Panel Handbook

Ohio Arts Council

FUNDING THE ARTS

Ohio Arts Council

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INTRODUCTION

Panelists play an important role in the grant-making procedures and policy development of the Ohio Arts Council (OAC). Their contributions of time and expertise allow them to: ensure a fair, transparent and thoughtful decision-making process for grant awards; support the state in its efforts to recognize and reward excellent artists, arts and cultural organizations and schools through monetary grants; gain increased awareness of the state's cultural assets; and network with other professionals with similar interests and/or fields of study. We hope you will find your experience as a panelist educational and rewarding.

It is important that you read the entire handbook prior to serving on an OAC panel. If you have any questions or concerns please contact your program coordinator.

OPEN PANEL MEETINGS

In keeping with the spirit of Ohio's open government laws, the OAC initiated open panel meetings in 1975. During these open panel meetings, panelists' deliberations can be heard through attending the meeting or listening online. This public review allows applicants and other interested parties to observe the review process, including the scoring of applications using the program's evaluation criteria. Other than a small number of staff-reviewed grant programs, all OAC grant programs use open panel meetings to generate funding recommendations to the OAC board. The board is the only body empowered to make funding decisions or issue grants and its decisions are final. OAC board meetings occur three times per year and are required by law to be open to the public. Summaries of panelists' comments from panel deliberations are made available to each applicant in written form, reinforcing the accountability and transparency of the panel process.

PANEL APPOINTMENTS

The OAC's enabling legislation states that individuals appointed to the OAC board shall have broad knowledge and experience in the arts. The law also allows the board to establish advisory panels to assist in its efforts to promote and preserve the arts in Ohio. The OAC board and staff work together to ensure that panelists selected for these advisory panels have broad knowledge in the arts, arts education and community development; a high level of expertise in their respective fields; and represent diversity in a variety of areas (see PANELIST SELECTION below).

Section 3379-7-07(A) of the OAC Rules and Regulations provides for the creation of advisory panels:

The council or the executive committee from time to time may create an advisory panel in any designated art field. Each panel shall perform such duties as shall be specified by the council, including submitting from time to time recommendations to the council for courses of action designed to promote the functions and activities of the council. Each panel shall be advisory only and shall not have authority to commit the council financially or otherwise without the council's express consent.

Sections 3379-7-07(B) and (C) provide for the appointment and tenure of advisory panelists:

A list of members of the advisory panels shall be compiled for council approval by the panel selection committee, a standing committee consisting of five council members who are appointed by the chair with council approval for a one-year tenure. The committee will review suggested names of panel members as submitted by the chair and director who, in turn, have had input from staff and the arts field. Council members will submit suggestions for panelists directly to the committee prior to the council meeting where panelists are approved. After approval of the panel members, the council shall appoint the members to the advisory panels.

Appointments to the advisory panels shall be for a term of either one or two years. The panel selection committee may recommend to the council that an advisory panel member be reappointed, but such reappointment must be approved by council and shall not result in such member serving for more than four consecutive years on the same panel. When an advisory panel member has served four consecutive years on the panel, such member may not be appointed to any panel again until two years have elapsed.

PANELIST SELECTION

Prospective panelists are chosen after being nominated to serve on a grant review panel or contacted by OAC staff to discuss service. Formal nominations are accepted from the public and should include a completed nomination form for panel membership (available on the OAC website at oac.ohio.gov/grantsprogs/StaticPages/NOMINATIONFORM.pdf) as well as a copy of the nominee's current professional résumé and/or bio.

Nominations are accepted year-round and interested individuals may nominate themselves. Prospective panelists are contacted by OAC staff during the summer to discuss panel service and confirm their availability for the panel dates in question. The OAC board approves panelist slates each fall and the executive director invites each panelist to serve via a letter. Each prospective panelist either accepts or declines the invitation via a written panelist acceptance form that must be completed and returned to the OAC.

OAC Panelist Selection Criteria:

- Professional qualifications and breadth of experience
- Broad-based knowledge of the arts at the community, state, national and/or international level
- Ability to clearly articulate applications' strengths and weaknesses based on the OAC scoring criteria
- Past performance as a panelist and/or peer recommendation
- Ability to work well in a group

Each panel represents diversity in a variety of areas, including:

- Gender, age, race, ethnicity and disability, reflecting Ohio's overall diversity
- Geographic distribution representing all regions of Ohio including both urban and rural areas
- Artistic disciplines and sub-disciplines (for multi-disciplinary panels)
- Organizational budget size (to include small, medium and large institutions)
- Organizational role/job function (board members, administrators, artistic directors, education specialists and others, as well as artists)

PANEL MEETING ARRANGEMENTS & PANELIST HONORARIA

Panels generally meet in Columbus for one to three days, depending on the number of applications received. Panelists are notified of meeting dates and location at least three months in advance. Panelists receive an honorarium in exchange for their preparation for, travel to and service on the panel; no reimbursements for individual expenses are issued. Honorarium amounts vary by length of panel meeting and are specified in the appointment letter sent to each panelist by the executive director. OAC staff members work with nearby hotels to secure room blocks and can assist with travel and meal arrangements, etc., but all expenditures are the responsibility of panelists and are not reimbursable by the OAC.

