

# Arrowhead Regional Arts Council Reviewer Guidelines FY 24

## PANELIST RESPONSIBILITIES

**Review:** Thoroughly read the grant applications and review support materials (videos, images, etc.) on your own **BEFORE** the panel meeting. You will typically have 2 weeks to do this. Applications are accessed online using our grant management portal. Panelists are expected to share thoughts and comments. Applicants are encouraged to request feedback for grant writing improvement. Your comments will be used as a learning tool and remain anonymous.

**Evaluation and Scoring:** Attend a zoom panel meeting consisting of no more than 4 hours. At this meeting, panelists will meet to discuss and score each application. Following each application discussion, panelists report a final score for the applicant. All scoring is done silently and remains anonymous.

ARAC strongly encourages panel comments that are balanced, acknowledge strengths, and identify weaknesses of the application, offer constructive suggestions for improvement, and always convey respect. Panelists should consider each application on its own merits.

Panelists attend via Zoom and the panel review is open to applicants. You cannot address or ask questions of the applicants, and they are not allowed to speak. We encourage applicants to attend.

Applicants are encouraged to request feedback for grant writing improvement. Your comments will be used as a learning tool and remain anonymous.

## PANEL PREPARATION

**Prior to the panel meeting, please read and evaluate all the applications you have been assigned.** Panelists are expected to be familiar with the contents of each application, including supplemental attachments prior to the panel meeting. You should plan to allocate approximately 20-30 minutes for reading each application and making initial assessments. Be sure to make notes and comments to share at the panel meeting.

These materials will also be briefly reviewed and discussed during the panel meeting. Following each application discussion panelists will have the opportunity to change their initial scoring if desired, and everyone enter their final score for the applicant.

## **AS YOU REVIEW, KEEP THESE THINGS IN MIND...**

We want to ensure that the grants are divided among our geographic regions, in many artistic disciplines, and with racial diversity. Also, ARAC can determine how best to spread the grants

to a wide selection of geographic areas, a wide range of artistic disciplines, racial diversity, and other factors included in the state of Minnesota's Office of Grants Management review criteria.

Those factors listed on the state's review criteria are:

- Racial and ethnic communities, including Indigenous Peoples
- LGBTQI2+ communities
- Disability status
- Veterans
- Geographic diversity within and across Minnesota
- ARAC is also interested in a diverse range of artistic practices

### REVIEWING TIPS:

**Look for evidence, not assertions.** An assertion is an unsupported statement such as: "Audiences love the artists we bring to our festival every year." Evidence can come in many forms but generally relies on facts, metrics, and/or data. For example: "Ninety percent of the 500 audience members surveyed at our 2015 festival gave the artists a rating of "above average" or "exceptional."

**Look for strengths, questions, and areas of weakness related to each review criterion.** Panelists will likely find areas where applications demonstrate strong evidence and effective strategies that seem likely to achieve outcomes. Take note of these areas of strength. However, panelists will also likely find areas where some applications present weaknesses that leave project effectiveness in doubt. Weakness can stem from a lack of information, leaving the panelist with too many questions and unknowns, or from strategies that do not seem evidence-based and seem unlikely to achieve outcomes.

**Be specific in your notes and tie your notes to review criteria.** As you make note of strengths, questions, or weaknesses in an application, be sure to be specific, and to reference the criteria to which they relate.

**Consider projects within their own contexts:** Think about the goals of each grant proposal as they may not compare perfectly with each other.

**Review and score applications based only on the information provided.** Please do not make assumptions when information is missing and do not include any prior knowledge you may have of an applicant. Do not go to an applicant's website to learn more – you may be unwittingly creating a bias.

### More In-Depth ... Please Read Thoroughly!

The criterion of artistic merit asks panelists to assess the "quality" of an artist or organization as if this is an empirical fact—a thing outside of our individual heads and hearts that is

locatable, measurable, quantifiable, and justifiable. What these factors are often remains mysterious and unnamed. In truth, artistic merit is predicated on access, opportunities, and the ability to navigate educational and funding systems that privilege white dominant culture. In a system of racism, one can see how unexamined notions of “excellence” are entrenched in white supremacy. With a racial justice lens, we might begin to question inequities in grant writing skills and capacity, access to partnerships, and other resources.

