



FRAN ABRAMS CREATIVE WRITING AWARD

For Montgomery County High School Juniors

2025-2026 AWARD GUIDELINES

SUBMISSION DETAILS

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Friday, January 23, 2026, at 11:59 p.m.

Award notifications will occur in Spring 2026.

**All applications and relevant materials must be submitted online through
AHCMC's application portal.**

Late applications and materials will not be accepted.

P.O. Box 8817, Silver Spring, MD 20907

(301) 565-3805

www.creativemoco.com

The Mission of the Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County

The Arts & Humanities Council of Montgomery County (AHCMC), in partnership with the community, cultivates and supports excellence in the arts and the humanities, expands access to cultural expression, and contributes to economic vitality in the region.

Equity & Inclusion

With the acknowledgement and understanding that access to resources has been historically limited for certain groups of people, AHCMC is committed to cultural equity within all funding activities and to serving communities that have been traditionally underrepresented in mainstream funding, discourse, leadership, and resource allocation, including but not limited to, Black, Indigenous, Native American, Latinx, Chicanx, Arab, MENASA (Middle Eastern, North African, South Asian), Asian, Pacific Islander, and other communities of color, socio-economically disadvantaged communities, differently abled individuals and/or people with disabilities, and Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual constituents. AHCMC recognizes that language is fluid, and the intersectional justice movement is redefining terminology regularly. This list is not exhaustive and will be updated periodically as language continues to shift over time.

ADA Compliance

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) offers protection to individuals with disabilities all over the United States, by prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities in several areas, including employment, schooling, transportation, public accommodations, and access to state and local government' programs and services. Programming and projects funded by AHCMC should be accessible to differently abled individuals and/or people with disabilities. Additional resources, including a PDF of *Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator's Handbook*, can be found on [AHCMC's website](#).

Applicants who need accessibility accommodations should feel welcome to contact [AHCMC grants staff](#).

The award ceremony is held at the Betty Mae Kramer Gallery in Silver Spring; a public space that is ADA accessible and welcomes community members of all abilities.

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Introduction

The *Fran Abrams Creative Writing Award* (Abrams Award) is a competitive award open annually to all Montgomery County high school juniors. Established in 2010, this award uplifts the unique and authentic voices of Montgomery County high school students who demonstrate a commitment to creative writing. Fran Abrams worked tirelessly throughout her career to support the arts and humanities in Montgomery County.

Purpose

This award is available to high school juniors enrolled in a public or non-public high school in Montgomery County who demonstrate a commitment to creative writing.

The 2025-2026 Abrams Award will be presented to three recipients following a juried selection process that is based upon the merit of original submitted work and the applicant's commitment to the creative writing discipline, not financial need.

Award

The awardee who receives the highest average panel score is given an award of \$1,500, a mentorship with a professional writer, and the opportunity for the awardee to read their work during an award ceremony. In addition, two runner-up awardees will receive \$750 each and a one-on-one meeting with the mentor.

The mentorship provides award winners an opportunity to learn from a professional writer, gain insights about the creative writing process and creative writing careers. The schedule and scope of the mentorship will be collaboratively designed and mutually agreed upon by the awardee and the mentor.

2025-2026 *Fran Abrams Creative Writing Award* Estimated Timeline

Application Preparation Webinars	December 2025
Application Deadline	January 23, 2026
Panel Review	March 2026
Award Announcement	April 2026
Award Ceremony	Summer 2026

Important Notes

- Writing samples must be the applicants' own work; collaborative works or group projects **will not be accepted**.
- The Abrams Award is not centered around a specific submission of a piece, but rather on the student as an aspiring and emerging writer.
- 2025-2026 Abrams Award applicants can not apply for the 2025-2026 *Ida F. Haimovicz Visual Arts Award*.
- Writing samples should be from work created within the last three years.
- Work samples can include but are not limited to work created for school credit.
- Incomplete submissions **will not be accepted**.

- Applicants who need assistance or accommodation to complete this application should contact AHCMC grants staff.

