

Indiana Arts Commission
Regional Arts Partnership: Best Practices for Grantsmaking

“Grantsmaking ” is the systematic and publicly accountable management process which allocates and accounts for funding for arts activities, services, and resources consistent with the Partner’s arts needs assessment and regional service plan.

Goal: The grantsmaking services provided by the Partner seek to provide a systematic and publicly accountable process for providing regional arts block grant funds to arts providers within the region for the support of arts activities, services, and resources which have been identified by the arts needs assessment and regional service plan process.

Standards: All of the grantsmaking management service standards in this document are considered minimum service standards for every Partner and are organized into the following categories: Planning, Resources, Delivery, Communication, and Record keeping.

A. Planning

1. The Partner develops written guidelines (policies and procedures) for the processing and management of grants.
2. All processes and criteria used to evaluate applications for funding have been reviewed and approved by the governing board.
3. Decision-making criteria include, at a minimum, consideration of project quality, project management, community impact, public benefit, provisions for financial accountability, and the “fit” of the proposed program or service with the needs identified in the regional service plan.
4. A range of grants to arts providers is offered, based on the needs identified in the arts needs assessment and regional service plan.
5. Every Partner strives to include participants from every county in its region.
6. Grant guidelines include, at a minimum, the following elements:
 - a) Types and descriptions of grants
 - b) Minimum and maximum awards (as applicable); include a availability of funds disclaimer
 - c) Application deadlines
 - d) Grantsmaking calendar/timetable
 - e) Applicant eligibility criteria
 - f) Applicant match requirements
 - g) Allowable expenditures and restrictions on use of funds
 - h) Decision making process (panel and Partner)
 - i) Evaluation criteria and indicators
 - j) Appeals policy and procedures
 - k) Application requirements and supporting documents to be submitted
 - l) Contract requirements
 - m) Reporting requirements
7. All aspects of the grantsmaking process are made accessible to people with disabilities.
8. A variety of evaluation methods, including feedback from applicants, grantees, panelists, panel chairs, staff, and information from grantee reports are utilized.
9. Fiscal and programmatic reviews are used to evaluate the effectiveness of all grantees.
10. The effectiveness of the grantsmaking program, including the grantsmaking process and the performance of panelists, is evaluated on an annual basis.

11. Grantee report information is analyzed on a regular basis as a part of the program evaluation process.
12. The grant guidelines are reviewed on an annual basis and revisions made as needed.
13. There is a process for applicant or regional advisory council's involvement in the annual review and development of guidelines.
14. Evaluation findings are used to modify and improve the grantsmaking program and process.
15. The Partner will not withhold funds for any specific art form or favor one art form over another, or withhold support or services from any area within the region unless such action is supported by the findings of the region's service plan and approved by the regional advisory council and the IAC.

B. Resources

1. An individual has been designated to manage this service.
2. All personnel who manage and deliver grantsmaking services have appropriate education, skills, and/or specialized training.
3. A systematic process for recruiting and selecting panelists is utilized.
4. Panelists are provided with a written job description.
5. Orientation and training for all panel chairs and panelists is provided prior to the panel meeting and distribution of the grant applications to be reviewed.
6. Panelists are provided with written instructions about how to evaluate applications and information about the panel decision-making process.
7. Panelists are chosen from a wide spectrum of artistic disciplines, interests, and community leadership positions. Panelists have experience with the arts and/or knowledge of public and private community-based organizations and nonprofit management issues.
8. Panelists represent the diversity of the region, with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, age, geographic location, and disability.
9. Panels are composed of both new and veteran panelists.
10. Potential conflicts of interest are identified and panels are composed to eliminate and/or minimize potential conflicts of interest.
11. Panelists and volunteers are recognized for their service.

C. Delivery

1. The Partner provides a regionally representative process that ensures equal access to regional block grant funds throughout the region and is responsive to the arts needs assessment and regional service plan.
2. Grant guidelines are made available to potential applicants.
3. Technical assistance is offered to applicants regarding project development, grant writing, and completing the application.
4. A grants advisory panel process, which provides for broad citizen involvement in the allocation of regional arts block grant funds, is utilized.
5. Staff provides support to the panels but does not serve as a panel chair or a panel member.
6. All panel meetings are open to the public for observation and are recorded.
7. A member of the Partner's governing board or an individual appointed by the board who is not a staff person chairs all panel meetings.
8. Each panel chair is a non-voting member of the panel.
9. An established process exists to deal with panelist conflicts of interest.
10. The contractual compliance of all grantees is monitored during the grant period.

D. Communication.

1. The availability of grants and the application process is widely advertised throughout the region using a variety of methods, including but not limited to: information sessions, media coverage (TV, radio, print), direct mailings, newsletters, websites, and public speaking engagements.
2. Specific efforts are made to inform potential applicants from underserved populations about the availability of grants and the grantsmaking process.
3. A variety of methods are utilized to make the public aware of the date, time, and location of all panel meetings, including but not limited to media coverage (TV, radio, print), direct mailings, newsletters, websites, and public speaking engagements.
4. At least two weeks prior to the events, provide all applicants and the IAC with written invitations to attend and observe the proceedings of their respective panel meetings.
5. Applicant notification information includes, at a minimum, the decision made and rationale for the decision.
6. Panelists are advised of the outcomes of their deliberations following board action and applicant notification.
7. A press release is issued to notify the general public about the award of grants to arts providers.
8. All applicants are notified in a timely manner in writing (electronic is acceptable) of funding decisions.
9. The recording of the panel meeting is provided to applicants, upon request.

E. Record Keeping.

1. The Partner will review grant proposals/reports for compliance and rescind funds as necessary.
2. The Partner implements a systematic process for assuring that their grantees are financially accountable and that they provide the type, quality, and level of services projected, consistent with the terms of the service agreement between the Partner and the grantee.
3. A fiscal and programmatic reporting system, including a reporting process with written schedules for the Partner and its grantees, is established and utilized.
4. Information from grantees regarding the financial and programmatic outputs and outcomes of service is collected.
5. All grantees are required to submit and maintain fiscal, statistical, and programmatic reports on a specific schedule.
6. Grantees are provided with written procedures for the budget modification process and for filing claim vouchers/checks.
7. Records retention guidelines are provided to grantees.
8. Information about each application (whether or not it receives funding) is maintained according to the IAC Grants Making Handbook and current RAP Policies/guidelines.
9. All grantee information is stored in a Partner-maintained computer program until the time that one becomes available through the IAC.