We Are Listening - Grants for Organizations - June 28, 2018

Link to recording:

Play recording (1 hr 41 min)

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Pxwg4ctG

Notes:

FRAMEWORK FOR INVESTIGATION

Americans for the Arts
Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change
Funder Edition:
https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/Aesthetics%20Companion_Funders.pdf

As funders have become increasingly sensitized and motivated to address issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in their grantmaking, they're rethinking the fundamental assumptions of their grantmaking.
- They may see that their pool of applicants does not reflect the community's or nation's diversity.
- Even when they attract a range of diverse proposals and applicants, funders may be disappointed that grant selection processes don't yield a greater variety of funded projects.
- They desire rigor in making decisions but are concerned that too often the default in deliberations about rigor is convention or Western tradition.
- They are acknowledging that biases toward the status quo are deeply embedded in seemingly routine practices such as recruiting applications, identifying and vetting panelists, and adjudication systems such as combining ratings.
- Funders attuned to these factors, while acknowledging their positions of privilege,

are open to questioning their practices, shifting paradigms of status quo grantmaking, and taking more risks.
- They aspire to make investments that contribute to social change and demonstrate aesthetic excellence in terms relevant to context and intent.

The Aesthetic Attributes

Commitment - Creative processes and products embody conviction to the cause espoused through the work.

Risk-taking - The creative work assumes risk by subverting dominant norms, values, narratives, standards, or aesthetics.

Sensory Experience - Vivid sensations deepen the experience of the creative work and heighten the power of its messages and the potential for change.

Emotional Experience - Arts for Change facilitates a productive movement between "heart space"—the emotional experience that art evokes—and the "head space" of civic or social issues.

Cultural Integrity - The creative work demonstrates integrity and ethical use of material with specific cultural origins and context.

Disruption - Art challenges what is by exposing what has been hidden, posing new ways of being, and modeling new forms of action.

Communal Meaning - The creative work facilitates collective meaning that transcends individual perspective and experience.

Stickiness - The creative work achieves sustained resonance, impact, or value.

Coherence - Strong ideas expressed with clarity advance both artistic and social purposes.

Resourcefulness - Imaginative use of available resources drives artistic innovation and demonstrates responsible social and environmental practice.

Openness - The creative work deepens impact by remaining open, fluid, transparent, subject to influence and able to hold contradiction.

1. **Communicate values and intentions.** A funder might borrow aesthetic attribute terminology and descriptive language to communicate the goals and values of a funding program or initiative.

2. **Frame grant criteria.** Sharper language and descriptions of aesthetic characteristics of interest—for example, projects that are grounded in commitment to social goals through creative practice, take risks, or demonstrate communal meaning—can help

applicants assess if and how their work relates to initiative goals and frame their proposals.

3. **Seek and advise applicants.** Artists often need assistance in learning how to talk about their own work. When artists and cultural organizations see their interests reflected, this may encourage new and different applicants. Funders might share the framework with artists who are preparing proposals as a way to encourage reflection on aesthetic features of their work. Attributes and their associated questions for reflection can be adapted for applications or interviews. Consider, for example, the opportunity provided to applicants by these varied questions:
•   How are proposed artistic choices connected to or informed by the overarching social justice intent?
•   How does the intended emotional response function in relation to the change-making focus of the work?
•   How have the artists and stakeholders explored relationships of power, privilege, and cultural context within the process of making the work?

4. **Prepare panelists.** The framework can provide context and ground a discussion of excellence in Arts for Change. Selected attributes and related art examples could be used to al

5. **Moderate panels/make decisions.** Panel moderators can use the framework to prepare themselves with probing questions to open up conversations. During panel deliberations, the moderator can encourage panelists to consult the attributes to give fair review to work samples and to support their arguments for particular applicants. This helps to level the playing field for artists and organizations who are unknown to panelists.

6. **Frame feedback.** Even when projects are not selected, funders can support applicants with specific feedback that may help them clarify and better articulate their aesthetic intentions and capacities. For example, a funder might share details about one or two strong attributes to build upon (e.g., commitment) as well as those where the applicant may have fallen short (e.g., coherence, emotional experience).

