



Heritage Awards FY 2026 Guidelines

DEADLINE: September 26, 2025



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This publication is available as a PDF on the MSAC website: www.msac.org.

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Program Overview

Purpose

Heritage Awards recognize long-term achievement in the traditional arts.¹ MSAC defines traditional arts as community-based living cultural traditions handed down by example or word of mouth. Awards recognize up to six recipients annually from among the categories of Person/People, Place, and Tradition.

Awards in the Person/People category are given to individuals or groups whose efforts demonstrate long-term achievement in:

- Artistry
- Community leadership
- Creative practice
- Documentation
- Entrepreneurship
- Presentation
- Performance
- Research

Awards in the Place category are given to locations that:

- Achieve long-term prominence over a period of generations
- Serve as gathering spaces for community fellowship
- Serve as sites for traditional practices

Awards in the Tradition category are given in broad recognition of activities that connect communities to folklife in areas such as:

- Traditional practices
- Recurring events
- Occupations
- Local knowledge
- Cultural movements
- Organizations

Grant Cycle

Funding

Heritage Awards are \$10,000 each and are disbursed annually.

Awardees receive funding in one payment (100% of award amount) after agreement execution.

Support Period

Awardees agree to spend or obligate all funds by June 30, 2026. Obligation means that awarded funds are expended, encumbered, or otherwise legally committed to be used, such that returning the unspent funds would cause the Award recipient legal harm.

¹ A resource to assist with understanding this document is the MSAC Glossary, which provides an overview of terms commonly used in MSAC grant guidelines, on the website, and in other published materials. Access the Glossary by [clicking here](#).

Use of Funds

Each Heritage Award includes an unrestricted grant of \$10,000. Funds may be expended at the awardee's discretion.

Award funds may not be used for:

- Contributions to any persons who hold, or are candidates for, elected office
- Contributions to any political party, organization, or action committee
- Activities in connection with any political campaign or referendum
- Lobbying activities

Timeline

The timelines below are estimates and may change according to nomination volume, funding changes, constituent needs, staff capacity, or other factors. Subscribe to MSAC communications to be notified of any public information sessions and other program updates by completing [the signup form on our website](#).

- Nominations
 - Publication: August 18, 2025
 - Deadline: September 26, 2025
- Nomination review
 - September - November 2025
 - Panel meeting: December 9, 2025
- Award Notification
 - January 2026
- Final reports
 - Deadline: August 15, 2026

Eligibility

Eligible Heritage Award nominees are people, places, and traditions located in Maryland that demonstrate long-term achievement in the traditional arts. Nominees may be people, places, and traditions that have been features of Maryland cultures for many generations, as may people, places, and traditions that have come to Maryland more recently through patterns of migration, immigration, or the movement of refugees.

- People, places, and traditions may receive the Heritage Award only once
- Heritage Awards are not given posthumously
- Self-nominations are accepted
- There is no limit to the number of nominations that may be made in connection with a single traditional art
- Multiple nominations of the same nominee are reviewed by staff prior to going to panel, with only the strongest nomination going to the panel for review

All Heritage Award funds must be disbursed to individuals who reside in Maryland (i.e., own or rent residential property in Maryland) who are age 18 or older, or to nonprofits, colleges and universities, or units of government located in Maryland. MSAC staff work with awardees to determine the preferred recipient of funds.

The eligibility guidelines listed above provide an overview only. In some cases, MSAC staff might make eligibility determinations addressing situations not described here but in support of the mission of the agency and the Department of Commerce.

Nomination Process, Review, and Award

Process

Before You Nominate

Those interested in making a Heritage Award nomination are encouraged to contact the State Folklorist to discuss their nomination ideas prior to submission. Contact information is listed in the Contact Information section.

Nomination and Review

SmartSimple

Nominations are submitted via the secure, online grants management system, SmartSimple. Log in or create a free account on the [SmartSimple registration page](#).

