



FY18-19 Strategic Plan/Biennial Plan Executive Summary

Established in 1994, the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC) increases access to the arts in the 7-county Twin Cities metro area by providing grant opportunities and services to arts organizations and artists. MRAC is one of eleven Regional Arts Councils in Minnesota.

For the first time in history, the Twin Cities 7-county region topped 3 million people in 2015, representing 55% of all state residents. Looking closer, the five counties that added the most residents between 2010 and 2015 on net were Hennepin (+69,278), Ramsey (+25,037), Dakota (+15,938), Anoka (+13,994), and Washington (+12,879). *(Source: Minnesota Office of the State Demographer).* The region includes urban, suburban and rural communities.

The majority of MRAC's funding comes through the Minnesota State Arts Board (MSAB) and is primarily from appropriations from the Minnesota State Legislature from the State's general fund and the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. MRAC also receives a generous grant to support its Next Step Fund program from The McKnight Foundation.

Since the Arts and Culture Legacy Amendment was approved in 2008, MRAC has experienced significant growth in its grantmaking capacity, which now exceeds \$3 million annually since the Amendment's inception. As a result, MRAC has experienced a corresponding increase in inquiries; requests for technical assistance, applications, panel review days and volunteer panelists. These past eight years have also seen a transition to new organizational leadership and staffing, which have brought a wealth of new talents, experience and expertise to the organization.

During this same time period, the 7-county region has also become more racially and culturally diverse. Between 1960 and 2015, the percentage of people of color in the Twin Cities increased from 1.8% to 26% and is predicted to grow to 28.7% by 2025. (Source: Minnesota Office of the State Demographer).

Yet, despite this growing diversity, many of MRAC's underrepresented communities, particularly communities of color, face disparities resulting in inequitable access to economic, educational, social and cultural opportunities.

A priority in developing MRAC's plan for the next two years is to focus on learning, developing relationships, engagement and expanding access for underrepresented communities. MRAC is committed to becoming interculturally competent organization through its programs and services and that constituents are provided relevant information, support and tools to more effectively support their organizations.

Strategic Planning/Biennial Planning Process

To help assess its current environment and determine its future priorities, MRAC contracted with Mandorla Consulting in fall 2016 to guide its board and staff through a strategic planning process and the development of a new biennial plan for FY18-19 to submit to MSAB by May 2017. The board elected to pursue a strategic planning process to provide a comprehensive assessment of the organization, programs and constituents served.

To launch this effort, MRAC board and staff participated in a retreat that set the frame for continued planning sessions throughout the year. MRAC also solicited input both from key organizational partners and constituents through interviews, community meetings and a survey. MRAC received a 32% survey response from 241 respondents.

Several major themes emerged from the 2017 constituent survey as follows:

- Improve the training process of panelists who review funding proposals and diversify the composition of panels in terms of racial/cultural diversity, gender, age, nonprofit experience and artistic disciplines represented.
- Streamline current grant applications to be more accessible and user-friendly.
- Recognize the unique needs of small, grassroots organizations and barriers faced in applying

- for funding, especially first time applicants.
- Increase awareness and understanding of the disparities that exists for communities of color and other underrepresented communities.
 - Develop a communications and outreach strategy for engaging with diverse communities and sharing grantees' stories about their funded projects.
 - Continue to provide timely, relevant and accessible education and training opportunities to help groups and nonprofits manage and lead their organizations.

Based on the analysis of the feedback during this process, MRAC board and staff recommended the following changes to its mission and vision along with the adoption of guiding principles that reflect how MRAC approaches its work:

Mission

MRAC improves arts access for communities in the seven county metropolitan area through support to artists and organizations.

Vision

- Artists and arts organizations thrive.
- Arts engagement takes place in every community.
- The public actively values and celebrates the arts and artists.