BEFORE THE PANEL MEETING

By the time the panel meeting convenes, a large amount of work has already been done by OAC staff to vet incoming applications and prepare them for review by the panel. Constituents are urged to submit a draft of their application for staff review prior to completing their grant for submission at the final application deadline. Drafts allow the OAC staff to become familiar with each applying organization's mission, history and planned work and assist applicants in developing a competitive final application. Drafts are typically due no later than 30 days prior to the final application deadline.

After the final application deadline, all applications are reviewed for completeness by staff members in the Grants Administration and Operations office. Applicants are notified that their applications have been received and, if necessary, asked to provide additional information. The application is also sent to the appropriate OAC program coordinator for an in-depth review. Each coordinator is responsible for contacting applicants to clarify any points in question prior to the panel meeting.

Several weeks before the panel meeting, application packets are mailed to panelists. Each packet includes a cover letter outlining meeting logistics, copies of all applications to be reviewed (including primary and secondary reading assignments), information on evaluation/scoring, instructions on using the OnLine Grant Application system (OLGA), and other items. Panelists are asked to read all applications prior to attending the panel meeting and enter preliminary comments and scores for each application into the OLGA system.

Panelists will also typically be asked to take part in an online panelist orientation session shortly after their application packets arrive. Sessions generally last one hour and consist of audio webinars with online presentations by OAC staff. Each program's orientation is different, but discussion topics generally include a review of packet materials, discussion of scoring procedures, updates on any changes since the packet mailing, and a question-and-answer session to address panelist questions and assure that everyone understands expectations for the review and is prepared to complete their initial assessment and assign preliminary scores.

Panelists are always encouraged to contact OAC staff at any time prior to the meeting to discuss the program, panel meeting or other issues.

AT THE PANEL MEETING

Reading Session

When the meeting convenes, OAC staff members note any panelist conflicts of interest (see CONFLICTS OF INTEREST, below). This session is closed to the public. Afterwards, panelists spend time reviewing application support materials, including hard copy work samples and audiovisual materials. There is no evaluative discussion of applications during this closed session. For two- and three-day panel meetings, the first day is generally devoted to a closed reading session; for one-day meetings, the morning or a portion of the morning is used for the reading session with the open application review held in the afternoon.

Application Review

Following the orientation and reading session, the evaluative portion of the public panel meeting begins. All applicants are encouraged to attend or listen online.

Panel meetings are convened with the help of outside facilitators chosen by the OAC staff. The panel facilitator is responsible for overseeing the panel's discussion and managing the pace of review. Panel facilitators do not take part in the application review and do not score applications. Meetings begin with an introduction of panelists and OAC staff followed by a brief audience orientation. Members of the audience are reminded that they may observe the meeting but may not take part in discussions.

Two panelists are assigned to each application and conduct an in-depth review of the application narrative, budget and support materials. The primary reviewer begins the review of each application by describing the applicant's programming and assessing its strengths and weaknesses based on the program's stated review criteria. The secondary reviewer presents additional information or differing opinions (he/she should also be prepared to make the initial presentation if the primary reviewer is absent). Finally, remaining panel members who wish to add comments of their own may do so. This approach encourages a thorough review of all applications without placing a heavy workload on any one panelist, and ensures that many viewpoints are considered. OAC staff members participate in the discussion only to share objective information and/or clarify OAC policies. Audience members who believe a panelist has mis-stated a piece of *factual information presented in the application* may complete an Information Correction Form to request a verbal correction; requests are reviewed immediately and acted upon at staff's discretion.

Throughout the discussion, panelists must maintain a high level of professionalism and specifically describe the ways in which the application meets or does not meet the program's review criteria.

After all comments have been shared for a given application, the facilitator will close the discussion and call for a "yes/no" vote to determine if the application will move to the scoring round. Tie votes move the application to the scoring round; applications that receive a majority of "no" votes are not scored. If the application advances to the scoring round, each panelist may then update their scores in OLGA in any of the four evaluation areas after participating in the discussion. Once all scores are entered, the facilitator will move to the next application.

After the last application is reviewed, time will be provided for panelists to make final adjustments to previously entered scores. No discussion of applications will take place during this time. When all updates have been finished, scores are recorded for use in generating funding recommendations and grant awards.

Finally, OAC staff members will lead the facilitator, staff, panel and audience members in a brief policy discussion about the grant program, panel procedures or other agency business. Comments made during policy discussions will be used when considering future refinements to OAC *Guidelines* and other agency policies (see POLICY DEVELOPMENT, below).

Whenever practical, the OAC provides a free online audio broadcast of each panel meeting allowing applicants and other members of the general public to listen to the discussion online. The entire meeting, including the policy discussion, is broadcast; online listeners may not interact with panel members. Meetings are not recorded.

