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INTRODUCTION – ABOUT THE REGIONAL ARTS COMMISSION OF ST. LOUIS

The Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (RAC) is at the forefront of efforts to transform St. Louis into a more vibrant, creative and economically thriving community by elevating the vitality, value and visibility of the arts. Founded in 1985 with a mission to promote, encourage and foster the arts in St. Louis City and County, RAC is governed by a board of 15 Commissioners who have been appointed by the chief executives of St. Louis City and County. These Commissioners lead the organization in its ongoing efforts to develop support for and to market the arts for the benefit of all throughout the region.

RAC, the largest annual funder of the arts in the St. Louis region, awarded 125 grants in 2018 through its annual grants program, dedicating more than $3.8 million to support nonprofit arts and culture organizations as well as non-arts organizations providing arts programs in the St. Louis area. Since its inception in 1985, RAC has awarded more than 7,000 grants totaling over $100 million to support nonprofit arts, individual artists, cultural organizations and programs.

Grantmaking is one of the most important strategies for building a more vibrant community through the arts. We’ve recently redesigned and streamlined our annual grants program to ensure greater equity and transparency in our grantmaking process and to enable arts and culture organizations to provide greater and more equitable access to the arts for all people throughout the St. Louis region.

We extend our deep gratitude for the talent, skills and wisdom that you will bring to our annual grant review process. Although there are difficult decisions to be made, we are certain that you will find your experience as a panelist both educational and rewarding. In return for your participation, you’ll have an opportunity to meet other professionals and community leaders, to discuss the latest trends in the arts and to gain a first-hand perspective on the St. Louis arts and culture industry.

RAC supports nonprofit organizations through two main grant categories:

- **General Operating Support (GOS)** grants are made to arts organizations with a history of funding from RAC and annual operating expenses (AOE) of $150,000 or more. The GOS grant category provides unrestricted, renewable funding to support day-to-day operations of nonprofit, mission-driven arts organizations that produce and present ongoing, year round programming.

- **Program Support** grants are made to both arts and non-arts organizations providing arts programming. The Program Support grant category provides support for one-time projects or ongoing programs that broaden and deepen participation and increase access to the arts. Organizations can request funds for only one program in this category.

RAC’s funding programs are guided by two policies:

- **Freedom of Expression Policy**

  The Regional Arts Commission (RAC) has an abiding commitment to preserving and enhancing freedom of speech, thought, inquiry and artistic expression. The Commission’s responsibility for and dedication to securing the conditions with which freedom of expression can flourish extend to all forms of artistic expression, including the visual arts, design, literature, media and the performance arts of theatre, music and dance.

  RAC recognizes that the right of artists to exhibit or perform does not preclude the right of others to take exception to particular works of art.
Cultural Diversity Policy
The Regional Arts Commission (RAC) advocates respect, inclusion and appreciation of the diverse cultures and backgrounds of all individuals. The Commission is committed to working through the arts to eliminate bias and prejudices based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or disability. The Commission encourages, supports and strengthens arts organizations and programs that reflect these values. RAC also partners with other organizations to address issues of diversity.

SECTION 2
PANELIST ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
As a panelist, you will play a central role in the annual grant-making process. RAC relies on panels comprised of individuals who are passionate about arts and culture and represent a broad and diverse range of professions, backgrounds, demographics, and artistic and cultural viewpoints to assist with the evaluation of grant applications using a four-point rating system.

Panelists are selected to represent a cross-section of professions, artistic and cultural viewpoints, and they have the qualifications to provide knowledge of specific arts disciplines, of management and program experiences, and of the community. Panels include both citizen panelists and RAC Commissioners.

Panel Responsibilities and Conduct
As a panelist, you will review and rate applications according to three review criteria:

- artistic merit and quality of program(s)
- community benefit
- organizational capacity

As part of your evaluation of the applications, you will assign a rating that will determine eligibility for funding amounts. Using RAC’s formula-based funding system for General Operating Support (GOS) and a modified system for Program Support, the RAC Grants Committee will then make the final funding decisions based on the panelists’ ratings, the amount of funding available and the number of requests.

Although monitoring grantee programs and events is not a required part of the Citizen Panel Review process, panelists are encouraged to attend as many programs as possible. Organizations applying for support receive a list of citizen review panelists and may offer panelists complimentary tickets to their regular programs. Typically, these tickets do not include admission to fundraising events, galas or other social gatherings.

