PAC NYC
PERELMAN PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

THE DEMOCRACY CYCLE

A joint project of PAC NYC and Civis Foundation

Submission Guidelines
2026 Open Call

Welcome to The Democracy Cycle Submission Guidelines. We invite you to review the following information and submit a proposal if you feel your work is aligned with the goals of the project. Please note the resources section at the end of the page if you have additional questions. Thank you for your interest.

Overview

Over a 5-year period, The Democracy Cycle – a collaboration between the Perelman Performing Arts Center (PAC NYC) and Civis Foundation – will commission and develop a total of 25 new performing arts works across the fields of theater, dance, music, opera, and multidisciplinary performance that express themes related to the nature and practice of democracy, particularly as it is practiced in the United States.

Purpose

Our hope is that the commissioned projects will enrich and expand discussion of and participation in democracy – be it in the national, state, regional, or hyperlocal community realm – as it is practiced within the United States and worldwide. The Democracy Cycle project is inspired by the following beliefs:

- Democratic values are a global expression of humanity's striving to live with one another with respect and in peace.
- Democracy, as practiced in the United States, includes a history of founding exclusions. It has been, and must continue to be, the ongoing work of our society to expand upon the ideals of inclusivity embedded in our founding documents.
- Democracy faces significant perceived and actual threats in the current moment, both domestically and internationally.
- The Intersection of capitalism and democracy creates both opportunities and tensions
- Artists are the beating heart of democratic values because of their ability to imagine new worlds, envision new possibilities, and provoke meaningful discourse across divides.

The primary focus of The Democracy Cycle will be on democracy as it is currently being practiced in the United States. However, commissioned projects may include references to democracies worldwide provided they have potential for informing and deepening our understanding of American democracy.

The Commission

Each selected artist will receive $60,000 in support, consisting of a commission of $30,000 to create the new work as well as an additional $30,000 in support, consisting of the work's development process (research, readings, workshops etc.).

The Timeline

February 9, 2026: Application portal opens for The Democracy Cycle's 2026 Open Call

February 12, 2026, 1:00 PM ET: Live webinar where the Democracy Cycle staff will give an overview of the steps to apply and the application elements, with an opportunity for questions and answers at the end.

April 28, 2026, 5:00 PM ET: Application deadline date for 2026 Open Call

May-September, 2026: Applications are screened for eligibility by TDC staff. Eligible proposals are reviewed by a minimum of two Readers. Using Readers' evaluative scores, a list of finalists is developed.

Fall 2026: A peer panel drawn from the fields of performing arts, and the study and practice of democracy reviews finalists' proposals and selects 8 projects to receive the 2025 commissions.

Winter 2027: All 2026 Open Call applicants notified of their project's status

Eligibility Requirements:

Eligible applicants must:

- Be generative artists who are currently creating new work in theater, dance, music, opera, or multi-disciplinary performance (See FAQs for definition of "generative artist")
- Have created, completed, and premiered at least 2 full-length prior works of live performance publicly, as evidenced by their answers to the application's "Qualifying Productions" section, artist's bio, CV and/or work samples (Note: Staged readings and/or workshop showings are not premieres.)
- Propose a new live performance work which may be at any stage of development, but may not be planned to premiere before May 1, 2027. (Remounts of previously completed/premiered works are ineligible.)
- Propose a new live performance work which is planned to be completed in 2027 or 2028.

- Be prepared to manage the income-tax implications of accepting a commission from a U.S.-based arts organization. (U.S. citizenship is not a requirement, this is a national and international call.)

Proposals are not eligible if

- The lead artist is enrolled as a full-time student in a degree-granting program. Ph.D. candidates need to have completed their course work by the application deadline to be eligible.
- The lead artist is under the age of eighteen
- The main purpose of the project is the curation or documentation of existing work(s)
- The proposed work advocates by name for the success or failure of a current partisan candidate for office or a political party
- The lead artist or any of the main collaborators are employees of, immediate family of employees of, or consultants to PAC NYC or Civis Foundation

Selection Criteria

Readers and panelists will consider the following in selecting the commissioned projects:

- How does the proposed work expand, critique, or celebrate democracy, the practice of democracy, and democratic ideals?
- How has the artist or artists identified and responded to ideas or themes related to democracy, including core democractic principles and values (ex. political equality, majority rule, minority rights, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, among others.
- Does the work demonstrate clear potential for generating meaningful reflection and discourse on democracy as demonstrated by project narrative, samples of prior work, and artistic history of its collaborators.

Application Requirements:

You will submit your application through Submittable here. To do so, you will need to have or create a free Submittable account.

