



## CONNECTING CALIFORNIA

*A new grant opportunity from California Humanities*

***PLEASE READ THESE GUIDELINES CAREFULLY***

<b>CONNECTING CALIFORNIA AT-A-GLANCE</b>			
<b>Program Purpose</b>	To support public activities and events that are new & innovative as well as tried & true ways of <b>building social connection, understanding, empathy, and trust across difference to unlock CA’s true potential.</b>		
<b>Who Can Apply</b>	CA-based nonprofit organizations and CA-based entities using CA-based fiscal sponsors; CA-based public entities, including libraries, municipalities, schools, colleges, universities, and tribal governments. <i>Current California Humanities grantees are not eligible to apply.</i>		
<b>Application Deadlines &amp; Notifications</b>	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <u><b>All Deadlines at NOON</b></u>  Monday, February 23  Monday, May 4  Monday, July 13 </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <u><b>Award Notification</b></u>  Monday, April 20  Wednesday, July 1  Monday, September 14 </td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;">Future deadlines to be announced. Projects <u>must not</u> begin before a signed grant agreement is submitted.</p>	<u><b>All Deadlines at NOON</b></u> Monday, February 23 Monday, May 4 Monday, July 13	<u><b>Award Notification</b></u> Monday, April 20 Wednesday, July 1 Monday, September 14
<u><b>All Deadlines at NOON</b></u> Monday, February 23 Monday, May 4 Monday, July 13	<u><b>Award Notification</b></u> Monday, April 20 Wednesday, July 1 Monday, September 14		

<b>Project Period</b>	<b>Up to 12 months</b> from the time of award notification; extensions will not be granted
<b>Availability of Funds</b>	<b>Grant funds will be paid in full within 30 days</b> after the signed grant agreement is submitted.
<b>Project Reflections</b>	<b>Final documentation and the story of your project are due within 60 days</b> of the project's end.

***TO DETERMINE IF THIS GRANT OPPORTUNITY IS FOR YOU***

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**PROGRAM PURPOSE ..... 3**  
**GRANT APPLICATION BASICS ..... 4**  
**ABOUT APPLYING ..... 7**  
**TIMELINE ..... 9**

## PROGRAM PURPOSE

Social connection is essential to being human. It's how we get to understand who we are—our role in our family, our community, and our place in the world. Connection is how we build trust, empathy, and respect for each other. Connection is what we need to feel we belong.

In a state as diverse as California, in all its different ways, it is both a gift and a challenge to create the connections we need to live together well. Differences can be inspiring and spark curiosity, but they can also spark fear or distrust.

At California Humanities, we have long been committed to lifting up the range of our diversity as our superpower. We believe the richness and breadth of California's many cultures are the state's greatest assets. The variety of perspectives and approaches, backgrounds and skills, and experiences and wisdoms is an underexplored treasure we all hold. Connecting across differences is the key to unlocking the potential of co-creating a vital and just shared future. We invite curiosity about who we are and what we can do together.

***Connecting California*** is a new grant opportunity from California Humanities to support new & innovative as well as tried & true ways of building social connections, understanding, empathy, and trust across our differences and what we share.

Grants ranging between \$1,000 and \$5,000 will support “connection activities.” These will be activities and events that bring people together to explore differences—in age, culture, geography, race, gender, faith, politics, work, values, ideas, and more—and to discover what we have in common as people who want to live full and rewarding lives.

Connection activities must be publicly accessible and ideally in-person, but may be virtual if that makes sense given the nature of the event or allows for broader participation.

Publicly accessible connection activities might be with small groups who meet to build relationships of trust over time, or with larger events that inspire communities to find inventive ways to break down old barriers. There are countless possibilities!

Here are some ideas:

- Learning about your neighbors through a series of potlucks, exploring questions about our shared humanity—for example, *What would you want to be remembered for? What is a childhood memory that you cherish or that haunts you? What is a fear you have overcome?*
- Working with people of diverse backgrounds to create something together for their neighborhood—for example, collectively planning, designing, and painting a mural honoring layers of local history or local heroes

- Hosting a regular gaming event or hackathon with youth and city leaders that address urgent shared concerns—for example, to explore culturally-rooted ideas for youth employment or working together to create more engaging environments in schools
- Organizing a series of gatherings around themes and/or activities that reveal different perspectives on familiar themes—for example, a library hosting presentation & conversation events on the meaning of key ideas in the Declaration of Independence, leading up to the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its signing
- Figuring out how to creatively break down barriers that hold back solutions—for example, establishing conversation spaces of mutual respect and active listening between officials and community members to address the complex issues of the housing crisis
- Hosting a multilingual story exchange where participants are invited to share short personal stories or songs in their native languages—for example, a community center might host an event that weaves together stories in Spanish, Mandarin, Tagalog, and English, using translation and music as connective tools, making expressive language a bridge rather than a barrier.

