



REGIONAL ARTS COMMISSION

..... OF ST. LOUIS

ORGANIZATION REVIEW PANEL
HANDBOOK

2020-2021

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION –ABOUT THE REGIONAL ARTS COMMISSION OF ST. LOUIS

The Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (RAC) is at the forefront of efforts to transform St. Louis into a more vibrant, creative and economically thriving community by elevating the vitality, value and visibility of the arts. Founded in 1985 with a mission to promote, encourage and foster the arts in St. Louis City and County, RAC is governed by a board of 15 Commissioners who have been appointed by the chief executives of St. Louis City and County. These Commissioners lead the organization in its ongoing efforts to develop support for and to market the arts for the benefit of all throughout the region.

Last year, RAC, the largest annual funder of the arts in the St. Louis region dedicated more than \$3.8 million to support nonprofit arts and culture organizations, as well as non-arts organizations providing arts programs in the St. Louis area. Since its inception in 1985, RAC has awarded more than 7,000 grants totaling over \$100 million to support nonprofit arts, individual artists, cultural organizations and programs.

We extend our deep gratitude for the talent, skills and wisdom that you will bring to our annual grant review process. Although there are difficult decisions to be made, we are certain that you will find your experience as a panelist both educational and rewarding. In return for your participation, you'll have an opportunity to meet other professionals and community leaders, to discuss the latest trends in the arts and to gain a first-hand perspective on the St. Louis arts and culture industry.

RAC supports nonprofit organizations through two main grant categories:

General Operating Support (GOS) grants are made to arts organizations with a history of funding from RAC and annual operating expenses (AOE) of \$150,000 or more. The GOS grant category provides unrestricted, renewable funding to support day-to-day operations of nonprofit, mission-driven arts organizations that produce and present ongoing, year-round programming.

Program Support grants are made to both arts and non-arts organizations providing arts programming. The Program Support grant category provides support for one-time projects or ongoing programs that broaden and deepen participation and increase access to the arts. Organizations can request funds for only one program in this category.

RAC's funding programs are guided by two policies:

Freedom of Expression Policy

The Regional Arts Commission (RAC) has an abiding commitment to preserving and enhancing freedom of speech, thought, inquiry and artistic expression. The Commission's responsibility for and dedication to securing the conditions with which freedom of expression can flourish extend to all forms of artistic expression, including the visual arts, design, literature, media and the performance arts of theatre, music and dance.



RAC recognizes that the right of artists to exhibit or perform does not preclude the right of others to take exception to particular works of art.

Cultural Diversity Policy

The Regional Arts Commission (RAC) advocates respect, inclusion and appreciation of the diverse cultures and backgrounds of all individuals.

The Commission is committed to working through the arts to eliminate bias and prejudices based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or disability. The Commission encourages, supports and strengthens arts organizations and programs that reflect these values. RAC also partners with other organizations to address issues of diversity.



SECTION 2

PANELIST ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As a panelist, you will play a central role in the annual grant-making process. RAC relies on panels comprised of individuals who are passionate about arts and culture and represent a broad and diverse range of professions, backgrounds, demographics, and artistic and cultural viewpoints to assist with the evaluation of grant applications using a four-point rating system.

Panelists are selected to represent a cross-section of professions, artistic and cultural viewpoints, and they have the qualifications to provide knowledge of specific arts disciplines, of management and program experiences, and of the community. Panels are composed of both review panelists and RAC Commissioners. Review panelists who are not members of the RAC Commission are eligible to receive a modest honorarium to say thank you for the time and talent shared with this important process.

Panel Responsibilities and Conduct

As a panelist, you will review and rate applications according to three review criteria:

- artistic merit and quality of program(s)
- community benefit
- organizational capacity

As part of your evaluation of the applications, you will assign a rating that will determine eligibility for funding amounts. Using RAC's formula-based funding system for General Operating Support (GOS) and a modified system for Program Support, the RAC Grants Committee will then make the final funding decisions based on the panelists' ratings, the amount of funding available and the number of requests.