7. **Evaluate implementation and results.** The framework may help funders develop evaluation and reporting guidelines, focus site visits, and assist grantees with assessing how their projects met aesthetic intents. The framework may be shared with evaluators working with funders as the basis for discussion regarding assessing aesthetic dimensions of the work. For example, an evaluator might focus on whether a project has indeed facilitated communal meaning-making, offered many access points (openness), and sustained resonance (stickiness) with participants.

8. **Design and refine programs.** A funder who is at the point of designing a new initiative, rethinking a current program, or simply examining the assumptions on which a program is based might employ selected attributes and related questions as guides to review and assess the current portfolio, frame alternative program goals, and communicate intentions to colleagues and board members. "ert panelists to priority criteria, help them raise and reflect on questions about creative practices, and support a

nuanced, informed, and critical assessment and discussion of aesthetic qualities. For example, a panelist orientation could include a discussion about cultural integrity—what it means; when the issue of cultural integrity is likely to come into play; cautions about cultural appropriation; and examples of projects that might be either good models or raise red flags— especially important with diverse panels likely to have differing perspectives, and/or when including reviewers new to panel processes.

Grant Application Review	
Current Language	Responses/Considerations/Suggested Changes
ACTIVITIES AND GOALS SECTION What is your organization's mission statement? What are your organization's (or arts program's) goals for the upcoming fiscal year (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020)? (1)	*Goals are one thing and mission is different - goals for the year contribute to that; does not show a holistic view of what we actually do; (CS) mission is what we work toward and our values are what really drive our programs to be what they are
Describe your organization (or arts program) and note any significant changes or events that have occurred in your organization (or arts program) in the last two years.	*Are these artistic/financial? What should we be speaking to; depending on what response you want out of this - you could break out the first section into two questions and combine; 2 years is a good time period but we (CS) are WAY different than 5 years ago - new applicants vs. longstanding applicants; showing some source as evolution; could break out administratively and program wise
Describe your organization's (or arts program's) activities that will occur in the upcoming fiscal year (July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019). Include a description of your primary venue(s)*, i.e. size of space, number of seats (include typical percentage of capacity filled), and/or square feet (if applicable).	*The venue topic is somewhat vague - it is more complicated to explain this than you might think; more clarity - EVERY classroom, EVERY auditorium etc.; Purpose of this question?: the first part of it is the most important; there is something in simplicity; this question wants the grantee to tell us how many people they impact over the year?
ARTISTIC MERIT OF PROPOSED ACTIVITIES How do your arts activities reflect your mission statement and goals as described	*Helpful for panelists to see the connecting thread

in Questions 1? *For arts services applicants, please refer to your arts services activities.*	
How are artistic decisions made, and who makes those decisions? *For arts services applicants, how do you decide what activities to present and who will present those activities?*	(BCA) I would imagine responses to this vary based on size of organization - who are artistic leaders of this org? (AMES) Second part of question - how do you see what decisions were made before and how do they inform what is happening moving forward? (BSO) See the importance this but it is hard to be more inclusive based on the BSO rules (WAM) The way it is phrased now - answer would be quite static - strengthened by a second question about community involvement in programming decisions (ARTIVATE) Add in the HOW vs. just the WHO (WIDEA) Second question for organizations that may be bound by certain restrictions about how they program (GLORY) AD has a team instead of a committee and this is a place where she can put that
How do you evaluate the artistic quality of the activities presented by your organization (or arts program)? What criteria do you use? *For arts services applicants, how do you evaluate the quality of the arts services activities and programs your organization provides?*	*(MHS) this question sent me down a psychological path (MICA) Expand the evaluators beyond quality (CS) We like to use audience numbers as a justification is something is quality but this may not be the case - quality is justified by each person's opinion - rights and wrongs to that (GLORY) smaller orgs it is hard to start with evaluation process itself - some guidelines for specific art forms would be helpful
ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS What is the staff structure of your organization (or arts program) and the responsibilities of key staff members? If volunteers assist with your organization (or arts program) be sure to describe their responsibilities and how they are organized.	(MOTORHOUSE) This description doesn't answer the answer of organizational effectiveness - doesn't mean you are in fact effective - different metrics to define? (ARTIVATE) Typically provide org chart/staff listing - instead, how does information flow? Essential elements? How CAN it affect effectiveness? (MHS) Could be moved to be included with size and scope of the organization questions (BCA) Makes me

