



# Application Handbook

Remuseum presents The Vanguard, an award and accelerator for innovative leaders in the visual and performing arts, in partnership with the Doris Duke Foundation. The Vanguard's \$100,000 annual award will recognize up to ten leaders who are exploring new ways to strengthen arts institutions, and a year-long accelerator will help them refine, implement, and evaluate their ideas. The first award and accelerator of its kind, The Vanguard celebrates leaders who are ready to center the public in their work in new ways, building models for increased relevance and sustainability in the arts.

## Background

While the nature of cultural production, audience tastes and methods of engagement (to say nothing of institutional missions themselves) have changed radically, the standard presentation and business model of “high” arts and culture has changed little over the last century.

At the same time, both museums and performing arts institutions have exhibited increasing symptoms of unsustainability (declining audiences, rising costs, and shifting philanthropic interests that may not favor the arts). Those symptoms now manifest as a generally acknowledged crisis, in which the recent loss of federal funding may represent a longer-term shift in which the old social contract for the arts — one in which the arts were recognized as a source of civic strength, worthy of investment for the benefit of all — may have dissolved.

Most leaders acknowledge that their institutions need new ways to matter to more people. Heeding this call, some innovative leaders want to accelerate the transition. They begin not with the “format” — how the art is delivered — but with the “benefit”: who and what is the art for?

Why are such leaders rarely getting to put their ideas to work? In no small part because, at a time when we need new ideas more than ever, a culture of fear has left most leaders without enough capital (reputational or risk capital) to put new ideas to work on their own.

This fear derives from many sources: cautious boards that may lack context to know what mission-driven risks are worth taking (and may fear backlash from any number of sources); donors and audiences who fear losing things they cherish; colleagues who defend norms even when they threaten institutional missions (and their jobs); and even the press, which can sometimes adopt its own limiting standards of what arts institutions should be or do.

Former Ford Foundation CEO Darren Walker described those fears in detail when he wrote (in a 2024 *New York Times* [op-ed](#)) that “we penalize bold leadership when we should be rewarding it.”

The purpose of The Vanguard is very specifically to offer that reward and to overcome those fears by supporting leaders ready and willing to explore new ways to center the public in their work, thereby driving increased relevance and sustainability for their organizations.

It begins with The Vanguard Award, which annually celebrates up to leaders and their readiness to innovate, and invests \$100,000 in each leader’s institution in support of a new idea. A 12-month program of support (the Vanguard Accelerator) follows, launched at a week-long retreat with a curriculum developed by MIT’s Martin Trust Center for Entrepreneurship and taught by professors from MIT’s Sloan School of Management and the University of Chicago Booth School of Business. The curriculum will help Vanguard members refine their ideas while also building the practices of disciplined entrepreneurship into their organizations. Support continues long after the weeklong retreat as leaders develop both their ideas and innovation practices with both their colleagues and boards.

By year’s end, members of this Vanguard will have built an intellectual kinship with each other while modeling a spirit of innovative leadership for the field. Remuseum will continue evaluating and sharing their work as case studies for cultural organizations broadly, and future classes will continue expanding a Vanguard of leaders (10, then 20, and on) who build models of success for cultural organizations in the 21st Century, allowing arts & cultural institutions not just to survive but to support a stronger and more pluralistic civil society.

## **The Program**

### Vanguard Award

Up to 10 CEOs/Executive Directors annually will receive a \$100,000 award (payable to the institution they lead) as an investment in them and their institutions to fund an idea that will be developed in The Vanguard Accelerator.

The purpose of this award is not about funding the implementation of a specific program. Instead, we signal that they and their ideas are nationally recognized as worthy of support. Vanguard members will be announced through a major national communications campaign, intended to emphasize that they represent the vanguard of cultural leadership.

