

Metropolitan Regional Arts Council FY22-23 Biennial Plan Draft

Mission Statement:

The Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (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.

Region - Background, demographics, other context for the plan

Provide any necessary context about your region (i.e., economic, demographic, geographic, cultural, etc.) or about your organization that has a meaningful impact on your planning or your programs and services.

The Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC) serves Region 11 - also known as the metro - which includes Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties. Geographically, the metro only covers 3.5% of the state, but is home to an estimated 3,075,563 people, making up 55% of the state's population.

According to Minnesota Compass, the demographics of the metro in 2017 are as follows: Persons of Color 27.2%; American Indian .6%; Asian 7.9%; Black or African American 9.7%; LatinX 6.4%; Two or more races 2.7% and; White 72.8%. Individuals with a disability make up about 11%.

These statistics contribute to the 26% growth of Minnesota's population of color since 2010 – making up the fastest-growing segment of the state's population.

Additionally, Carver, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington Counties are expecting growth of at least 10 percent through 2030.

These growth trends are important for MRAC in understanding who is in the metro, how to best reach them and what we should prioritize to meet our mission and vision.

MRAC was established in 1994 as one of eleven Regional Arts Councils increasing access to the arts and serving every county in the state.

Specifically, MRAC serves arts organizations and fiscally-sponsored groups with budgets of less than \$400,000; non-arts organizations with art budgets of less than \$400,000 and individual artists in the metro. However, the majority of organizations that receive MRAC grants and services have budgets of less than \$100,000.

In FY20, MRAC received 1,654 applications and awarded 619 grants totaling \$3,887,611. Of which, 547 were organizations and fiscally-sponsored groups, and 72 were individual artists. The 547 organizations and fiscally-sponsored groups received \$3,707,611 from the state's general and Legacy funds, and individual artists received \$180,000 in funds from the McKnight Foundation.

MRAC relies on community members from the metro area to serve as panelists that review grant applications and make funding recommendations to the Board of Directors. In FY20, 197 individuals contributed their time to serve as panelists. Of those panelists, 64% identified as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color, and 11.5% identified as being a person with a disability. We also partnered with Cow Tipping Press, an organization committed to changing the narrative on developmental disabilities, on having an individual with an intellectual/developmental disability serve as a panelist for the Access Improvement grant program. Finally, we had a record 86% of panelists that identified as having a disability serve on the Access Improvement grant program.

Needs Assessment:

The biennial plan must be based on a needs assessment carried out in a manner which ensured input from the arts community and the arts involved public. The components of the needs assessment shall be determined by the regional arts council and may consist of any combination of constituent meetings, focus groups, program evaluations, mail, e-mail, online, or telephone surveys, individual interviews, or other evaluative tools. The assessment shall be conducted to assess and prioritize constituent needs, to evaluate appropriate community and regional resources to meet those needs, and to determine the practicality of continuing existing programming activities, service and grants assistance programs, or the feasibility of developing new programs, services, or grants by the regional arts council. The needs assessment shall be updated at intervals

determined and announced by the regional arts council, but no less frequently than once every four years. The results shall be included in the biennial plan.

In this section, describe:

1. When the needs assessment was completed.
 2. The process used to generate input from the arts community and the arts-interested public.
 3. The methods and/or tools used to gather input.
 4. The key findings identified through the needs assessment.
1. Regular assessment of needs is integrated into our applicant services and all of our on-going engagements with constituents. However, we did a much larger needs assessment with grant applicants, grant recipients, participants in MRAC Management Training workshops, panelists and with the arts-interested public that had no prior engagement with MRAC that ended in March of 2019.
 2. The design of the 2019 needs assessment process began in January and followed MRAC's guiding principles to accomplish the following goals:
 - a. Collect demographic data about respondents so we can identify needs that are specific to the diverse groups of the metro;
 - b. Gather insights about experiences with MRAC programs, services and staff so we can maintain positive relationships or make improvements where necessary;
 - c. Reach MRAC constituents, that is individuals that have some experience with MRAC and;
 - d. Reach residents in the metro that have no experience with MRAC and that are under-represented in MRAC's applicant, recipient and workshop attendee pools.

We developed a 27-question survey and sent it out to our listserv with 6000 emails in our e-newsletter. Additionally, we shared it on our Facebook page with 2,590 followers and received 383 completed surveys, which is a 65% increase from our 2017 survey.

