FY26 MHAA Instructions for Completing Project Grant Applications and Reviewer Criteria

(as of 12/16/24)

This document provides step-by step instructions for completing the MHAA Capital and Non-Capital Grant Applications and some consideration for how to respond to each question. If additional clarification is needed, please contact your heritage area director or MHAA Administrator, Ariane M. Hofstedt, directly at ariane.hofstedt@maryland.gov

Introduction

This section contains only the most pertinent aspects you need to know about submitting your application (i.e. application deadlines, required fields) and encourages applicants to use the *FY 2026 MHAA Project Grants Guidelines for Applicants* and contact MHAA staff for additional information.

Overview

Applicant Organization

Start by filling in your organization name. Then fill in the legal name of your organization which is often the same as your organization name but can be different. You must complete both fields and the legal name you provide in the "Legal Name" field must match EXACTLY the legal name as registered with the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT).

You can check your organization's legal name by going to SDAT website here: https://egov.maryland.gov/BusinessExpress/EntitySearch (see "Eligible Applicants" section of the *FY 2026 MHAA Project Grants Guidelines for Applicants* for more information).

Complete the rest of this section by selecting your organization type from the pull-down options and entering your tax ID/federal employer Identification Number (EIN). For nonprofit organization and government agencies this is generally a 9-digit number, e.g., 52-1234567. Then enter the street, city, state, and zip code address of your organization along with your website (if applicable, this is not required).

Project Contact

In this section you will identify the primary project contact. This is the person who will manage the grant and serve as the primary project contact. They will receive all correspondence, notification, and reminders regarding the grant. The primary project contact is often the project manager or person who will be overseeing the implementation of the project and keeping track of the day-to-day tasks associated with its completion.

Acknowledgement of Management and Administrative Capability

In this section you must check the box to affirm that the organization and primary project contact have read the *FY 2026 MHAA Project Grants Guidelines for Applicants* and the best of their knowledge the organization and the primary project contact can provide the administrative and managerial oversight needed to complete the proposed project.

There are no points awarded to the "Overview" section.

Project Information

Grant Project Title

The project title should refer to the property and/or specific activity for which funding is being requested. If you would like to use a different project title than the one you listed in your Intent to Apply, you are allowed to revise the title at the time of full application and list something different here, but please make sure to let your local heritage area know.

Project Summary

In this field, please provide a short description that includes a list of the specific work and/or deliverables to be completed using the grant funds and match. This section is limited to a 250-word count. For example, XYZ organization will be producing a new interpretive brochure that highlights its seasonal educational events. Consultants will be hired to help design the new brochure and translate it into French and Spanish. Approximately 2,000 copies will be printed.

Overall Project Description

Please describe the overall project, including any consultants or contractors you plan on working with and/or past and future phases of work. Be sure to include any pre-planning and preparation work that has already been completed. If you are seeking funds for a specific phase of a capital project, for example, please indicate clearly which phase of work this grant request is applying for and what, if any, work has been done previously or is planned for the future. You will also have another opportunity to list other people who will be working on your project, along with their resumes/CVs, in the "Supplemental Documents" section later in the application.

For example, XYZ Organization is applying for phase 2 construction funds that will include installing a new roof and adding a bathroom to the visitor center. Final construction drawings were completed last year in phase I and a final phase III landscaping project is schedule for next year which will complete the project.

Please note, depending on the amount of your grant, you may be required to solicit 2 – 3 written bids before selecting a consultant or contractor (see "MHAA Grants Manual" located here, https://mht.maryland.gov/Documents/grants/MHAA%20Grants%20Manual.pdf

Timeline/Schedule

Please list the proposed timeline of the work to be funded by your grant and match. You can also include other phases (identified as outside the grant period) if applicable. Keep in mind that your project start date will be July 10, 2025, and your first payment may not be released until January 2026. Using the example above, a corresponding timeline could appear as follows:

- July 2024 – June 2025: Phase I Final Construction Drawings Completed (outside the FY26 MHAA grant period)
- July 2025 – June 2026 Phase II Construction of New Roof and Bathroom (proposed request for FY26 MHAA grant funds)
- July 2026 – June 2027: Phase III Landscape Construction (outside the FY26 MHAA grant period)

The entire "Project Information" section is worth 10 points, all of the questions in this section are required and will be considered.

