

Flexible Support Grant Program Guidelines

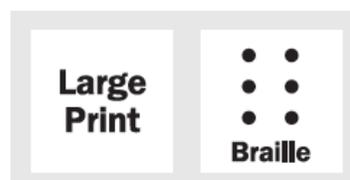
FY 21 (July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021)

Program Director:

Scott Artley

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651-523-6384



Deadlines:

Round 1: September 8, 2020 (Tuesday)

Round 2: November 9, 2020

Round 3: February 8, 2021

Review our guidelines, and contact MRAC with questions or for support. Alternative formats and translation available. MRAC will need 10 business days to obtain translation services.



As one of 11 regional arts councils in Minnesota, MRAC is funded by an appropriation from the Minnesota Legislature and the Legacy Amendment Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. In November, 2008, Minnesotans passed the Clean Water, Land & Legacy amendment to the Minnesota Constitution, which created the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. Proceeds from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund “may be spent only on arts, arts education and arts access and to preserve Minnesota’s history and cultural heritage.

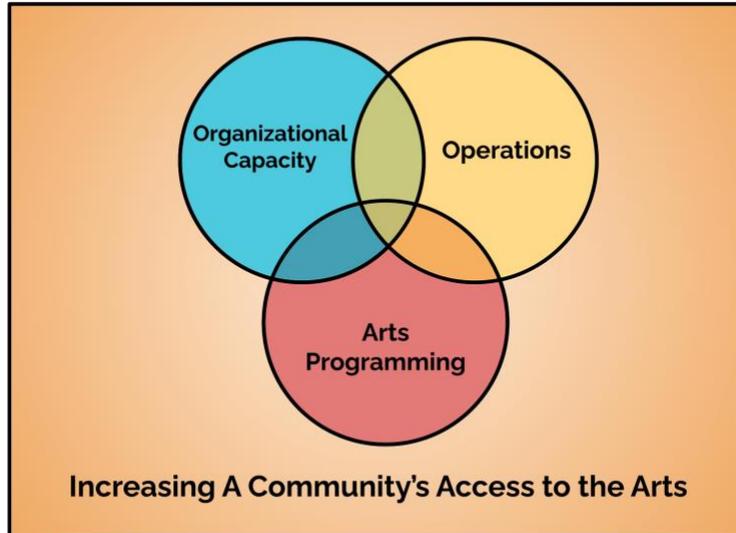
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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The **Flexible Support** grant provides up to \$15,000 in funding to help groups create access to the arts and stay connected to audiences/community across the seven-county metro area: Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties. Projects must benefit Minnesotans. Grant requests must outline specific arts projects that may include related costs for artists and other personnel, supplies, equipment rental, and other expenses needed to carry out the project. No matching funds are required for this program. This program supports the production of artistic projects, and/or activities that strengthen the organizational capacity and operations of groups providing access to the arts. Examples of proposals could include one or more of the following: planning, adapting, maintaining, expanding, producing, developing resources or leadership capacity, moving towards recovery.

MRAC believes that **Organizational Capacity**, **Arts Programming**, and **Operations** are all critical to a group increasing a community’s access to the arts. Groups need to offer Arts Programming, systems and plans in place to provide that programming (Organizational Capacity), and the people/things to build and execute on those systems and deliver those programs (Operations). At MRAC, we believe that increasing access happens best when it is authentically grounded in community; a group is most effective when its project is similarly grounded in community.



Your grant proposal could include an **Arts Programming** activity such as a single event like a theater production or a series like a semester of painting classes. **Organizational Capacity** activities might include a coordinated management effort that bolsters the organization’s ability to do its work (like rebranding, building a website, or overhauling financial tracking systems), and/or could include the purchase of equipment, making facilities improvements. **Operations** activities could be those that support the ongoing operations of a group (such as paying staff salaries or rent on a space). All of these types of activities, independently, or in some combination, could be the organization’s “project.” Your project should encompass what you need to make an impact with your community at this time.