Additionally, in the effort to reach the arts-interested public beyond people that already know about MRAC, we hired three consultants to do outreach and facilitate 9 talking circles with 84 participants in Saint Paul and Minneapolis. Each circle was a minimum of 2 hours with the facilitator, then an additional 30 minutes to 1 hour for Q&A with MRAC staff.

Currently, we gather input regularly by adapting our applicant services to be more engaging and deliberate with communities that have been historically marginalized. This has allowed us to learn on an ongoing basis with more intention about needs, barriers and how to overcome challenges within our system.

Also, after each grant round, we survey grant reviewers to collect feedback on the

orientation, the review process, and whether or not their accessibility needs were met.

We consider this feedback when making changes to the panel process.

3. We used two main methods for collecting information in our 2019 needs assessment: online SurveyMonkey questionnaire and talking circles.
 - a. A 2-part SurveyMonkey questionnaire with 27 questions that built off the 2017 survey to give us comparison data over time.

Part I of the survey:

- Collected demographic data about respondents

Part II of the survey:

- Evaluated experience with MRAC programs and services
- Helped to identify gaps in programming and services - areas to improve and make adjustments

- b. Talking circles that focused primarily on reaching art-involved individuals from outside MRAC's constituency - specifically from demographics that are under-represented in our applicant and grant recipient groups (ie. people of color and indigenous people, people with disabilities, ages 55+, etc).

4. Key findings: see in attachment

Description of the planning process:

The biennial plan must include a description of the biennial planning process used by the council including a list of the steps included in the development of the biennial plan and the participants involved in the biennial planning process.

December - January: Reviewed biennial planning documents

- Biennial Plan required components.
- 25- year framework guiding documents: MN State of Innovation, MN Legislative Guide and the MN State Arts Board.
- MRAC's FY19-20 Biennial Plan Narrative

January - Reviewed past needs assessment documents

- Review the following past work:
 - 2019 Needs Assessment results
 - Inspire to Change Report
 - Accessibility Focus Groups
- Board and Staff vision and strategy discussion
- Begin writing plan

February

- Review current programs and deadline calendar
- Share draft with board

March

- Board approves biennial plan for public review
- Post biennial plan draft on MRAC website for public review
- Public meeting
- Make any necessary changes

April

- Submit to MSAB

Work plan for grants, programs, and services – Overview

The biennial plan must include a work plan which contains a description of services, programs, and grants available from the council, and the goals and objectives of these activities as related to the needs assessment, and the 25-year arts legacy outcomes.

Statewide Goals:

1. People of all ages, ethnicities and abilities participate in the arts
2. The arts are interwoven into every facet of community life
3. Minnesotans believe that the arts are vital to who we are
4. People trust Minnesota's stewardship of public arts funding
5. The arts thrive in Minnesota

MRAC Goal 1: Support organizations and artists to be responsive to their artistic goals and community needs.

Objective 1a: Provide grant programs that are responsive and compliant

Indicators:

- MRAC has clear guidelines that describe the grant process, criteria and eligibility requirements to the public.
- MRAC guidelines comply with the Minnesota State Arts Board and state grant-making policies.
- MRAC has open communication and staff are available for public engagement.
- MRAC will recruit community members that represent the diversity of the metro to serve as grant reviewers.

MRAC Goal 2: Distribute state funds equitably throughout the region.

Objective 2a: Promote a culture of inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility in the arts.

Indicators:

- Operationalize principle-driven processes for making decisions.

- Develop internal systems that are adaptable, responsive, and culturally-informed.
- Disparities in funding will decrease for priority communities.
- Relationships and trust with priority communities will increase.

Objective 2b: Broaden the participation of people with disabilities in the arts.

Indicators:

- Build internal and external capacity of knowledge and practices that increases accessibility.
- Provide training and education about accessibility.
- Be an accessible organization.

Objective 2c: Establish strategic partnerships in communities across the metro.

Indicators:

- MRAC is an engaged and trusted partner in the metro arts and arts involved communities.

MRAC Goal 3: Strengthen MRAC’s organizational and staffing capacity

Objective 3a: Hire, support and develop staff

Indicator:

- MRAC will have the appropriate staff capacity to manage all programs, provide quality services and attention to constituents.
- MRAC staff will feel supported, have confidence and grow their capacity to provide knowledgeable and quality services to the region.