Panelists appointed to serve must be able to fulfill the following responsibilities:

- read written applications and supplementary materials by the communicated deadline
- review each application according to program guidelines and review criteria by the communicated deadline
- participate fully in panel meetings and any necessary appeals
- declare all actual or apparent conflicts of interest prior to the discussion of any application
- attend one panelists orientation
- submit completed W-9, if receiving honorarium

Contact with Applicants

Panelists should not meet with applicants regarding the review process prior to the application review meetings. In addition, panelists are requested not to discuss the proceedings and deliberation of the panel following the review meeting and prior to final action by the governing body of RAC. For information concerning application review and panel procedures, applicants are encouraged to attend panel meetings which are open to the public. In addition, they can review their panel comments and contact RAC staff.



SECTION 3

REVIEW PROCESS

RAC staff manages the application process and provides panelists with online access to the applications and work samples several weeks before the meeting. Panelists then read the applications, review the work samples, make preliminary assessments and rate the applications on the online review system.

RAC will implement Lead Readers as part of the application review process. Panelists will be asked to read all applications, but each will be assigned a smaller set of the applications to lead the discussions during the panel meeting. All panelists will know in advance who will be the lead readers for each application.

It is strongly recommended lead readers take especially thorough notes on their assigned applications as they will lead the discussion for those applications based in the Grant Review Criteria. (Grant Review Criteria is detailed in Section 5)

On the day of the panel meeting, panelists meet as a group to discuss and assign final ratings to the applications. Again, the lead readers will provide a more thorough discussion of their assigned applications.

Review Panel — Meeting Format and Process

Meeting Format

Panel meetings are open to the public, and applicants are encouraged to attend. Although applicants are not allowed to address the panel during the deliberations, they can be present to hear the comments that panelists make regarding the merit of their applications. Open panel meetings further enhance the review as a conscientious and democratic process. To prevent or avoid the appearance of public lobbying, panelists are discouraged from interacting with applicants during the meeting or any scheduled breaks.

Panel Discussion and Comments

Meetings are facilitated by a non-voting member of RAC staff. Panel comments should provide objective and substantiated information upon which evaluations can be made. Your intention should be to provide constructive feedback to applicants who may benefit significantly from what they learn from your observations. Good comments are those that solidly address the quality of the applicant's overall proposal as it relates to the grant review criteria for either the Program Support or GOS panel to which you are assigned. The best comments are tactful, succinct and well-balanced, and they provide both negative and positive feedback. Panelists prepare comments in advance, given the limited amount of time that we will be able to spend on each application (10-15 minutes). Panel comments will be shared with applicants following the panel meetings.

Rating of Applications

First Round Review:

After the panelists participate in a group discussion of each application using the review criteria as a guide, they are each asked to provide a numerical rating (using the four-point rating scale) that they feel



provides an overall assessment of the application's merit. The ratings are then totaled and averaged to arrive at a final overall rating.

Second Round Review:

Panelists will have an opportunity to view the entire list of applicants reviewed that day with the rating given in the first round. Organizations are listed from highest to lowest in the order of the ratings that were assigned. After consideration of the overall ratings of all organizations, panelists may then make a motion(s) to discuss and consider adjusting the rating of an individual organization(s). A rating can be adjusted if the change is approved by a vote of the panel following Robert's Rules of Order. The final overall rating is part of the formula that determines the amount of funding an applicant will receive.

Conflicts of Interest

Panelists are required to declare any conflicts of interest with organizations that are applying for funding, prior to the panel meeting in the Conflict of Interest Form. Panelists will receive this form prior to the Panelists Orientation and may submit the form electronically or in person any time before their panel service. In the event of a conflict of interest with an organization, panelists are required to recuse themselves from the discussion of and voting on that particular application.

Special Circumstance Review

RAC staff may determine (on a case-by-case basis) that an application should be pulled from the evaluation process and referred to the RAC Grants Committee for a separate review. This would only occur during extraordinary and rare circumstances, typically reserved for when significant organizational changes occur after an application has been submitted but before the proposal is reviewed.