Panelists appointed to serve must be able to fulfill the following responsibilities:

- read and become familiar with written applications and supplementary materials provided prior to the panel meeting;
- review each application according to written and published program guidelines and review criteria;
- participate fully in panel meetings; and
- declare all actual or apparent conflicts of interest prior to the discussion of any application.

Contact with Applicants
We discourage panelists from meeting with applicants regarding the review process prior to the application review meetings. In addition, panelists are requested not to discuss the proceedings and deliberation of the panel following the review meeting and prior to final action by the governing body of RAC. For information concerning application review and panel procedures, applicants are encouraged to attend panel meetings which are open to the public. In addition, they can review their panel comments and contact RAC staff.
RAC staff manages the application process and provides panelists with online access to the applications and work samples several weeks before the meeting. (See page 9 - Online “Reviewer” system). Panelists then read the applications, review the work samples, make preliminary assessments and rate the applications on the online “Reviewer” system. On the day of the panel meeting, panelists meet as a group to discuss and assign final ratings to the applications.

**Citizen Review Panel — Meeting Format and Process**

**Meeting Format**

Panel meetings are open to the public, and applicants are encouraged to attend. Although they are not allowed to address the panel during the deliberations, applicants can be present to hear the comments that panelists make regarding the merit of their applications. This is an important learning process for the applicants, as they are able to receive valuable feedback on their organization or program(s) from individuals with expertise and diverse backgrounds. In addition, open panel meetings further enhance the review as a conscientious and democratic process. To prevent or avoid the appearance of public lobbying, panelists are discouraged from interacting with applicants during the meeting or any scheduled breaks.

**Panel Discussion and Comments**

Meetings are facilitated by a non-voting member of RAC staff. Panel comments should provide objective and substantiated information upon which evaluations can be made. Your intention should be to provide constructive feedback to applicants who may benefit significantly from what they learn from your observations. Good comments are those that solidly address the quality of the applicant’s overall proposal as it relates to the grant review criteria for either the Program Support or GOS panel to which you are assigned. The best comments are tactful, succinct and well-balanced, and they provide both negative and positive feedback. We recommend that panelists prepare comments in advance, given the limited amount of time that we will be able to spend on each application (10-15 minutes).

Notes will be taken by RAC staff, and panel comments will be shared with applicants via email following the panel meetings.

**Rating of Applications**

After the panelists participate in a group discussion of each application using the review criteria as a guide, they are each asked to provide a numerical rating (using the four-point rating scale) that they feel provides an overall assessment of the application’s merit. The ratings are then totaled and averaged to arrive at a final overall rating.

After completion of the first round of discussions on each of the applications, panelists have an opportunity to view the entire list of applicants in the grant category. Organizations are listed from highest to lowest in the order of the ratings that were assigned. After consideration of the overall ratings of all organizations, panelists may then make a motion(s) to discuss and consider adjusting the rating of an individual organization(s). A rating can be adjusted if the change is approved by a vote of the panel following Robert’s Rules of Order.

The final overall rating is part of the formula that determines the amount of funding an applicant will receive.

**Conflicts of Interest**

Panelists are required to declare any conflicts of interest with organizations that are applying for funding. In the event of a conflict of interest with an organization, panelists are required to recuse themselves from the discussion of and voting on that particular application.

**Special Circumstance Review**

RAC staff may determine (on a case-by-case basis) that an application should be pulled from the evaluation process and referred to the RAC Grants Committee for a separate review. This would only occur during extraordinary and rare circumstances, typically reserved for when significant organizational changes occur after an application has been submitted but before the proposal is reviewed.
Appeals Process
In addition to reading applications and serving on the panel, panelists may also be asked to participate in the appeals process. After applicants receive their organization's panel comments and final ratings, they have the right to appeal if they believe that an error was made during the review that adversely affected their final rating. Applicants must have solid grounds for an appeal in order for it to be considered.

Dissatisfaction with a rating or denial of an award is not sufficient grounds for an appeal. Solid grounds for an appeal are based on a misstatement of fact made during the panel meeting that is evidenced by written information found in the application. New information not originally included in the application can’t be offered as evidence of the misstatement. RAC staff reviews and approves all requests for appeals which are submitted by the applicants in writing.

When there are appeals to be considered, RAC staff will ask that the individuals who served on that applicant’s panel reconvene to discuss the appeal and determine if it has merit. If the appeal has merit, the panel will be instructed to increase the applicant’s final rating.