### Vanguard Accelerator: Innovation Intensive and Curriculum

The kickoff and centerpiece of the 12-month Vanguard Accelerator will be a one-week innovation intensive at Doris Duke Foundation's Shangri La, a center of cultural & innovation (for more information about Shangri La, see the Appendix) in Honolulu, HI. Participants come together to gain key skills to take innovative ideas and turn them into plans they can implement because they and their colleagues have adopted a mission-based spirit of innovation, all while sharing insight and counsel with peers.

The Accelerator curriculum, tailored for cultural leaders, will be advised by Prof. Bill Aulet, a legendary teacher and mentor who has developed an unusually successful program to teach disciplined entrepreneurship, and led by his colleagues, MIT Professor Jenny Larios Berlin, entrepreneur, Lecturer at MIT Sloan School of Management and Co-Founder of Makerstate, which provides disciplined entrepreneurship training to artists and creatives, and entrepreneur Gregory Bunch, Adjunct Professor of Entrepreneurship at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, who has founded, led and advised a broad array of companies (and holds a M.Div degree from Harvard Divinity School). Professors Larios Berlin and Bunch will personally teach the week-long intensive at Shangri La.

Members of The Vanguard will leave the week-long intensive with a refined idea and, even more important, an approach to disciplined entrepreneurship. They will use this as the foundation upon which to fully develop their idea alongside their colleagues and innovation teams (and with their boards) when they return to their institutions.

They will not be left alone in that work. The Vanguard Accelerator academic team will provide ongoing support to The Vanguard during the 12 months that follow. Vanguard members will engage in structured, monthly sessions with our professors and coaches chosen for them and their projects. These sessions will afford Vanguard members the opportunity to deepen the skills and insights they have acquired, to workshop ongoing projects, and to seek support and camaraderie from similarly-situated peers. Separate in-person gatherings will be organized during the year based on location, topic and interest. The year will culminate with a public “demo day” in which The Vanguard (together with their own innovation teams) will present the results of their work in a single forum. Throughout the year, Remuseum will generate public attention (and cover) for these leaders, their institutions, and their work.

As the ongoing community grows, members of previous Vanguard classes may become participants and mentors to their successors.

## **How Vanguard Members Will Be Selected**

Rather than identifying rising leaders based on their adherence to existing norms, this program seeks to identify leaders who are **ready** to lead in new ways, based on their track record in implementing new ideas.

Among the key qualities of an ideal Vanguard member: a track record of innovation in the presentation of arts and culture; an entrepreneurial mindset; a generous and collaborative disposition; an idea worthy of development; and a willingness to fully set aside the time required for the Vanguard Accelerator.

Vanguard members will not be chosen on the basis of institutional tenure or seniority in the field. While they need to understand deeply the underlying business they lead and its levers for change (this is not an MBA or traditional leadership-development program), a strong Vanguard class will bring together both experienced CEOs as well as those who are new in their roles — or perhaps even new to the arts and culture field. We are seeking applications from all geographies and regions of the U.S. Board support, for both the leader and their innovative idea, will be tested as a requirement for participation.

One review panel will narrow the list of applications to a group of finalists and a finalist review panel made up of leaders from the visual and performing arts sectors will recommend a final list of at least 8 Vanguard members.

## **Applicant Eligibility**

The Vanguard Award is available to leaders (Chief Executive or other officer) of U.S.-based nonprofit visual and performing arts organizations with annual operating budgets greater than \$1 million. This threshold serves as a guideline rather than a strict requirement, reflecting an organization's capacity for leaders to devote time, with their staff, to the 12-month accelerator. Awardees must remain in their executive position for at least 12 months following the beginning of the Accelerator to receive the full amount. Organizations must be certified as tax-exempt by the IRS (or, in the case of fiscally sponsored/university-based organizations, their parent organization must be tax-exempt).

**Readiness:** In the context of their own track record for innovation, each applicant must explain why the time is right to develop skills as an entrepreneurial leader and to refine and implement a new idea, at this time in their own life and career and in the life of the organization they lead.

**Purpose:** Each applicant must describe an idea/initiative that would increase organizational relevance and revenue by centering and engaging the public in new ways.

