

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. My organization is incorporated and has been providing public programs for two and a half years but we just started the IRS Tax Exempt process. Are we eligible?

A. Yes. The track record in programming counts as long as your IRS filings are in process at the time of filing the Notice of Intent to Apply and you have achieved both incorporation and tax exempt status by June 1, 2012.

Q. How can I be sure I meet the multi-county impact eligibility requirement?

A. Review your ticket sale/attendance records, mailing lists, and audience surveys to understand where your audiences are coming from geographically. Consult your organization's mission. In addition, consider whether you receive press coverage regularly from regional press or only from local press. All these factors combined should help you determine if your organization is regional or local in its service.

Q. The narrative topics seem in places redundant. Does the Council really want me to repeat information in different parts of my narrative?

A. No. The narrative topics are intended to provide a framework and give you some guidance on the kinds of information panelists will need to consider when addressing the evaluation criteria. The questions or information requested under each topic heading must also serve organizations of various sizes, geographic locations, and disciplines. The questions posed are not seeking the same information in different parts of the narrative. If you feel you have given a topic sufficient coverage in your narrative in one area, it is not necessary to repeat the information. Look at the topics and your narrative holistically and convey what you feel should be in your narrative, even if there is not a question posed for a unique circumstance you face.

Q. Does the Council fund capital renovation or construction projects?

A. Not at this time. When the NJ Cultural Trust grows sufficiently the Council will design and administer a program for capital projects. In applications, organizations should only present their operating, program or project budgets as requested and operating budgets should not include income and expenses related to major capital projects.

Q. Must I demonstrate I meet all the Council Priorities/Best Practices and Models in order to receive a positive evaluation?

A. No. Applicants should review the list and their programs to determine in which area or areas (if any) it makes a significant contribution. Significant is the key word. The panelists are similarly counseled to note which area(s) it appears an applicant makes a significant contribution.

Q. Who serves on the grant review panels?

A. Your peers who are widely recognized in the field for their accomplishments. We receive suggestions for individual evaluators from many sources, including applicants, and reach out to these individuals to find out their interest in being considered. Credentials of potential panelists are reviewed by staff and then the Grants Committee of the Council. The full Council votes on adding individuals to the pool of approved evaluators. From this pool the Council configures panels annually which mirror the applicant pool and which are balanced with respect to artistic discipline, cultural and/or regional diversity; and include various skill sets.

Q. My organization does not keep its financial records the same way the Finance Charts request information. How do I complete the charts?

A. The expense and income categories on the charts are part of a National Information Standard used by every state arts council to review grant application budgets. It is also important that panelists have the ability to fully understand budgets by having all budgets presented in the same way. The expense and income categories are defined in the Glossary section of the Guidelines and you can always check with Council staff if you are not sure how to categorize expenses or income. In addition all information must be for the 12-month July-June grant period even if your organization's fiscal year ends at a time other than June 30. In this case you would take your expenses by month for the July-June period that for your organization spans two fiscal years and complete the charts.

Q. Isn't the grants process really political and doesn't it depend on who you know?

A. Absolutely not. The Council maintains a conflict-free process that removes staff completely from the evaluation process and relies on independent peer panelists to assess applications. The panels use only the published criteria to evaluate the applications. The Grants Committee of the Council bases its funding decisions directly on the rankings and consensus comments of the panels, which include feedback on the Council Priorities that applicants significantly advance. Committee members recuse themselves and abstain from discussion and voting if there is an applicant with which they have even the perception of an affiliation, as does the full Council when it votes on the Committee's recommendations. While the Council respectfully listens to the support expressed by elected officials and others in the community, its decisions are based on the panel process and its well informed understanding of the needs and priority issues that the Council's programs and services seek to address.

Q. How is it fair to compare my small organization to a major institution with a long history given that our applications are reviewed in the same panel?

A. Applicants are not compared to one another. Each applicant states its mission or project goals and the panels assess how well the applicant is able, or is poised to, carry out that mission artistically with sound governance, finances and public benefit. In a sense, applicants are "competing" not with other applicants, but against the statement of their own goals. It is therefore important for applicants not to overdo superlatives or claim they are "the best," "the only," etc. unless they can back up those claims and want those to be the yardstick against which they will be measured. Also, the panel reflects peers from both small and large organizations.

Q. Why is another organization that I believe is similar to mine getting more funding than my organization?

A. Many factors could be at play in this situation. Very often, frankly, organizations are not aware that an organization they perceive to be similar in fact has a much larger budget and more extensive or different programs and audiences. The other organization could have also received a stronger evaluation through the panel process, resulting in receipt of a larger percentage of their request.

Q. Why are applications not funded and what recourse does one have?

A. Many factors go into the funding decisions. The evaluation by the peer review panel is usually the most direct explanation. A ranking that is not particularly strong indicates that all members of the panel agreed to a variety of weaknesses in the organization, program or project as evident to them from their review of the application. In the event the panel misread an application, applicants may appeal the decision by indicating those comments they believe are in error and cite parts of the original application submission where the misinterpretation occurred (no new information can be introduced in this process). Also, applications may not be funded simply because the Council did not have sufficient funding to support as many organizations or projects as it would have liked and therefore put the resources it had into those that were regarded as the very best by the peer panels.