

Metropolitan Regional Arts Council

Panel Policies

Introduction

The Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC) is committed to improving arts access for communities in the seven-county metropolitan area through support to artists and organizations. MRAC's primary effort to accomplish this is by providing financial support through grants for the process of creating art as well as opportunities to enjoy the artistic accomplishments of others. MRAC's grantmaking uses a panel process to make funding recommendations to the MRAC Board of Directors. Panelists are asked to make judgements that are consistent with MRAC's program guidelines and published review criteria.

Panel Composition

Panels are composed of no less than four individuals. Panelists are selected on the basis of professional qualifications and standing, broad-based knowledge of various arts disciplines, ability to provide constructive criticism, and experience in the cultural and geographic communities in the metro area. Panelists must be willing to commit the time and energy necessary for panel service.

MRAC strives to have panels that are reflective of the applicant pool in terms of discipline, geography, gender, age, ethnicity, and other demographic descriptors. For this reason, we ask that potential panelists self-identify their expertise, arts discipline, geographic region, and demographics. Providing demographic information is always optional.

Panelists are selected from a database of board approved individuals that were recommended by board, staff and previous panelists, and through a public call for nominations.

Preparing for the Grant Review

All confirmed panelists are required to attend a virtual orientation to learn about MRAC's mission and values, panel policies, review criteria, and review procedures. Grant applications are distributed a month before ratings are due. Specific questions or concerns related to an application may be addressed to MRAC staff.

Staff Responsibilities

MRAC staff review applications for eligibility. Staff members do not at any time communicate their opinions about an application to panelists nor do they participate in rating applications

Panel Responsibilities

1. To serve the people of the seven-county metropolitan area through a broad concern for the arts not as a delegate of a particular region, institution, or special interest group.
2. To attend a virtual orientation for briefing on MRAC programs, policies, and procedures, and to follow those procedures throughout the review process.
3. To abstain from the review of any application(s) with which the individual has, or may appear to have, a conflict of interest.
4. Panelists shall review and understand, prior to submitting ratings, MRAC's mission, the criteria that will be used to evaluate applications, and the online evaluation process.
5. A panelist shall evaluate applications with an understanding of how they will apply the numerical rating scale and the panelist will use that scale consistently in rating all of their assigned applications.
6. Panelists shall submit ratings and comments with a thorough understanding of each application, ready to give feedback about how the application meets MRAC criteria, and prepared to provide insight about how and why they are assigning a particular rating.
7. To ensure that all applications are held as confidential information until the MRAC board has acted upon them.
8. To maintain objectivity by discouraging contacts with applicants until recommendations to the MRAC board have been acted upon.
9. To act in an advisory capacity in identifying issues raised in the application reviews.

Conflict of Interest

Because review panels are assembled and approved by the MRAC board of directors prior to final eligibility determination, MRAC cannot prevent conflicts of interest. Please note that a conflict of interest does not preclude an individual from serving on a review panel. It simply means that the panelist may not submit ratings and comments on the application(s) with which the conflict(s) exist.

A position of objectivity must be maintained at all times to ensure fairness to all applicants. When a panelist has a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest in regard to a specific applicant or project, the panelist must abstain from the review of that specific application.

A panelist is considered to have a conflict of interest, in regard to a specific application if they:

- Would receive direct financial benefit from the applicant organization or the project
- Serve as an employee or governing board member of an applicant organization

- Served with or without payment as a consultant, assistant, or advisor to an applicant organization
- Have a familial relationship with an applicant or a staff or governing board member of an applicant organization
- Have recently received free tickets or other benefits from an applicant organization which, in so doing, may impair the panelist's impartial judgment

Under every application, panelists are asked to indicate if they have a conflict of interest. If a panelist has a conflict of interest, they will not provide ratings or comments for that application.

Panel Feedback

Applicants may contact MRAC staff to request panel feedback. If requested, panel feedback will be uploaded to the application's grant record after the Board approval date. Panelists are expected to provide informed and constructive feedback as a part of the review process, to avoid unsubstantiated or derogatory comments, and to respond to applications with courtesy and respect.

Panel Recommendations

The panel will review applications using the program guidelines and the review criteria. MRAC staff present a list of the applications and their ratings in ranked order based on the panel's averaged ratings to the Board of Directors. The Board reviews the panel rankings and approves awards, in full, for the top ranked applications that fall within the allocated funds for the round.

Expense Reimbursement

A panelist may be reimbursed for caregiver costs related to the virtual orientation and online evaluation process.