**Accelerator participation:** Applicants must commit to participating in the week-long Vanguard Accelerator at Shangri La if they receive the Award as well as a 12-month series of follow-up meetings.

**Pre-Approval:** Applicants must confirm that the idea and their application have been shared with their direct reports and with their board leadership. Board support for the idea will be confirmed before finalists are selected to receive awards.

Funding will be awarded in the form of a grant from Remuseum, Inc to the leader's 501(c)3 organization, which must be eligible to enter into an award contract and receive funding from Remuseum, a US-based 501(c)3 organization.

## **Application Information**

Please be prepared to provide the following information in the application portal:

- Name
- Title
- Email

- Phone Number
- LinkedIn profile URL
- Tenure (how long have you been in your current position?)
- Describe your own track record of innovation and entrepreneurship and explain how you and your institution are ready for this program (*max 1000 characters*)
- What is your new idea? (*max 1250 characters*)
- What problem/challenge or example prompted this idea? (*max 750 characters*)
- How would this idea change your organization and its relationship to the public? (*max 750 characters*)
- Is it more than an idea? If so, explain where it stands now. (*max 750 characters*)
- How would you propose to evaluate the impact this idea, once implemented, and to utilize lessons from it to benefit the field? (*max 750 characters*)
- Have you shared or submitted this idea with other funders for support? If so, what has been the feedback? (*max 500 characters*)
- Organization name and EIN
- Organization URL
- Organization’s mission statement
- Describe what your organization does
- Most recent audited financial statement (or, for fiscally-sponsored organizations, an approved financial budget for the most recent 2-year period)
- Provide a video introducing yourself and your organization in 60 seconds or less.
- How did you hear about The Vanguard? (*max 250 characters*)
- All recipients of the Vanguard Award must participate in the Vanguard Accelerator from January 23-31, 2027, which will take place at Shangri La in Honolulu, HI. Following the Accelerator, awardees must commit to 12 months of follow-up (remote) meetings with MIT, culminating in a “demo day”. Please confirm that you can commit to participating in the gathering in Hawai‘i, as well as the 12-months of follow-up sessions.

## **Application/Review Process**

All applications are submitted via an online form (this handbook is for reference purposes only). The application will be open at 12:00 PM ET on Monday, May 18, 2026 and will close at 11:59 PM ET on Friday, June 19, 2026. One review panel will narrow the list of applications to a group of finalists and a finalist review panel made up of leaders from the visual and performing arts sectors will recommend a final list of Vanguard members.

## Key Dates and Deadlines

April 22, 2026	Vanguard Announcement
May 5, 2026, 12:00 PM ET	Informational Webinar #1: “ <u>About the Vanguard</u> ”
May 12, 2026	Deadline for Submitting Questions for May 14 Webinar
May 14, 2026, 3:00 PM ET	Informational Webinar #2: “ <u>Completing The Vanguard Application: Questions &amp; Answers</u> ”
May 18, 2026, 12:00 PM ET	Application Portal Opens
June 19, 2026, 11:59 PM ET	Application Portal Closes
July-August, 2026	Application Review
September/October 2026	Vanguard Members Announced
December 2026	Kickoff Session (Online)
January 23-31, 2027	Vanguard Accelerator at Shangri La
February–December, 2027	Vanguard Accelerator (ongoing work with MIT)

## Questions?

Remuseum will host two informational webinars on The Vanguard:

- May 5, 2026, 12:00 PM ET: “About The Vanguard”
- May 14, 2026, 3:00 PM ET: “Completing The Vanguard Application: Questions & Answers”

Sign up for the webinars here:

May 5, 2026, 12:00 PM ET: “About The Vanguard”:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_WP8fxlkpTJuk-nTGbki-gQ](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_WP8fxlkpTJuk-nTGbki-gQ)