## GRANT APPLICATION BASICS

**Who Can Apply:** California-based nonprofit organizations with federal 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status and California-based public entities (including libraries, municipalities, schools, colleges, universities, and tribal governments).

**Organizations that do not have federal tax-exempt status must apply through a purpose-aligned, California Humanities-approved nonprofit fiscal sponsor.** Organizations working with a fiscal sponsor must submit a document outlining the arrangements between themselves and their fiscal sponsor to ensure smooth, responsible fiscal administration and program management, such as a memorandum of understanding (MOU). For an overview of what it means to work with a fiscal sponsor, click [here](#). For an example of an MOU, click [here](#). Please check with Elisa Kutza, [ekutza@calhum.org](mailto:ekutza@calhum.org), on possible ways to find a fiscal sponsor or how a nonprofit organization can qualify to become a California Humanities-approved fiscal sponsor.

If your organization needs to apply through a nonprofit fiscal sponsor, that sponsor will be the official applicant for the grant and will receive the funding if an award is made. Your organization will be the “project organization,” that is, the organization that carries out the project and will receive funds, if granted, from your fiscal sponsor. The fiscal sponsor carries the main financial responsibility for the project, which is why it is

important that both you and your fiscal sponsor have a written agreement about your respective responsibilities to each other.

All applicants, including fiscal sponsors, must be in good standing with the State of California and the IRS.

Past grantees of California Humanities must also have no outstanding or unapproved interim or final reports. **California Humanities grantees with open grants are not eligible to apply.**

We encourage applications from the following kinds of organizations:

- with budgets of \$500,000 or less
- in rural areas or places where there are few resources for nonprofits
- that have never been funded by California Humanities.

The bullets above are not requirements, but they carry weight in the evaluation of applications.

**What Can You Apply For:** Grant support for public events that bring people together across difference in creative and respectful ways. Events should be free or low-cost.

**How Much Can You Apply For:** Grants range from \$1,000 to \$5,000. The grant award must be matched 1:1 with non-federal funds, in-kind support (such as salaries of existing project staff, ongoing administrative expenses of the organization, donated goods/services/equipment/venues, volunteer time), or a mix of both.

**When to Apply:** Applications will be accepted multiple times a year. Applications must be submitted at least 3 months before the project's start date.

Upcoming deadlines are Monday, February 23; May 4; and July 13, 2026, at NOON.

**Late applications will not be accepted. Incomplete applications may be deemed ineligible.**

Future deadlines to be announced. Please sign up [here](#).

**Award Notification:** Applicants will be notified of grant decisions about two months after the submission deadline via email. Decisions are final and may not be appealed. If unsuccessful, applicants may wish to revise their application and apply in a future round. Review feedback will be provided to all applicants on request.

**Project Period:** Your project must be completed within one year of award notification. Project extensions will not be granted.

**Availability of Grant Funds:** Grant funds will be paid in full within 30 days after receipt of a signed grant agreement.

**Use of Funds:** Grant funds may be used for project-related activities, such as staff time, speaker/presenter fees, venue rental, refreshments (no alcohol), promotion/outreach, stipends, and equipment. No more than 10% of grant funds may be used for administrative overhead or fiscal sponsorship fees. Funds may not be used to advance political or legislative agendas or candidates.

**Matching Funds:** The total grant amount must be matched at least 1:1 by non-federal sources, such as private funding/donations, or in-kind resources (e.g., volunteer labor, donated food/materials/services/equipment/spaces). This means **the total project budget must be at least twice your grant request, and outside resources equal to or exceeding** your request must be secured by the end of your project.

**Project Reflections:** Within 60 days from the end of the project period, grantees are required to submit: 1) documentation of what activities were supported and who was involved (for example, photos, video, partner and participant feedback/surveys), 2) a simple reporting of what went as planned, what didn't, what was learned, and what purposes and connections were achieved (this can be submitted in written form or audio/video report); 3) a checklist of the kinds of people and partners that participated in the project; and 4) an accounting of how your projected budget was actually spent (including your match of the grant).

**Other Grantee Responsibilities:** To receive a grant, grantees must agree to comply with all grant requirements, including:

- Expending funds only on eligible expenses;
- Adhering to legal requirements of the National Endowment for the Humanities or other relevant funding sources as outlined in the grant agreement;
- Providing timely information to California Humanities about project activities, including requests for approval of any major changes in the project, notification of when and where activities will take place, so that California Humanities staff may announce or attend;
- Publicly acknowledging the support from California Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and other funders outlined in the grant agreement;
- Complying with reporting requirements. Failure to submit a project reflection will prevent awardees from applying for future grants from California Humanities.

## **ABOUT APPLYING**

**How to Apply:** Applications are accepted only through an online portal at <https://ch-grants.smapply.io/>.

Below are highlights of important application information to help you determine whether you can or want to apply and to prepare your application before submitting online. A PDF of what the online application looks like is available on our [website](#).

