

SMAC Grant Process

Ever wonder about the process a SMAC grant goes through from start to finish?
Here is the whole process step by step:

1. **It all starts with an idea.** An individual, organization, or school has an idea for an arts project or event they can clearly envision a plan and budget for, but they don't think they have the financial support to make it happen on their own.
2. **Time for a little research.** Visit our grant page at swmnarts.org/grants/ and decide which grant you think fits your project best. When clicked on, each grant gives important details like guidelines, deadlines, evaluation criteria, application questions, budget forms, and tutorials for navigating the online system. Contact us at 800-622-5284 or info@swmnarts.org with any questions and for guidance in choosing the right grant to apply for.
3. **Attend a workshop.** SMAC hosts free grantwriting webinars for every grant we offer. Staff can also set up conference calls or travel to your county to do in-person custom workshops for your group. You'll receive **specific** grant application advice for **your** project and get **your** questions answered!
4. **Fill out your application.** SMAC grant applications are completed online. To begin, go to SMAC's website, www.swmnarts.org, and click the "LOG IN" button in the black "Grants" box on the homepage. You will also find an "APPLY NOW" button on the page for each grant program. If you're a first-time applicant, follow the instructions to create an account.



Once you log in, click the Apply button, which will bring up a list of available grant applications. Choose the application you need, then get started filling it out. Here are some tips for working on your application:

- Make sure to read all the instructions found throughout the application. Some questions may be necessary for you even though they are not marked required, such as questions about your fiscal agent.
 - Try to be as clear and concise as possible, while still answering the questions fully.
 - If you want to work on your application offline, save a copy of the question list from the SMAC website. You can type your answers into the Word document and then copy and paste them into your online application.
 - Prepare in advance the items that you are going to upload. These may include your budget, equipment bids, resumes, work samples, or links.
 - Save your draft often.
 - Contact us if you have questions or need technical help while you're filling out your application. If you notify us up to two weeks before the deadline, we can look through your application to make sure you're on the track. We're here for you!
5. **Submit your application.** When you're finished answering the questions and uploading your supporting documents, submit your application by clicking the button on the bottom of your screen. Remember that all applications are due by 4:30 pm on the day of the deadline. The online system won't allow you to submit after that time.
 6. **Review by SMAC staff.** SMAC staff will go through your grant application, checking that your project and expenses are eligible and making sure that you submitted all the required materials. SMAC staff may give you a 48-hour period in which to clarify some information or provide updated materials.
 7. **Grant Panel Review Process.** Grant applications are reviewed by a panel of at least six volunteers.* These volunteer panelists are artists, arts administrators or volunteers, and arts appreciators representing multiple artistic disciplines from throughout the SMAC geographic region.

For each grant program, SMAC staff contacts a set of appropriately knowledgeable panelists to review the applications received. The panelists log in to SMAC's online grant system to review the grant applications, recusing themselves from those applications that would be conflicts of interest for them. Then they individually score every application on each of the criteria for that grant program.

For example, an Art Project grant would be rated on these five criteria (which are outlined for the applicant when applying):

- the artistic quality and merit of the project and the artists involved (18 points)
- the impact the project will have on the participants and audience (8 points)
- the applicant's attempt to reach out to underserved communities through their project (5 points)
- the ability of the applicant to accomplish the project (5 points)
- the plan for evaluating the outcomes of their project (2 points)

Scores are based on the following scale: Exceptional, Strong, Moderate, Weak, Poor, Fail.

After the panelists have scored the applications on their own, they meet together, either in person at the SMAC office or by phone conference, to discuss the grant applications. They are allowed to change their scores during the discussion. SMAC staff members are present to facilitate the meeting and take notes during the discussion, but they do not score the applications or take part in any way, other than to make sure the discussion stays focused on the criteria.

The panelists' final scores are averaged together into an overall score for each application. Applications must receive at least a Moderate (50%) score for each of the criteria and overall in order to move on to the next step, approval for funding by the SMAC Board.

**SMAC is always looking for more qualified panelists to aid in grant reviews. Serving on a SMAC panel is an informative way to understand the grant process. Individuals who have applied in the past, or are planning on applying in the future, are encouraged to apply to become a panelist. To learn more, please visit: <http://swmnarts.org/about/become-a-grant-panelist/>.*

8. Funding decisions by the SMAC Board. Before meeting, the SMAC Board is provided with the scores and minutes of any grant rounds that took place since their last meeting. At the meeting, they discuss any concerns that may have been raised by the panel, along with the panel's funding recommendations. Grants are awarded to the extent of funds available. If there is not enough money to fund all eligible applicants in a round, the SMAC Board may take into consideration first time grantees or final report history, equity, or geography. The board then votes on their funding decisions.

9. Notifying the applicants. The day after funding decisions are made at the board meeting, SMAC staff begins drafting award or denial emails for each applicant. Sometimes this can take awhile, so if you don't hear about your grant the day after a board meeting, don't worry. Both award and denial notifications include notes from the grant review panel so applicants can make a stronger application in the future. SMAC strongly encourages denied applicants to reapply in another round. Award notifications contain instructions for applicants to return to the online grant system to certify their grant contract.

10. Contracts and payments. The grant contract outlines the grant award amount, general conditions, publicity and acknowledgement of the grant, the final report process, and accounting and liability considerations. The contracts, accessed through the online grant system, are certified by the SMAC executive director, the applicant project director, and the applicant authorizing official. Grantees will receive a check for 80% percent of their grant award once their contract has been certified, approximately 30 days prior to their project start date.

11. Grant projects take place. Grantees conduct their projects according to the plans outlined in their application. Any major changes to a project must be approved by SMAC staff. During their project, grantees should also collect any information needed to complete their final reports.

12. Submitting final reports and receiving final payments. Grantees must submit an online final report, which includes information on budgets, attendance, and outcomes, within 60 days of their project end date. After SMAC staff approves the final reports, grantees will receive a check for the final 20% of their grant award.

13. Grant data reporting. SMAC staff submits data from all applications received to the Minnesota State Arts Board; reporting of grantee project outcomes is required by state legislation. These outcomes appear on a central website, available to the general public, maintained by the Legislative Coordinating Commission.