Applicant Eligibility Requirements

Students eligible to apply must have met all the following eligibility requirements **by the published deadline:**

- Reside in Montgomery County, MD;
- Can provide AHCMC with a Social Security Number (SSN) or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) prior to receiving the award disbursement;
- Enrolled full-time during the fall of 2025 and spring of 2026 of their high school junior year in a public, private, or home school located in Montgomery County, MD; and
- Graduating high school in the spring of 2027.

Creative Writing Disciplines

The work submitted must demonstrate the applicant’s proficiency in any one or combination of the following creative writing disciplines:

- | | |
|---------------|------------------------------------|
| • Poetry | • Scriptwriting |
| • Fiction | • Spoken Word |
| • Songwriting | • Creative Nonfiction ¹ |

Work samples in the above disciplines may include but are not limited to:

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| • Novels | • Personal essays |
| • Poems | • Screenplays for film or television |
| • Short stories | • A video of the applicant reciting their original spoken word or written work |
| • Song lyrics | • Scripts for theater, podcasts, or radio |
| • Memoirs | |

For applicants whose work has a performance aspect to it such as spoken word, or whose work is conveyed through media such as a podcast or radio broadcast, a video and/or audio upload in addition to the written component is strongly encouraged.

Panel Process

All eligible applications are evaluated by a panel of writing and arts/humanities education professionals in an open panel review process. Panelists are chosen to represent a cross-section of professionals qualified to provide expert knowledge of creative writing and arts/humanities education. AHCMC staff make every effort to ensure that the panel is diverse in all respects.

AHCMC staff review applications for eligibility and completeness, but do not score. Staff manage all administrative and logistical tasks necessary to conduct a successful panel review, provide panelists all documentation necessary to evaluate applications effectively, inform the panel in matters of AHCMC policy and procedures, and facilitate panel meetings. Panelists are provided with the eligible applications and support materials approximately four weeks prior to the panel review meeting to allow

¹ Creative Nonfiction is the retelling of factual events and/or people in a dramatic, creative way. For the purposes of this award, research/history papers will not be accepted. If you have any questions, please contact Jesus Guzman, AHCMC Grants Assistant Manager, at Jesus.Guzman@creativemoco.com or (301) 565-3805 ext. 21.

sufficient time for their evaluation. All eligible applications are evaluated based on the following AHCMC Evaluative Criteria: Supporting Activities, Aspirations, and Originality & Creativity (described in detail below).

The panel convenes to discuss and provide scores for each application. Panel meetings are open to applicants who wish to observe; however, applicants are not permitted to make any comments or participate in any way during the panel meeting. Applicants may not contact panelists before or after the panel meeting regarding their application review. Once the application deadline has passed and the panel has received the application for review, AHCMC staff will not forward updates from the applicant to the panel.

AHCMC grants staff use the applicant's panel scores to recommend the awardees to AHCMC's CEO. AHCMC's CEO has final authority to approve the recommended awardees.

Panel scores and comments are available to all applicants upon request after award notifications have been publicly announced. Applicants are **highly encouraged** to schedule a feedback appointment to review panel scores and comments by contacting Jesus Guzman, AHCMC Grants Assistant Manager, at Jesus.Guzman@creativemoco.com or (301) 565-3805 ext. 21.

Evaluative Criteria

Panelists evaluate and score all 2025-2026 Abrams Award applications based on the extent to which the application addresses the following Evaluative Criteria. An applicant's commitment to all Evaluative Criteria should thread through the entire application, including the narrative and work samples.

Supporting Activities (20 points)

- ✓ Describes how the applicant engages in creative writing activities, which can include in-school and out-of-school activities;
 - **Applicants are encouraged to share if they find it challenging to engage in creative writing outside of school hours due to other responsibilities or commitments.** (i.e. family responsibilities such as sibling or elder care, or employment ...etc.)

Aspirations (40 points)

- ✓ Clear commitment to creative writing;
- ✓ Describes creative writing goals; and
- ✓ Demonstrates interest in developing skills that apply to creative writing.

Originality & Creativity (40 points)

- ✓ Demonstrates creativity, originality, and strong conceptualization;
- ✓ Identifies and explains key concepts and emotions explored through the work; and
- ✓ Articulates how the writing style and techniques are used to communicate the intended theme(s).

