

2026/27 Poet Laureate

City of Berkeley

[APPLY HERE](#)

Important Dates (Subject to change)

Applications Open	October 2025
Application Deadline	October 31, 2025, 11:59 pm
Review Period & Finalist Selection	November 2023
Finalist Interviews	December 1, 2025 – 1-5pm
Civic Arts Commission Meeting – Poet Laureate Approval	December 3, 2025, 6:00 pm
Appointment Service Term	January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2027
Service Reflection Due	March 1, 2028

1. OVERVIEW

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Poet Laureate program is to:

- champion Berkeley’s rich poetry, spoken word, and literary arts communities;
- honor a Berkeley poet to serve as a creative ambassador of the city;
- serve as an aesthetic voice and collaborator with the broader arts community;
- provide mentorship to burgeoning literary artists;
- and continue Berkeley’s historic tradition of Free Speech.

1.2 Program Background

The City of Berkeley’s Poet Laureate Program was first formalized as an open competitive process in 2023 as a joint program of the City of Berkeley and Berkeley Public Library. The Library led the process and selection of the youth poet laureate, and the City led the nomination for the City’s poet laureate. This is the second formalized, open selection process for the City’s poet laureate appointment for the term starting January 1, 2026. The selected poet will be Berkeley’s third poet laureate.

1.3 Eligibility – Who can apply?

Applicants must meet all of the following eligibility requirements:

- Applicant is an individual poet and *not* applying as a partnership, group, or collective
- Applicant’s current and primary residence is in the City of Berkeley
- Applicant is 18 years of age or older

1.4 Eligibility – Who can’t apply?

- City of Berkeley employees employed at the time of the application or during any part of the Service Term
- Individuals who do not live in the City of Berkeley

- Organizational applicants (*for example, festivals, nonprofit organizations, businesses, etc.*)

1.5 Honorarium

The City of Berkeley Poet Laureate will receive a **\$5,000** honorarium for the two-year Service Term.

The full honorarium will be made in one lump sum payment. Payment will be made to the appointee in January 2026, upon receipt of invoice after the selection process has concluded.

The honorarium may not be used for the following:

- Political advocacy or lobbying
- Religious purposes or proselytization

1.6 Service Requirements

All service requirements must be completed within the two-year Service Term.

- Produce one (1) original poem inspired by or related to Berkeley
- Coordinate at least one (1) public reading event per year (*at least two—total—over two years*)
 - One of these public readings must be coordinated in partnership with the Berkeley Public Library
- Recite a poem at up to five (5) City and/or Library events per year (*up to 10—total—over two years*)
- Meet Berkeley's Youth Poet Laureate, with the goal of a continued mentorship

Optional Service Opportunities:

- Serve as a Selection Panelist for the next Poet Laureate selection process
- If applicable, provide mentorship to the Berkeley high schooler participating in the statewide Poetry Out Loud competition

2. APPLICATION PROCESS

2.1 Application Materials

All application materials **must be submitted electronically before the deadline**. The Poet Laureate application consists of the following components:

- Proof of residency - Applicants must submit documentation demonstrating Berkeley residency with their application.
 - Accepted forms of proof include:
 - ✓ Utility bill from the last 3 months (electric, gas, internet, water, etc; no cell phone bills)
 - ✓ Current lease agreement (must cover the date of application)
 - ✓ Property tax bill from the last two years
 - ✓ Unhoused and unsheltered poets may provide a letter from a Berkeley-based shelter or a Berkeley-based homeless service program as proof of Berkeley residency.
- Three (3) Work samples and descriptions
- Recitation of an original poem (video submission)
- Résumé or Curriculum Vitae (C.V.)
- Answers to Narrative questions
- Support materials (*for example, news articles and event fliers*)

Finalists **may** be invited to an interview with the Selection Panel in November 2025. For the interview, the finalists will be asked to prepare a presentation of the following information:

- A brief summary of your experience with poetry, spoken word, and/or literary arts
- How you, your poetry, and/or your artistic practice would represent the City of Berkeley
- An example of a poetry reading event you would plan for your required service

2.2 Application Management System

All application materials must be submitted electronically using the Office of Economic Development's grants management system, [Submittable](#). Technical assistance with creating a Submittable account is available through [Submittable's Customer Support](#). Paper or physical applications are not accepted.

2.3 Technical Assistance

Technical assistance for program-specific inquiries is available from staff at loedmailbox@berkeleyca.gov, or phone (510) 981-7530. Technical assistance can help provide guidance around eligibility, service requirements, or review criteria.

2.4 Accommodations for Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations to participate should make their requests via loedmailbox@berkeleyca.gov. Staff will work with the Disability Compliance Program (ada@berkeleyca.gov) to review and fulfill the request. Disability-related accommodation requests must be made at least 72 hours in advance of deadlines or meetings. TTY users can dial 7-1-1 to be connected to a specially trained communications assistant from a [state relay provider](#).

2.5 Translation Services

The program guidelines and application questions are available to be translated into another language upon request via loedmailbox@berkeleyca.gov. If the application is submitted in a language other than English, a third-party translation service will be used to translate application answers into English for Selection Panelists.