Reviewer Criteria and Considerations
Do the project summary, timeline, and overall project description provide a feasible plan for the creation of a heritage tourism product?
1. Does the applicant provide a clear outline of the project, including deliverables and the scope of work? 2. Will the project result in a heritage tourism product? 3. How thought out is the project and does it appear to be feasible? If it is part of a larger multi-phase project does the applicant appear ready for the proposed phase of work? 4. Does the timeline align with the scope of work outlined in the project summary and description?

Budget Information

Grant Funds Requested

Enter the amount of funds you are requesting from the FY26 MHAA grant program.

- The maximum amount you can request for an MHAA Capital Grant project is $100,000.
- The maximum amount you can request for an MHAA Non-Capital Grant project is $50,000.
- The minimum for both the Capital and Non-Capital grants is $5,000.

Required Match Amount

Ener the amount of matching funds. This should be EXACTLY the same amount as grant funds requested dollar-for-dollar.

For both of the above fields, round up to the nearest dollar. If you would like to enter a different amount than the one you listed in your Intent to Apply, you are allowed to revise it at the time of full application and list something different here, but please make sure to let your local heritage area know. **Enter numbers only, no commas or dollar signs**. If you have not already, please download the Excel Project Budget Form using the Project Budget template that can be downloaded in the application or on the MHAA webpage. Once downloaded, complete it using the following guidelines and save it to your personal or work computer as an Excel file.
https://mht.maryland.gov/Documents/grants/Grants_MHAA_BudgetDetail.xlsx

When completing your budget, you must adhere to the following guidelines:

- You must provide a 1:1 match to the grant using any combination of cash and in-kind contributions.

- Salaries and/or benefits of permanent or temporary staff of the applicant organization are considered ineligible grant expenses, but staff time working on the grant-funded project can be used as match.
- You may not use other sources of state funds to fulfill your match requirement, with the exception of staff time for state employees working on the project which can be used as match
- All grant and match funds must be spent within the term of the grant (July 10, 2025 - Project End Date)
- If the total project is expected to cost more than the total grant request and required match combined, those additional costs should be listed on the application budget as Other Project Costs. State funds should not be included.

Single one line-item budgets are discouraged. A breakdown of costs by multiple line items is preferred. If you are working with a contractor(s) and they give you one lump sum, please ask them to break it down. For additional information see Appendix E: Sample Budget in the *FY 2026 MHAA Project Grants Guidelines for Applicants.*

Upload Your Budget Here

To upload your completed Project Budget Form, click "choose file" and select your filled out Excel Project Budget Form from the folder where you saved it on your personal or work computer. Then, click "upload."

Anticipated Other Project Costs

If the total project is expected to cost more than the total grant request and required match combined, those additional costs are considered Other Project Costs and should be included in your project budget. Do not include state funds in other project costs. If there are state funds supporting your project that are not part of the grant funds you are requesting from MHAA, you can explain this in narrative form under the Additional Budget Information section.

Total Project Budget

This amount should match exactly the amount listed in your Excel Project Budget and be comprised of your grant request, matching funds, and other project costs.

Source of Match

If you know the source(s) of your match funds (other state funds are not eligible, except state staff time can be used as in-kind match) please list them here. If they are still to be identified, please provide any details you can about potential match sources. Proof of match is NOT required at time of application.

Additional Budget Information

In this field, in narrative form please provide any additional details about your proposed budget, such as quotes for work and estimates. For capital work, estimates from contractors are preferred, but if applicants are unable to provide official estimates, please explain how budgeted expenses were determined, e.g., based on previous work experiences. You are not required to submit additional budget information, but it is strongly recommended.

Supporting Budget Documents Here

Convert any written estimates or letters from contractors to a PDF file and save to your personal or work computer. To upload Supporting Budget Documents, click "choose file" and select the PDF file(s) from the

folder where you saved it on your personal or work computer. Then click "choose file'" and select your supporting budget PDF documents. Then, click "upload."

The entire "Budget Information" section is worth 10 points.

Reviewer Criteria and Considerations
Does the budget contain the necessary expenditures to complete the tasks outlined in the timeline?
1. Do the expenditures align with the deliverables described in the scope of work and timeline? 2. How well does the applicant explain how estimates were developed? If applicant provided additional budget information and/or estimates from contractors, do they appear fair and reasonable and in support of the deliverables?