	think of what each person is doing - if you are more concerned with the total operations - specific to that (WA) Submitting an org chart would paint a good picture for the panel/MSAC to be included as attachment
Describe the duties and responsibilities of your board of directors including the length of membership terms, nomination and election processes. Make sure to specify your board's advisory and/or governing role(s). List your board committees and their responsibilities. *For Arts Program Grant applicants, frame your response with respect to any board (if applicable) or committee that oversees your arts program.*	(ARTS EVERY DAY) How does your board reflect community you serve? Demographic makeup of BOT members
How are your board, committees and staff members involved in planning, and how do you implement planning recommendations? If applicable, provide a date and summary of your latest strategic plan and/or of your next scheduled plan.	(BCA) Assuming we are referring to long term planning (ARTS EVERY DAY) Add community to list of people planning
What is the financial management structure of your organization (or arts program)? Are board and/or staff members involved in day-to-day financial decision-making? What is the process used in preparing, approving, and monitoring budgets; and how often are financial reports prepared and distributed?	(DOCS IN PROG) Clarification - when you are asking how often financial docs are being generated - normally BOT oversees that and not staff
Describe the financial position or your organization (or arts program) for the past year, current year, and planned year. Provide notes on financial information such as significant changes of the amounts in line items, deficits, multi-year grants, etc.	(DOCS IN PROG) Clarification - if you are on a calendar year - we might have referred to coming year as a calendar year whereas that doesn't apply to what we are asking (BSO) Financial position is not just a narrative that is on the specific organization; common theme among orchestras for example, all with a deficit (BCA) Adding value to what the term

	specific challenge means
SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY Describe the community your organization (or arts program) serves. Community is defined specifically as those individuals or groups for whom your activities are intended.	(ARTIVATE) Broad. How long do I spend describing who we work with? (CS) Broad. How does your organization reflect the community you serve? (AMES) Comment to intended audience vs. who comes all of the time (MICA) Diversity at the very beginning of this section - not just an embedded community that is always engaged (MHS) Asking grantees how effective they actually are at being inclusive - we serve ALL Marylanders. What steps will you take to have that inclusive audience? (WALTERS) If free institution, can't capture exactly who is coming through the doors but we can say who we are aspiring to serve and how we are trying to meet that goal (ARTS EVERY DAY) Can we ask how we reach underserved communities? If the intent is to serve all of MD not just those that take it upon themselves to find out about you - should be thought about how they are reaching out to them? (CS) How are you diversifying your audience? (ARTIVATE) Who our organization working with and measure influence on? Working with other partners to advance this thing so is that my audience or the kids that they get me to? (DOCS IN PROG) This ends up being a tricky question - based on Silver Spring but when we are doing our MD State Arts Council grant - geographic question becomes challenging for us in the DC metro area (DE) For whom your activities are intended vs. who might benefit from your activities? (BSO) You intentions might be to serve XYZ when in fact you don't hit them at all (KEN) Defining your area of service and then that folds down in this question? -DOCS IN PROG - often people want to hear about outreach and into underserved area but our mission is to present arts at the park - we don't send artists into schools (ARTS ON STAGE) This question is easy

