Exploratorium Artist-in-Residence Program Details

Since its inception in 1974, the Exploratorium's Artist-in-Residence Program (AIR) has grown to include hundreds of artists and performers. The museum works with individuals and artist groups who are drawn to collaboration, interested in interdisciplinary dialogue, and open to developing new working methods.

Projects have taken countless forms, such as multimedia performances, theatrical productions, animated filmmaking, immersive installations, walking tours, and online projects. The program allows artists to embed within the unique culture of the institution, affords access to a dynamic and distinct staff, and provides opportunities for cross-pollination with a diverse public. While the museum allows room for variance, residencies typically unfold over two years and include both an exploratory and project development phase.

The AIR program is an opportunity for artists to begin their residency with a sense of curiosity and experimentation rather than a fully formed idea and to work in a co-creative manner with the Exploratorium.

Applicants to the program should be inherently curious and deeply invested in inquiry as a part of their practice. Exploratorium AIRs receive a $15,000 annual stipend, support for travel, project management and financial support for residency projects, and access to Exploratorium facilities and staff expertise.

Apply for the 2026–2027 AIR Program

Questions? Email residency@exploratorium.edu

Program Goals

- Support artists with inquiry-based practices in developing new areas of research through a supportive, collaborative relationship.
- Develop ideas based on research conducted at the Exploratorium to be expanded on over the course of the residency.
- Discover new potential participants and creative partners to further connect artists interested in the sciences and working with collaborators.
- Build the capacity of artists working in public engagement as a part of their practice.

Annual Residency Support

- $15,000 paid in four installments
- Materials for prototyping
- Support for travel to and accommodation in San Francisco for nonlocals
- Access to resources at the Exploratorium, including but not limited to staff time and expertise, access to and support for working in the Exploratorium Exhibit Development Workshop, etc.

Application and Residency Timeline

May 20, 2026 • Application form opens
June 29, 2026, 2025 • Last day to submit applications
September 2026• Finalists notified and interviews scheduled
October • Notifications sent to all applicants
November 2026–November 2027 • Residency Year 1
November 2027–November 2028 • Residency Year 2

Application Process

The Exploratorium will solicit applications through an open call process. Applications will be evaluated by outside panelists and Exploratorium staff; a limited number of applicants will advance to a finalist round. Finalists will be offered $250 to present and discuss their work in a studio visit format.

Summary of Expectations

- The Exploratorium AIR Program is conceived as a two-year program with distinct time for onboarding and getting to know the organization, idea incubation, prototyping and experimentation, idea refinement, and, if appropriate, project production. Exploratorium

AIRs are expected to spend sufficient time at the Exploratorium or engaged in Exploratorium activities to complete residency phases.
- Applicants should be ready and able to commit to the time necessary to be an AIR.
- AIRs should have an interest in presenting their work to Exploratorium staff members and visitors through talks and public programs.
- An interest in working in the Exploratorium's unique environment and excited about engaging with our audiences and our community.

Eligibility

- Applicants can work in any artistic discipline, including performance-based disciplines and writing. The Exploratorium welcomes applications from artists at all stages of their careers, but applicants should have a demonstrated track record of successful projects and the commitment necessary to sustain a two-year long residency.

Selection Criteria

- Strength of artistic work and practice
- Capacity and desire to collaborate and co-create with the Exploratorium on the development of a project over two years.
- Demonstrates investment in an inquiry-based practice driven by curiosity and discovery that includes exploration, research, experimentation, and questioning as a central element of the work.

Application Questions

The 2026 Exploratorium AIRe application will gather personal details including your name, website, CV, and artist bio, etc. Along with those details, you can upload up to 10 media items, including images, audio, video, and PDFs. You can also expect to answer the following essay format questions with the listed character limits for responses.

- Please describe your interest in working with the Exploratorium. Your response should indicate why specifically you're interested in the residency program at the Exploratorium, the impact it will have on your work, and frame the residency in the context of your artist practice. **(1250 character limit)**

- Many past artists' projects at the Exploratorium have included work that addresses natural phenomena such as sound, light, color, etc., as well as biology and climate change, and projects that utilize technology as a medium. Please describe your engagement with science, technology, and/or natural phenomena. A selection of past artists in residence at the Exploratorium can be found here. **(1250 character limit)**

- We value curiosity, research, and experimentation as a part of the art making process. Provide one detailed example that describes how curiosity, experimentation, and research are a part of your practice. **(750 character limit)**

- The Exploratorium's intergenerational audience is one of our greatest and most exciting assets. Please describe your approach to engaging people of all ages. **(750 character limit)**

- Our aim and intent is for artists to start the residency without a specific project idea. That said, if you have a project you'd like to develop while at the Exploratorium, please share it here. **(750 character limit)**

- This residency is expected to unfold over the course of two years and it is a substantial commitment. Please take a few sentences to let us know why now is the right time for you to be an AIR with the Exploratorium. **(750 character limit)**

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to be located in the Bay Area to be an AIR?
We welcome applications from artists from around the world. We do expect our artists who are not local to be able to travel to the Bay Area for focused work sessions and to make time for virtual meetings.

Does this residency come with a physical studio space?
The Exploratorium does not provide a consistent studio space for the duration of the residency. As a part of your work, you may be provided with a temporary work station in our Exhibit Development Workshop or another logical location for you to conduct your work.

What can I expect in the first year of my residency?
We'll spend the first year of your residency getting to know each other, dreaming up project proposals, and testing out some prototypes. We'll set up a standing time to check in on the residency along with times to work with the Exploratorium team. If you're located in the Bay Area, your work times on site might be more spread out. If you're not local, we'll schedule concentrated work sessions both virtual and in person.

What kinds of resources and support are available to me as an AIR?
You can expect a variety of resources and support as an AIR. This includes access to Exploratorium staff engineers and scientists to support your project development as well as project management and research support. You'll also have a budget for materials on a per-project basis and travel and accommodation if you are not in the Bay Area.