### **Project Title:**

### **Project Summary:**

Please provide a brief description of your project (up to 50 words). Your description should include who will participate in the project, what activities will take place as well as when and where they will take place, and what you hope the result will be.

### **Description of Proposed Project Activities**

- What kinds of participants will you bring together, and why those communities? Approximately how many participants will there be? (Up to 150 words)
- What ideas will be addressed and/or differences will be bridged in the project? (Up to 150 words)
- What kinds of events/activities will be hosted to encourage dialogue and reflection? Please include planned dates, times, locations, and venues whenever possible. (Up to 200 words)
- How are you well-placed to carry out this project? For example, how well do you know the communities involved, and how will you make participation easy and accessible? What skills will be used to facilitate respectful interaction and thoughtful dialogue? If you are working with partners, who are they and what role will they play? What resources will they provide, such as translation services, venue, and outreach? (Up to 250 words)
- What kind of shift in social connection, understanding, empathy, and/or trust within the community do you anticipate will result from the project? (Up to 100 words)

### **Project Budget & Narrative**

**Project Budget:** You will need to complete a project budget form outlining how you plan to make use of the grant funds and other resources to support your project. You may request between \$1,000 and \$5,000 in grant funds from California Humanities. Please be reasonable and realistic in your requests for what you need to carry out your project.

Please Note: You are required to match your grant request with an equal amount of cash and/or in-kind resources such as donated supplies/materials, refreshments, equipment, space, or labor. For example, to request a \$1,000 grant, you must secure at least \$1,000 in other cash or \$1,000 worth of in-kind resources, or a mix of \$1,000 worth of cash and

in-kind resources. Your project budget should total at least \$2,000 to request a \$1,000 grant. You may over-match your grant request, that is, secure outside resources that equal more than your grant request, but not less.

Description	Funds Requested from Connecting CA (\$1,000 to \$5,000 in total)	1:1 Match of Other Funds and/or In-Kind Resources (= or > total grant request)
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Project Management Fees or Salaries		
Service Fees – for example, a meeting facilitator, speaker, performer, advisor, photographer, videographer, stipends for youth/community members		
Program Expenses – for example, printing costs, marketing, refreshments (no alcohol), art supplies, space/equipment rentals, travel		
Administrative Overhead – for example, rent, phone, postage, internet, website OR Fiscal Sponsorship Fee (only up to 10% of your grant request)		
<b>EXPENSE TOTALS</b>		
<b>REVENUES</b>		
Total Connecting CA grant request		
Total Cash Match		
Total In-Kind Match		
<b>REVENUE TOTALS</b>		

**Project Budget Narrative:** There will be a space in the application form to provide a more detailed explanation of the costs and revenue sources included in your budget. For example, for expenses: \$1,500 for project management (\$50/hr x 30 hrs), \$250 for 10- \$25 stipends for community advisor meetings, \$500 for venue rental; for revenues, \$1,000 cash match from ABC Community Foundation (request pending), \$200 for \$25/hr x 8 hrs volunteer ushers.

**Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** – only for fiscally-sponsored projects

If you are working with a nonprofit fiscal sponsor for your project, please include a copy of the MOU outlining the arrangements between you and the fiscal sponsor to ensure the smooth administration of the project and responsible management of the grant. Fiscal sponsors must not take more than 10% of the total grant amount. You can find

information about fiscal sponsorship and MOUs [here](#), and a sample MOU template [here](#).

## **Review Criteria**

Once an application is determined to be eligible and complete, it will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Clarity and significance** of project purpose (3 points)
- **Alignment** of planned activities with the goals of the project, and the purpose and requirements of the Connecting California program (3 points)
- **Capacity and knowledge** to successfully carry out the proposed project (3 points)
- **Reaching underserved** areas and communities (This is not a program requirement, but has weight in the evaluation of applications.) (1 bonus point)

Please note:

- Applications will be reviewed based on the criteria above. Obvious typos, misspellings, errors in grammar, and the like will not be taken into account (unless they obscure meaning).
- In addition to evaluating the merits of each application, the overall need to cover a variety of populations and geographies across the state will be taken into consideration.

## **TIMELINE**

**Program Launch:** Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2026

**Application Webinar:** An application webinar will be recorded and posted on our website by Friday, Feb. 6.

### **Round 1**

**Application Opens:** Tuesday, January 20, 2026

**Application Deadline: Monday, February 23, 2026, NOON**

**Award Notification:** Monday, April 20, 2026

**Project Period:** Ends April 30, 2027

### **Round 2**

**Application Opens:** Monday, March 9, 2026

**Application Deadline: Monday, May 4, 2026, NOON**

**Awards Notification:** Wednesday, July 1, 2026

**Project Period:** Ends July 31, 2027

**Round 3**

**Application Opens:** Monday, May 11, 2026

**Application Deadline: Monday, July 13, 2026, NOON**

**Awards Notification:** Monday, September 14, 2026

**Project Period:** Ends September 30, 2027

*Future Rounds to Be Announced*