Project Impact

In this section you will be asked to explain the potential impact of this project as it pertains to MHAA's three areas of focus:

- Developing Heritage Tourism Products
- Building Partnerships
- Sustaining Regional Identity

How will this project result in increased heritage tourism?

Consider sharing how this project will engage visitors or a new audiences, how you will market and/or distribute this project, how visitors will access the project, and what qualitative and quantitative ways the project will contribute to increased heritage tourism (i.e. visitation, number of items produced, creation of new interests or investments, contribution to a body of knowledge, promotion of heritage, etc.)

This question will be worth 23 points.

Reviewer Criteria and Considerations
Does the project have a clear heritage tourism value?
1. Does the applicant explain quantitative and/or qualitative ways in which the project will contribute to increased heritage tourism? For example, visitation, number of items produced, how the product will spur new interests and/or investments, contribute to a body of knowledge or story, or save/promote/protect heritage in some way? 2. Does the applicant talk about what audiences will be impacted? Will they be reaching a new audience or strengthening relationships with an existing one? 3. How will audiences access the product? How will it be disseminated? Online? Visiting a physical location?

How will this project build partnerships within your heritage area?

List and/or describe any partners that will be working with you and how they will be contributing to the project. Consider, for example, how this project will engage partners and leverage resources, how it will

bring common and uncommon partners together around a shared, local vision or how it may help partners build organizational capacity. Partners might include other nonprofits, your local heritage area, and members of your community. These can be people, organizations, businesses outside of your own, including any entities you have new or existing relationships with already, such as your local heritage area. Think broadly when answering this question, partnerships do not have to be present throughout the life of the whole project. They can apply to one-time, specific interactions as well as more formal consistent arrangements.

For example, XYZ Organization intends to develop a series of lectures highlighting the history of their local town and will be partnering with a local restaurant who will provide the venue for free and discounted food to participants. They share a common goal of attracting visitors to the area to learn more about its local history and boost the local economy through heritage tourism. An additional benefit is that the revenue earned from both partners allows them to increase their organizational capacities.

This question will be worth 15 points.

Reviewer Criteria and Considerations
Will the project build partnerships within the heritage area?
1. Does the applicant list and/or describe partners (people, organizations, businesses, local heritage area, etc.,) they will be working with to complete the project? Is the partnership a new or existing one? 2. Will the partnerships listed contribute to a common product, vision, or help build organizational capacity? 3. Do the partnerships listed help to leverage resources (people, money, marketing, etc.)?

How will this project sustain regional identity or showcase your heritage area's distinctive cultural, historical, and natural assets?

Each local heritage area has planning documents, interpretive themes, and annual priorities and goals that are used to guide how they work with and support the historic, cultural, and natural resources in their respective areas. Projects funded through the MHAA are intended to support these efforts. You are strongly encouraged to work with your local heritage area to learn how your project supports their goals and objectives and/or the creating of new place-based experiences that highlight historic/cultural/natural resources, traditions, or priorities in your heritage area.

You may cite specific sections of your local heritage area's planning documents (found here https://mht.maryland.gov/Pages/MHAA/heritage-areas.aspx), but direct quotes are not required as long as you explain how your project will sustain a significant aspect of your local community and the regional identity of your heritage area. We encourage you to talk directly with your local heritage area directors for more information. This question is worth 20 points.

Reviewer Criteria and Considerations
Will the project sustain or support the regional identity, including any local priorities that have been identified by the local heritage areas?
1. Does this project directly support the themes, goals, and/or priorities of the local heritage area?

2. Does this project support other aspects of regional identity that have been identified by the community that tangentially support the heritage area? If so, how well does the applicant make a substantive case?
3. Does the proposed project help support the overall activities of the applicant organization in serving as a resource for the heritage area?

***NEW* PRIORITY FUNDING AREA OF INTEREST for FY26**

Does your project highlight an aspect of Maryland's involvement in America's 250th anniversary? If so, please explain how.

MHAA has designated America's 250th anniversary (2026) as a priority funding area of interest for the FY26 grant round. This is done in support of the Maryland 250 Commission's "… charge to create the most inclusive commemoration in state history … that recognizes all Marylanders' journeys toward life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Any capital and non-capital projects submitted for consideration that highlight an aspect of Maryland's involvement in America's 250 anniversary are eligible to receive 2 additional points during the grant review process.

This question is worth 2 points.