- Nominators are required to complete and submit nominations by electronic means, including the use of an electronic signature. To make an accessibility request for an alternative submission method, please contact the State Folklorist using contact information listed in the Contact Information section
- Technical support for SmartSimple is available during regular office hours
- Nominators must meet any revision deadlines requested after submission, as specified in writing, or the nomination will be considered withdrawn
- By submitting a nomination to MSAC, whether via electronic means or otherwise, the nominator agrees to allow MSAC to retain records per state and federal document retention laws and policies. The nominator is also agreeing to the Terms and Privacy Policy of SmartSimple as applicable to MSAC

Nominator expectation

Heritage Award nominators make nominations on behalf of nominees. Nominators may reside in Maryland or outside of Maryland and must provide contact information during the nomination process. Nominators serve as the primary point of contact for a nomination until awardees are selected.

Panelist service

MSAC convenes panelists, representing a range of arts expertise statewide, to evaluate applications and nominations electronically. Panelists are selected via public application process and based on relevant experience and expertise. Opportunities to serve as panelists for various grant programs are posted throughout the year; individuals interested in panel service are encouraged to learn more and apply on MSAC's [Ways to Get Involved webpage](#).

Nomination form and review criteria

The nomination is a digital form available in SmartSimple and consisting of prompts requiring dropdown menu selections, fill-in answers, and external file uploads.

The nomination form includes the option of uploading an audio or video recording answering narrative questions. This option is intended as an accommodation. Instructions for uploading nomination recordings are included in SmartSimple.

- Nomination recordings must be uploaded either as .mp3, .mp4, or .mov files not exceeding 20 minutes total
- Nominators are responsible for formatting and producing nomination recordings in keeping with the technical specifications above; inaccessible or inaudible recordings are considered incomplete and will not be considered

Nomination evaluation is based on review criteria that correspond with the prompts in the nomination form. The review criteria provide guidance on rating a nominator's response to a prompt.

Nomination prompts and review criteria are provided below, for reference.

Criterion 1: Nomination's identification of a form of folklife

- Nomination questions:
 - Describe the cultural history and community of origin of the form of folklife being considered in this nomination. (250 words)
 - Describe the current community participating in the form of folklife being considered in this nomination. (250 words)

Excellent (17-20 points)	Good (13-16 points)	Fair (9-12 points)	Poor (8 or fewer points)
Nomination clearly identifies a living cultural tradition strongly connected to a cultural community of origin over a generational period of practice	Nomination identifies a living cultural tradition connected to a cultural community of origin over a moderate period of practice	Nomination partially or ambiguously identifies a living cultural tradition connected to a cultural community of origin over a limited or unclear period of practice	Nomination's connection to folklife and cultural community of origin is negligible or not present

Criterion 2: Nominee's connection to the folklife of a particular community of origin

- Nomination question:
 - Explain and provide evidence of the nominee's importance to the current community participating in the form of folklife described above. (250 words)

Excellent (17-20 points)	Good (13-16 points)	Fair (9-12 points)	Poor (8 or fewer points)
Nominee's importance to the folklife of a cultural community of origin is clearly demonstrated	Nominee's importance to the folklife of a cultural community of origin is demonstrated	Nominee's importance to the folklife of a cultural community of origin is somewhat demonstrated	Limited or no connection made between nominee and the folklife of a cultural community of origin

Criterion 3: Nominee's sustained engagement with folklife as a person or people, place, or tradition

- Nomination question:
 - Explain and provide evidence of the nominee's sustained engagement with the form of folklife described above, either as an individual (for Person/People nominations); a community gathering place (for Place nominations); or a traditional practice (for Tradition nominations). (250 words)

Excellent (17-20 points)	Good (13-16 points)	Fair (9-12 points)	Poor (8 or fewer points)
Nominee's engagement with folklife clearly extends over a substantial period of time	Nominee's engagement with folklife extends over a moderate period of time	Nominee's engagement with folklife extends over a limited or unclear period of time	Nominee's length of engagement with folklife is negligible or not stated

Unscored questions:

- What is the relationship of the nominator to the nominee? (100 words)
- Describe how receiving this award provides a direct benefit to the culture from which the tradition originated. (250 words)
- Optional supplemental materials:
 - Supplemental materials include but are not limited to letters of recommendation, media coverage, or audiovisual examples of past work not exceeding 10 pages and 5 minutes of combined audiovisual review time
 - Supplemental materials may reflect any point in the nominee's career or existence
 - Supplemental materials may be accepted in the following file formats: mp3, .mp4, .mov, .pdf, .jpg, .tif

Financial Requirements

All Award recipients are required to submit a current signed [W-9 form](#) upon notification of their award. The address on the W-9 Form must match the address of the nomination information entered in SmartSimple. If the nomination is a self-nomination, a completed W9 form may be uploaded at the time of nomination submission.