**For individual artists:**

- Artist demonstrates strong technical skills and craft in the execution of their work
- Self-awareness of the artist is communicated in their response to application questions
- Work reveals something about the world, communicating unique perspective/s, inviting the viewer to question, discover, explore new ideas—the storytelling is compelling
- Opportunity represents an artistic challenge or stretch, there is risk involved
- Exploration feels relevant and deeply considered
- Artist has an authentic relationship/connection to the content/community involved in the work
- Artist shows a commitment to working in this form
- Combination of aesthetics, technical skill, and delivery is engaging emotionally, intellectually, spiritually

**For art organizations:**

- Extent to which the project serves the organization’s community or constituency
- Potential impact on artists (including evidence of direct payment) and the artistic field
- Alignment of the project to the organization’s mission, audience, community, and/or constituency
- Vitality of any proposed performance measurements
- Plans for documentation and distribution of project results, as appropriate
- Ability to carry out the project based on such factors as the feasibility of the budget, the quality and clarity of the project goals and design, the resources involved, and the qualifications of the project’s personnel
- Potential to reach underserved populations such as those whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited

- Demonstrated racial diversity on the board, leadership, staff, artists served, and participants in programs and audience

### EXAMPLES OF FEEDBACK:

#### Supportive

“Thank you for taking the time to clearly define this project’s intended community. It’s clear that the applicant has lined up a strong list of partners for this project. I appreciate the additional detail provided on each of those partners, and how they are connected to the community. As an outside reviewer, it helps me to see this project’s public benefit.”

“This application’s budget was well presented and helpful to read. In addition to artist fees, I’m glad to see that ARAC funds will be used to cover some of the administrative costs, ensuring that the applicant has the capacity to bring the project to life.”

“The letters of support helped me to see that this applicant has already done the work building relationships with neighborhood stakeholders. It’s clear that this project can engage its community in a meaningful way.”

#### Critical

“I can’t determine whether this application meets the criteria for public benefit. There isn’t enough information about what community is being served, and there is no evidence that meaningful partnerships or relationships have been made with any community.”

“The support materials in this application didn’t help me to understand how this applicant is engaging its community, offering vibrant arts programming or has the capacity to make the project happen. I would advise the applicant to be more careful choosing support materials. Be sure that they connect to the funding criteria.”

“Language matters. If you are going to label a group of people as “underserved”, be sure to explain in what ways that group of people are “underserved”. It helps us to see that you understand the community you are working with, and that you aren’t just falling back on coded...as it is written this application doesn’t convey a great deal of respect for the community it proposes to work with.

### Conflict of Interest and Abstention Guidelines

It is important to note that there is nothing wrong or illegal about having a conflict of interest. It is necessary to select individuals to serve who are active in their arts communities as artists and/or arts advocates, but it is important that any conflict of interest is handled responsibly. You will be asked before each grant proposal discussion to declare if you have a conflict of interest or would like to abstain. For either conflict of interest or abstention we require that the member not take part in the discussion and does not score the application.

The following affiliations are actual conflict of interest situations:

- A member has a material or financial interest in the application or applicant organization.
- A member is a director, trustee, officer, employee, or agent of the applicant organization.
- A member has been involved in the writing, editing, or reviewing of an application prior to submission.
- A member is related by blood or marriage to an individual directly affected by the application or applicant organization.
- A member has an issue with a person or organization involved in the application that prevents them from being unbiased.

A panel member may abstain for the following reasons:

- A member may feel he or she has insufficient knowledge of the discipline or medium represented to vote on an application.
- A member may have recently received free tickets or other benefits from an applicant.
- A member may have personal reasons for not wanting to vote on an application

You will be asked before each grant proposal discussion to declare if you have a conflict of interest or would like to abstain. For either conflict of interest or abstention we require that the member not take part in the discussion and does not score the application.

### **WHO SHOULD I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?**

For questions regarding the grants, contact Holly at [grants@aracouncil.org](mailto:grants@aracouncil.org)