2027 *Expand Massachusetts Stories* Support Grants

Expand Massachusetts Stories' Support Grants fund the work of community-centered storytelling that expands public understanding of Massachusetts and its people, with an emphasis on stories that often go unrecognized or undervalued.

Organizations with ongoing community-centered storytelling programs central to their missions, and operating budgets at or under $1 million, can apply for Support Grants of up to $15,000.

Funding can be used to cover programs and/or operations costs. And, unlike previous rounds of EMS, organizations do *not* need to put forward specific projects for funding consideration.

Amount of Funding

- Up to $15,000
- Mass Humanities will award approximately 30-45 grants in total, with some partial awards. Awardees will receive 90% of their grant at the beginning of the grant period and 10% after completing a short final report.

Timeline:

Application opens	November 16, 2026
Webinar	December 9, 2026, from 12- 1 pm
Deadline	January 11, 2027
Notification	March 16, 2027
Grant period	March 17, 2027-March 16, 2028 (one year only)

Questions? Register for our webinar on Dec. 9 or send questions to a Mass Humanities Program Officer at grants@masshumanities.org. We will do our best to respond and advise.

Expand Massachusetts Stories (EMS)
Since 2021, the Expand Massachusetts Stories program has supported over 190 projects to find, share, and tell stories of Massachusetts. Through a four-year retrospective on the program, and by listening to grantees' reflections on their work, we saw how community-centered storytelling is not simply a means of communication, it is a powerful driver of belonging, connection, and trust—all essential building blocks of social and civic health. We also learned that flexibility is critical to this impact. For the small and grassroots organizations leading this work, the ability to adapt, respond to community needs, and build relationships on their own terms is essential to earning and sustaining trust.

We define community-centered storytelling as an approach that engages the communities whose stories are being shared, whether those communities are in the present or are connected to the stories through descent or shared history. Community-centered storytelling invites involvement from community members in collection, interpretation or program design; invests time in relationship and trust-building; practices shared authority; and values both lived experience and learned expertise in humanities topics or methods. It aims to engage people in collaborative meaning-making, not to extract stories or knowledge for other ends.

Community-centered story telling programs **can** include:

- Oral history collection, archiving and interpretation
- Projects and programs that engage descendant or shared-legacy communities in program design
- Tours, events, programs, discussions, etc. based on community-centered archives, exhibits, or research
- Intergenerational storytelling/oral history programs
- Community-based exhibits
- Community-created and presented performances
- Community programs for cultural preservation and continuity
- And more

For the purposes of this grant, community-centered storytelling programs **do not** include:

- Direct social services such as counseling, clinical or group therapy, legal or medical services
- Leadership, college preparation, and/or personal development classes
- Programs primarily for language and literacy training
- Primarily technical training classes for media production (videography, sound design, video editing), not included within a community storytelling program

- Primarily technical art, craft or handiwork classes
- Strategic planning processes
- Fundraising campaigns or events
- Academic research projects
- Scholarships and regrants

Eligibility

To be eligible, organizations must be engaged in ongoing community-centered storytelling work.

Consider how you would answer these questions:

___ Does your organization already use community-centered practice in surfacing and sharing stories?

___ Are your programs focused on a new topic but continuing to use community-centered practices?

___ Have you undertaken community-centered storytelling programs in 2024, 2025, or 2026?

___ Have you already planned for and budgeted for this work to take place in 2027?

If you answered yes to 3-4 of these questions, your program is eligible.

To be eligible for this grant, applicant organizations must:

- Have community-centered storytelling programs focused on Massachusetts stories that are and have been active, continuously or in part, since June 2024. New projects outside the scope of the applicant's typical programs or cycle are not eligible (see FAQ)
- Be based in Massachusetts and serve Massachusetts residents
- Be a 501(c)3 nonprofit tax-exempt organization based in Massachusetts, or a state or federally recognized tribe
- Have an operating budget under $1 million
    - Applicants with single one-time capital grants that push their operating budget over $1 million are eligible to apply
- Follow state and federal regulations which bar discrimination based on race, gender, religious creed, color, national origin, ancestry, disability, age, or sexual orientation, and which require accessibility for persons with disabilities. Specifically:

[The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)]

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
The Age Discrimination Act of 1975

Requirements for Projects Related to Native American & Indigenous Communities

Mass Humanities award recipients have the responsibility of ensuring that researchers and scholars working on projects related to Native Americans, Aleut, Eskimo, or Native Hawaiian peoples adhere to the following provisions described here:

National Endowment for the Humanities Code of Ethics Related to Native Americans

Suggestions for Best Practices on Oral History Projects

Mass Humanities recommends that oral history collection adheres, as much as possible, to the Best Practices guidelines set out by the Oral History Association: Oral History Best Practices - Oral History Association

Current Mass Humanities grantees must be **up to date** on all reports for any prior or current grant.

