



ARTS COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20250224-011

Date: 2/24/2025

Subject: RECOMMENDATION FOR EVOLVING THE CURRENT CULTURAL ARTS GRANTS PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

Motioned By: Commissioner Medicharla

Seconded By: Commissioner Garza

Recommendation

This recommendation comes from the **FY25 Arts Commission Working group** chaired by Commissioner Nagavalli Medicharla with participants including Arts Commissioners Acia Gray, Gina Houston, Faiza Kracheni and Monica Maldonado, and Community members including Bonnie Cullum (Vortex), Candyce Rusk (Individual artist, creative + business writer), John Riedi (Austin Creative Alliance), Matrex Kilgore (Individual artist, Theatre/Arts education, TCA background), Toni Bravo (DiverseSpace Dance Theatre), Anne Charlotte Patterson (Individual artist, Dance, Music Commission), Celeste Quesada (Non-profit/film, Music Commission)

Note: The recommendation includes sections highlighted in yellow indicating difference of approach/opinion on the item within the working group.

Description of Recommendation to Council

RE-DEFINE PROGRAMS

- THRIVE (biennial): Two Year Operational Support to help arts nonprofits **get to institutional status**
 - Emerging
 - **Established / Legacy**
- ELEVATE (annual): Annual Project-based Support for arts nonprofits, art groups, and independent artists.
 - *Note: Removed “creative businesses”*
- Nexus (semi-annual): Semi-annual / short term Project-based Support for arts nonprofits, independent artists, and art groups
 - *Note: Removed “creative businesses”*

RE-DEFINE APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Thrive:

- Arts Nonprofits
- Organization should be registered as an arts non-profit for min. 5 years and have demonstrated creative history for the past 5 years
- Org operational budget min. **\$50K** in the past year

Elevate:

- Arts Non-profits
 - Organization should be registered as a non-profit for min. 3 years and have demonstrated creative history for the past 3 years

- Independent Artists
 - Demonstrated creative history for the past 2 years
 - Require fiscal sponsorship
 - Fiscal sponsorship fee limited to 10% of grant or less
 - Sponsoring entities should meet accepted standards for sponsoring qualifications - separation of funds, financial processes meeting GAAP, do not share staff with sponsored projects, etc.
- All applicants need 50% matching funds incl. IN KIND or possible staff exploration of questions that would highlight this community engagement
- Arts Group
 - Demonstrated creative history for the past 2 years
 - Require fiscal sponsorship
 - Fiscal sponsorship fee limited to 10% of grant or less
 - Sponsoring entities should meet accepted standards for sponsoring qualifications - separation of funds, financial processes meeting GAP, do not share staff with sponsored project, etc
- All applicants need 50% matching funds incl. in kind or staff exploration of questions that would highlight community engagement

Nexus:

- Independent artists
- Arts groups
- Arts Nonprofits
- Demonstrated creative history for the past 1 year
- No fiscal sponsorship requirement
- No matching funds required

RE-DEFINE FUNDING CRITERIA:

- **Thrive for Operational / Core Support Grants (Biennial)**
 - Grant amounts for non-profit orgs up to 50% of (average of) past two years of operating budget, with a cap of \$150K per year maximum in grant amount.
 - Provides incremental growth/scaling
 - Ex. An org with avg. \$50K operating budget can get up to \$25K per year in grant funds making their potential annual operating budget \$75K / year for the subsequent two years.
 - Ex. An org with avg. \$100K operating budget can get up to \$50K per year in grant funds making their potential annual operating budget at \$150K / year for the subsequent two years.
 - Ex. An org with \$500K avg. operating budget can get a max. of \$150K per year in grant funds, making their potential annual operating budget at \$650K / year for the subsequent two years.
 - To effectively support a diverse ecosystem of organizations, THRIVE can strategically prioritize grants for entities that require a financial boost to advance their development. By allocating funds to organizations that need this critical support, THRIVE can help level the playing field, enabling smaller or mid-sized organizations to scale up and enhance their impact.
 - An organization can receive up to 2 cycles of Thrive grants in a 6-year period
- **Elevate for Project-Based Grants (Annual)**
 - Refer to NEA GAP funding for types of projects
 - [GRANTS FOR ARTS PROJECTS | National Endowment for the Arts](#)