AFTER THE PANEL MEETING

After the meeting has adjourned, staff will calculate the average score for each application and prepare a list of all applications ranked by score from highest to lowest. This list will be distributed to panelists and applicants via email; applicants will also receive access to a written summary of panel comments about their application. Based on the final scores and ranking of all applications, staff determines funding recommendations. All funding recommendations are presented to the OAC board for final approval. Each program is competitive and not all scored applications will receive funding.

An appeals process is available to applicants who believe a procedural error, such as a vote miscount, adversely affected their review. Appeals must be submitted in writing to the OAC executive director within 30 days of the panel meeting and are reviewed and acted upon by the Executive Committee of the OAC board after consultation with OAC staff. Appeals may not be made on the basis of an applicant's disagreement with the panel's assessment of the artistic quality or merit of the proposed project or program.

Members of the OAC board then meet to review and approve grant funding recommendations. During the meeting the board chair asks program coordinators to present recommendations and answer questions from board members. All OAC board decisions are final. After the board meeting, emails are sent via the OLGA system to all applicants notifying them of the board's decisions. All applicants – especially those whose funding requests were ultimately turned down – are invited to contact their program coordinators to review their applications and gain assistance for preparing future grant applications. Grant agreements are made available to new grantees via the OLGA system at the beginning of each new grant period.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Because most OAC panelists are professionally involved in the arts – and many work for organizations that are themselves applicants – adhering to a strict conflict of interest policy is critical. Panelists must be aware of possible conflicts of interest and avoid any action that could be interpreted as a use of their panel membership to further their own, their spouse's or partner's interests, or the interests of an organization with which they are affiliated. Panelists are not appointed to represent any organization, discipline or geographic region, but are invited to serve because they will use their expertise and experience to carefully and fairly adjudicate all applications. This ensures that public funds are used prudently and strategically based on the OAC's mission, goals and review criteria.

With that in mind, panelists should follow these guidelines:

1. A panelist may take part in projects that receive OAC funding but should not personally receive any remuneration from those OAC funds for services in connection with any such project. If a panelist plans to participate in a project supported by the OAC, the applying organization should be able to clearly indicate the nature of that participation upon request.

2. Panelists should avoid any action that could be interpreted as a use of panel membership to further their own interests or the interests of any organization with which they, their spouse, family members or business associates are affiliated.

3. Panelists are required to leave the room during the discussion of and voting on any application with which they have a conflict of interest. OAC staff will ask panelists to identify applications for which they may have a conflict of interest during the closed orientation session.

4. The panelist acceptance form, which must be completed and returned to the OAC no later than 90 days after the panel appointment (see PANELIST SELECTION, above) includes space for panelists to outline their employment and affiliation with organizations that might be eligible for OAC support. This information will be updated at the panel meeting to reflect any changes since the time of appointment. Forms will be kept on file in the executive director's office at the OAC and, in accordance with Ohio law, will be public information and subject to public inspection.

5. Panelists are asked not to interact with audience members during the open panel review so as not to create the appearance of lobbying or conflicts of interest. Audience members are also reminded of this during their orientation. Panelists should notify OAC staff immediately if any person attempts to lobby for an application(s) or make any other attempt to influence panelists before or during a panel meeting.

NOTE: Panelists who are affiliated with a college or university will be considered to have a conflict of interest with any application from any department or campus of that college or university.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

As part of its efforts to be accessible and responsive to all Ohioans, the OAC board actively seeks comments from staff, applicants, panelists and others about the development of its policies. A time for discussing OAC policies is scheduled following the grant review portion of panel meetings and at special sessions. Throughout each panel meeting, panelists are encouraged to make note of policies or processes they wish to bring up during this policy discussion. OAC staff may also provide panelists in advance with a list of items they want panelists to consider. Policy issues identified by each panel are then presented to the OAC board's Policy and Planning Committee and then to the full OAC board for their authorization.

OUR THANKS

Panelists play a critical role in helping the OAC fulfill its mission to fund and support quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically. Without your assistance, expertise and time, an open panel process would be impossible. The OAC board and staff greatly appreciate your service.

If you have any questions or comments about the information contained in this handbook, please contact an OAC staff member.

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING

Ohio Arts Council

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"The Ohio Arts Council is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically."

The Ohio Arts Council was created in 1965 to "foster and encourage the development of the arts and assist the preservation of Ohio's cultural heritage." This is accomplished by the Council in two primary methods; first, through the various grant funding programs that the Council operates to provide support to artists and to make arts activities available to a broad segment of Ohio's public; and secondly, by providing services that help to enhance the growth of the arts. A variety of grant programs, services and other resources are operated and overseen by the OAC.

The Ohio Arts Council is committed to the economic, educational and cultural development of the state. The OAC believes the arts should be shared by the people of Ohio. The arts arise from public, individual and organizational efforts. The OAC supports and encourages these efforts.

ohio.oac.gov

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