The application requests the following information:

Name and contact information of Lead Artist
Each Democracy Cycle commission will be awarded directly to an individual generative artist. In cases where the work is being made by a collective, please select one artist to represent the application on the collective's behalf. All communication about the application will be directed to this individual via Submittable. Please ensure whomever is named is available to answer questions and receive updates from the time of submission to the time of notification. The allocation of award monies between collaborators will be their responsibility.

Lead Artist's Primary Artistic Discipline
Although you may work in multiple disciplines, selecting one helps us organize and assign applications to knowledgeable readers and panelists. Please select the discipline in which you would be most comfortable being reviewed. Feel free to use the project narrative section of the application to offer more information about disciplinarity in your creative process and how you define or make use of performing arts disciplines.

Name of company or organization
Applicants may be affiliated or unaffiliated with a producing or presenting organization. While we would love to hear about any affiliation, the presence or absence of partners will not impact the review of the proposed work in any way. We welcome all configurations and stages of performance creation.

Information on your qualifying productions to be eligible for this commissioning opportunity
You must have created and premiered at least two evening-length works of live performance. We ask you to list out the title, premiere date, running time and venue, as well as your role and a link to further information on these two qualifying productions. Note: Staged readings and/or workshop showings do not count as premieres.

A narrative description of your project
We ask that the lead artist share the core ideas and intended creative process of the proposed work in a 3500 character narrative or a 4-minute video or audio submission. It's useful to remember that straightforward descriptions are most helpful to orient the Reader in this section. As artists and professionals themselves, they understand that the work is nuanced and may be challenging to capture in any narrative form. They will absorb its dimensions through the whole of the proposal, but the narrative is a place to ground them with as concrete a description as you are able to provide.

Please include the following in your project narrative in whatever sequence you prefer:

- What is the core form of the work: Scripted play? Musical? A dance work? Dance-theater piece? Multidisciplinary movement work? Or something else?

- What will the audience see onstage and experience during the performance?
    - Note that The Democracy Cycle commission supports works that will be performed live in front of an audience. Proposals that include film or digital art as part of a live performance will be eligible. Proposals that lack a live performance element will be deemed ineligible.

- How do you intend the work to stimulate dialogue or analysis around the idea of democracy, or democracy's current state of practice, particularly as it is experienced in the United States?
    - This prompt is key to helping the selection committee understand the work's alignment with the goals of this commission. We established The

Democracy Cycle because we believe democracy to be fundamental to humanity's efforts to live with one another with respect and in peace. We acknowledge that the subject is vast and complex, and that its expression in a work of art may be subtle, surprising, or full of contradiction.

- Note: While the primary focus of The Democracy Cycle is on democracy as it is currently practiced in the United States, projects may include references to current or former democracies worldwide provided they have potential for informing and deepening our understanding of American Democracy.

- What is your approach to creating this work?
  - Please briefly describe your creative process. How does your work typically take shape? If you have already begun making the proposed work, what has your approach looked like to date? How will you collaborate with others to realize this work? We understand that processes may differ from work to work, or that it may change within a single work. Any insights on how your works tend to develop are welcome.

- Do you have other existing support, such as a producer or additional commissioners?
  - This is for informational purposes. The commission is open to works at any stage of development or budget size.

What do you see as your greatest artistic influences, or your artistic lineage?

- Please share what artists you feel have helped you form your own artistic style, or whose footsteps you feel you walk in, and why.

Anything else to share

- Is there anything else you would like us to know about your work? Please use this open space to briefly offer relevant information that may not be covered elsewhere, or write "N/A" if you have nothing further to share.

CV and narrative bios for up to 3 main collaborating artists (including yourself)

- Please upload an Artistic Resume or CV detailing artistic and/or professional experiences for yourself, and for up to two main artistic collaborators. While we recognize that producers often play a strongly creative role, we ask that collaborators named here be generative artists. (Feel free to include your producer in the "Is there anything else you would like us to know about your work?" field.)
- NOTE: Please indicate whether your main collaborators are confirmed or tentatively confirmed. Should your proposal be chosen by the panel to receive a commission, a change in the composition of confirmed primary collaborating artist teams may result in modification of the terms of the commission or withdrawal of the commission in its entirety, as determined by PAC in its sole discretion.

- Please also provide a short narrative bio for yourself, and the up-to-two other main collaborators.
    - If you are working as a collective, please provide an additional short bio for the collective itself.

A detailed project budget for the creation process.