IMPORTANT DATES

MRAC Fiscal Year	Application	Earliest Grant	Latest Project
July 1, 2020- June 30, 2021	Deadline	Expenditure Date (also the Grant Notification Date)	End Date
Flexible Project Support Round 1	Tuesday, September 8, 2020 11:59 p.m.	December 16, 2020	June 30, 2022

MRAC Fiscal Year July 1, 2020- June 30, 2021	Application Deadline	Earliest Grant Expenditure Date (also the Grant Notification Date)	Latest Project End Date
Flexible Project Support Round 2	Monday, November 9, 2020 11:59 p.m.	March 17, 2021	June 30, 2022
Flexible Project Support Round 3	Monday, February 8, 2021 11:59 p.m.	June 16, 2021	June 30, 2022

During each MRAC fiscal year (July 1 - June 30), groups may apply to any or all deadline(s), but can only receive one Flexible Support grant.

Eligible groups may also receive an Equity Response grant.

Groups that have an open MRAC-funded project in any grant program from a previous fiscal year are eligible to apply for these new FY21 funding sources.

BEFORE APPLYING - RESOURCES

The Metropolitan Regional Arts Council is a hands-on grantmaker and we want to help you prepare an application that is eligible and ready for panel review. Assistance is provided in the following ways:

1. **Online Resources** - Visit the [Grant Resources](http://mrac.org/grants/grant-resources) page (mrac.org/grants/grant-resources) to access templates, technical how-tos for the grant interface, links to sites to find demographic information, and a glossary of terms.
2. **Grant Application Workshops** - MRAC offers grant application workshops to learn about the grant program and to discuss project ideas. Check the [online calendar](http://mrac.org/events) (mrac.org/events) for dates and times. Recorded workshops are also posted online before the deadlines.
3. **Program Directors** - MRAC Program Directors are available for questions on eligibility and program intent, project idea development, and will, when possible, review your application materials for eligibility in advance of the deadline. **We encourage you to reach out to the program director before**

you submit an application, especially if you are a first-time applicant to MRAC.

APPLICATION ACCESSIBILITY

The Metropolitan Regional Arts Council does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its services, programs, or activities. We at MRAC strive to provide accessibility services and accommodations proactively, and are committed to finding solutions to ensure people of all abilities are included.

These PDF guidelines are made to be accessible to screen reader software, and a [web page version of the Flexible Support Program guidelines](http://mrac.org/flexible-support/flexible-support-text-guidelines) (mrac.org/flexible-support/flexible-support-text-guidelines) is available in a format accessible to screen reader software and translation programs. MRAC staff is available to assist with adapting our typical processes to ensure that people with disabilities have equal opportunity to submit an application.

Please email Scott Artley, Accessibility Program Director, at scott@mrac.org or leave a message at 651-523-6384 to connect about your needs. You may also contact the MRAC's main number at 651-645-0402 or mrac@mrac.org. Office hours are generally 9 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

HOW TO APPLY & ELIGIBILITY

MRAC grant applications **must** be completed online and received by MRAC no later than **11:59:59 p.m.** on deadline day. To access the online portal, visit www.mrac.org and select 'Manage My Organizational Grant.' The online interface allows for Google Translate to access the application in a variety of languages. Groups should only use one organizational grant record, while there can be multiple users per organization. All communication about this grant will be sent to the applicant's contact information in the online application. Contact MRAC with any difficulties accessing the online portal, but note that **technical assistance is available only until 5:00 p.m. on the deadline day**. We do not accept incomplete or late applications. Please read guidelines thoroughly to ensure eligibility.

All applicant groups **and** project activities **must** be located within the seven-county (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, Washington) Twin Cities metro area.

Applicant group must implement and manage the proposed project. Groups that are new to MRAC, and those returning again, are eligible to apply.

Applicant groups must be *one* of the following:

1. Arts groups and organizations

- a. Federally tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit arts organizations with annual operating expenses of \$400,000 or less.
- b. MRAC may ask for more information, such as an audit or a board approved financial statement, if the organization appears to have been approaching the \$400,000 limit in their previous year. If a previous year's audit is not yet finished, a contingency may be placed on that award until the audit or board approved financial statement proves eligibility.

2. Cultural groups and organizations

- a. Federally tax-exempt 501(c)(3) culturally-specific nonprofit organizations that provide arts and non-arts programming with annual arts programming expenses of \$400,000 or less.

