

TRESTLE

How To Navigate

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Austin, Texas

Funding for Nonprofits, Startups & Filmmakers

Austin is one of the most interesting funding environments in the country right now - and it's shifting fast. The city just made its largest single-year cultural investment ever, the state rewired its film incentive with a \$1.5 billion commitment, and a growing network of CDFIs are targeting underestimated founders at every stage. Texas has more mission-driven infrastructure than most people expect.

COLOR KEY:

Nonprofit

Startup / For-profit

Film & Media

NONPROFIT

For Nonprofits

CITY OF AUSTIN: ACME CULTURAL FUNDING

Austin Arts, Culture, Music and Entertainment (ACME)

City of Austin

Largest-ever grantmaking cycle in FY26: \$24M+ to 731 recipients. LGBTQ+ and trans organizations explicitly included. Elevate: \$4,000-\$80,000 for established nonprofits (\$12.86M total, 289 orgs). Nexus: \$5,000 or \$10,000 for individuals and small groups - FY27 deadline April 16, 2026. Live Music Fund: \$7M annually, \$5K-\$70K. Creative Space Assistance (CSAP): \$60,000 for orgs with physical creative space. Heritage Preservation: \$3M for cultural documentation - strong fit for documentary filmmakers.

\$4K-\$80K

LGBTQ+ explicitly included

Nexus deadline April 16

FY27 restructure coming

Austin Community Foundation (ACF)

Third-Largest Charitable Foundation in Central Texas

Manages \$500M+ in assets, distributes \$51M+ annually. Forever Austin Fund: \$5,000-\$50,000 annual grants across economic mobility, arts, environment (\$2.3M to 99 orgs in 2025). Women's Fund + Hispanic Impact Fund: \$1.1M annually in unrestricted general operating support to nonprofits advancing economic mobility. Applications typically open early summer. Geographic focus: Travis, Burnet, Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Williamson counties.

\$5K-\$50K

Central Texas

General operating

Texas Pride Community Foundation (TPCF)

Statewide LGBTQ+ Funder

Primary statewide LGBTQ+ funder for Texas. Community Grants: up to \$10,000 in general operating support. Explicitly prioritizes underserved geographies, transgender people, people of color, seniors, youth, and people with disabilities. Previous Austin recipients: ASHwell and Austin Rainbow. Also operates the Texas Health Impact Grant focused on HIV care and advocacy for Black and Latinx transgender individuals.

Up to \$10K

Statewide

Trans + POC priority

ACME is mid-transition - move now

Austin's cultural funding department is actively restructuring its grant programs for FY27. The people making those decisions are visible and reachable. Attending ACME info sessions and building relationships with program staff now - before the new unified guidelines go into effect - positions your organization to be an early mover in the new system.

STARTUP

For Underestimated Founders

CITY & GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Austin Kiva Hub

Austin Economic Development + Kiva

Launched March 2026 - Austin's first-ever Kiva Hub. Crowdfunded microloans \$1,000-\$15,000 at zero percent interest, no fees, no minimum credit score required. One of two designated Kiva Hubs in Texas. Local Capital Access Manager provides hands-on guidance. 90%+ of Kiva borrowers successfully fund their loans.

\$1K-\$15K

0% interest

No credit score

Launched March 2026

CDFIS & MISSION-ALIGNED CAPITAL

PeopleFund - BIPOC Small Business Accelerator

Central Texas CDFI

Primary CDFI for underserved entrepreneurs in Central Texas. Accelerator offers: expedited loan packaging, access to PeopleFund loan products, business planning software, and a completion grant of \$3,000-\$5,000. Application explicitly includes an LGBTQ+ identification field and is "open to all regardless of race, gender or creed." 78% of graduates still operating at 3 years, 415+ graduates to date. Q1 2026 application cycle active.

\$3K-\$5K completion grant

LGBTQ+ inclusive

78% still operating at 3yrs

SXSW Pitch Competition

South by Southwest

Held every March. In 2026, 45 companies competed from 600+ applications. Since 2009, 93% of SXSW Pitch participants received funding; combined alumni funding exceeds \$23.2 billion. Austin-based founders have a natural advantage in their home city. Categories: Entertainment/Media/Content, Smart Cities, HealthTech, and more. SXSW is infrastructure, not just a festival.

Annual - March

93% alumni get funded

\$23.2B alumni raised

PeopleFund is genuinely accessible

For queer founders used to programs that say the right things but don't show up in practice, PeopleFund's track record speaks for itself. Their application explicitly includes an LGBTQ+ identification field. The Austin Kiva Hub's zero-interest, no-credit-score model removes most traditional barriers for early-stage founders.

FILM

For Filmmakers

STATE & CITY INCENTIVES

Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program (TMIIP) - Senate Bill 22

Texas Film Commission

Texas passed SB 22 in 2025 committing \$1.5 billion over 10 years - the largest state film incentive commitment in Texas history. Direct cash grant (no secondary market transaction). Grant rates: 5% on \$250K-\$999K spend, 10% on \$1M-\$1.5M, 25% on \$1.5M+. Stackable uplifts up to ~31% total. Requirements: \$250K min TX spend, 55% TX resident crew, 55% TX resident cast, 60% of production days in Texas, apply before photography begins. No per-project cap. Documentary films qualify.

Up to ~31% cash grant

Direct cash payment

\$250K min spend

Documentary eligible

City of Austin Creative Content Incentive Program (CCIP)

Austin Economic Development

Layers an additional 2.5% rebate on top of TMIIP for productions hiring Austin Metro Area residents at living wages. Maximum combined stack: up to 33.5%. Requires production by an Austin-based company or promoting Austin as a destination.

+2.5% on top of TMIIP

33.5% max combined

Austin residents

LOCAL FILM ORGANIZATIONS

Austin Film Society (AFS)

Founded 1985 by Richard Linklater

Heart of Austin's independent film ecosystem. AFS Grant for Feature Films: \$200,000+ annually (2025: \$130,000 to 13 projects; 8 of 14 recipients female, 1 non-binary, 3 LGBTQIA+, 9 from communities of color). AFS Grant for Short Films: parallel program for narrative, documentary, animation, experimental. AFS Fiscal Sponsorship: 7.5% fee for Texas-based projects - currently paused for new applications. Austin Studios: five-stage professional production facility.

\$200K+ annually

LGBTQ+ inclusive

7.5% fiscal sponsor fee

TX residency required

Austin PBS Finishing Funds Grant

Austin PBS

\$15,000 to one documentary filmmaker per cycle for public media repackaging (\$12,000 film repackaging + \$3,000 public media conference). Eligibility: Central Texas residency or project set in Central Texas. Must be completable as one-hour cut for public television.

\$15,000

Documentary

Central TX residency

Public media distribution

AFS is the first relationship to build

Even if your project is not ready for a grant application, becoming an AFS MAKE Member connects you to the fiscal sponsorship program, the grant pipeline, Austin Studios, and the local filmmaker network. For queer filmmakers in particular, AFS's documented commitment to funding LGBTQ+ directors - combined with fiscal sponsorship access to identity-aligned foundations - makes it the first call for most community-rooted projects in Texas.