

Chapter 22

Saskatchewan Arts Board – Awarding Grants Impartially and Transparently

1.0 MAIN POINTS

One way the Saskatchewan Arts Board supports the arts in Saskatchewan is through awarding grants to professional artists, professional arts organizations, and communities. It awards between \$6 million and \$8 million in grants each year.

The Arts Board had, other than the following areas, effective processes to award grants impartially and transparently for the 18-month period ended June 30, 2018.

To improve impartiality, the Arts Board needs to obtain signed agreements from peer evaluators before it gives them grant application packages, and record the time of conflict of interest absences in its meeting minutes. This decreases the risk of potential disclosure of confidential information, and better shows appropriate handling of declared conflicts.

To improve transparency, the Arts Board needs to:

- Set the frequency of its formal reviews of major grant programs, and track the receipt and resolution of complaints. Tracking of complaints enables identifying common themes to consider when reviewing and updating grant programs.
- Document how its uses and selects independent assessors (type of peer evaluators used for unique genres of art), and develop detailed written guidance on scoring grant applications. This promotes openness of the Arts Board processes to award grants and assists in scoring applications equitably and transparently.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Arts Impact Communities

Art has many forms from visual arts to performing arts. Forms of art include painting, sculpture, literature, architecture, music, dance, theater, photography, and films.

The arts can positively impact the development of local communities and social networks, and contribute to innovation within a community.¹ Statistics Canada estimates the direct economic impact of culture products at \$915 million in Saskatchewan in 2016, or 1.3% of provincial GDP.²

In addition, research shows that 82% of Canadians believe engagement with the arts leads to good health and well-being.³ Research also states that 95% of Canadians believe

¹ Creative City Network of Canada, *Arts and Positive Change in Communities*, (2005), p. 2.

² Statistics Canada, *Provincial and Territorial Culture Indicators, 2016*, (2018), www.statcan.gc.ca/dailyquotidien/180227/dq180227a-eng.htm (06 March 2018).

³ Strategic Counsel, *Building the Case for Business Support of the Arts*, (2015). www.businessforthearts.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/04/Business-Support-for-the-Arts-%E2%80%93-Making-the-Case.pdf (31 July 2018).



that arts experiences are a valuable way of bringing together people from different languages and cultural traditions.⁴

2.2 Importance of Arts Board Supporting Artists Fairly and Transparently

The Saskatchewan Arts Board is the oldest public arts funder in North America.⁵ A Cabinet-appointed Board of Directors, of which at least one-third the arts community has nominated, governs it.

As shown in **Figure 1**, the Arts Board’s mission is to recognize, encourage, and support the arts to enrich community well-being, creativity, diversity, and artistic prosperity.⁶

Figure 1 – The Saskatchewan Arts Board Vision, Mission, Values, and Strategic Goals

Vision:

- A creative society where the arts and artistic expression play a dynamic role and are accessible to everyone in Saskatchewan.

Mission:

- The Saskatchewan Arts Board recognizes, encourages, and supports the arts to enrich community well-being, creativity, diversity, and artistic prosperity.

Values:

- Excellence—We support artists, organizations and communities striving for excellence in the arts.
- Diversity—We are committed to supporting artists and arts activities that are reflective of the diversity of Saskatchewan.
- Adaptability—We support artists and arts organizations as they pursue new and innovative practices.
- Accountability—Our policies and processes are transparent and reflect a commitment to effective stewardship of the public trust we hold.
- Leadership—We strive to lead through consultation, collaboration, responsiveness, and advocacy.

Strategic goals for 2016-19:

- Goal 1: Champion of the arts. The Arts Board will take a leadership role in fearlessly advocating for Saskatchewan art and artists.
- Goal 2: Art-and-artist-centred. The Arts Board will ensure responsible and responsive delivery of relevant programs and services.
- Goal 3: Public Engagement. Our work will enrich the quality of life of the peoples of Saskatchewan by supporting access to and increasing appreciation and understanding of the arts in the province.

Source: Saskatchewan Arts Board, *2016-19 Strategic Plan*, pp. 2 and 4.