3. Fiscally sponsored groups with arts projects and annual operating expenses of \$400,000 or less.

- a. A fiscally sponsored group must be comprised of at least three people.
- b. The group must have an advisory committee of at least three people that is responsible for oversight of project and grant funds.
- c. Groups must have a fiscal sponsor. Fiscal Sponsors must be registered with the IRS as a 501(c)3 nonprofit with a Minnesota address and have an active registration with the Minnesota Secretary of State as a nonprofit organization.

4. Non-arts and non-cultural nonprofit organizations

- a. Non-arts and non-cultural nonprofit organizations with annual arts programming expenses of \$400,000 or less. Non-arts and non-cultural nonprofit organizations must be able to isolate their arts programming revenues and expenses from non-arts and non-cultural financial activity.
- b. A public entity such as a unit of state, local, or tribal government with arts expenses of \$400,000 or less.
- c. Community education units of a school district in the seven-county metro area with arts budgets of any size.

d. Eligible nonprofit, non-arts and non-cultural organizations must describe how this request will create access to the arts and ensure connection to audiences across the seven-county metro.

Applicant groups *cannot* be:

- Individuals.
- Public, private, alternative, charter, transitional, or home schools (this includes school support organizations such as PTAs, PTOs, school foundations, etc.).
- Organizations whose main purpose is to raise funds for another person, organization, or cause.

This program does *not* fund:

- Projects that do not uphold applicable federal, state, and local laws, rules, regulations, and ordinances in relation to the use of MRAC funds.
- Attendance at training events/conferences outside the state of Minnesota.
- Projects that are managed by another entity other than the applicant.
- Projects and activities designed to raise funds/regrant/donate funds on behalf of another person, organization, or cause. MRAC funds cannot be contributed to another organization or person.
- Projects that attempt to influence any state or federal legislation or appropriation; to support activities that are essentially for the religious socialization of the participants or audience; or discriminate against persons or groups.
- Projects that include costs expended before Earliest Grant Expenditure Date. All expenses included in the grant proposal must be spent on or after this date. Including expenses spent prior to this date may deem the entire application ineligible.
- Projects for which any portion of activities take place after June 30 of the MRAC fiscal year following the one in which the award was issued are ineligible. **The latest project end date is June 30, 2022.** This means that the project is complete and all grant funds have been expended.
- Projects budgets that include unrealized income such as scholarships or in-kind support.
- Projects in which any portion of activities are located outside the seven-county metro area are ineligible. Exception: attendance at training/conference events may be outside of the seven-county metro area as long as they take place in Minnesota.
- These dollars cannot substitute other state dollars. This includes:
 - When projects take place as part of the K - 16 school-day curriculum and activities in public, private, alternative, charter and home schools are not eligible. This includes costs to subsidize school participation (e.g. tickets, bussing, etc.).

- Requests in which any portion of the project budget will be used to pay an artist or arts organization to provide essentially the same services that an ongoing teacher, teaching staff, or arts specialist previously provided or would be expected to provide in a school setting are ineligible.
- Requests in which the project will replace discontinued or nonexistent arts programs that should be fulfilling the state's arts curriculum requirements in schools are ineligible.
- The purchase of real estate property.
- Development of endowments.
- Capital projects (facility improvements) to leased spaces that are not approved by the property owner are not eligible. No capital improvements can be made to homes. Written permission from the property owner of the space is required.
- Debt reduction and building cash reserves.
- Travel expenses to or from Minnesota. You may engage an out-of-state artist or consultant within your project, but their travel expense to get to or from Minnesota cannot be included in a MRAC request.
- Expenses to purchase alcoholic beverages or to pay associated costs (servers, insurance, liquor licenses, etc.).
- Costs for relocating the applicant's legal address/residence outside the state of Minnesota.
- Using these funds as a match requirement for other MRAC awarded grants.
- Project expenses that are included in another MRAC grant.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

The following will be reviewed by the panel:

- Group's Purpose and Background (1500 characters)
- Community (3000 characters)
- Proposed Project (4000 characters)
- Impact (3000 characters)
- Project Personnel List (2000 characters)
- Board of Directors/Advisory Committee (500 characters)
- Project Expense Budget (1000 characters)
- Project Income Budget (if applicable) (1000 characters)