Reviewer Criteria and Considerations
Will the project highlight an aspect of Maryland's involvement in America's 250th anniversary?

• How well does the applicant articulate the project's connection to the 250th Anniversary?
• How does the project do any of the following in support of the objectives outlined in the Maryland 250 Commission's EXECUTIVE ORDER 01.01.2024.29:
  ○ Acknowledge that the confiscation of Indigenous land and displacement of Indigenous people is central to the United States' origin story and recognize the persistence and contributions of these communities today.
  ○ Honor the legacy of both free and enslaved African Americans in the making of Maryland and the nation, whose untold stories of heroism and perseverance are critical to the understanding of our shared past and present.
  ○ Support the identification and enhancement of cultural assets that tell the story of who we are as Marylanders and promote place-based visitor experiences for residents and visitors alike.
  ○ Engage youth, new Americans, and lifelong learners in programs designed to encourage the search for meaning behind America and deepen engagement in civic life.

How does your project address diverse or inclusive historical narratives?

Please use this section to explain how your project will address diverse historical narratives that are inclusive in their content and/or in the audience(s) they will potentially work with, represent, and attract. You are also

encouraged to consider if the project you are proposing will assist your organization with addressing any work it may be doing to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

For capital projects, consider if the project will result in a new space in which public programs or events will eventually be held that support diverse and inclusive audiences and narratives. Also, applicants may comment on efforts that will be made to best support Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) participation from vendors or contractors. For capital projects receiving $90,000 or more in grant funds an MBE plan will be required (see page 21 of the *FY 2026 MHAA Project Grants Guidelines for Applicants*); however, MBE efforts are encouraged for all capital and non-capital projects regardless of award amount as a best practice.

This question will be worth 5 points.

Reviewer Criteria and Considerations
Does this project address diverse or inclusive historical narratives?
1. Does the applicant explain how the project (either through its content, intended audiences, or process) will address, represent, or support a particular racial, ethnic, LGBTQ+, or gender group, story, or individual that has otherwise been underrepresented or untold.

What provisions exist or will be made for physical or programmatic access by individuals with disabilities?

Please use this section to describe any provisions that you will make to provide individuals with disabilities with physical or programmatic access to your project. For more about ADA Standards for Accessible Design and other information, please visit https://www.ada.gov/.

This question will be worth 5 points.

Reviewer Criteria and Considerations
Does the project make provisions for physical or programmatic access by individuals with disabilities?
1. Will the applicant be making any physical or programmatic accommodations for individuals with disabilities so they can access the proposed project? Examples may include, but are not limited to, having handicapped parking available, elevators, or ADA compliant bathrooms. 2. For non-capital projects, making exhibits or tours available virtually or offering documents/brochures in braille or online using a reader. 3. For capital projects, incorporating ADA Standards for Accessible Design into construction whenever possible.

Why does this project need to proceed at this time? What will happen if this grant is not awarded or only partially funded?

Please use this section to explain your project's urgency or why it is important that it proceed at this time. What will happen if the project does not? Is it part of a sequence of events that can only take place now? Are the matching funds you are using only available at this time? What other factors are contributing to the

project needing to take place now? Explain what will happen if this grant is not awarded or only partially funded.

Reviewer Criteria and Considerations
Does the project make a clear case as to why it must proceed at this time?
1. Will a historic resource be damaged or lost? 2. Will matching funds no longer be available? 3. Is it part of a sequence of events that can only take place now? 4. Does the applicant explain other factors are contributing to the project needing to take place now? 5. Does the applicant explain what will happen if this grant is not awarded or only partially funded?

This question will be worth 10 points.

The entire "Project Impact" Section is worth a total of 80 points.

Property Information (for capital projects only)

Property Name and Address

Please enter the name of the property if it has one that is used formally or informally. For Example, the Historic XYZ Mansion. If no name is used, you can just enter the address of the property where the project will be taking place. The name and address can be entered as one line with commas in between. For example, The Historic XYZ Mansion, 123 Historic Street, Anywhere, MD XXXXX

Supplemental Property Information:

Briefly describe the property's historical significance, significance to community groups, if applicable, and how the property is/will be used. Please share any additional information about the property, such as special designations (i.e., listed on the National Register or Maryland Inventory of Historic Places, or located in a historic or arts and entertainment district). To verify if your property is associated with any local or state designations, we recommend using the State of Maryland's online Neighborhood Revitalization Mapper https://portal.dhcd.state.md.us/GIS/revitalize/index.html.