Program Information

Describe the grants and other forms of assistance the council will provide, the review criteria for evaluating grant requests, and eligibility requirements.

Grant Programs & Services

MRAC will offer 3 grant programs; 2 for fiscally sponsored groups and organizations that are funded by the state’s general fund and legacy fund and 1 for individual artists funded by the McKnight Foundation.

1. Flexible Support: provides grants of 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.

2. Equity Response: provides resources for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)-led, People with Disabilities (PWD)-led, and/or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual/Agender, Two-Spirit (LGBTQIA2+)-led MRAC eligible groups. Equity Response grants provide funding (up to \$5,000) for targeted small-scale projects as a starting or transition point for groups to support their ability to provide access to the arts in a changing environment (COVID-19 and current social change realities).
3. Next Step Fund: Funded by the McKnight Foundation, provides project grants up to \$5,000 to professional artists in any discipline for the purpose of career development and artistic achievement.

In support of the grant programs, assistance is provided in the following ways:

1. Online Resources at the 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. Recorded workshops are also posted online prior to the deadlines.
3. MRAC Program Directors are available for questions on eligibility and program intent, project idea development, and will, when possible, review application materials for eligibility in advance of the deadline.

The following will be reviewed by the panel:

- Group's Purpose and Background
- Community
- Proposed Project
- Impact
- Project Personnel List
- Board of Directors/Advisory Committee
- Project Expense Budget
- Project Income Budget

Criteria

MRAC grant programs are evaluated on a set of criteria to advance the legacy goals established by the Minnesota State Arts Board and Regional Arts Councils. Applicants are asked to consider the following questions when writing their applications.

Community:

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?

Proposed Project:

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?

Impact:

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?

Workshops and Learning Opportunities

In addition to our grant programs, MRAC offers free workshops and learning opportunities to help arts groups and organizations be as strong and effective in their work as possible.

Grantmaking and Monitoring process

Provide a detailed description of the council's grant making process including the review process, the terms of the grant contract with grant recipients, the time needed and process followed in paying grant recipients, the responsibilities of grantees, and the grant monitoring process.

Grant process – Step 1: Guidelines

MRAC grant guidelines and deadlines are shared with the public by June 1.

Grant process – Step 2: Applicant services

Grant application workshops and eligibility reviews:

- a. MRAC Program Directors provide grant application workshops to help applicants prepare grant applications. Workshops cover MRAC programs, funding, eligibility, program scope, and the details of applying.
- b. Additionally, MRAC Program Directors are available for questions on eligibility and program intent, project idea development, and will, when possible, review application materials for eligibility in advance of the deadline.

Grant Process – Step 3: Panel process

- 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 presents recommendations for funding in a list of the applications in ranked order based on the panel's averaged ratings to the Board of Directors. The Board reviews the recommendations and approves awards, in full, for the applications that fall within the allocated funds for the round.

Grant Process – Step 4: Board Approval

Summaries of every grant application is compiled into a recommendation document for MRAC's Board of Directors. MRAC staff reports on the recommended applications for board discussion and approval. Board members with a conflict of interest must declare the conflict, and cannot vote for that recommendation. The board's funding decisions may be appealed solely on alleged procedural errors. There is no right of appeal based on the size of the grant awarded or on disagreements with the review panel's assessment of an application.

Grant Process – Step 5: Communications

Applicants receive notification via email of the board's decision, always within days after the board meeting. A list of funded applications is also posted on the MRAC website, facebook page and via e-newsletter.

Every grant recipient receives an auto-email 2 weeks before project end date to remind them of final report and check in on progress and completion on time.

Grant Process – Step 6: Grant agreements and final reports:

After board approval and notification, recipients have 30 days to fill out the grant agreement and provide a current Form W9. Once received, MRAC executive director approves the grant agreement and initiates the payment process. Payments are paid in full and issued twice a month.

Grant recipients have two months to submit a required final report with a narrative about the activities and financials about how the funding was expended before the grant is closed.

Responsibilities of grantees:

- See attached sample grant agreement for details.
- Executing the project as written and approved by the board of directors.
- Crediting legacy funded projects with logo and language.
- Communicating any project changes for approval by Program Directors. All communications and changes are documented in recipients grant record through Foundant grant interface.
- Submitting a final report with a narrative about the activities and financials about how the funding was expended before the grant is closed.