Award

Notification

After nomination review, nominators and Award recipients will be notified of their status as soon as possible. If the nomination is approved, the nominator and Award recipient will receive instructions to access a Grant Agreement Form (GAF) to review and sign electronically via SmartSimple.

Following notification, the Award recipient will be listed as the primary contact in the nomination and will receive all notifications. Automated notifications from SmartSimple will be sent from noreply@smartsimple.com. Please adjust email notification and security settings to ensure receipt of these notifications. Check your spam folder if a nomination submission confirmation notification has not arrived to your inbox.

Disbursement

The Award funds are provided in a disbursement, which is a distribution from a dedicated fund for the specific purposes outlined in this guidelines document. The disbursement process begins when the GAF is fully executed. The Award recipient will receive notification of full execution from SmartSimple. This notification will include a PDF copy of the fully executed GAF, which will also be accessible in the awardee's SmartSimple profile.

The Award recipient will receive the Award disbursement approximately six to eight weeks from the date of notification of the fully executed GAF. More information on MSAC's disbursement processing timeline can be found on the [Payment Process](#) web page.

MSAC grants and awards are generally considered taxable income. Disbursements are issued directly by the State of Maryland, not by MSAC, and no Social Security, state, or federal income taxes are withheld. Individuals receiving grants or awards of more than \$600 will receive, via mail, a 1099 form from the State of Maryland. This form will arrive after the end of the calendar year in which the grant or award was paid. To request or access your 1099 electronically, register and log in on the General Accounting Division (GAD) [Online Service Center site](#). Specific questions regarding the taxability of your award should be directed to the IRS, the Office of the Maryland Comptroller, or your tax advisor.

Award recipients are encouraged to sign up to receive disbursement electronically via Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). Those with existing state vendor profiles can sign up for EFT disbursements by completing the relevant forms on the [Comptroller's EFT for Vendors site](#). Typically, those who have previously received MSAC grants or awards have an existing state vendor profile.

Recipients new to MSAC or other state funding will receive award funds via check made payable to the name and address indicated on the awardee's W-9. They will be able to sign up for EFT for any subsequent disbursements.

Disbursement Status

Award recipients are encouraged to deposit award disbursement checks immediately. If the Award recipient has not received award funds within eight weeks of notification of a fully executed GAF, the Award recipient should contact MSAC to inquire about disbursement status. The Award recipient is responsible for following up with MSAC staff if disbursement is not received during the fiscal year in which it was awarded. If the disbursement was lost in transit, the State of Maryland is able to re-issue disbursement. However, MSAC is unable to guarantee that funds will be available for re-issue after the end of the fiscal year in which an award was awarded.

If the Award recipient owes any Maryland state taxes or other state liabilities, GAD may intercept fund disbursements and hold them until the liability is resolved. Should this be the case, GAD will send written notice of this directly to the Award recipient via mail. MSAC is not provided further information, as it is confidential. Awardees can find more information and discuss options with the Central Collections Unit at (410) 767-1220. Additionally, information on held disbursements can be found by creating an account on GAD's [Online Service Center site](#).

Documentation

To support artists and their careers, MSAC makes site visits available to Heritage Award recipients as a free service during the award period. Site visits consist of professional photo, audio, and/or video recording to document the awardee and their tradition. Site visits are optional; waiving site visits will not negatively affect the status of the award.

MSAC staff work directly with Award recipients to arrange site visits and strive to ensure that awardees are clear about the purpose of the visit, comfortable with the duration and nature of the documentation activities, and aware of their importance to the work of MSAC. Photo, audio, and video documentation collected during site visits is deposited in the [Maryland Traditions Archives](#), a public archive of Maryland's living cultural traditions housed at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, with MSAC oversight. Documentation is also used to promote MSAC's traditional arts work to the public.