May 14, 2026, 3:00 PM ET: “Completing The Vanguard Application: Questions & Answers”:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_qHWwPu9nQ8mu2PUcG6axwQ](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_qHWwPu9nQ8mu2PUcG6axwQ)

Questions can be submitted using [this link](#). If you want your question to be addressed at the Informational Webinar on May 14, 2026, please submit it by May 12, 2026. We will continue to update the FAQ listing on the Vanguard website at [Remuseum.org](https://Remuseum.org) after the webinar.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Applicant Eligibility

**Who is eligible to apply?** Executive officers (CEOs, Executive Directors, or other officers who report directly to the board) of nonprofit visual or performing arts organizations with an annual operating budget of over \$1 million. Organizations must be IRS-certified as tax-exempt 501(c)(3) entities.

**Are interim executives eligible to apply?** No, this award is for full-time leaders positioned to drive the vision and strategy for their organization in the long-term.

**Do I need a certain number of years in my current role to be eligible?** No. Vanguard awardees are not chosen based on institutional tenure or seniority. We welcome both experienced CEOs and those new in their roles — or even new to the arts and culture field.

**Is the \$1 million minimum operating budget a strict requirement?** No, the \$1 million threshold serves as a guideline rather than a strict requirement, reflecting an organization's capacity for leaders to devote time, with their staff, to the 12-month accelerator.

**Are leaders of fiscally sponsored or university-based organizations (e.g. university art museum or presenting organizations) eligible?** Yes. In the place of audited financial statements, applicants from fiscally-sponsored or university-based organizations must provide approved financial budgets for the most recent 2-year period.

**Do I need my board's approval before applying?** Yes. Applicants must confirm that their idea and application have been shared with their direct reports and board leadership. Board support will be verified before finalists receive awards.

### Review and Selection Process

**Is the review process blind to institutional size, geography, or budget?** No, but this program is structured to acknowledge that good ideas come from all sources, regions, and scales of organizations, and Remuseum will work to reduce any bias based on size, geography or other identifying factors.

**Will finalists be interviewed before final selection?** Yes, Remuseum will incorporate interviews with finalists, and will also confirm support from board leadership in writing or through an interview.

**Will applicants receive any feedback if not selected?** Only the finalists will receive feedback on their application.

### The Idea

**Is the \$100,000 intended to fund a specific pre-existing program?** The award is meant to fund a new or nascent idea or program that has been shared with institutional leadership (including the board) but has not been fully implemented.

**Does the idea need to be entirely new, or can it be an expansion or iteration of something already underway?** No. It does not need to be entirely new. Many great innovations are incremental adaptations of previous innovations.

**Are there categories of ideas that are not eligible (e.g. capital projects, technology infrastructure, or ideas focused on internal operations)?** No. We welcome ideas across all areas of organizational operations.

**How is “centering the public” defined? Does the idea require a specific orientation towards underserved or new audiences, or does it encompass any form of public engagement?** The phrase “centering the public” is intentionally broad because we do not know what kind of ideas will help the arts matter to more people while helping arts organizations fulfill their missions more sustainably.

**Is the \$100,000 disbursed all at once, or in installments?** Funds will be paid in two or more installments, based on milestones reached during the course of the Accelerator.

**Are there restrictions on how the \$100,000 can be spent (e.g. can it cover staff salaries, overhead, or travel)?** Awardees have discretion on the use of funds, so long as it is in support of the idea developed in the Accelerator.

**Are there reporting requirements for the \$100,000?** The grantee institution will submit a final report on its use of funds and work. The grantee also agrees to provide information to Remuseum to support evaluation of the work.

### Travel and Time Commitments

**Will travel costs to Shangri La and any other in-person gatherings be covered by the program?** Yes, all costs associated with participation in The Vanguard (including travel, food, lodging) will be covered.

**What happens after the week-long retreat?** Vanguard members receive ongoing support through monthly structured sessions with professors and coaches, separate in-person gatherings organized by location and topic, and a final public "demo day" where members present results of their work.