The Online Application Process

All applications and relevant materials must be submitted online through the AHCMC SurveyMonkey Apply (SM Apply) grants portal: <https://artsandhumanities.smapply.io/>. For specific questions about SM Apply, please contact Jesus Guzman, AHCMC Grants Assistant Manager, at Jesus.Guzman@creativemoco.com or (301) 565-3805 ext. 21.

1. Go to [SM Apply](#) and login to your SM Apply account using your username and password.

- a. If you do not have an account, create one by clicking the green “Register” button in the upper right-hand corner. Complete all necessary steps to activate your account.
2. Select “Programs” in the upper right-hand corner to view open opportunities.
3. Find the box that reads “2025-2026 Fran Abrams Creative Writing Award” and select the green “More” button.
4. Click the green “Apply” button on the right-hand side.
5. Complete all required tasks marked with an asterisk (*).
6. Submit your application by clicking the green “Submit” button on the left-hand side.
 - a. Applications cannot be submitted unless all required tasks are marked as complete.
 - b. Applications that are complete but not submitted by the deadline cannot be reviewed.**

Required Application Materials

All documents except for work samples must be submitted as PDFs. (See the work sample directions below for information about acceptable file formats.) Contact AHCMC grants staff if you need guidance converting your documents to PDFs.

IMPORTANT! Staff will remove materials that exceed the stated limits below.

A completed, online [SM Apply](#) application includes:

1. Completed Narrative

- Fillable form in SM Apply.
- Download a template of the application under the “Application + Templates” tab on [AHCMC’s website](#). **Please note that templates are for the applicant’s reference only and all applications and materials must be submitted through SM Apply.**

2. Signed High School Transcript

- Applicants must upload a PDF copy of their current high school transcript verified by the original signature of their guidance counselor. This signature verifies that the applicant’s grades are up to date and that the applicant is on track to graduate with a high school diploma in the spring of 2027.
 - Homeschooled applicants may have their current high school transcript signed by their primary instructor if a guidance counselor is not available.
- **Transcripts will only be used to verify eligibility; transcripts are not sent to the panel and do not impact the evaluation process.**

3. Homeschool Notification Form (required for homeschooled students only)

- All homeschooled applicants must submit a Homeschool Notification Form signed by a parent or guardian who verifies that the student is homeschooled and that they comply with Maryland State Department of Education home-schooling regulations.
- **The Homeschool Notification Form will only be used to verify eligibility; this form is not sent to the panel and does not impact the evaluation process.**

4. Work Sample Cover Page

- Fillable form in SM Apply with the title of each work, genre, and year completed.

5. Work Sample(s)

- Upload **a maximum of 10 work samples** of original work created within the last three years that demonstrate the applicant’s creative writing practice. **Work samples must be no more than 10 files or 10 pages total. (This includes images, written work, and any submitted audio/video).**

- **At least one piece must be work that the applicant would feel comfortable sharing and reading publicly.**
- Work samples must be of finished work.
- Applicants may submit work samples for a combination of disciplines.

- **Work samples should demonstrate the applicant’s own work, not work created by others.**
- Submit work sample(s) in the format specified below:
 - Poetry/Songwriting: Submit no more than 10 poems and/or song lyrics.
 - Fiction/Creative Nonfiction/Scriptwriting:
 - Double-spaced with at least 11-point font and 1-inch margins.
 - If the work submitted is an excerpt of a larger work, include a synopsis and an outline of the larger work. Clearly explain how and where the piece submitted fits into the whole.
- If the written work has a performance component, the applicant has the option of uploading a performative sample in addition to the written work sample as follows:
 - Audio/Video: Maximum 4, up to 100 MB per file, no more than ten minutes combined. **Please note that any submitted audio/video counts towards the limit of 10 work samples.**
 - The SM Apply link feature only supports links to YouTube and Vimeo.
 - If using the SM Apply link feature for YouTube or Vimeo, use the full hyperlink at the top of your browser instead of shorthand links (i.e., use the full <https://www.youtube.com> link, not <https://youtu.be>).
 - Applicants may choose to use the SM Apply link feature or embed the links in a document and upload it as a PDF.
 - If providing links to websites other than YouTube or Vimeo, links must be embedded in a document and uploaded as a PDF. For each link, the entire link address should be visible.
 - Make sure that links are not broken.
 - Make sure that the content from hyperlinks is viewable and does not require a password.
 - If the submitted video and/or audio is more than ten minutes combined, applicants must include instructions for which segments are relevant. (Ex: Please click on the YouTube hyperlink to watch the video from 0:47 to 4:10.)
 - To add instructions for panelists: After uploading, click on the 3 dots to the right of the work sample that you wish to add instructions to. A window will pop up with the work sample title and a text box.

