



Grant Review Panelist Orientation

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SW MN Arts Council and the State Arts Funding System

Mission

Southwest Minnesota Arts Council (SMAC) is a non-profit organization committed to promoting and encouraging the development of the arts in the eighteen counties of southwestern Minnesota by serving as a source of funds and technical services which enable local organizations, educational institutions, and individuals to sponsor, create, and promote the arts in their communities.

State Arts Funding System

As one of the 11 regional arts councils covering all of Minnesota, SW MN Arts Council is part of the state arts funding system. The regional arts councils and their partner, the Minnesota State Arts Board, are working toward the following goals for Minnesota arts funding:

- The arts are interwoven into every facet of community life
- Minnesotans believe the arts are vital to who we are
- People of all ages, ethnicities, and abilities participate in the arts
- People trust Minnesota's stewardship of public arts funding
- The arts thrive in Minnesota

The regional arts councils work to ensure that Minnesota arts funding reaches every corner of the state.

SMAC Service Region

SW MN Arts Council's service region consists of 18 counties:

Big Stone	Lincoln	Pipestone
Chippewa	Lyon	Redwood
Cottonwood	McLeod	Renville
Jackson	Meeker	Rock
Kandiyohi	Murray	Swift
Lac qui Parle	Nobles	Yellow Medicine

And two tribal nations:

- Pezihutazizi/Upper Sioux Community
- Cansayapi/Lower Sioux Community

We acknowledge that this region occupies the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of the Dakota people.

Funding Sources

SW MN Arts Council's funding for grants comes from several sources:

- *Minnesota State General Fund.* Minnesota State General Fund dollars account for approximately 9% of SMAC's available grant funds. These dollars are allocated to the state arts funding system by the State of Minnesota.
- *Arts & Cultural Heritage Funds.* Arts & Cultural Heritage or "Legacy" funds account for approximately 78% of SMAC's available grant funds. In 2008, Minnesota's voters passed the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment to the Minnesota Constitution, which

increases the state sales tax by three-eighths of one percent beginning on July 1, 2009 and continuing until 2034. This additional sales tax revenue is distributed into four funds: Clean Water; Outdoor Heritage; Arts & Cultural Heritage; and Parks & Trails. The arts portion of the Arts & Cultural Heritage fund is divided between the MN State Arts Board and the regional arts councils. (Remaining Arts & Cultural Heritage funds are allocated to MN history, humanities, education, etc.)

- *The McKnight Foundation.* McKnight Foundation funds account for approximately 13% of SMAC's available grant funds. These dollars are intended for grants for individual artists.
- *SMAC-Region Memberships & Donations.* SMAC receives membership dues and donations from individuals, organizations, businesses, cities, and counties in the region. These funds are used to supplement the other funding sources above.

To see which funding source(s) will be used for the grant program you are reviewing, refer to that program's guidelines.

Grant Programs and Guidelines

Grants for the current year are listed below, with links to program guidelines and criteria.

For organizations and units of government (cities/counties/tribal government):

- [Art Project](#), \$7,000
- [Quick Support for Organizations](#), \$2,500
- [Public Art](#), \$20,000
- [Equipment & Facilities Improvement](#), \$10,000
- [Operating Support](#), 15% - 35% of expenses (arts organizations only)

For public schools and youth:

- [Arts in the Schools](#), \$4,000
- [Art Study Opportunity for Youth](#), \$500 (for individual students)

For individuals:

- [Artist Growth](#), \$4,000
- [Artist Equity](#), \$4,000 (for BIPOC artists)
- [Quick Support for Artists](#), \$1,000
- [Advanced Artist Fellowship](#), \$7,000