Fiscal Sponsorship: Fiscally sponsored community-led projects are also eligible to apply. Fiscally sponsored projects must have a signed fiscal sponsor agreement at the time of application. See more about Fiscal Sponsorship in the FAQ.

Those **not** eligible to apply include:

- Mass Humanities grantees with past-due reports
    - Current grantees should log into the grants portal to verify that they are up to date with all their reports. Please reach out to your Program Officer if you cannot access your organization's account.
    - Please reach out to your Program Officer about any incomplete projects. We will work with potential applicants to get up to date on reports.
- Individuals: Mass Humanities does **not** award funding to individuals.
- Municipality entities or government agencies
    - Municipal libraries or museums may apply through a "friends of" group
- K-12 Schools or their "friends of" organizations
- Programs that do not primarily serve Massachusetts residents
- Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) or programs geared to college students
    - Independent centers operating at institutions of higher education may be eligible; please reach out at grants@masshumanities.org to discuss with a Program Officer

    - If an IHE has a partnership with a community organization for an eligible program, we suggest that the community partners apply
- Individual arts, media and film production and distribution projects that are **not** part of an existing community program
- Non-profit publications, including magazines, newspapers, and literary journals

Use of Funds

Funds **can** be used for programs and/or general operating expenses. This may include:

- Staff salaries
- Operating costs (rent, utilities, and other services required to keep the lights on)
- External contractors and consultants
- Non-salary program expenses (materials, travel, stipends, event costs)
- Other program or operating costs

Funds may **not** be used for:

- Advocacy and/or lobbying
- Purchases of land or facilities
- Endowment or capital campaigns
- Debt or deficit reduction

Review Criteria

Applications will be evaluated in five different areas:

Connection to Mission

- Community centered storytelling is core to the organization's mission. It is an approach through which the organization meets its mission. It is not a one-off project for the organization.
- Organization has experience with and track record of community-centered storytelling work.
- The organization may face constraints regarding resources, funding, or access in meeting its mission.

Community Centered Storytelling Programs

- The organization's storytelling programs prioritize leadership or participation from communities in surfacing, sharing, and engaging with stories of Massachusetts.
- The organization's storytelling programs practice shared authority and honor both lived experience and learned expertise.
- Programs focused on the past are led by, co-designed with, or otherwise. substantially engage with participants who share legacy, descent, or other relevant connections with the histories being surfaced.
- Programs focused on living communities are led by, co-designed with, or otherwise substantially engage contemporary participants in surfacing stories and collaboratively making meaning from them.

Expand Massachusetts Stories Priorities

- The organizations' storytelling programs surface, interpret and/or share stories of Massachusetts, particularly communities and stories that have been unrecognized in, undervalued, or excluded from public conversation.
- How do you make sure these stories reach your audiences and/or communities?

Grant Period Activities and Audiences

- Programs and activities take place during the grant period and are within the applicant's plans and capacities.
- The applicant demonstrates the capacity to continue programming work and has adequate staffing, volunteers, and/or partnerships to support their work.

Impact of Funds

- Support from Mass Humanities will have a clear and compelling impact on the organization's ability to further its mission and continue its community-centered storytelling programs.
- Support from Mass Humanities will have a substantial impact on the community being centered.

Application Components

Applicants are asked to briefly answer ten short narrative questions (aligned with the Review Criteria above), and to upload two years of financial information and samples of program activity.

Apply via our online grants portal here.

FAQ

We are a history center. Every three years we co-create a new exhibit with community members. This year we are starting a new cycle. Are we ineligible?

You are eligible! Your new cycle is a continuation of your existing community-centered approach to exhibit design.

Can organizations whose storytelling programs focus on the past apply?

Yes! Projects about the past can still be community-centered in their approach when they are led by, co-designed, or otherwise substantially engage with participants who share legacy, descent, or other relevant connection with the histories being surfaced.

We are embarking on our first collaborative story project this year. Are we eligible?

No. We appreciate your efforts! We're continuing to redevelop our grantmaking to support different stages of work and new opportunities for partnership. This opportunity is for existing programs and projects that are already underway. Stay tuned.

We are a performing arts center, are we eligible?

Programs by arts organizations that engage communities in collaborative finding, sharing, and interpreting stories are eligible. These programs must be central to the organization's mission and go beyond single performances or post-performance discussion events for ticketed attendees.

Can I apply for a Reading Frederick Douglass Together Program?

No, Support Grants cannot be used for RFDT programs. However, an organization can apply for both grants concurrently. Visit our site for more information on how to apply.

We paused our program in 2026 due to funding cuts and are bringing it back. Are we eligible?

Yes, if you already have plans to bring the program back in FY27. We do not recommend applying for programs that are not yet part of your FY27 plans.

I'm having problems with the online application process

You'll find detailed instructions on our site; contact us with specific questions at grants@masshumanities.org