The panelists will be sent the written appeal in advance of the meeting, which is typically held as a conference call unless there is a compelling reason for the panelists to convene in person. The meeting is conducted using Robert’s Rules of Order. A majority of panelists must vote in favor of approving a change to the final rating in order for it to be increased. The results of the meeting are shared with the applicants immediately following the meeting.

Grants Committee / Funding Approval
After the appeal process has been completed, final ratings are forwarded to the RAC Grants Committee for review. The Grants Committee consists of specially appointed Commissioners. This committee makes funding recommendations that are submitted to the full Commission for final approval based on the Citizen Review Panels’ ratings.

REVIEWING AND RATING APPLICATIONS USING THE GRANT REVIEW CRITERIA

General Operating Support (GOS) — Rating System and Grant Review Criteria
Each application will be rated according to RAC’s review criteria. RAC uses a four-point rating system (1 – 4), with steps between each rating (4, 4-, 3+, 3, 3-, 2+, 2, 2-, 1). An organization’s rating is used to determine its RAC award.

Organizations that receive a rating of 4 are considered model organizations, and a rating of 4 is considered a rare achievement. Organizations that receive a rating of 3 are considered strong organizations. Organizations that receive a rating of 2+ are considered fundable, but there are considerable areas where the organization needs to improve. Organizations that receive a rating of 2 or lower will not be recommended for funding under any circumstances.

A rating of 2+ or higher does not guarantee the funding of an application. Please note that available funds and total grant requests will vary, and RAC cannot predict or determine, in advance, the lowest rating that will be fundable in a given year.

General Operating Support (GOS) — Funding Formula
RAC utilizes a funding formula to determine all GOS awards. This formula is based on an organization’s annual operating expenses (AOE), which are determined by averaging an organization’s total functional expenses from their last three IRS 990 forms. RAC uses a regressive formula to determine the maximum amount of funding that an organization is eligible to receive. Organizations with a smaller AOE are eligible to receive a larger percentage of their AOE. Organizations with a larger AOE are eligible to receive a larger award, but that award will be a smaller percentage of their AOE.
General Operating Support (GOS) — Grant Review Criteria
GOS applicants receiving the highest rating will share the following characteristics:

**Artistic Merit and Quality of Programs**
- Strong artistic vision and leadership
- Recognition of artistic excellence and quality of programs including awards, recognition and occasional local media
- A loyal audience base evidenced by consistent attendance numbers and ticket sales
- Demonstrated practice of hiring local professional artists and developing local talent

**Community Benefit**
- Achievement of diversity goals through intentional outreach efforts and/or partnerships with diverse groups
- Implementation of strategies and programs to promote life-long learning through the arts and to broaden and deepen an understanding of the artform through accessible and affordable programs
- Demonstrated commitment to diversity in staffing, board recruitment and use of vendors
- Increased access to the arts through local and neighborhood-based programming
- Demonstrated awareness of responsibility to promote public value of the arts through advocacy activities such as local, state-wide and national efforts
- Ongoing efforts to assess and evaluate audience needs through surveys and other basic evaluation tools

**Organizational Capacity**
- Solid administrative leadership and management
- An engaged and contributing working board of directors
- Strategic planning efforts undertaken on a regular basis

**Program Support — Rating System and Grant Review Criteria**
Every application will be rated according to RAC’s review criteria. RAC uses a four-point rating system (1 – 4,) with steps between each rating (4, 4-, 3+, 3-, 2+, 2-, 1). An organization’s rating is used to determine its RAC award.

Organizations that receive a rating of 4 are considered model organizations, and a rating of 4 is considered a rare achievement. Organizations that receive a rating of 3 are considered strong organizations. Organizations that receive a rating of 2 are considered fundable, but there are considerable areas where the organization needs to improve. Organizations that receive a rating of 1 will not be recommended for funding under any circumstances.

In this category, a 2+ is the minimum rating that will be considered for funding. Depending on available funding during a given grant cycle, the RAC Grants Commission will determine the lowest rating that RAC will fund. Funding is not guaranteed under any circumstances.

Each organization will receive a 10% reduction from the maximum funding level for each step down in their rating. For example, if an organization is applying for a $15,000 grant and receives a rating of 4, they will receive 100% of the maximum funding level, which is the full $15,000. If an organization applying at the same $15,000 level receives a rating of 3, they are eligible for 70% of the maximum funding level, or $10,500.
Program Support — Grant Review Criteria

NOTE: Organizations applying in the Program Support categories vary considerably, and the rating of the applications is done in consideration of the appropriateness of the criteria relative to the size, budget and organizational capacity of the organizations.