	for us because it is a ticketed event - but we can tell you where they are all coming from vs. an organization not ticketed
How do you inform the community about your activities? Give examples: such as email lists, flyers, advertisements, direct mailing, newsletters, social media, etc.	(ARTS EVERY DAY) Inform is a bad word choice - not inviting (CS) Perhaps engage (DE) Add in how you successfully engage your community - talk about what WORKS (is there a measure of impact on economic mobility of a community where the org is serving underserved)
How does your organization (or arts program) include the community you described above in planning and evaluation of programming? Give specific examples.	(MHS) Solid question. This should go up to the top. (WALTERS) Going back to communities we aspire to work with vs. who we do, if there is an underserved community we want to work with we will of course engage with them but how do you include community in planning - how is your current audience participating in evaluation (how does everyone have a seat at the table?)
How do you determine if you are successfully engaging your community?	(MOTORHOUSE) Community involves artists as well. Could answer this in two tiers. (AMES) Columns with different communities and you could answer about each to be more clear
What attempts do you make to attract new audiences? Include outreach programs and activities. Give specific examples.	(MICA) Attempt and Attract are weak. How are you being responsive to arts and non arts audiences? Will generate more dynamic answers. (AMES) First time applicant vs. previous year (WALTERS) Swap order of last two questions - you may get very different answers because you are forced to think about how you are including new audiences

Questions from the Field

The grant funding formula.
(MHS) Up to 10% of an organization's budget? Evaluation procedure is that how you

reach that 10% max. It is not realized based on what we get from State (GLORYSTAR) Same formula in my head about the 10%. (WALTERS) I think it is pretty clear (CS) We don't know...budgeted with hands up in the air.

Adding a merit-based component/review criteria.
In addition to or replacement of current system - competitive based on some criteria (DOCS IN PROG) If it is replacing the formula, it will make it harder to budget but if it's a bonus on top then that would be great. (ARTS EVERYDAY) Relates to the percentage and cap - if it's one of the large organizations that gets the lion-share of the budget NO - if for smaller, then yes. Large and Small organizations should be treated differently (MOTOR HOUSE) How do we define merit? (BSO) Who is defining merit? Panelist from a large organization on panel - could not necessarily be fair process

Percentage and a cap?
Cap is a nationwide policy for the most part - as most organizations grow without a cap they receive more and more of the funding - with a cap it could be redistributed down the line. Acknowledging on the other side of that, any kind of cap would cause some major organizations in the State to rethink how they deal with the State funding (MOTOR HOUSE) As a small org, great! As a larger, you would kick and scream (WALTERS) Just because we are a large organization, doesn't mean we are growing our budget every year - especially with risk of funding being cut at the federal ever - MSAC money is needed now more than ever (CS) As our budget grows, it grows for artistic value - to build capacity

Is capacity an issue?
Michael Kaiser - 16-23% committed to administrative cost is considered healthy. MSAC is not a great model 8-9% committed to administrative cost. How can we celebrate organizations who are operating at a healthy capacity? How can we shift that dynamic - we are modeling it first of all. How do we fly that flag? We want to invest in your organizations for sustainability and longevity. (DOCS IN PROG) So excited. We are a small organization, staff of 2, biggest challenge is building reserves - whether it is tied to current grant program or its a new program (GLORY) Really excited about this. Small and midsized organizations need it. (ARTS EVERDAY) MSAC can identify shared issues and try to work to fix them at a systemic level. (WALTERS) Add into grant application.

Project grants/mini grants/turnaround grants?
(MHS) Great. (MOTORHOUSE) Great. (BSO) Worried about buy in from other partners in terms of time - ED responds with 3 question grant application. (MHS) Data arts was a big barrier to entry (ARTS ON STAGE) Financial statement vs. an audit - not worth it to spend $10,000 on an audit.

Grants panels: What works? What doesn't? In person or electronically?
(BCA) Has served on other panels; leery of an electronic system for people involved you might find people's attention is lost vs. being present and focused (MOTORHOUSE) In person panel brings attention to the actual work happening - site visit is an important aspect (ARTIVATE) Unsure is TWO are needed ID and A; electronic is a dry process not engaging at all (MHS) In person panels force you to ask

tougher questions (DE) Visits are important; crucial (MOTORHOUSE) Definitely in person and its great for the panelists to immerse themselves in the arts community (ARTS ON STAGE) We work from our homes; if you want to see what we are doing its only during a certain scheduled date and not ongoing (BCA) Panelists reviewing orgs should be from like minded organizations of similar sizes