Though each site visit is unique to each Heritage Award recipient, the following guidelines broadly describe the intention behind all site visits:

- Scheduled in accordance with dates and times of day that best illustrate the awardee (e.g., arranging to document oystering during oyster season or Cambodian New Year music during the April New Year observed in Cambodian communities)
- Illustrate awardees in the contexts in which they would normally be occurring (e.g., arranging to document traditional Irish music performance at an Irish traditional music session or gospel quartet music at a Sunday church service)
- Photo documentation site visits last approximately 3 hours
- Video documentation site visits last approximately 16 hours, and are split up to occur on multiple days

See the “Awards Awarded” section of the Heritage Award webpage at [this link](#) for examples of previous Heritage Award recipients over the past five years.

Reporting

All Award recipients must file a final report in SmartSimple. The report will be added to the Award recipient's SmartSimple profile as soon as the GAF is fully executed.

The final report deadline for the 2026 Heritage Award is August 15, 2026.

The final report form collects information about the Award recipient and the award, including optional demographic information, data for the National Endowment for the Arts, summary of activities and use of award funds, and other program-specific information and documents, as relevant.

Award recipients whose award disbursements were intercepted by GAD due to state liabilities, as outlined in the Disbursements section above, are not exempt from submitting required reports. Awardees must either return the funds to MSAC or submit a report accordingly.

Failure to submit a report may jeopardize current MSAC grants or awards, eligibility for future MSAC grants or awards, and may result in the required return of grant or award funds. Before any funds are distributed, Award recipients are also required to submit any outstanding reports or satisfy obligations for any other MSAC grants or awards they have received.

Ineligible and Declined Nominations

Nominations that do not receive funding generally fall into one of two categories: ineligible or declined.

A nomination is marked ineligible if it is not complete or does not comply with the eligibility requirements of the Heritage Award program. A nomination can be marked ineligible at any time during the review process.

After a nomination is considered eligible, it may be declined for several reasons. A nomination may be declined due to funding allocation limitations at the time, or for the following reasons:

- Required information is incomplete or insufficient to make an award determination
- There are material inconsistencies between the nomination and the nominee's actual information

Nomination Feedback

Nominators may request feedback on their nominations—whether ineligible, declined, or approved for funding—by submitting a feedback request form. A link to this form will be provided in award notification emails.

Nominations that are ineligible or declined may be revised and re-submitted during the following cycle but are not automatically carried over from year to year.

Contact Information

MSAC staff offer technical assistance when feasible throughout the nomination process. This includes professional development related to grant writing and program requirements; one-on-one conversations; and tailored feedback.

For more information on the Heritage Award nomination process, contact:

- Program and nomination strategy assistance
 - Ryan Koons, State Folklorist
 - ryan.koons@maryland.gov
 - (410) 767-6568 (O); (443) 536-8368 (C)
- Award logistics and technological assistance
 - Catherine Teixeira, Grants Director
 - catherine.teixeira@maryland.gov
 - (443) 799-7256
 - Tammy Oppel, Grants Management Associate
 - tammy.oppel@maryland.gov
 - (443) 326-5555
 - Kirk Amaral Snow, Grants Management Associate
 - kirk.amaralsnow@maryland.gov
 - (410) 767-8865

MSAC Overview

Description

MSAC is an appointed body of 17 Maryland citizens, 13 of whom are named by the Governor to three-year terms that may be renewed once. Two private citizens and two legislators are appointed by the President of the Senate and by the Speaker of the House. All councilors serve without salary.

To carry out its mission, MSAC awards grants to nonprofit arts organizations, arts programs, and individual artists, and provides application assistance, professional development, and other resources to individuals and groups. MSAC reserves the right to prioritize grant awards.

MSAC receives its funds from an annual appropriation from the State of Maryland; grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency; and, on occasion, contributions from private, non-governmental sources.

Authority

MSAC is an agency of the State of Maryland under the authority of the Department of Commerce, Division of Tourism, Film and the Arts.

Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lieutenant Governor
Harry Coker, Jr., Secretary of Commerce
Steven Skerritt-Davis, Executive Director, MSAC

Staff

MSAC maintains a professional staff to administer its programs. For staff listing, visit the [MSAC staff page](#).