One of the ways the Arts Board supports artists is through awarding grants. The Arts Board uses public money to provide grants. The Arts Board receives the majority of its money from the Ministry of Parks, Culture, and Sport (General Revenue Fund).

Figure 2 sets out the seven major grant programs (shaded in grey) and other grant initiatives that the Arts Board has awarded to professional artists, professional arts organizations, and communities over the last six years.^{7,8} Each year, the Arts Board awards between approximately \$6 million to \$8 million in grants.

In 2016-17, the 61 organizations that received grants from the Arts Board presented 5,324 exhibitions and performances to almost 1.4 million people.⁹

⁴ Environics Research Group, *Arts and Heritage Access and Availability Survey 2016-2017*, (2017), p. 34.

⁵ Saskatchewan Arts Board, *2016-19 Strategic Plan*, (2016), p. 4.

⁶ Saskatchewan Arts Board, *2016-2017 Annual Report*, (2017), p. 5.

⁷ Professional artists have completed training in their discipline through formal studies or apprenticeships, maintain a professional practice, and display or present their work in a manner recognized by peers in their art form.

⁸ Professional arts organizations have a professional arts mandate in the areas of research, creation, production, presentation, exhibition, publishing, and the development of professional artists or community engagement.

⁹ www.saskartsboard.com/menu/about/who-we-are.html (06 March 2018).

Figure 2—Grant Expense by Program for 2013-2018^{A,B}

Program	Frequency of Adjudication Session 2018	Fiscal Year					
		2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
		(in thousands)					
Professional Arts Organizations Program	Biennial	\$3,312	\$3,925	\$3,645	\$3,642	\$3,917	\$3,179
SaskFestivals	Triennial						
SaskFestival project	Annual	761	761	771	842	891	778
Independent Artists	Semi-annual	697	695	695	675	675	875
Indigenous/ Métis Art and Artists	Semi-annual	200	200	200	200	200	181
Artists in Communities	Annual	375	375	415	495	665	555
Artists in Schools	Annual	258	250	265	300	254	261
Scholarships	Annual	25	22	25	25	25	25
Culture on the Go	NA	---	331	268	300	282	511
Other granting initiatives	Various	70	105	162	---	343	1,867
Grants returned		(6)	(12)	(76)	(151)	(30)	(42)
Total		\$5,692	\$6,652	\$6,370	\$6,328	\$7,222	\$8,190

Source: Saskatchewan Arts Board Annual Reports for fiscal years 2013-2018.

^A Saskatchewan Arts Board fiscal year is from April 1 to March 31.

^B Grey shaded cells reflect major grant programs.

Each year, the Arts Board receives about 400 grant applications for its different programs. Typically, the Arts Board can fund between one-fifth to one-quarter of them. To treat applicants fairly, the Arts Board uses a peer adjudication process to decide whom to award grants.

Good grant administration includes using strong processes for assessing eligibility for funding and prioritizing funding applicants as necessary. To be transparent, the process must be well defined and understandable to interested applicants, and the basis of decisions well documented, and communicated. To be impartial, peer adjudication processes typically use suitably skilled, knowledgeable, and objective peer evaluators (e.g., jurors and independent assessors) for each adjudication session.¹⁰ Jurors are peer arts professionals who evaluate grant applications and can recommend funding. Independent assessors provide specialized expertise that supplements the work of a jury (i.e., to provide comments and score a project with a specialized discipline).

Not having good grant administration increases the risk of awarding grants to applicants that do not contribute to the intended outcome of a particular grant program, and of grants viewed as not being awarded impartially or transparently. In addition, not having a transparent and fair process of adjudicating grants may jeopardize the Arts Board's reputation and diminish public trust.

¹⁰ Office of the Auditor General Western Australia, *Grant Administration Report 16*, (2016), pp. 4 and 6.



3.0 AUDIT CONCLUSION

We concluded that for the 18-month period ended June 30, 2018, the Saskatchewan Arts Board had, other than the following areas, effective processes to award grants impartially and transparently.