Guiding Principles

- We take into account the needs and interests of constituents in our region when developing programs and services.
- We strive to maintain transparent decision-making processes and accessible public information.
- We meet our constituents where they're at and recognize their unique needs.
- We act with integrity, ensuring that all constituents are treated in a fair, respectful and consistent manner.
- We're committed to advancing inclusion and racial equity in all aspects of our work.
- We work with our community partners to promote and advocate for the arts.

In addition, MRAC's board further recommended the following overarching organizational strategy for how MRAC will prioritize its efforts in the future:

Overall organizational strategy:

MRAC will provide leadership, resources and tools that enable artists and arts organizations to thrive in a changing environment and address disparities in the 7 county metropolitan area through a robust menu of programs and services and community engagement activities.

In order to carry out this organizational strategy, MRAC board recommended adoption of the three priority strategies below:

Strategy #1:

- ❖ **Build capacity for organizations and artists to be responsive to their artistic goals and community needs. Through this strategy, MRAC will:**
 - Develop clear funding guidelines that support the advancement of artists and arts organizations.
 - Increase access to MRAC's resources for underrepresented organizations and artists through intentional outreach and engagement.
 - Develop culturally relevant peer learning and skill building opportunities for MRAC applicants to increase their knowledge and effectiveness in serving new and existing underrepresented audiences.
 - Strengthen outreach, training and support for panelists involved in the grant review process.
 - Act as strong advocates for the arts.

Strategy #2

- ❖ **Develop deep knowledge, trust, and relationships between and with communities to eliminate barriers and advance inclusion and racial equity. Through this strategy, MRAC will:**
 - Work with board and grantee community leaders to develop a common framework and understanding of MRAC's inclusion and racial equity goals.
 - Identify and close the gap on racial disparities through its grants programs and panelists.
 - Develop a communications plan that will build deeper relationships with MRAC's key stakeholder groups and share stories of MRAC funded projects.

Strategy #3

- ❖ **Strengthen MRAC’s organizational capacity, staffing and internal systems to continuously improve programs, services and support panelists.**
- Adjust program eligibility guidelines and staffing complement to ensure a balanced and reasonable workload for managing growth in applications.

Implementation:

The intent of this new strategic plan is to guide MRAC’s long-term planning and program development efforts for the next three to five years and serve as an important resource document. The strategies and goals listed are broad in scope as we anticipate that this important work will extend beyond the FY18-19 biennium.

For the next two years, MRAC will prioritize the three strategy areas with its financial and staffing resources. Internally, MRAC will integrate these activities that support these strategies into its current programs. Staff and board will develop work plans to focus their respective efforts to carry out these strategies and regular updates on progress reports will be shared at both MRAC’s board meetings and through annual program reports to the Minnesota State Arts Board.

Metropolitan Regional Arts Council

Summary of updates and changes with FY18-19 Biennial Plan

Programs and Services:

- Continue offering 9 grant programs for constituents including Arts Activities Support, Community Arts, Arts Learning, Organizational Development, Capital, Next Step Fund, Management Consulting Fund, Management Training Fund and Arts Achievement Award.
- Conduct an evaluation of MRAC's programs and services to assess their impact and effectiveness by June 30, 2018.
- Implement changes to 2019-20 grant program eligibility guidelines and prepare rollout plan of updated guidelines.
- Increase access to MRAC's resources for underrepresented organizations through intentional outreach and engagement.
- Develop culturally relevant peer learning and skill building opportunities for MRAC applicants.
- Strengthen outreach, training and support for volunteer panelists.

Organization Initiatives:

- Work with board and grantee community leaders to develop a common framework and understanding of MRAC's inclusion and racial equity goals.
- Use data effectively to track MRAC's progress in closing the gap on racial disparities through its grant programs and panelists.
- Develop an organizational communication plan that will build deeper relationships with MRAC's key stakeholder groups and share stories of MRAC funded projects.
- Adjust program eligibility guidelines and staffing to manage growth in applications.