

**News Release – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 2, 2026**



Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA) announces Grant for Innovative Early Dissertation Research

ACASA is launching a new research grant to support graduate students enrolled in PhD programs in the arts and cultures of Africa and the African Diaspora. This award is specifically directed to students in the formative stages of doctoral research and dissertation development. Every year one (or more) \$5,000 grants will go to those who show exceptional promise of becoming leaders in the field based on their innovative approaches to dissertation research. A five-person selection committee chosen by the ACASA Board will determine the grantee(s); the inaugural recipient will be announced at the 2027 ACASA Triennial.

This merit-based award is intended to facilitate progress toward a fully realized dissertation prospectus. ACASA seeks to provide resources to support the development of new and groundbreaking methodologies, drawing on archives, libraries, and museum collections, as well as interactions with communities, partners, scholars, mentors, colleagues, and others. The range of possibilities is without limit and the grant is open to all continuing PhD students. We welcome bold ideas and risk-taking. At the end of the research year, recipients are expected to produce a progress report that can be posted on the ACASA website and linked to the Newsletter.

Criteria that will guide in assessing and selecting deserving dissertation research proposals include (but are not limited to):

1. Incorporating one or more methodological approaches in original ways;
2. Focusing on new subjects of inquiry (especially those involving historically understudied regions, groups, artists, mediums or more);
3. Employing non-traditional strategies of investigation and collaboration;
4. Engaging with timely disciplinary or other practical, methodological, and theoretical issues, questions, and challenges, including the future of the field and its continuity.

Applications for the inaugural award cycle will open in Fall 2026, with submission deadlines and application materials to be announced at that time. Applications will be due in early 2027. All updates and communications regarding the grant will be shared through [ACASA's website](#), ACASA social media channels, and member email announcements. Those interested in joining ACASA may visit the [website](#) for membership information.

ACASA Grant for Innovative Early Dissertation Research is a donor-funded initiative. It has been launched by Marla C. Berns, former ACASA President and ACASA Leadership Awardee, in honor of her mentor Professor Arnold Rubin, whose research and ideas advanced innovation and risk in the development of African art history. Berns' outright gift along with a \$5,000 matching challenge will initiate an effort to secure funding from other ACASA members. If you wish to help support the future of this new ACASA research initiative please contact Amanda M. Maples, ACASA President (president@acasaonline.org) or Caroline Bastian, Arts Administrator and Project Manager (bastian@acasaonline.org).