Meetings

Council and panelist meetings are open to the public in accordance with the Open Meetings Act set forth in Title 3 of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland. The dates, times, and locations of Council and panelist meetings may be obtained on the [Meeting Notices page](#), or by contacting MSAC at msac.commerce@maryland.gov or (410) 767-6555.

Mission and Goals

MSAC's mission is to advance the arts in our state by providing leadership that champions creative expression, diverse programming, equitable access, lifelong learning, and the arts as a celebrated contributor to the quality of life for all the people of Maryland.

MSAC's strategic plan outlines five pillars and goals:

1. Access: Bolster access to arts experiences and resources
2. Awareness: Amplify the stories of Maryland's arts sector and the value of public support
3. Connection: Foster networks within and beyond the arts sector
4. Equity: Cultivate a thriving arts ecosystem centered in equity
5. Leadership: Commit to a culture of care and innovation

Read [MSAC's full strategic plan](#) to learn more about implementation actions.

Equity and Justice Statement

The arts celebrate our state's diversity, connect our shared humanity, and transform individuals and communities. MSAC and its supporting collaborators are committed to advancing and modeling equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion in all aspects of our organizations and across communities of our state.

MSAC and its grantees are committed to embracing equity and non-discrimination regardless of race, religious creed, color, age, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, class, language, and/or ability.

The driving goals of MSAC's grant processes are:

- To yield a greater variety of funded projects
- To eliminate biases that may be found in any part of the granting process (e.g., applications, panelist procedures, adjudication systems)
- To acknowledge positions of privilege while questioning practices, shifting paradigms of status quo arts activities, and taking more risks
- To expand deliberations to include criteria beyond current conventions or Western traditions

Accessibility

MSAC is committed to making sure all Marylanders can access its programs and services. Everyone is welcome, and all MSAC events and activities must be fully accessible both physically and programmatically. MSAC complies with all applicable disability-related statutes and regulations and seeks to ensure meaningful participation by all Marylanders, regardless of need or ability. See the "Grantee Requirements" section below for more information on the accessibility-related expectations of all grantees.

Accessibility Web Page

MSAC has a dedicated [accessibility page](#) available on our website. It includes contact information for the accessibility coordinator, federal and state regulations, the organization's equity and justice statement, grievance procedures, an emergency preparedness plan, accommodation policies, other accessibility resources for artists and arts organizations, and Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) images.

Language Access

MSAC offers language accessibility services. Services include making translations of grant materials, remote American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, subtitles, braille translation, translation into languages other than English, and more.

En Español/Spanish: MSAC pone a disposición servicios de traducción y accesibilidad de idiomas. Contacte msac.commerce@maryland.gov para más información.

中文普通话/Mandarin Chinese: 马里兰州艺术委员会(MSAC)提供翻译和语言无障碍服务。请联系 msac.commerce@maryland.gov 了解更多信息。

한국어/Korean: MSAC 는 한국어 지원을 돕고 있습니다. 자세한 문의사항은 msac.commerce@maryland.gov 로 연락 주시기 바랍니다.

For all other languages, please contact MSAC at msac.commerce@maryland.gov for more information.

Feedback

If constituents would like to provide general feedback about the accessibility of programs funded or produced by MSAC, contact MSAC at msac.commerce@maryland.gov or (410) 767-6555.

Grievances

For programs or services provided by MSAC:

If a program or service operated by MSAC, facilities operated by MSAC, or public meetings conducted by MSAC are inaccessible to persons with a disability, or is illegally discriminatory, and a constituent wishes to file a grievance, see the following steps.

- For questions or discussion prior to filing a grievance, contact MSAC at msac.commerce@maryland.gov or (410) 767-6555
- To file a formal grievance, contact Cathy Dombroski, Director of Human Resources for the Department of Commerce, at catherine.dombroski1@maryland.gov

For programs or services that are not provided by, but are funded, by MSAC:

- Communicate the grievance to the sponsoring organization
- For situations in which a constituent feels a grievance was not handled appropriately by the sponsoring organization, or if a response from the organization has not been provided within 30 days, file a formal grievance by contacting MSAC at msac.commerce@maryland.gov or (410) 767-6555

MSAC will work with constituents to provide assistance as appropriate.