6. Completed AHCMC Reporting Data Form

- **This form corresponds with AHCMC’s reporting obligations. Responses will not be factored into eligibility or the panel review.** All responses will be kept confidential. Responses will only be shared publicly in the aggregate.

Application Preparation Assistance

Applicants are highly encouraged to contact AHCMC grants staff with any questions **prior to the application deadline.**

Application Preparation Webinars

AHCMC staff will hold free preparation webinars to assist applicants. While attendance is not required, AHCMC strongly encourages all applicants to attend a webinar. Whether or not an applicant attends a webinar will not be a factor in evaluating the application. Please go to <https://www.creativemoco.com/find-opportunities/newsletters/> to join our email list and receive notifications about opportunities, deadlines, and webinars.

Personal Appointments

Personal appointments with AHCMC staff are available for students who are unable to attend a webinar or who need additional assistance or accommodation to complete the application. Appointments can include assistance with the content of the application such as a draft review, and/or assistance with navigating the online application portal. Consultation services in languages other than English are available by appointment.

Personal appointments must be scheduled **at least two weeks prior to the application deadline**. **Drafts for review must be submitted at least two weeks prior to the application deadline**. To schedule an appointment, contact Jesus Guzman, AHCMC Grants Assistant Manager, at Jesus.Guzman@creativemoco.com or (301) 565-3805 ext. 21.

Post-Award Information

Applicants are strongly encouraged to read this section carefully before applying.

Award Recipient Responsibility

Conditions for accepting the award: Award recipients understand and agree to honor the following obligations:

- The award recipient will work with a creative writing mentor designated by AHCMC;
- The award recipient must attend the award ceremony;
- The award recipient must agree to read their original work at the award ceremony;
- AHCMC reserves the right to promote the Student Awards and publicize the student's works on AHCMC's website and digital publications;
- AHCMC agrees to credit the award recipient by name and include copyright symbol on the written work. AHCMC will not use the recipient's writing for monetary advantage; and
- AHCMC reserves the right to publish the name of the recipients and the recipient high school in press releases to publicize the *Fran Abrams Creative Writing Award*.

Award Disbursement

The full award will be disbursed to the award recipient following AHCMC's receipt of:

- A W-9 form with the award recipient's Social Security Number (SSN) or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN);
- The Intellectual Property Release Form; and
- The Media Release Form.

The Intellectual Property Release Form, and Media Release form must all be signed by both the award recipient and a parent and/or legal guardian of the award recipient.

Important Reminders & Tips

- Applications must be submitted online through [SM Apply](#) by **11:59 p.m. on the posted deadline**. **Late applications will not be accepted.**
- Applications will not be accepted that are emailed, delivered in person, faxed, or submitted in any fashion other than the online application system.
- **Follow the instructions in SM Apply carefully.**
- Write clearly and concisely—do not use jargon. Remember that the panelists who are reading the application may be unfamiliar with the applicant’s work.
- AHCMC staff do not participate in panel discussions—the application must stand on its own.
- Reference the evaluative criteria when preparing and writing the application.
- Before submitting, proofread the application for readability and content.
- **To avoid unanticipated technical glitches, do not wait until the deadline to submit.**

SUBMISSION DETAILS

APPLICATION DEADLINE: Friday, January 23, 2026 at 11:59 p.m.

Award notifications will occur in Spring 2026.

All applications and relevant materials must be submitted online through AHCMC’s application portal.

Questions?

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