The following will *not* be reviewed by the panel:

- Fiscal sponsor letter (one upload, for fiscally sponsored groups only)
- Property owner permission letter (one upload, if applicable)
- Evaluation plan
- Outcomes
- Additional Data

Application Tips: You will type your application into the text boxes online. Character counts include letters, numbers, spaces, and paragraph breaks. There is no formatting (bold or italics). You may find that you do not need all the characters allotted. Do not include links in narrative text fields, the review will be limited to your application. The application system will auto-save your work every few minutes, but some applicants may wish to work in another document and paste your answers in once written. We provide templates on our website for working on your proposal before uploading it to the online form.

1. Application Narrative (Type into text boxes online. Character counts do include spaces)

The narrative portion of your application is designed to help you outline your group's purpose and background as well as address each of MRAC's three criteria in relation to the proposed project: **Community**, **Proposed Project**, and **Impact**.

Please provide enough information to help the review panel evaluate your project in relation to *each* criterion. Assume the panel is not familiar with your group, your arts discipline, or the community you intend to serve; use the narrative to provide this information. The panel will apply all three criteria to the application as a whole.

Purpose and Background (1500 characters)

Summarize why and how your group formed, and what it does. What is its history? What is the group's mission or purpose for forming? In general, what kind of arts programming has it produced, and/or does it plan to produce? This section is not rated by panelists, but helps introduce your group to panelists who may not be familiar with what you do or your group's artistic output.

Community (3000 characters)

Communities can be defined as a geographical neighborhood, or a community centered around artistic practices, or shared cultural identities.

1. Describe your community. Consider using statistics, numbers, qualitative information, etc.
2. How is that community included in the leadership of your group or this specific project?
3. What shared interest, challenge, or demand exists within this community that your group addresses?
4. What is your vision for staying relevant to your community?

Stronger proposals will... Give reviewers enough context about the group to understand who you are, who you serve, and an idea of the journey your group is on. You may find addressing COVID-19 changes to your community is relevant here.

Be sure to answer all four questions; consider numbering your responses.

Proposed Project (4000 characters)

1. What is your current situation/position as it relates to creating access to the arts for your community? What is your group struggling with, and/or what are your group's opportunities in the COVID-19 and social change realities of today?
2. What artistic or organizational goals do you have that will address the situation/position just described?
3. What are the proposed activities and timeline that will help you achieve these goals?
4. How will this project ensure (or contribute to your group's capacity to ensure) access to the arts that is inclusive and accessible to community members marginalized because of race, disability, and/or other kinds of oppression?

Stronger proposals will... Paint a clear picture of a compelling set of project activities that advance (or contribute to advancing) the organization's overarching artistic/community goals. Demonstrate that the group has thoroughly considered the project's details. This section of the proposal will likely be the longest.

Be sure to answer all four questions; consider numbering your responses.

Impact (3000 characters)

1. Why did you choose the project you are proposing? How does it address your situation/position and what you want to accomplish?
2. How will this impact your organization or group?
3. In what ways will your community be involved in or benefit from this specific project?

Stronger proposals will... Explain how the group is positioned to execute an impactful and inclusive project that will achieve ambitious (but realistic) outcomes tied to its artistic and/or community goals.

Be sure to answer all three questions; consider numbering your responses.

2. Project Personnel (2000 characters)

List the key people and partnering organizations (if any) involved in your project. Briefly describe the qualifications of the individuals listed for the project and the roles of the partnering organization(s) in this project. **Individuals and organizations named on this list and in the narrative must know at the time of the application that they are included in the project.**

A project personnel listing might look like this:

Savannah Xiong, lead teaching artist, has a 20-year history presenting and teaching watercolor painting to teens through formal educational systems and community-based events and organizations. Their work has been included in art exhibitions across the globe and in 2019 they were named educator of the year by the Art Teachers Association of MN.

3. Board of Directors/Advisory Committee (500 characters)

Nonprofits are required to have a board of directors and fiscally sponsored or government groups applying to MRAC are required to have an advisory committee. These governing bodies must encompass a minimum of three individuals. Enter in a list of your board/committee members indicating their profession, organizational affiliation, and/or area of expertise, etc. This document may be made available to the public so please do not include contact information.