Grant Process

- While working on their grant applications, applicants can:
 - attend SMAC webinars or in-person workshops
 - talk to SMAC staff about proposed projects and eligibility
 - get answers to questions about completing the application
 - receive feedback on their application draft before submission
- Submitted applications are reviewed by staff for eligibility. Applicants then have 48 hours to address eligibility issues, submit missing documents, etc.
- All eligible applications submitted in the current grant round are made available online to the grant review panelists. The panelists who have signed up to review the round of applications are given approximately two weeks to read them and do preliminary scoring based on the criteria for the program.
- Then, panelists meet virtually to discuss the applications and finalize their scores. SMAC staff members facilitate this discussion, but do not score or comment on the applications. Grantees may choose to observe the discussion, but this happens rarely.
- Panelists reviewing monthly Quick Support and Arts in the Schools applications complete their scoring and comments on their own and do not meet for discussion.
- After panel scoring, applicants will be awarded one additional percentage point for each of the following conditions they meet, to address SMAC's funding priorities:
 - First time SMAC applicant
 - Applicant individual or organization led by or primarily serving people from an underserved/underrepresented community (BIPOC, LGBTQIA2+, disability)
 - Applicant from a county that has received three or fewer SMAC grants in the last fiscal year
- The final scores and panel comments go to the SMAC Board of Directors, which makes the final funding decisions. Grants are awarded in ranked order to applications meeting the criteria, to the extent of funds available.
- Applicants are then notified by SMAC staff whether their grant requests have been awarded. They also receive the anonymous panel scores and comments for their application.
- After signing a contract, grantees receive their grant funds in advance of their project start date (if the contract has been completed in time). While carrying out their project, grantees must acknowledge the source of their grant funding. Once activities are concluded, grantees complete a final report.

Conflicts of Interest

Panelists note conflicts of interest during the online review process and group discussion and do not score or comment on any application for which they have declared a conflict of interest. Conflicts of interest include:

- Any kind of governing or financial relationship – serving on the applicant’s board currently or within the past two years, being employed by the applicant (including a recent or expected paid consulting situation), or any grant activities that would benefit you financially.
- Any kind of family relationship – SMAC defines family as “a spouse, domestic partner, parent, child or spouse of a child, brother, sister, or spouse of a brother or sister”.
- A perceived conflict of interest – you are an involved participant in the grant activities (not just an audience member), the applicant is either a friend or someone you don’t get along with, or there is some other situation where people might think that you wouldn’t be able to score fairly.

Board, staff, and panel members may not share the panel recommendations with any person who is not a SMAC panel or board member until after the board of directors has acted upon those recommendations. Applicants who contact the SMAC office requesting information following the panel meeting are told that no information can be released until after the board’s decision. Applicants are not allowed to discuss their applications or comment on the recommendations of the panel with panel or board members prior to board action.

A grant application will be considered ineligible for funding consideration if there is found to be a breach of SMAC conflict of interest policies and procedures in connection with that application.

Using the Grant System

Learn how to evaluate grant applications using the SMAC grant system: [Using the Grant System](#)

Reading an Application

Applications include answers to narrative questions and attachments of resumes, work samples, budget, surveys, etc.

Make sure to allow plenty of time to read and score the applications. Especially at first, it may take 20-30 minutes per application, so it’s a good idea to plan on looking through a few per day over the two weeks rather than waiting until right before the meeting.

Reading Tips

- As you read, look for evidence of the criteria for the program.
- Focus on the content of the application, not on the style or expertise of the writing.
- You should be able to envision the project after reading the application.
- Look to see whether the narrative and the supporting documents agree.
- There aren't universally good or bad answers to the questions; consider what makes sense for the project and applicant.
- Most organization applicants have small organizational budgets – keep that in mind with your expectations of them.
- Keep expectations for artists at an appropriate level for their career stage.
- Assume that all applicants need the money they're asking for – financial need isn't a criterion, and organizations are encouraged to have healthy fund balances.
- Don't compare applications; consider each on its own relative to the criteria.

Contact SMAC staff (info@swmnarts.org or 800-622-5284) if you run into any questions or can't access an attachment.

Scores and Comments

Considering Artistic Quality

Art can be very subjective, but panelists are asked to view projects and work samples through SMAC's particular lens. In evaluating artistic quality, we ask you to look for:

- Authenticity or originality
- Technical skill
- Personal artistic vision/voice
- Professional commitment
- Work that evokes or provokes emotion, intellectual inquiry, or other response from an audience

For folk, traditional, or cultural art, you can consider:

- Authenticity
- Technical skill
- Commitment to the art form
- Recognition from the community to which the art form belongs

We also ask you to honor the aesthetic choices the organization or artist has made, and to offer your scores within those artistic choices. You might not, for example, respond to *magic realism* or may not like *creative nonfiction*, but we ask you not to let your aesthetic biases prevent you

from seeing the artistic quality and merit of the project. Also, be aware that you don't give more credit than is due because the project is within an artistic discipline/theme you particularly admire.