Program Support applicants receiving the highest rating will share the following characteristics:

Artistic Merit and Quality of Programs

- Strong artistic vision and leadership;
- Engagement and compensation of qualified and experienced artists;
- Distinctive and unique programming that enriches cultural offerings and/or preserves cultural traditions in St. Louis;
- A loyal audience base evidenced by attendance numbers, community support and ticket sales (as applicable);
- High quality program(s) demonstrated through support materials including artist bios, printed programs, marketing materials, reviews and coverage in local media (as applicable); and
- Ongoing commitment to program planning best practices, including goal setting and evaluation.

Community Benefit

- Demonstrated commitment to community engagement and the use of community knowledge and relationships to make informed and relevant programming decisions;
- Demonstrated and intentional efforts to attract and retain diverse audiences and increase access to the arts for underserved individuals or under-resourced neighborhoods; and
- Demonstrated efforts to contribute to the vibrancy, safety and economic vitality of neighborhoods, communities or the entire St Louis region.

Organizational Capacity

- Experienced administrative staff and/or volunteers to implement the project;
- An engaged and diverse board of directors that contributes financially to the organization;
- History of a successful arts and culture program(s) and a clear plan to implement the project;
- Regular short and long-term planning for the program and organization (if appropriate);
- A project budget that is realistic, appropriate to the scope of the project and that reflects a diversity of funding sources;
- Implements appropriate marketing efforts for the program; and
- Effective management of past RAC grant(s).

Program Support — Grant Amounts

Eligible organizations can apply for funding in four distinct grant tiers. The maximum amount of funding that an organization can receive from each of these tiers is $15,000, $10,000, $5,000, or $3,000, respectively.

The grant tiers are based on the overall program or project cost and require at least a 1:1 cash match. Therefore, an organization with project expenses of $30,000 or more can apply for a $15,000 grant, an organization with expenses of $20,000 or more can apply for a $10,000 grant, and an organization with expenses of $6,000 or more can apply for a $3,000 grant. In-kind expenses will only count towards the cash match at the $3,000 grant tier.
SECTION 5

USING THE ONLINE “REVIEWER” SYSTEM

You will use the online RAC “Reviewer” system to read and rate the applications. The 2018 applications will be uploaded on this system and made available three weeks in advance of the panel meeting. The link to the “Reviewer” system, along with detailed instructions on how to use it, will be sent via email. Your login will be your email address, and once you sign-in for the first time you will be able to set your own password.

NOTE: You must complete the review for all of the applications by a specified date and time in advance of your panel meeting. We encourage you to start as soon as possible to make sure the system is working. We recommend that you plan ahead to work on the applications over the three-week period rather than waiting until the last minute, since the reviewing process requires a considerable amount of time.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Once you have logged in, you will navigate to your “Review Assignments.” There, you will have the option to select which “Team” you are on. For most reviewers you will only have one option, if you are serving on multiple panels, you will find each of them here.
- Once you select your “Team,” you will see a list of applications below and you can begin your review.

To review the applications:

- Click the name of the organization you wish to review, the organization name will be a blue hyperlink. This will open up the application and the “Reviewer Form” side by side.
- We recommend reviewing the applications online, but you do have options to download or print the applications. Please note, you will still need to review any video links and video online as they will not be downloaded.
  - Downloading – You will see a “Download” button throughout the reviewer system, with options to download all applications, or selected applications.
  - Printing – Next to each organization name, you will see an icon that looks like a folder. Clicking this icon will display all the “tasks” that the applicant completed, these are the different sections of the application. Next to each task, you will see an option to “Print” in blue for each task.
- Once, you have selected an application to review, you will find at the top of your browser, a drop-down menu. Use this drop-down menu to navigate to the different application sections.
- After you have finished reviewing the application, use the “Reviewer Form” to record your ratings. Click “Submit” to save your ratings. If you wish to change your ratings, you may do so at any point in time.
- You may also make notes in the “Comments” box for your own use, these will not be shared with the applicants.
- If you would like to download or print your comments and ratings for your use during the panel meeting, you can find the options to “Download” or “Print” next to each application. RAC staff will not be printing these materials for you, but tablets will be available for your use.

If you have any technical questions or difficulties in using the “Reviewer” system, please contact:

James F. Anderson
james@racstl.org