3. EVALUATION AND SCORING

3.1 Review Criteria – Round 1 (Application Submission)

Electronic applications will be evaluated by Selection Panelists according to the following criteria:

Literary Practice and Experience (40%)

- Work samples demonstrate high-quality artistry and command of poetry as a craft
- Resume or Curriculum Vitae (C.V.) demonstrates exceptional accomplishments through literary experience and achievements
- Reasoning for how the Poet Laureate appointment will enhance, develop, and/or transform the applicant's artistic practice is compelling

Craft and Performance (30%)

- Video Work Sample demonstrates a mastery of poetry recitation that embodies physical presence, voice and articulation, and dramatic appropriateness

- Recited poem demonstrates a mastery of written poetry and literary arts
- Applicant’s artistic voice is representative and a reflection of Berkeley’s diverse identities

Community and Civic Engagement (30%)

- Narrative answers and support materials demonstrate a history of community engagement and collaboration in Berkeley (*for example, hosting events, organizing, teaching, leading workshops, and/or creative outreach*)
- Applicant shows a deep and meaningful relationship with Berkeley

3.2 Review Criteria – Round 2 (Interview Presentation)

If necessary, finalist interviews will be evaluated by the Selection Panel according to the following criteria:

Service to the Field (50%)

- A brief introductory summary of your experience with poetry, spoken word, and/or literary arts
- Clear explanation of how you, your poetry, and/or your artistic practice would represent the City of Berkeley

Performance and Presence (50%)

- Outline of an example poetry reading event you would plan for your required service is feasible, engaging, and meaningful

3.3 Scoring Scale

Selection Panelists use the following scale in assessing how well the applicant meets the review criteria. Numerical values are then translated to the appropriate weight for each criterion.

5	Exceptional	meets review criteria to the highest degree
4	Strong	strongly meets review criteria
3	Good	satisfactorily or successfully meets review criteria; average
2	Fair	moderately meets some of the review criteria; needs some improvement
1	Underdeveloped	minimally meets the review criteria; greatly needs improvement
0	Weak	does not meet any elements of the review criteria

4. REVIEW PROCESS

4.1 Eligibility Screening

Staff will review each application submitted before the deadline for eligibility and completeness. Eligible applications advance in the review process to be evaluated by a Selection Panel.

4.2 Selection Panel

The Selection Panel is comprised of individuals with diverse backgrounds in the literary arts field. Any Selection Panelist who has a conflict of interest with an application(s) must recuse themselves from reviewing that application(s). A ‘conflict of interest’ is defined as a situation in which a Selection Panelist

has a competing professional, financial, or personal interest that could impair their ability to perform their evaluation responsibilities objectively.

4.3 Panelist Independent Review and Review Panel Meeting

Selection Panelists will independently evaluate all eligible applications in accordance with the review criteria for Round 1 of the review process. At the conclusion of the independent review period, a review panel meeting will be scheduled for Selection Panelists to discuss the top scoring applications. If necessary, finalists selected for interviews will be determined by the Selection Panelists' final scores, and will be invited to participate in Round 2 of the review process (Interview Presentations).

4.4 Round 2 - Finalist Interviews

If necessary, finalists from Round 1 will participate in an interview with the Selection Panelists. The interviews will be evaluated in accordance with the review criteria for Round 2.

4.5 Civic Arts Commission Approval

After scoring, the selection panel will make a final decision and put forth an appointee, staff will present the results of the process at the December 2025 Civic Arts Commission meeting. The Civic Arts Commission approves the Poet Laureate before the official appointment is made.

5. POET LAUREATE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

5.1 Invoicing

The Poet Laureate must complete an invoice for \$5,000 in January of 2026, and submit it to the City of Berkeley for payment. Please note: Appointees should be aware of the tax implications upon receiving the award and maintain documents required for state and federal income taxes.

5.2 Selection Panel Service (optional)

It is optional but encouraged that the Poet Laureate serve as a Selection Panelist for the next application cycle of the Poet Laureate Program. This service will be completed at the end of the second year of the Service Term.

5.3 Service Reflection

A completed Service Reflection form is due within 60 days after the end of the Service Term (anticipated by March 1). The Service Reflection should outline completed activities, achievements, and experience working with the Youth Poet Laureate during the Service Term. It also includes evaluation questions for self-reflection and for staff to make improvements to the program. Poets Laureate who do not submit a Service Reflection are ineligible from applying for future Poet Laureate appointments.

5.4 Use of Original Berkeley Poem

The City may use the original poem created as part of the Service Requirements for city-related business. The poem may be displayed on the City's website and displayed in print at a publicly accessible location. Appropriate credit will be given to the poem's author. The Poet Laureate will retain the copyright of the original poem and will acknowledge the City of Berkeley whenever it is published.

5.5 Notifying Library and City Staff about Public Engagements

In public engagement or events where the appointee is appearing in an official capacity as the City's Poet Laureate they should notify the appropriate Berkeley Public Library and City of Berkeley staff for promotional support from both agencies.

5.6 City Permits and Permissions

A Poet Laureate appointment does not imply that the City will produce, exhibit, or promote artwork(s) created during the Service Term. It is the responsibility of the Poet Laureate to secure venues, permits, and appropriate insurance for public presentations.

5.7 Incomplete Service Requirements

Poets Laureate who do not complete all service requirements during the Service Term may need to return their honorarium to the City of Berkeley.