

TRESTLE

How To Navigate

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Washington, DC

Funding for Nonprofits, Startups & Filmmakers

DC is a genuinely unusual funding environment - its own government structure, dense foundations, a competitive film rebate program, and a local culture serious about equity. Whether you're running a queer-led nonprofit, building a community-rooted startup, or making a documentary with social impact at its center, DC has more on the table than most people realize.

COLOR KEY:

Nonprofit

Startup / For-profit

Film & Media

NONPROFIT

For Nonprofits

DC GOVERNMENT & AGENCY GRANTS

DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (CAH)

District of Columbia Government

DC's primary arts and humanities funder. Key programs: PEF Grant (up to \$30K orgs/\$15K individuals, film explicitly eligible, FY27 opens spring/summer 2026), AHFP (individual DC-based artists), Art Bank Program (up to \$25K orgs), AHEP (arts education delivery), and AEG (visual art exhibitions, up to \$35K).

Up to \$35K

Film eligible

FY27 spring 2026

DC Office of the Attorney General (OAG)

Community-Based Grant Programs

Four grant programs: Cure the Streets (violence interruption, up to \$750K/site - no bylaws excluding people with criminal records), Domestic Workers Employment Rights (up to \$260K), Leaders of Tomorrow (youth violence prevention), and Workplace Rights (employee rights education).

Up to \$750K

Safety & Equity

Youth

DC Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONSE)

District of Columbia Government

Funds nonprofits and for-profit orgs delivering violence intervention. FY26 Group Violence Reduction Strategy Grant awarded ~\$750K per ward. Eligible: 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), faith-based, and for-profit organizations operating violence intervention services.

~\$750K/ward

For-profit eligible

Events DC Community Grants Program

Events DC

\$750,000 annually in two cycles of \$375,000 each. Supports nonprofits serving DC youth through sports, performing arts, and cultural arts. Strong fit for arts-based youth work across wards.

\$375K/cycle

2 cycles/year

Youth Arts

Mayor's Office / Serve DC - Funding Alert

Mayor's Office of Community Affairs

Free "Funding Alert" newsletter highlighting open grant opportunities from DC agencies and beyond. Worth subscribing as a first step - surfaces timely opportunities across every category.

Free newsletter

Multiple categories

PRIVATE & FOUNDATION FUNDING

Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation

Local Foundation

One of DC's most significant local funders. Covers Arts & Humanities, Community Services, Education, Environment, and Health. Deadlines: March 1, July 1, November 1. No LOI required. Prefers general operating support. Does not typically award more than 10% of annual budget. Recent arts grantees: \$10,000-\$60,000.

\$10K-\$60K+

3 deadlines/year

No LOI required

Greater Washington Community Foundation

Community Foundation

Multiple component funds covering DC, Maryland, and Virginia. Administers an LGBTQ+ Fund supporting coalitions of LGBTQ+-centered DC organizations. Also runs the Sharing Community Funds - \$945,000 distributed in 2025 to orgs focused on racial wealth gap, basic needs, and economic mobility.

LGBTQ+ Fund

Racial equity

DMV region

Capitol Hill Community Foundation

Neighborhood Foundation

Awards seasonal spring and fall grants to DC-area nonprofits. Recent cycles: \$295,000-\$325,000 across community services, arts and culture, health, and housing.

\$295K-\$325K/cycle

2 cycles/year

Stonewall Community Foundation - Reclaiming Our Power

National LGBTQ+ Foundation

Multi-year general operating support: \$20,000/year for two years (optional \$15,000 third year) to queer and trans-led organizations with budgets under \$1 million. Prioritizes organizations on the frontlines of resistance, healing, and joy. Five additional grantees selected in 2026.

\$20K/yr x 2 years

LGBTQ+-led

Under \$1M budget

What to know about the current LGBTQ+ funding climate in DC

LGBTQ+ organizations are competitive for most grants up to \$100,000, and private foundations have in some cases prioritized LGBTQ+ groups for mid-to-large grants. However, 2025-2026 has brought real instability - funders are pulling back at the national level. Locally, DC's LGBTQ+ Budget Coalition has secured nearly \$1.5 million in recurring city budget funding. Building relationships with both private foundations and local government agencies is more important than ever right now.

STARTUP

For Underestimated Founders

DC GOVERNMENT & CAPITAL PROGRAMS

DC BizCAP

DC Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking (DISB)

DC's primary capital access program via U.S. Treasury's SSBCI. Three tracks: Collateral Support Program (cash collateral for businesses with shortfalls), Loan Participation Program (direct lending for working capital/expansion), and Innovation Finance Program (co-investments with VC funds into DC startups). Up to \$62 million approved, with a dedicated DC Venture Capital Program targeting underserved founders in tech.

