



# Maryland State Arts Council Program Policy Evaluation Committee

MEETING MINUTES  
October 25, 2022  
Google Meet

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It shall be the duty of the Program Policy Evaluation Committee to review and assess, as necessary, on-going programs maintained by the Council; to study new program initiatives for Council consideration; to direct the Council's on-going planning process with respect to policies, programs, and Council operations; to make recommendations for Council action on these matters when appropriate; and to undertake such other duties as the Council may from time to time direct. The committee shall consist of no fewer than three members

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In attendance: Shelley Morhaim, Chris Sloan, John Schratwieser, Julie Madden, Jackie Copeland, Lizzie Morales, Cathy Teixeira, Steven Skerritt-Davis, Keyonna Penick, Emily Sollenberger, Laura Weiss, Jack Rasmussen

Shelley called the meeting to order at approximately 1:07 pm after reading the guiding documents.

Jackie made a motion to approve the minutes. Julie seconded the motion. All in favor. The minutes were approved.

## **Special Request Grants** (Skerritt-Davis) Program Revision Overview

Intent to create an accessible structure and transparency to the way discretionary funds are distributed.

### Section 1 of 3: Program Description Policies

**Proposed Policy:** The purpose of the Special Request grant is to provide support for arts activities that fall outside organizations' regular budgets but align with MSAC's goals to provide support and build capacity for Maryland's arts sector. A primary aim of the program is to bolster stability, innovation, and visionary thinking among organizations supporting the arts.

**Justification:** Revision provides clearer, more thorough language describing the purpose of the Special Request program

**Proposed Policy:** The Special Request program supports three types of arts



activities:

- Innovative projects addressing stated constituent needs
- Pilot or one-time projects
- Capacity-building efforts

Justification: Revision provides a clear, descriptive overview of the types of projects that may receive Special Request funding

Proposed Policy: Innovative projects are locally-led, mission-specific efforts in which an organization provides arts experiences or resources that address the stated needs of a particular group. The innovative aspects of such projects should represent a departure from the applicant organization's regular activities. A framework for imagining such innovation is MSAC's Grantmaking Approach, which is available for review at <https://msac.org/about>.

Justification: Revision provides a thorough description of the first of three types of projects that may receive Special Request funding

Proposed Policy: Pilot or one-time projects are efforts in which an organization attempts to reach a new goal that is relevant to its mission but not yet part of its regular activities. Such projects should be accessible by the public but otherwise may be undertaken in a spirit of creativity and experimentation. Based on the outcome of such projects, applicants may choose to incorporate them into ongoing, regular activities. Applicants are eligible to apply for Special Request funds supporting as many as three consecutive years for the same pilot or one-time project, although an initial award does not guarantee funding in subsequent years.

Justification: Revision provides a thorough description of the second of three types of projects that may receive Special Request funding

Proposed Policy: Capacity-building efforts are organized initiatives that support an organization's long-term stability, visibility, or effectiveness. Such efforts are geared toward internal improvement and may or may not be immediately accessible by the public (e.g., consultancies, needs assessments, staff searches, etc.). The outcome of capacity-building efforts is an improvement in the applicant's ability to deliver on its mission.

Justification: Revision provides a thorough description of the second of three types of projects that may receive Special Request funding

Proposed Policy: Grants are between \$2,000 and \$50,000 and are disbursed based on applicant requests.

Justification: Revision institutes funding minimums and maximums, thus increasing fairness and transparency of grantmaking



Proposed policy: All applicants must schedule a 30-minute meeting with relevant MSAC staff before starting an application.

Justification: Revision builds technical assistance into the application process, thus positioning applicants for greater success

### Section 2 of 3: Application Form Policies

Proposed Policy: What category best describes the activities for which funding is being sought?

- Innovative projects addressing stated constituent needs
- Pilot or one-time projects
- Capacity-building efforts

Justification: Revision adds an unscored question tying the application narrative to one of the three project types that may receive Special Request funding

Proposed Policy: What activities will be supported with this funding? Be detailed.

- Clear, specific, and thorough explanation of the proposed innovative project addressing stated constituent needs, pilot or one-time project, or capacity-building effort

Justification: Revision provides clear criteria framing evaluation within the three project types that may receive Special Request funding

Proposed Policy: How do these activities fall outside the organization's regular activities?

- Clear, specific explanation that the proposed activities have not been attempted in the past and are relevant to the applicant's current organizational context (e.g., mission, strategic plan goals, leadership and staff structure, constituency composition, etc.)

Justification: Revision provides details on project activities taking place outside applicants' regular activities

Proposed Policy: How will the proposed project provide a direct or indirect benefit to one or more groups in the organization's geographic area of service?

- Clear, thorough description outlining engaged group or groups and the nature of the benefit provided, either through shorter-term impact via project activities or longer-term impact via capacity building activities

Justification: Revision identifies applicant constituency in geographic terms, as with current GFO guidelines

Proposed Policy: Enter budget information in the box below, or upload a "Budget" attachment using the button below.