To improve transparency, the Arts Board needs to:

- Set the frequency of its formal reviews of major grant programs, and track the receipt and resolution of complaints
- Document how it uses and selects independent assessors, and develop detailed written guidance on scoring grant applications
- Communicate application submission alternatives to potential applicants with limited or no internet access

To improve impartiality, the Arts Board needs to:

- Obtain signed agreements from peer evaluators before it gives them application packages, and record the time of conflict of interest absences in its meeting minutes

Figure 3—Audit Objective, Criteria, and Approach

Audit Objective: to assess the effectiveness of the Saskatchewan Arts Board's processes for the 18-month period ending June 30, 2018, to award grants impartially and transparently.

Audit Criteria:

Processes to:

1. Have clear and accessible policies
 - 1.1 Maintain current approved policies for adjudicating grants (including documentation requirements, and mechanisms to appeal/complain)
 - 1.2 Maintain current approved policies for identifying and avoiding conflict of interests in awarding grants (including documentation requirements)
 - 1.3 Align policies with good practice
 - 1.4 Keep staff and potential applicants informed of key application and adjudication policies
2. Determine clear objectives for each program
 - 2.1 Identify objectives for each program (e.g., supporting emerging artists, supporting arts organizations)
 - 2.2 Verify program objectives align with strategic direction
 - 2.3 Obtain appropriate approval of program objectives
3. Support applicants in providing quality applications
 - 3.1 Define the program eligibility criteria in sufficient detail for potential applicants and staff understanding
 - 3.2 Give potential applicants sufficient advance notice of availability of grant funding and requirements
 - 3.3 Establish with potential applicants open and effective communication on grant application process (e.g., expectations, deadlines)
4. Define the specifications for adjudicating grants
 - 4.1 Design evaluation criteria to support the impartial ranking and prioritization of eligible grant applications
 - 4.2 Identify expertise required to assess eligibility and adjudicate applications for each program
 - 4.3 Approve jurors with suitable expertise (e.g., theatre professional)
5. Award grants within a reasonable timeframe
 - 5.1 Identify eligible applicants using staff with suitable knowledge
 - 5.2 Select successful applications (using evaluation criteria and jurors)
 - 5.3 Obtain appropriate approval prior to awarding grants to successful applicants
 - 5.4 Inform applicants of decisions within reasonable timeframe
 - 5.5 Address applicant complaints using approved process

Audit Approach:

To conduct this audit, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Arts Board’s processes, we used the above criteria based on our related work, reviews of literature including reports of other auditors, and consultations with management. The Arts Board’s management agreed with the above criteria.

We examined the Arts Board’s policies, procedures, and records that relate to awarding grants, and compared them to other Canadian arts funders. We interviewed relevant staff responsible for administering grant applications and selecting jurors, and observed adjudication. We tested a sample of 30 grant applications, and jury records to assess operating effectiveness of the Arts Board’s processes to award grants.

4.0 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Objectives of Grant Programs Align with Strategic Direction, but Program Review Frequency not Set

The Arts Board developed and refined objectives for each grant program that align with its strategic direction. In addition, it used program reviews of each grant program to keep those objectives current. However, it has not defined how often it expects reviews of its major grant programs to occur.

The Arts Board has awarded grants to support Saskatchewan artists and arts organizations since 1948. At June 2018, it had seven major grant programs and other grant initiatives (e.g., a micro-grant for short-term projects) (see **Figure 2**).

One of its three goals is to be *Art and Artist Centred—The Arts Board will ensure responsible and responsive delivery of relevant programs and services, building and maintaining transparent and accessible processes.*¹¹ See **Figure 4** for planned actions for this goal.

Figure 4—Planned Actions for Goal 2: Art and Artist Centred

The Arts Board will:

- Continue its work around program review, renewing its commitment to active consultation as part of these processes.
- Develop new ways to serve artists in rural and remote communities.
- Move towards online applications, bearing in mind the technical restrictions that may exist in remote regions of the province.
- Investigate, within the three years of its Strategic Plan, opportunities for new programming that can support Indigenous artists, artists in remote and rural areas, and newcomer artists.