**Are the monthly follow-up sessions in person or virtual?** Monthly sessions will be virtual. Remuseum will organize any in-person gatherings during the Accelerator year based on areas of focus, need, and availability.

**What happens if an awardee leaves their organization mid-year? Does the award follow the leader or the institution?** The grant is associated with the awardee's participation in the Vanguard Accelerator at the institution they lead. The grant will end if the awardee leaves their organization during the Accelerator year.

**Does Remuseum retain any intellectual property rights over ideas developed through the program?** No. Intellectual property rights will be retained by the organization.

**Will my institution's idea be made public?** Remuseum will generate public attention for Vanguard leaders, their institutions, and ideas throughout the year (with the understanding that the idea may evolve during the Accelerator).

**We encourage anyone to submit additional questions about the program or application process using this form.** While we will not answer all questions directly, they will inform updates to our FAQs (above) and may be addressed on our webinars.

## **About the Vanguard: Funders and Leaders**

### Funding Partners

The Vanguard has been generously funded by the Doris Duke Foundation, David Booth, the Alice L. Walton Foundation, the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation, the Arison Arts Foundation, Pilot House Philanthropy, Amy and David Abrams, the Hill Art Foundation, and the Jasteka Foundation.

### About Remuseum

Remuseum is an art museum think tank focused on relevance, financial sustainability, and governance. It conducts and compiles research on those questions and gathers and supports leaders (both museum directors and trustees) focused on informed, mission-based innovation for their institutions and for the field. Remuseum was inspired and originally funded by entrepreneur and philanthropist David Booth together with support from Alice Walton and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, where it remains closely affiliated. Remuseum has received additional support from the Ford Foundation and the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation.

Remuseum's Founding Director is Stephen Reily, one of the few leaders who has served on numerous museum and arts boards and also led a major art museum for an extended period. He has served on the boards of the Speed Art Museum, the New Museum for Contemporary Art, Creative Capital Foundation, and the American Federation of Arts. In 2017 Reily became Director of the Speed Art Museum, and during his tenure of 4+ years, the Speed originated exhibitions that generated national attention for relevance and impact; increased access and visitation; and turned budget deficits into operating surpluses. A former lawyer and U.S. Supreme Court Clerk, Reily is a serial entrepreneur and Co-Founder of IMC Licensing, a brand licensing agency that has generated over \$10 billion in sales for the consumer brands it represents. As a social entrepreneur, his philanthropy includes the Louisville Urban League's Reily Reentry Project, responsible for a majority of criminal expungements granted in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

## About Doris Duke Foundation and Shangri La

The mission of the Doris Duke Foundation is to build a more creative, equitable, and sustainable future. The foundation works across three areas: Arts & Culture; Nature; and Health & Well-being. Visit [dorisduke.org](https://dorisduke.org) to learn more.

Samsheer (Sam) Gill is the third president and CEO of the Doris Duke Foundation. Before joining DDF in April 2021, Gill was senior vice president and chief program officer at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, where he oversaw more than \$100 million in annual grantmaking across the foundation's programs, in addition to managing Knight's research and assessment portfolio and its grants administration function. Previously, he also served as vice president of Freedman Consulting, LLC. Gill attended the University of Chicago and the University of Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar.

The Vanguard Accelerator will be hosted at [Shangri La](https://www.shangrilahawaii.org), a Center for Cultures & Ideas and a Museum of Islamic Art, in Honolulu, HI. Shangri La is part of the Doris Duke Foundation and home to one of the most significant collections of Islamic art in the United States. Originally conceived by Doris Duke as a place to foster understanding across cultures, Shangri La is a creative campus and convening space where artists, scholars, thought leaders and communities come together through residencies, exhibitions, convenings and public programs. Through its collection and partnerships across Hawai'i and beyond, Shangri La invites new perspectives and shared cultural exchange. For more information visit [www.shangrilahawaii.org](https://www.shangrilahawaii.org) or follow @hi\_shangrila on Instagram, YouTube and Facebook.