- Please submit a budget for the project's creation and development process (not for the premiere or running costs) on the form provided. Please include expense and income categories that balance (or show a slight surplus).
- You should show the $60,000 of Democracy Cycle funds as "pending".
- Please mark all income as either projected or confirmed in the middle column of the budget form in Submittable.. Note: only numbers should appear in the right-hand column (column C), or the budget form will NOT auto-compute.
- We understand that you may be in the early stage of the work and that both income and expenses are prospective at this time.
- A sample high-level budget could use the below line items but could a) also use others and b) be more detailed, if you have that information now:

<u>Expenses:</u>
Personnel
    Creative
    Technical
    Administrative
Rehearsal space
Materials
Technical Production
Travel
Research
Administration

<u>Income:</u>
Individual contributions
Grants
Earned
In-kind

(All income should be marked either projected or confirmed)

A timeline for the development of the work

- Starting from the initial stages of the creation of the work through to the imagined completion, please identify major milestones and associated dates surrounding the project's conception, production, funding, and premiere. Though this commission supports specifically the creation and development of the project and not the premiere, we would still like to know when you estimate you will be ready to premiere the piece. Please indicate where you are in this timeline at the time of submission.

- Example:
    - **Sept. 2021:** Writing residency at X
    - **Dec. 2021:** Collaborator Y joined the project
    - **Jan - December 2022:** conversations, writing sessions, and fundraising
    - **Jan 2023:** work-in-progress showing with feedback session
    - **Feb 2023:** awarded grant for project development
    - **April 2023:** Developmental residency with full company at Z
    - **July 2023:** Tech residency with work-in-progress showing
    - **October 2023:** Work ready to premiere.
- Note: We understand that milestones are subjective, and that there are likely many of them inside your process. Please include no fewer than 7 and no more than 15 milestones from beginning to completion of the project.

Work samples

- Please submit recent, relevant work samples in the form of videos, audio, images, pdf document and/or links. See Submittable for format specs.
    - These should be examples of previous live performance work that you have created and premiered. Note: video work samples of production footage are the most helpful to reviewers.
    - Please note: work samples must either be in English or include a translation
    - Feel free to reach out for guidance to democracy.cycle@pacnyc.org if you have questions.
- URL links are welcome. Please include cue points when pointing the panel to an online video work sample. **Please include all necessary logins and passwords, and double check that they work before submitting.**
- Please include a short description of all samples, including title and year completed.
    - If there is a clear connection in theme or form between the sample of a prior work and the proposed project, it can be extremely helpful to briefly articulate that for reviewers (but this connection is not required).
    - **THEATER and DANCE and MULTIDISCIPLINARY**
        - Up to 2 video work samples, each cued to a 5-minute duration. These must be production footage of previously premiered works. No trailers.
        - If such exists, a third work sample may be a work-in-progress sample of the proposed project. Either 10-15 pages of the draft script, or video of up to 5 minutes of a work-in-progress showing of the proposed work.
    - **MUSIC and OPERA and MULTIDISCIPLINARY**
        - Up to 2 audio or video work samples, each cued to a 5-minute duration. These must be production footage of previously premiered works. No trailers.

- If such exists, a third work sample may be a work-in-progress sample of the proposed project. Either 10-15 pages of the draft script, or video of up to 5 minutes of a work-in-progress showing of the proposed work.

Contact information for one professional reference

- Please share the name of a colleague you feel might speak best to your work and creative practice. This might be a collaborator or producer/presenter with whom you've worked in the past. Please do not include your collaborators on this project, or those who may have a direct financial stake in a positive outcome for this commission.

Request for demographic information (optional)

- This section is fully optional. The information collected from this section will allow PAC NYC to evaluate the effectiveness of our outreach in alignment with the organization's mission and values. Specifically, this data will allow us the opportunity to strengthen future Request For Proposal / Open Call processes.

Resources

- The Democracy Cycle homepage www.pacnyc.org/the-democracy-cycle
- The Democracy Cycle downloadable Request for Proposals here
- The Democracy Cycle frequently-asked-questions or FAQs. (FAQs will be continually updated as the process gets underway and new questions arise.)
- Sign up for a one-on-one consultation regarding eligibility via Calendly here
- Register here for our live webinar on February 12, 2026, 1:00 PM ET. The Democracy Cycle staff will give an overview of the steps to apply and the application elements, with an opportunity for questions and answers at the end. This session will be recorded and posted on The Democracy Cycle's web page on the PAC NYC website.
- Email democracy.cycle@pacnyc.org with any questions not answered in these guidelines, on the website, in the webinar, or in the FAQs. Because our capacity is limited, plan to allow at least 7 business days for an answer to an emailed question

Reminder: April 28, 2026, 5:00 PM EST:
Application deadline for The Democracy Cycle 2026 Open Call

START YOUR APPLICATION HERE!

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