A listing might look like this:

Manny Mohammad, Lawyer, Minneapolis Law Firm, Board Secretary

4. Total Project Budget Expenses (1000 characters)

List the major expenses of your proposal with dollar amounts; do not include in-kind expenses like scholarships and items/services that do not have an actual cost. The expenses listed in the Total Project Cash Expenses field must equal the expenses detailed in the text box. Your project may be larger than the amount requested in this grant program. In the text box, provide simple explanations for the expenses.

Expense descriptions might look like this:

\$3000 equipment: laptop, printer, and desk

\$2800 personnel (\$700 each for 4 teaching artists).

Examples of eligible expense items:

- Contracted Artists
- Administrative & other personnel
- Professional fees/consultants
- Supplies and/or capital purchases
- Space rental
- Equipment rental
- Accessibility-related costs (be specific)
- Facilities expenses
- Administrative overhead (be specific)

Refer to page 6-7 of this document for a listing of ineligible expenses. Including ineligible expenses may affect the amount MRAC will award if funded, or render the entire application ineligible.

5. Project Income Budget (1000 characters)

If your expense budget is larger than your MRAC request, list all additional income sources with estimated amounts. If MRAC is your only source of income for this project you do not need to fill in this section.

Examples of income items:

- ticket sales
- admission fees
- tuition fees
- pay-for livestream
- membership dues
- Rental fees
- Individual donations
- Other grants/sponsorships

Note: No match is required for this grant.

6. Fiscal Sponsor Letter (one upload - for fiscally sponsored groups only)

A *fiscal sponsor* is a tax-exempt organization that receives MRAC grant monies and manages the financial aspects of the project on behalf of a group that does not have tax-exempt status. Your fiscal sponsor must be a federally tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Minnesota, be registered with the IRS with a Minnesota address, and must be active as a Nonprofit Corporation with the Minnesota Secretary of State.

You will need to upload a letter on the fiscal sponsor's letterhead that outlines the agreement between your organization and the fiscal sponsor. The letter must include the following:

- The name of the organization and the project being proposed
- Fiscal sponsor's EIN which is also known as a Federal Tax Identification Number
- The mission of the applicant group
- Signature of the fiscal sponsor contact
- A date within three months of the grant deadline

7. Property Owner Permission Letter (one upload- if applicable)

If you are requesting funds to install permanent equipment or to make capital improvements to a space or facility you do not own, upload a letter from the property

owner granting your organization permission to do the work detailed in the application.

8. Evaluation Plan

Within the grant application you will be asked to identify how you evaluate the impact of the funds on your organization and/or community. These are check-box options.

- Interviews/Conversations with participants
- Community dialogue (group conversations with a large group)
- Observation
- Reviewing recorded information or documentation
- Surveying (paper or online)
- Other (please describe below)

9. Outcomes

Within the grant application you will be asked to submit the proposed outcomes for the project. This is shared with the Minnesota State Arts Board.

How will these funds affect your organization and/or community? Based on the information below, choose from the drop-down of options to select an outcome most closely aligned to what you hope to achieve with the proposal. You may anticipate multiple outcomes, but *please select the one that seems most significant.*

Select one:

Arts Access

- A reduction in geographic, cultural and/or physical barriers to arts participation.
- A change in knowledge, attitude, behavior or condition due to public art, arts festivals or arts events.
- Artists/arts groups' are strengthened by connecting to their communities through the arts.
- Artists expand and improve their work and the way in which they create it.
- Artists connect to new audiences, building relationships that provide artistic growth.

Arts Learning

- Residents learn new arts skills & techniques.
- Residents gain awareness and appreciation for artistic disciplines and mediums.
- Artists build their capacity through professional development.

Arts & Cultural Heritage

- Residents build connections to their own and others' cultural heritage through events and/or activities.
- MN folk and traditional artists/audiences are expanded.
- MN folk and traditional artists see an increase in demand for work.