Appeals Process

In addition to reading applications and serving on the panel, panelists may also be asked to participate in the appeals process. After applicants receive their organization's panel comments and final ratings, they have the right to appeal if they believe that an error was made during the review that adversely affected their final rating. Applicants must have solid grounds for an appeal in order for it to be considered.

Dissatisfaction with a rating or denial of an award is not sufficient grounds for an appeal. Solid grounds for an appeal are based on a misstatement of fact made during the panel meeting that is evidenced by written information found in the application. New information not originally included in the application can't be offered as evidence of the misstatement. RAC staff reviews and approves all requests for appeals which are submitted by the applicants in writing.

When there are appeals to be considered, RAC staff will ask that the individuals who served on that applicant's panel reconvene to discuss the appeal and determine if it has merit.

The panelists will be sent the written appeal in advance of the meeting, which is typically held as a conference call unless there is a compelling reason for the panelists to convene in person. The meeting is conducted using Robert's Rules of Order. A majority of panelists must vote in favor of approving a change to the final rating in order for it to be increased. Applicants will be invited to the appeals meeting and will have 3 minutes to present a summary of their appeal to the review panel and be available for questions should they arise. The results of the meeting are shared with the applicants immediately following the meeting.



Grants Committee / Funding Approval

After the appeal process has been completed, final ratings are forwarded to the RAC Grants Committee for review. The Grants Committee consists of specially appointed Commissioners. This committee makes funding recommendations that are submitted to the full Commission for final approval based on the Review Panels' ratings.



SECTION 4

REVIEWING AND RATING APPLICATIONS USING THE GRANT REVIEW CRITERIA

General Operating Support (GOS)- OFF CYCLE

GOS is currently off-cycle. GOS grantees are currently completing a two-year grant cycle that began July 1, 2019 and ends June 30, 2021. Applications for the next two-year grant cycle will open in the fall of 2020 to receive funding beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2023. Exact dates and deadlines for the next two-year grant cycle to be announced.

GOS grantees completing their two-year grant cycle are required to submit mid-cycle reporting in June 2020 at the end of the 2019-2020 grant cycle to remain eligible for funding for the following year. Information regarding the reporting requirements will be shared by the beginning of 2020.

For additional information regarding GOS during this off-cycle, contact grants@racstl.org.

Program Support

Rating System and Grant Review Criteria

Each application will be rated according to RAC's review criteria. RAC uses a four-point rating system with steps between each rating (4, 4-); (3+, 3, 3-); (2+, 2, 2-) and, (1). An applicant's rating is used to determine funding.

Applicants that receive a rating of 4 are considered model – meeting all review criteria in an exemplary fashion; a rating of 4 is considered a rare achievement. Applicants that receive a rating of 3 are considered good, but some development is needed. Applicants that receive a rating of 2 are considered in need of significant improvement in multiple areas and are marginally fundable. Depending upon the availability of funds, applicants with ratings of 2+, 2 or 2- may not be recommended for funding. Organizations that receive a rating of 1 do not meet RAC criteria and will not be recommended for funding under any circumstance.

Please note that available funds and total grant requests will vary, and RAC cannot predict or determine, in advance, the lowest rating that will be fundable in a given year. Funding is not guaranteed under any circumstances.

Each organization will receive a 10% reduction from the maximum funding level for each step down in their rating. For example, if an organization is applying for a \$15,000 grant and receives a rating of 4, they will receive 100% of the maximum funding level, which is the full \$15,000. If an organization applying at the same \$15,000 level receives a rating of 3, they are eligible for 70% of the maximum funding level, or \$10,500.

Program Support — Grant Review Criteria

Organizations applying in the Program Support categories vary considerably, and the rating of the applications is done in consideration of the appropriateness of the criteria relative to the size, budget



and organizational capacity of the organizations.