Source: Saskatchewan Arts Board, *2016-19 Strategic Plan*, pp. 4 and 11.

Having well-defined objectives for each grant program is essential to develop clear and measurable criteria for grant eligibility and criteria to evaluate applicants against them.

Starting in 2015, as part of the development and then later implementation of its *2016-19 Strategic Plan*, the Arts Board reviewed each of its grant programs to refine program objectives, and confirm the programs remain relevant. To conduct program reviews, the Arts Board launched public consultations for six major programs. Staff traveled the province meeting with past and current applicants to collect feedback on its programs—

¹¹ Saskatchewan Arts Board, *2016-19 Strategic Plan*, pp. 4 and 11.



what worked well and what should change. For example, professional arts organizations (e.g., Regina Symphony Orchestra Inc., Saskatoon Opera Association) expressed concerns around the adequacy of operating grants and potential inequities within the program.

In addition, the Arts Board obtained input on program changes from its staff and former jurors.

By June 2018, the Arts Board had formally reviewed six of the seven major grant programs within the last three years.¹² It last did program reviews of many of its grant programs more than 10 years ago. As of June 2018, the Arts Board had not determined when it expects to review each major grant program next.

Not having an established program review cycle may result in program ineffectiveness, as the grant programs may not meet current artists' needs. Having an established frequency of formal program reviews will help to build and maintain transparent and accessible programs and services to artists. It is a good practice to have an established program review frequency.

1. We recommend that the Saskatchewan Arts Board establish the frequency of formal program reviews of its major grant programs.

Consultations and program reviews resulted in changes to grant program objectives, program eligibility criteria, evaluation criteria, program guides, and application packages. After the public consultations, the Arts Board drafted reports. It made them publicly available for further comments. In response to issues identified, the Arts Board refined program outcomes and related evaluation criteria for some of its grant programs.

We found all revised program objectives aligned with the Arts Board's Vision, Mission, Values and Strategic Goals (see **Figure 1**). We also found that the Chief Executive Officer of the Arts Board appropriately approved program objectives and kept the Board informed on the progress of program reviews.

4.2 Fair and Objective Procedures Established, but Need to Include the Use of Independent Assessors

The Arts Board has clear, current, and documented policies and procedures to administer grant applications, select jurors, and make decisions about awarding grants. These policies and procedures appropriately refer to and reinforce the principles of fairness and objectivity in the adjudication process. Other than for independent assessors, they clearly identify key participants in the process and their roles.

Consistent with *The Arts Board Act*, the Arts Board has established its adjudication processes; it involves qualified persons from the arts community using a peer adjudication process. These processes involve staff of the Arts Board (i.e., the Chief Executive Officer, program consultants), peer evaluators (called independent assessors and jurors), and the Board of Directors of the Arts Board.

¹² SaskFestivals Program was under review and planned to be completed by the end of August 2018.

The Governance Manual for the Board of Directors includes the grant programs and adjudication policy. The Board reviews this policy annually.¹³ The grant programs and adjudication policy:

- Gives the Chief Executive Officer responsibility for establishing adjudication processes and fair criteria for grants to ensure the integrity and objectiveness of a jury
- Requires the Chief Executive Officer to bring all grants in excess of \$20,000 to the Board of Directors for approval

In practice, the Chief Executive Officer directly administers the awarding of grants using program consultants. The Arts Board's website and operational policies sufficiently document the role and key responsibilities of program consultants.

The Arts Board employs six program consultants located in two offices—in Regina and Saskatoon. Each consultant is responsible for a particular grant program (e.g., Independent Artists Program) and particular discipline (e.g., Visual Arts) based on their professional background. Program consultants decide whether to use independent assessors, and lead the selection of peer jurors. In addition, they make sure jurors evaluate only eligible grant applications. They establish separate juries for each competition for grants. The Arts Board holds separate competitions for each grant program and it holds two competitions each year for a few grant programs (e.g., Independent Artists and Indigenous/Métis Arts and Artists).