Up to \$62M total

Underserved founders

Co-investment

DSLBD - DC Dream Accelerator Program

DC Department of Small and Local Business Development

FY26 cohort-based training for microbusinesses launched March 2026. DSLBD also administers the DC Capitalized Revolving Fund - micro-lines of credit up to \$10,000 for businesses facing barriers to traditional financing, through CDFIs EatsPlace and Life Asset.

Up to \$10K

Microbusiness

Cohort program

Mayor Bowser's \$26 Million Underserved Founders Fund

Office of the Mayor

Announced December 2024 to spur venture capital in underserved DC founders. Addresses that less than 4% of venture funding 2015-2024 went to Black founders, despite Black residents comprising 33% of DC's workforce.

\$26M fund

Black founders

Venture-focused

MISSION-ALIGNED CDFIS & ECOSYSTEM PARTNERS

LISC DC / Equitable Opportunities Capital Fund (EOCF)

LISC + Four DC Lending Partners

30 loans totaling \$11.5M since 2021. Four partners: Capital Impact Partners (flexible capital for underestimated markets), City First Enterprises (\$20K-\$500K+), LEDC (microloans \$500-\$250K, 100+ workshops/year), and WACIF (microloans for DC's underserved neighborhoods).

\$500-\$500K+

Multiple entry points

New Majority Ventures (formerly 1863 Ventures)

Melissa Bradley

Relaunched after closing nonprofit arm in late 2024. Continues supporting Black, brown, and underrepresented founders. Portfolio: 90%+ Black-owned businesses. Worth tracking as the organization stabilizes.

\$30K-\$150K

Black/brown founders

Rebuilding 2026

Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses

Goldman Sachs

Ongoing program offering business education, support services, and pathways to capital for DC-area growth-oriented entrepreneurs.

Education + capital

Growth-stage

What to know as an underestimated founder in DC

DC has a real equity-focused funding infrastructure - more than most cities. The public-private mix (DMPED, DISB, CDFIs, mission-aligned VCs) means underestimated founders have more entry points than just traditional VC. The challenge is navigation: many programs are quietly available and require active research or referrals. Building relationships with WACIF, LEDC, and DSLBD before you need capital creates the pipeline that makes applications faster and stronger.

FILM

For Filmmakers

DC'S FILM REBATE PROGRAM

DC Film, Television and Entertainment Rebate Fund

Office of Cable Television, Film, Music, and Entertainment (OCTFME)

One of the more flexible film incentive structures on the East Coast. Minimum spend: \$250,000. No project cap. Compensation cap: \$500,000/person. Apply before qualifying activity begins. Rates: Up to 35% on qualified expenditures subject to DC taxation, 21% with DC vendors, 30% on resident cast/crew, 10% non-resident, 50% on job training, 25% on base infrastructure. For social impact docs, job training and DC business criteria are real levers.

Up to 35% rebate

\$250K min spend

No project cap

FREE PRODUCTION SUPPORT

OCTFME One-Stop Production Services

Office of Cable Television, Film, Music, and Entertainment

At no cost: film/parking permits, location scouting, production support, community relations, festival coordination, crew/vendor databases, and workforce development via CECAP. Close government relationships make accessing DC's iconic locations significantly less bureaucratic than most cities.

Free

Permits

Location access

DC-BASED FILM GRANTS & ORGANIZATIONS

CAH - Projects, Events, or Festivals (PEF) Grant

DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities

Film explicitly eligible. FY26 grantees received \$5,000-\$6,500. FY27 cycle opens spring/summer 2026. Good entry point for DC-based filmmakers early in a project. DC residency required.

Up to \$15K individual

DC residents

Opens spring 2026

Women in Film & Video DC (WIFV)

DC Film Nonprofit

The primary film-specific nonprofit in DC. Fiscal Sponsorship: 7% fee, women-led/focused projects, April 17 2026 deadline, must have WIFV member in key role. Seed Fund for Documentary Filmmakers: R&D; phase grants for WIFV members. Narrative Short Film Finishing Grant: post-production in-kind support. Mentorship included with fiscal sponsorship.

7% fiscal sponsor fee

Women-led

April 17 deadline

The broader funding stack for DC filmmakers

Combine: CAH PEF grant (early development, DC residency), WIFV fiscal sponsorship (unlocks foundation grants + tax-deductible donations), DC Rebate Fund (production, \$250K min), SFFILM Documentary Fund (\$10K-\$20K), American Documentary Film Fund (up to \$50K), and individual donors via WIFV. For queer and community-rooted films, WIFV fiscal sponsorship opens access to LGBTQ+-focused foundations like Stonewall that otherwise require a standalone 501(c)(3).