See Appendix A of the *FY 2026 MHAA Project Grants Guidelines for Applicants* for "Instructions on How To Check Your Organization on SDAT, Medusa, and the Neighborhood Revitalization Mapper"

We also encourage applicants to highlight any local community significance that may be associated with the property that may not necessarily be captured in the Neighborhood Revitalization Mapper.

Property Owner Consent

For Capital projects, if the applicant organization is not the property owner you must demonstrate that you have a legal right to carry out the project. This includes notifying the property owner of your project at the time of application and possibly obtaining a letter of consent from them prior to award if it is required by the

Maryland Historical Trust (see Appendix H of the *FY 2026 MHAA Project Grants Guidelines for Applicants* for a sample letter).

In the application, you are required to check one of two boxes indicating that you are either the property owner or that you affirm that you have notified the property owner of your proposed project and understand that the Maryland Historical Trust may require a letter from the property owner indicating consent to the project should your project be selected for an award. In most cases, you will not be able to finalize your grant agreement or receive funding until a consent form the property owner is provided in writing.

There are no points awarded to the "Property Information" section.

Supplemental Documents

People Working on the Project

Use the text box field in this section to list the people who will be working on the project, including the primary project contact. This includes, staff and board members, volunteers, partners, and consultants. Include the name, title, company name and role they will plan in your project. For example, the organization's financial officer who will track grant expenses or a board member using their professional skills to help write an exhibit script.

If you have not yet identified your partners or consultants for this project, please provide a description of the qualifications you will be looking for.

Use the attachments field to upload their resumes/CVs or bios, letters of support from key partners, and/or consultants you will be working with on the project. Please include anyone who will be assisting with the administration and/or management of the project. Only one document can be uploaded here. If you have more than one document, use the Attachments tab to upload additional documents.

Letters of Support

In this section, please upload any letters of support from elected officials, partner organizations and community members that help to demonstrate the importance of, need for, and urgency of your project. Letters or support are encouraged but are not a required submission.

Organizational Documents from Nonprofit Organizations

Please use this section to upload your Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and Proof of Nonprofit Status. If you are a government agency, you may skip this step. All nonprofit organizations are required to submit these documents. Documents should be in PDF format and can be uploaded by clicking "choose file" and select your documents from the folder where they are saved on your personal or work computer. Then, click "upload." If you have more than one document, use the Attachments tab to upload additional documents.

Project on DNR Property

If your application is for a project that will take place on Maryland Department of Natural Resources property, you must obtain permission from DNR for the proposed project. In this section, please upload your approval letter from DNR. If you have submitted a request, but not yet received approval, upload your request form

that was submitted to DNR. For more information you can click the link that is provided in the application or see Appendix I in the *FY 2026 MHAA Project Grants Guidelines for Applicants*). Documents should be in PDF format and can be uploaded by clicking "choose file" and select your documents from the folder where they are saved on your personal or work computer. Then, click "upload."

Education Projects

If your application is for a Pre-K - 12 education project, please use this section to upload provide documentation that you have consulted with either the Maryland State Department of Education and/or your local school system on this project. In most cases, this documentation should consist of a letter from your local county school system or systems. Documents should be in PDF format and can be uploaded by clicking "choose file" and select your documents from the folder where they are saved on your personal or work computer. Then, click "upload."

Archaeological Requirements

Applicants proposing archaeological work will need to align their project with MHT's archeological guidelines, which can be found here, https://mht.maryland.gov/Pages/archaeology/archaeology.aspx. If you plan to perform archeology as part of your project, please read the guidelines first and check the box in this section to indicate that you agree to follow MHT's archeological guidelines.

Release/Consent/Legal Authorization

Please read and electronically sign the "Release and Consent" and "Legal Authorization" sections indicating that you understand that MHT/MHAA regularly shares information about projects that have received grant funding and that you consent to the publication of photographs and other application materials relating to the Project for which you may receive financial assistance from MHAA and authorize MHT/MHAA to print, publish or post pictures of the Project and to make application materials available to the public. If you consider information in your application confidential and do not want it made available to the public, you can indicate your objection in writing by uploading a letter in this section.

The application should be signed electronically by a person who is affirming that they are legally authorized to submit on behalf of the applicant organization and that the information contained in the application is true and accurate.