10. Additional Data

In addition to the information above, you will be required to provide details about your group and project (such as the anticipated number of adults and youth your activities will serve) that is not listed in these guidelines. These are brief questions and generally can be completed quickly. We collect this for reporting and tracking purposes and the application form lists which answers are shared with the panel. Some data is shared with the Minnesota State Arts Board.

PANEL RATINGS

A group of volunteer peer panelists will review all eligible applications and individually score proposals. Panelists are trained on the grant guidelines and provided with a guide to help them rate each application on the three grant criteria: **Community**, **Proposed Project**, and **Impact**. Panelists will rate each criterion on a scale of 1 through 5, where 5 is stronger. Criteria ratings are then combined for a total application score of 3 to 15. Panelists will be required to write at least one comment about their feedback and reasoning for their ratings.



The Narrative sections are the primary tool for panelists to find evidence that an application addresses the criteria. However, the panel will apply all three criteria to the application as a whole—for example, there might be information in your budget that supports the strength of the proposed project, or there may be a detail in the Proposed Project narrative that reinforces that the project is effectively informed by community leaders, supporting a stronger rating in the Community criterion. However, it's generally best to be explicit in the narrative about the ways the other parts of your proposal support a strength in each criterion. Be sure to answer all the questions posed, even if you think it's apparent elsewhere in the application.

Rating Guide

On a scale from 1-5, where 5 is stronger, a panelist is asked to rate how well an applicant has provided evidence to support the following statements:

Rating Guide - Community

- Applicant has identified a clearly defined community (who is in this community, who served in/by this community)
- Applicant has demonstrated that group leadership is an authentic reflection of this community, or meaningfully included in project leadership
- Applicant's vision for how it produces arts activities is relevant to the interests/needs of this community

Rating Guide - Proposed Project

- Applicant has described specific goals to create (or contribute to the group's capacity to create) access to the arts for the community described
- Project details are thoroughly considered, the scope is appropriate
- The project will create (or contribute to the group's capacity to create) access to the arts that is inclusive and accessible to community members marginalized because of race, disability, and other kinds of oppression

Rating Guide - Impact

- Applicant has made a compelling case for how the proposed activities are the right solution to address its current situation/position
- Activities will effectively produce intended outcomes for the group
- The project will contribute to the group's overarching vision, the involvement and/or benefit to community is clear

Get Help Reviewing Your Application

You may find it helpful to get a friend or colleague who is less familiar with your organization and/or project to review your application using the Rating Guide above before submitting to consider how you might improve.

REVIEW AND DECISION PROCESS

1. **Staff:** MRAC staff review all applications for eligibility.
2. **Panel:** A peer review panel reviews all eligible applications. The panel reviews for FY21 will take place remotely. Panelists will receive training from MRAC

staff and then will read and rate applications. Comments will be submitted in written form and scores and comments can be shared with applicants upon request.

3. **MRAC Board of Directors:** MRAC staff submits the panel rankings to the MRAC board of directors who make the final decision on funding.
4. **Appeal:** Appeals must be made in writing within 30 days of the notification of the board decision. Appeals are considered only on the basis of alleged procedural errors. Contact MRAC for a copy of the appeal policy.

IF FUNDED

- Communication regarding the grant award is via email with the contact person listed for the grant proposal.
- An authorized signer for your group or organization will need to complete an online grant agreement.
- A W9 form will need to be uploaded by the applicant. If fiscally sponsored you will need a W9 from your fiscal sponsor.
- Funds are sent via check to the organizational address on file in the online account within one month of the signed agreement being submitted. Make sure the address is current with all necessary information and mail can be received at this location.
- For groups applying with a fiscal sponsor, a check is mailed to the fiscal sponsor to the address included in the grant application. The check is made out to the fiscal sponsor and lists the applicant in the memo line.
- The group will need to use the appropriate language and logos on all promotion of the funded activities.
- Groups are required to spend the entirety of the MRAC grant award.
- An online final report is due 2 months after the project end date that was entered at the time of application. You must show expenditures at or greater to the budgeted amount or funds will need to be returned.
- Any project changes to the activities, timeline, or budget need to be approved in writing by the program director. Reach out with any questions or changes to the project before changing the project, as not all project changes can be approved.
- Overdue final reports may affect future eligibility to apply for and/or receive MRAC funding.