- Grant amounts for non-profit orgs up to 50% of (average of) past two years of operating budget with a cap of \$100K maximum in grant amount
- Individuals / Groups with fiscal sponsorship at \$10K-\$30K based on project ask
- **Nexus (Annual):**
 - Grant amounts at \$2.5K, \$5K and \$10K grants based on project ask

RE-DEFINE APPLICATION SCORING CRITERIA

Note: Adopted from TCA

Artistic Quality: 1-50 points

- Artistic significance
- Quality of works of art
- Quality of artists
- Impact on artists
- Quality of services

Capability: 1-25 points

- Administrative capability
- Personnel
- Demonstrated history
- Budget
- Planning, implementation, evaluation

Impact: 1-25 points

- Public service
- Audience or participants
- Economic Impact & Tourism
- Outreach

RE-DEFINE PANEL COMPOSITION, SCORING AND OPERATIONS

- **Panel Composition:**
 - Domain expertise required.
 - Combination of local and neutral reviewers.
- **Scoring Adjustments:**
 - Define which scores to discard (high/low) and normalize scores within distinct panels.
- **Transparency:**
 - Applicant's ability to provide clarification within a set timeframe on inquiries from panel
 - Applicant's ability to provide answers in live session to panel
 - Applicant's ability to view in real-time their individual application panel only
 - Panel subject matter expert to provide clarifications to panelists and keep things in track
- **Recruitment & Training:**
 - Actively recruit specialized panelists (theatre, dance, visual arts, film, etc.) for discipline-specific reviews
 - Clearly communicate scoring criteria to ensure fairness and understanding
- **Evaluation**
 - Separate evaluations into three categories—individual artists, arts groups, and nonprofits—to ensure fair, tailored assessments
 - Discipline-specific evaluations within each category to enhance accuracy and relevance in the review process

OTHER OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Applicants receive their scores with comments to improve future applications
- Change grant names to reflect the purpose (ex: Project Grant, Operational Support)
- Utilize clear and concise language in grant applications: Use clear, jargon-free language to describe applicants, their work, project details, impact, and audience. This ensures accessibility, broadens the applicant pool, and makes the grant process more inclusive.
- Expand marketing of grant program opportunities to community
- Post-program metrics for continued improvements in grants program
- Establishing a Sustainable Funding Pipeline for Legacy Organizations in Need of Operational Support: Developing a dedicated funding stream for legacy organizations—arts and cultural institutions with a long-standing history of serving the community, demonstrating significant cultural impact, and maintaining a track record of artistic excellence and public engagement. These organizations may have been foundational to the local arts ecosystem but may not meet the specific eligibility criteria of the THRIVE program due to funding structures, evolving grant requirements, or shifting priorities in arts funding.
- ACME department to provide grant program guidelines-draft to the Arts Commission with reasonable time for
 - The Arts Commission to review and provide feedback
 - ACME to incorporate Arts Commission’s feedback, as suitable, into the guidelines

This will ensure alignment with community goals, transparency and stakeholder trust.
- Arts Commission to approve grant program guidelines-draft

Overall, the above recommendation provides a structured approach to funding, eligibility, and evaluation, ensuring transparency, accessibility, and effectiveness in grant allocation.

Rationale:

Note: The working group plans to continue to meet with some new commissioners and new community members in the mix to further build on these recommendations.

Vote: 8-0

For: Chair Celina Zisman, Acia Gray, Amy Mok, Faiza Kracheni, Gina Houston, Felipe Garza, Monica Maldonado, Nagavalli Medicharla

Against: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Vice Chair Heidi Schmalbach, Keyheira Keys

Attest: Jesus Varela