- Budget information is clearly tied to the proposed arts activities and indicates realistic expenses

Justification: Revision provides tools for adding more thorough budget information,



as well as removes prompt regarding non-monetary resources, which are prompted and evaluated elsewhere in the application

Proposed Policy: What are the success indicators for the project (e.g., numerical thresholds, anecdotal or testimonial feedback, particular attendance levels, media coverage in specific publications, improved organizational efficiency, etc.)?

- Clear, specific and realistic indicators of success for the proposed activities, either in regard to project goals or capacity-building outcomes

Justification: Revision provides clearer success indicators and simplifies the criterion, as “process for evaluation” will be considered elsewhere in the application

Proposed Policy: How will data for project success indicators be collected and evaluated?

- Clear plan outlining how success will be measured, as well as how the applicant will evaluate the data captured in the success measurement process

justification: Revision adds a question providing additional focus on project evaluation tools, thus prompting applicants to consider post-project success more thoroughly

### Section 3 of 3: Application Review Policies

Proposed Policy: MSAC convenes a group of panelists to evaluate applications electronically. Each application is evaluated using the rubric criteria above. Panelists assign points and supply qualitative comments for each scored question.

Justification: Revision adds public vetting to application evaluation, as with most other MSAC grant programs

### Discussion

- Clarifying language around “group” definition
  - The application asks for the identification of the group. The applicant could identify a specific community within the organization’s geographic area of service.
- Councilors noted that this grant program as proposed (with a \$50,000 limit and its one-time nature) is not a sustainable option for staffing needs. Staff noted that other grant programs at MSAC provide for such needs, including the general operating support grants. Section 1 attempts to build technical assistance into the process, and staffing is allowable.
- Staff is working on creating a budget template in the application to compare applications fairly - building out a template that will account for different types of budgets and scenarios.
- Staff recommendation is to treat the program like other programs that have similar panel review processes. Council to approve program budget allocations, panel to score applications, and staff to make funding determinations within the budget and based on panel scores. Staff clarified



that the Grants Committee and council currently reviews and approves GFO and CAD grants only during the annual meeting. The council has final approval of the panelists and allocated budget for all programs. The current allocation is zero. In the past unused administrative funds have been approved to be moved into the special request fund.

- Staff clarified the recommendation for a rolling deadline as of now.
- Councilors questioned alignment of the category with MSAC's goals. Staff is recommending the program revision in order to address the needs for capacity building and support innovation and new thinking in the arts sector.
- Council members want to ensure this is the best use of public dollars and agree the state provides strong support to encourage innovation.
- Although councilors agree the program is progressive, the program should be reviewed in connection with the strategic plan. All programs can be reviewed to determine if goals are being met.
- Councilors discussed the funding level. Higher funding would require more council oversight of the program.
- Councilors noted that previous special requests were for 50-75% of total project costs and agreed that there is a larger policy conversation to be had about the role of MSAC in funding grantees.

Jackie made a motion to review the special request grants at council meetings and the program itself in strategic planning. Jack seconded. John opposed. All in favor. Motion passes.

### **Arts in Education** (Morales, Skerritt-Davis)

#### Overview

- Project-based grants
- Monthly reviews between August - May
- Grant awards up to \$7,500
- Grants that receive a score of 70% or higher are recommended for funding
- 100% of grant award goes to the teaching artist or teaching artist organization to work in school and community settings
- AiE program revision in 2019-20
  - FY21 & FY22: Decrease demand/competition due to the pandemic
  - FY23: Noticeable increase demand/competition for funding
- During the first two months of application reviews, one organization was awarded 34 grants totaling 26.6% of the overall AiE budget

Proposed Policy: One organization or individual may receive up to 35% of the total Arts in Education grant budget in FY 2023.

Justification: The proposed policy change aligns with MSAC's vision and equity and justice goals. It will ensure that no one organization or individual receives a majority percentage of the overall AiE budget in FY 2023. It will allow funding to continue to be available for other organizations and independent artists for additional months while staff work to determine a more permanent solution.



Discussion:

This is an unusual case, but seeing the trajectory of applications, staff want to make sure one organization doesn't monopolize all of the funding and acknowledge a mid-year course correction. The policy is not intended to be permanent but a stop gap for staff to make sure funding is available for teaching artists that haven't accessed funding yet. There haven't been any "normal" years since the 2019-2020 revision as the pandemic resulted in decreased demand as in-person instruction was not safe. Staff to look through data over the next year to propose more permanent policy changes for FY24.

John made a motion to approve. Jack and Jackie seconded. All in favor. Chris abstained. The motion passed to full council.

Appreciation all around for staff and quality of conversation amongst committee members.

Meeting adjourned at 2:04 pm.