demonstrated experience in managing projects of comparable scale and complexity. The contractor demonstrates experience with projects of a similar scope and magnitude to what is described in this statement of work, i.e., technical assistance, program evaluation, and community-based arts engagement project, especially those involving military-connected populations (with examples cited).

5. Price (10 points): The proposed budget is appropriate to the administration of the project. The contractor shall provide a reasonable breakdown of their costs to allow M-AAA to assess the various components of the overall price. The breakdown shall clearly identify and provide costs by key personnel and tasks as well as the breakdown between labor costs and other direct costs.