Program Support applicants receiving the highest rating will share the following characteristics:

Artistic Merit and Quality of Programs

- Strong artistic vision and leadership
- Engagement and compensation of qualified and experienced artists
- Distinctive and unique programming that enriches cultural offerings and/or preserves cultural traditions in St. Louis
- A loyal audience base evidenced by attendance numbers, community support and ticket sales (as applicable)
- High quality program(s) demonstrated through support materials including artist bios, printed programs, marketing materials, reviews and coverage in local media (as applicable)
- Ongoing commitment to program planning best practices, including goal setting and evaluation

Community Benefit

- Demonstrated commitment to community engagement and the use of community knowledge and relationships to make informed and relevant programming decisions
- Demonstrated and intentional efforts to attract and retain diverse audiences and increase access to the arts to underserved individuals or under-resourced neighborhoods
- Demonstrated efforts to contribute to the vibrancy, safety and economic vitality of neighborhoods, communities or the entire St Louis region

Organizational Capacity

- Experienced administrative staff and/or volunteers to implement the project
- An engaged and diverse board of directors that contributes financially to the organization
- History of a successful arts and culture program(s) and a clear plan to implement the project
- Regular short and long-term planning for the program and organization (if appropriate)
- A project budget that is realistic, appropriate to the scope of the project and that reflects a diversity of funding sources
- Implements appropriate marketing efforts for the program; and
- Effective management of past RAC grant(s).

Program Support — Grant Amounts

Eligible organizations can apply for funding in four distinct grant tiers. The maximum amount of funding that an organization can receive from each of these tiers is \$15,000, \$10,000, \$5,000, or \$3,000, respectively.

The grant tiers are based on the overall program or project cost and require at least a 1:1 cash match. Therefore, an organization with project expenses of \$30,000 or more can apply for a \$15,000 grant, an organization with expenses of \$20,000 or more can apply for a \$10,000 grant, and an organization with expenses of \$6,000 or more can apply for a \$3,000 grant. In-kind expenses will only count towards the cash match at the \$3,000 grant tier.



SECTION 5

USING THE ONLINE “REVIEWER” SYSTEM

You will use the online RAC review system to read and rate the applications. The applications will be uploaded on this system and made available approximately three weeks in advance of the panel meeting. The link to the online review system, along with detailed instructions on how to use it, will be sent via email. Your login will be your email address, and once you sign-in for the first time you will be able to set your own password.

You must complete the review for all of the applications by a specified date and time in advance of your panel meeting. We encourage you to start as soon as possible to make sure the system is working. We recommend that you plan ahead to work on the applications over the approximate three-week period rather than waiting until the last minute, since the reviewing process requires a considerable amount of time.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Once you have logged in, you will navigate to your “Review Assignments.” There, you will have the option to select which “Team” you are on. For most reviewers you will only have one option, if you are serving on multiple panels, you will find each of them here.
- Once you select your “Team,” you will see a list of application below and you can begin your review.

To review the applications:

- Click the name of the organization you wish to review; the organization name will be a blue hyperlink. This will open the application and the “Reviewer Form” side by side.
- We recommend reviewing the applications online, but you do have options to download or print the applications. Please note, you will still need to review any video links and video online as they will not be downloaded.
 - Downloading – You will see a “Download” button throughout the reviewer system, with options to download all applications, or selected applications.
 - Printing – Next to each organization name, you will see an icon that looks like a folder. Clicking this icon will display all the “tasks” that the applicant completed, these are the different sections of the application. Next to each task, you will see an option to “Print” in blue for each task.
- Once, you have selected an application to review, you will find at the top of your browser, a drop-down menu. Use this drop-down menu to navigate to the different application sections.
- After you have finished reviewing the application, use the “Reviewer Form” to record your ratings by the communicated deadline. Click “Submit” to save your ratings. You will have the opportunity to adjust your final rating at the Panel meeting.
- You may find it helpful to take notes in the “Comments” box. These comments may be referenced in feedback to the applicants in aggregate but will not be attributed to any Panelists directly.
- If you would like to download or print your comments and ratings for your use during the panel



meeting, you can find the options to “Download” or “Print” next to each application. RAC staff will not be printing these materials for you, but tablets will be available for your use.



**If you have questions regarding
your service as review panelist,
please contact**



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