The Art Board sufficiently documents the role and key responsibilities of jurors in two key documents—an Adjudication Guide and a Juror Manual. These documents outline the process of awarding grants, and establish guiding principles of fairness and objectivity in the process. They require jurors to be free from a conflict of interest, evaluate eligible applications fairly and objectively, and recommend to the Chief Executive Officer who, based on merit, will receive grants and how much.

The Arts Board updated its Juror Manual and Adjudication Guide in 2017-18. The Arts Board's staff advised us that the Chief Executive Officer had informally approved updates through email or verbally; we did not see any evidence of that approval. Documenting approval of changes to key manuals and guides would readily show the Board and staff that the Chief Executive Officer completed the review and fulfilled his responsibilities.

In addition, the Arts Board's policies and processes do not specifically refer to the role or use of independent assessors. In practice, the Arts Board uses independent assessors to evaluate applications that need specialized expertise (e.g., graphic novels). Independent assessors assess those applications against evaluation criteria, and give the Arts Board their comments and scores. The program consultants share those comments and scores of independent assessors with jurors at the face-to-face jury day, and include the scores in the final rankings.

We found the Arts Board used independent assessors to assess applications for 3 of 31 juries held during the 18-month period ending June 2018 (our audit period).

¹³ The annual review of the Governance Manual did not occur in 2017-18. Five of 12 members resigned in June 2017; terms of some other members expired in 2017-18. This resulted in Cabinet appointing 11 new members to the 12-member Board in January 2018 (Order in Council 15/2018). Due to these changes, the policy was not reviewed in 2017-18.



Documenting the selection and use of independent assessors enhances the transparency of the Arts Board processes to award grants.

2. We recommend that the Saskatchewan Arts Board set out, in writing, its process to use and select independent assessors when awarding grants.

Staff of the Arts Board keep themselves current with general practices that other Canadian arts-granting bodies use. For example, the Arts Board is one of nine provincial members of the Canadian Public Arts Funders.¹⁴ The provincial members meet regularly to share information, initiatives, and best practices amongst their peers. In addition, the Arts Board staff informally discuss and share practices and issues with other art professionals in public art organizations.

We found, except for a few areas described in the following sections, the Arts Board's processes to award grants are similar to those used by other Canadian arts granting jurisdictions. That is, it adjudicates grants using juries consisting of peers, and makes decisions based on the merit of the project set out in the grant application by evaluating against pre-determined evaluation criteria.

4.3 Conflicts of Interest Clearly Defined—Process Generally Followed

The Arts Board has clearly defined, in writing, conflict of interest as it relates to granting processes, its expectations on declaring conflicts of interest, and the ways to manage them. However, staff did not always sufficiently document its management of conflicts of interest as its processes require.

The Arts Board maintains specific policies for board members and staff about conflict of interest. These policies require board members and staff to be aware of their responsibility to be alert to potential conflicts, and to declare potential conflicts promptly.

As reflected in **Figure 5**, the Arts Board's policies and guidance defines, in general, conflict of interest as a situation in which board members, staff, jurors or their close associates or family members either may benefit from or be disadvantaged by the outcome of a decision they are in a position to influence.

In addition, its Adjudication Guide, Juror Manual, and standard agreements with evaluators (i.e., jurors, independent assessors) provide clear direction about conflict of interest and emphasize their responsibility to declare potential conflicts promptly. Agreements, that both independent assessors and jurors must sign, require them to declare any conflicts of interest, keep private confidential information, and follow the Arts Board adjudication process.

The Arts Board makes these procedures readily available to its staff as well.

¹⁴ Canadian Public Arts Funders is a network that unites and serves the federal, provincial, and territorial arts councils and equivalent public arts funders.

Figure 5—Key Arts Board Guidance on Conflicts of Interest for Jurors and Independent Assessors

The Arts Board outlines attributes of jurors (e.g., treat applications equitably, without prejudice; are able to work collaboratively and to reach consensus) and their responsibilities.

The Arts Board differentiates direct, indirect, and perceived conflicts of interest as follows.