Scoring and Commenting Tips

- Use the comments space to note anything that you want to bring up in discussion or share as feedback to the applicant, though make sure your comments are related to the criteria and support the score you have given. Comments entered here will be added to the minutes from the meeting.
- Score and comment based on what has been provided for you in the application, not on what you may have heard or experienced of the applicant. Also, don't rewrite the application ("I wish they had . . ." or "They should have . . ."), just score what is there.
- Refer to the Scoring Rubric for the grant program (see the link within your evaluation), which will help you determine what score to give if the applicant fails, meets, or exceeds the requirements for each of the criteria.

RATING		Feasibility of the Project	Excellence of Work	Project's Contribution to Artist's Growth
	<i>Possible Points:</i>	<i>0 - 3</i>	<i>0 - 14</i>	<i>0 - 14</i>
Exceptional	The applicant has provided overwhelming evidence in the application that demonstrates how its activities <u>greatly exceed</u> the relevant criterion.		12-14 points	12-14 points
Strong	The applicant has provided strong evidence in the application that demonstrates how its activities <u>exceed</u> the relevant criterion.	3 points	9-17 points	9-17 points
Moderate	The applicant has provided sufficient evidence in the application that demonstrates how its activities <u>meet</u> the relevant criterion.	2 points	7-8 points	7-8 points
Weak	The applicant has provided <u>inconsistent evidence</u> in the application that demonstrates that the criterion is being met.	1 point	4-6 points	4-6 points
Poor	The applicant is <u>lacking considerable evidence</u> in the application that demonstrates that the criterion is being met.		1-3 points	1-3 points
Fail	There is <u>no evidence</u> that the criterion is being met.	0 points	0 points	0 points

- If something is unclear or is missing some information, don't speculate – just score accordingly.
- Your scores can be changed later during panel discussion. (Another panelist may bring up something you hadn't thought about that ends up changing your perspective.)
- Some panelists tend to score generally lower, while others score higher, which is fine – just be consistent in how you are scoring each application.
- Note that some criteria are worth a higher percentage of the overall score than others. However, applicants must score at least 50% (average/moderate) on each of the criteria and overall to be considered for funding.

Panel Meeting & Discussion

Panel meetings take place virtually over Zoom. The meeting link will be in an email you receive from SMAC staff.

Meeting Procedure

- Make it a point to log on a few minutes early so that the meeting can start on time.
- SMAC staff and panelists will introduce themselves.
- Orientation and conflicts of interest
 - Staff will remind panelists of the scoring criteria for the grant program, to be aware of personal biases, and how the discussion and scoring will work.
 - Panelists will share the conflicts of interest that they noted in the grant system.
- Discussion of applications
 - Panelists will spend time discussing each application, focusing on important points related to the criteria.
 - Panelists' spoken comments will be taken down by the staff recorder. The comments entered in the grant system before or during the discussion will also be added to the meeting's minutes.
 - If you have a conflict of interest with an application, you must turn off your video and mute yourself while that application is being discussed.
 - After discussing an application, panelists are given a little time to adjust scores.
- There will be breaks built into the agenda, but feel free to take a break at another time if needed.
- The meeting will finish with panelists giving feedback about the application/evaluation process for the grant program.
- Your anonymous comments and scores will be given to the SMAC board so that they can make funding decisions based on your recommendations. These comments are also

given to applicants along with their grant award or denial notifications.

Discussion Tips

- Share comments supporting the scores you have chosen, especially if you think you may be an outlier.
- There is no need to repeat what someone else has already said, but let us know if you agree with others' comments or not.
- Any additional comments that you make in discussion don't need to be typed into your evaluation, as staff will be taking notes of what is said.
- As when scoring, stay focused on the guidelines and criteria, and refer only to what has been provided for you in the application, not on what you have heard or experienced.
- Don't worry about funding availability – just focus on evaluating the requests with care.