4-year grant cycle vs. 3?
(MOTORHOUSE) Fine with me! (MHS) My organization has been struggling to get more funding; we like to be able to present a new picture every now and then - could be a disadvantage in some ways (BCA) could be good for organizations not experiencing transitional change - for growing or young organizations 3 year (BSO) Would prefer some sort of long standing grant multi level (WALTERS) 4 year cycle but site visits every 2 years

What is the MSAC brand? What does this agency represent?
(MOTORHOUSE) Arts in Maryland (MHS) Do a good job of showing a wide array of what we are involved with but not too overwhelming (ARTS EVERYDAY) MSAC has been this out of reach organization and it does not change too much; staff has been here for a really long time; even being involved with MD Arts Day we are just advocating for the large institutions in the state; Organization of the Large Institutions; 50th event really showed off the culture we reach through the State Arts Council - hadn't seen artists from across the state; more showcasing of that and have it be more approachable; highlight and uplift under the radar artists (ARTIVATE) been associated with MSAC for longer and it did not have a brand it passed money along and it did not pay attention to why; if it is the vibrancy of the arts than live it (WALTER) MSAC is an important tool for leveraging funding from other organizations - it is legitimizing (ARTS ON STAGE) Several years since I called and asked if we are the arts or education - putting two together would be appreciated (BCA) My perception of the agency is different being Baltimore-based (ARTS EVERY DAY) Conversation around equity and inclusion could be started at the MSAC level. (MICA) Move toward forward looking similar to NEA - less arts elite kind of vibe with connection to state (PATRICIA) MSAC should not only be advocating at state level with legislature we should be a model for the local counties (KEN) We cannot advocate as a state agency (AMES) As an agency of legislative body cannot lobby; MCA listens to and follows what organizations want; need to reach out more and get information from organizations about what they need; MCA AMES and MSAC are not clear about what each other's agencies do; many people do not understand that MSAC funds the county arts councils (KEN) Fantasy situation - audience would understand that they are electing people into Annapolis who make the decisions on the appropriation that comes to MSAC and goes out to fund their organizations; right now our requirement is that logo is on the program; staff member or BOT is invited to an opening and simultaneously your legislature is invited to the event as well - at the event, the announcement is made THANK YOU GOVT for the appropriation, there is a staff member - connect the dots. (AMES) MCA and AMES can work with organizations to get information for legislators

Action: Convene a committee for application and instruction overhaul. Meetings will occur in late-July.

EXTRA -
Arts Program budget - prorating issue is has been achallenge
ARTS EVERYDAY - do this on a regular basis
WIDE ANGLE - appreciate the opportunity to talk through this process and being open to feedback

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Email feedback:

I participated in the session from two very different perspectives:

From the perspective of a freelance grant writer working on behalf of a MSAC-funded performing arts agency, this was a fantastic opportunity to help make the application process more meaningful, and clearer, for both applicants and reviewers. I heard my own thoughts reflected in the suggestions voiced by others. And I shared their appreciation of being included in the revision process. It was a unique and satisfying opportunity.

From the perspective of a full-time grant writer for Port Discovery Children's Museum, which was the grateful recipient of MSAC funding long before my tenure, and which has been told several times since that our organization and its arts program are not eligible for GFO funding due to a formulaic budget requirement, the session was less satisfying. However, it instilled me with hope that the application process will be more meaningful should we be able to apply for GFO funding in future. I was unable to identify whether any of those who voiced opinions represented unfunded institutions. (Though I heard at least two participants comment that their organizations had also been informed on several occasions of their ineligibility, but provided no other feedback.) Recognizing that the stated purpose of this session was to gather feedback about the application and related processes, I wonder if MSAC plans to hold a different kind of session in which unfunded organizations can ask questions about the factors determining eligibility status and learn more about how they might achieve eligibility and shape arts programming that meets MSAC's guidelines for artistic merit. And if so, I wonder how unfunded organizations will be informed of the opportunity to participate. Or perhaps those discussions would be better held with individual program officers serving the arts community by guiding institutions toward eligibility if and as appropriate? But if an organization has been told it is ineligible several times, how might the topic of revisiting eligibility be broached with a program officer without the organization seeming to disregard past feedback or risk wasting a program officer's time and effort?