- Direct conflict of interest is when a juror or his/her immediate family member will benefit financially from the success of an application (e.g., a juror's immediate family member is an applicant). Individuals who are in direct conflict of interest with any of the grant applications cannot serve as jurors.
- Indirect conflict of interest occurs when some factor makes it difficult for a juror to evaluate an application objectively. For example, the juror has written a letter of recommendation for the grant applicant. In such case, an individual is still able to serve as a juror, but that juror cannot participate in the discussion and scoring of the application. Depending on the severity of the conflict, that individual may be asked to leave the meeting during the discussion and/or scoring of an application.
- A perceived conflict of interest occurs in cases where an outsider could believe that a juror finds it difficult to be objective because of indirect conflict whether it is present or not.

The Juror Agreement requires jurors to do the following

- Declare any conflict of interest
- Review the Juror Manual to familiarize themselves with their responsibilities and the process they are expected to follow
- Review the program application package and evaluation criteria
- Review and assess each application and the provided support fairly and objectively

The Juror Agreement also requires jury meeting minutes to include the time a juror in a conflict of interest left and returned to the meeting.

Source: Excerpts from Saskatchewan Arts Board's Juror Manual and Juror Agreement.

We found that the definitions of conflicts of interest and related examples along with the Arts Board's guidance on declaring, documenting, and handling of conflicts are robust and consistent with good practice. In addition, we found procedures instruct jurors to be fair and objective, to protect personal and confidential information, and treat each application equally and non-discriminatory.

Once the jury is approved, the administrator sends a juror package to the selected jurors. The package consists of the Juror Manual, the Adjudication Guide, program guidelines, all applications with support material, a juror agreement, ranking documents (e.g., rating sheets), and other administrative documents.

Providing the juror package prior to the adjudication sessions gives jurors time to consider applications prior to the jury date and to prepare for discussions of the grant applications at the adjudication session. Grant application packages contain confidential information about applicants.

The Arts Board has independent assessors and jurors return signed agreements after they have received grant application packages. Independent assessors typically return signed agreements with assessed applications, and jurors do so on the day of the jury session, typically about three to four weeks after receipt of the applications.

Not requiring receipt of a signed agreement from evaluators prior to sharing confidential information may diminish the benefit of the signed agreement. In addition, it increases the risk of evaluators potentially disclosing confidential information and not declaring potential conflicts of interest promptly.



3. We recommend that the Saskatchewan Arts Board obtain signed agreements from evaluators before releasing grant application packages to them.

The program consultant chairs grant adjudication sessions and facilitates objective discussion between jurors. At the beginning of the meeting, the program consultant reviews the adjudication process with jurors, and asks them whether any conflicts of interest exist.

In our observation of a jury session, we found that staff did not sufficiently document the handling of a declared conflict of interest. The session minutes documented the disclosure of conflicts of interest for both Arts Board staff and jurors, and how the declared conflicts were handled (e.g., excused individual from related deliberations because of a potential conflict or impartiality). It did not document the time the person with a declared conflict left and returned to the meeting.

The Arts Board's Juror Agreement states that jury meeting minutes must include the time a juror in a conflict of interest left and returned to the meeting.

Recording the time individuals with potential conflict or impartiality left and returned to the meeting helps organizations show declared conflicts (real or perceived) were handled appropriately and impartial discussions occurred.

4. We recommend that the Saskatchewan Arts Board record the time the person with a declared conflict of interest left and returned to a grant adjudication session.

4.4 Grant Availability Sufficiently Communicated

The Arts Board communicates information about its programming and availability of grants to artists primarily through use of its website and social media. It uses alternate methods to communicate key information in response to ad-hoc requests from artists and arts organizations.

Its website provides a clear and concise explanation for potential applicants of awarding grants from the point of submitting the application to notification of jury results. The Arts Board uses social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) to reinforce and advise potential applicants of information on its website.

Its website includes deadlines for grant applications. Application guidelines and frequently asked questions are also included on the website to help applicants understand the application and adjudication process.

In addition, the Arts Board advertises its programming and availability of grants through participating and funding of arts festivals. It also places a few advertisements in either web- or print-based publications to reach specific groups of artists or art organizations (e.g., it advertises twice a year in a monthly newspaper whose readership is primarily the Indigenous community). Furthermore, it asks all grant recipients to use the Arts Board logo on their printed materials to acknowledge its support and increase awareness of its grant programs.