Grantmaking

Review Panels

To assist MSAC in its decision-making, Maryland residents with expertise in the arts are selected to serve on a variety of grant application review panels. The function of panels is to evaluate applications from organizations and individuals. Each year, MSAC publishes several open calls, and approximately 150 individuals serve as panelists for MSAC grant programs, including Grants for Organizations, Arts in Education, Independent Artist Awards, Public Art Across Maryland, Creativity Grants, Presenting and Touring, Professional Development Opportunity, Folklife Network, Folklife Apprenticeships, Heritage Awards, Capacity Building, Arts Capital, and County Arts Development. In addition, MSAC occasionally releases calls for residents to serve as program editors evaluating grantmaking policies and procedures, and jurors or judges for various arts activities supported by MSAC. Anyone wishing to serve is encouraged to visit MSAC's [Ways to Get Involved page](#) for detailed information and links to application forms for any open calls.

Constituents may also get involved with MSAC by creating a profile on the [Arts Directory](#), an online resource for raising the profile of Maryland artists and arts organizations; or by attending regularly scheduled virtual and in-person professional development sessions posted on [MSAC's Eventbrite page](#).

Appeals

MSAC strives to ensure fair and equitable distribution of grant monies based on stated criteria. Therefore, dissatisfaction with the denial or amount of an award is not sufficient reason for an appeal. However, an application may be reconsidered if a procedural impropriety or error has affected its review.

Grounds for such reconsideration are:

- A decision based on review criteria other than those stated in these guidelines
- A decision based on material provided to panelists or Councilors that was substantially incorrect, inaccurate, or incomplete, despite the applicant having provided the staff with correct, accurate, and complete application information

Based on the above, if an applicant believes there is legitimate reason for an appeal, the following steps must be taken:

- The applicant must discuss the problem with the program director who handled the application
- To pursue an appeal, the applicant must write a letter to the MSAC Executive Director within 60 days following receipt of the grant award or denial notification; the letter should (1) request a reconsideration of the decision, (2) state the grounds for the request, and (3) certify that the applicant first discussed the problem with the program director and provide the date and time the discussion occurred.

The applicant will receive written notification on the determination of the appeal within 90 days of the receipt of the written request for reconsideration.

Grantee requirements

All MSAC grantees must:

- Comply with Title VI, Section 601, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which states that no persons, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination related to, the arts
- Comply with Title IX, Section 1681 et seq. of the Education Amendments of 1972
- Comply with the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Section 6101-6107
- Comply with relevant State and federal laws
- Maintain complete and accurate records of all activities connected with the grant
- Give credit to MSAC in accordance with published [recognition guidelines](#) whenever and wherever credit is being given
- Notify the appropriate MSAC staff person in writing if a significant change is made in any MSAC-funded program or project

In addition to the requirements above, all MSAC grantees must ensure that any programming remains accessible to all and, if needed, conduct programs in accessible venues other than their own organization in order to meet accessibility requirements. Grantees are required to:

- Comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991, as amended
- Prohibit discrimination on the basis of: (a) political or religious opinion or affiliation, marital status, race, color, creed, sexual orientation, or national origin; of (b) gender expression, sex, or age, except when age or sex constitute a bona fide occupational qualification; or (c) the physical or mental disability of a qualified individual with a disability
- Designate an Accessibility Point of Contact to ensure compliance, receive accommodation requests, and document grievances, as well as publish direct contact information for the Point of Contact to the public
- Create and publicly share a grievance procedure to allow stakeholders to address any events or programs that are inaccessible
- Upon request, submit documentation of operations and compliance with the above

Disclosure of personal information

Certain personal information requested by MSAC's parent agency, the Department of Commerce, is necessary in determining eligibility for grants. Failure to disclose this information may result in the denial of one or all benefits or services, including funding, provided by MSAC. Availability of this information for public inspection is governed by the provisions of the Maryland Public Information Act, Title 4 of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland. This information will be disclosed to appropriate staff of the Department, or to public officials, for purposes directly connected with administration of the program for which its use is intended. Such information may be shared with state, federal, and local governments if legally required.