In 2017-18, the Arts Board started to move to applicants applying for grants online via its website (e.g., for the Micro-grant and the Prince Edward Arts Scholarship grant programs). Beginning fall 2018, the Arts Board plans to move to only accepting online grant applications.

It recognizes some artists and arts organizations with potential interest in applying for grants may not have internet access (e.g., those in rural communities or in the north). In these cases, it expects them to seek internet access (e.g., through a public library or a friend).

In our review of 2017-18 applicants, we found that all applicants resided in communities with internet access. We also found that the Arts Board is aware of ways to assist applicants that do not have access or the ability to complete applications online.

At June 2018, the Arts Board had not yet communicated alternate arrangements to potential applicants without internet access.

4.5 Grant Eligibility Criteria Clear and Understandable

The Arts Board reviewed and clarified grant eligibility criteria to make it clear and understandable for applicants.

For each grant program, the Arts Board established criteria that set out applicants who are eligible to apply. For example, in order to apply for the Independent Artists grant, the professional artist working independently or collaboratively should:

- Hold Canadian citizenship or Permanent Resident of Canada status, maintain a physical residence in Saskatchewan, and
- Be able to show that (s)he has pursued artistic practice in Saskatchewan for a minimum of one year prior to the program deadline.

Another eligibility requirement is that applicants applying for a grant must have met reporting requirements (e.g., report stating how the grant was used and how the project affected the artist's art practice/career) for previously awarded grants. The Arts Board used input from program reviews to update its grant eligibility criteria and to confirm its understandability.

We found that applicants can easily access grant program eligibility criteria, requirements and application packages at the Arts Board's website. In addition, the Arts Board website clearly advises applicants of the availability of program consultants to respond to questions, if any.

4.6 Grant Application Deadlines Reasonable

For each grant program, the Arts Board has established application deadlines that provide artists with sufficient time to submit grant applications.

We noted that each grant program has different grant application deadlines. For example, Indigenous/Métis Art and Artists program has two submission deadlines—in the spring



(April 15) and in the fall (October 15); while Artists in Communities has only one (May 1). Having different grant application deadlines distributes the workload related to adjudicating applications throughout the year.

The Arts Board posts grant application deadlines on its website.

We found that the Arts Board posts any changes made to grant application packages (e.g., additional requirements, change to the program guide) on its website at least six weeks prior to the application deadline. This gives artists sufficient time to prepare applications.

4.7 Grant Applicants Supported

Program consultants make themselves available to applicants to provide help with writing grant applications through various means.

Program consultants provide one-on-one help upon request. In addition to providing one-on-one help to applicants, program consultants offer grant-writing workshops.

Furthermore, the Arts Board often collaborates with other arts organizations and offers workshops during arts festivals or other arts events (e.g., Filmpool Festival). For the period of January 2017 to June 2018, we found the Arts Board offered workshops in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, and La Ronge. We noted these workshops occurred two to seven weeks prior to the grant application submission deadlines.

The Arts Board also organized open house events for applicants to come and ask questions regarding grant applications. For example, in March 2018, the Arts Board organized an open house in Regina and Saskatoon—an event where program consultants were available for artists to come and ask questions.

The Arts Board advertises availability of support including events on its website, and e-newsletters sent to all past applicants.

4.8 Process to Administer Applications Followed

Arts Board staff followed established processes when accepting and reviewing grant applications.

As of June 2018, the Arts Board accepted grant applications and support material (e.g., video, copies of play script) online, in paper form via mail, or in person. The Arts Board does not accept any applications mailed or brought to its office after the deadline.

Reviewing submitted applications takes about two weeks to complete after the application deadline. It includes:

- Checking applications for missing information and contacting applicants where application missed information
- Scanning submitted material to its database
- Preparing the list of applications for program consultants for further review

- Verifying applicants have submitted any outstanding reports for previously awarded grants

For all 30 grant applications we tested, the Arts Board staff followed its established application review process. Also, applicants of 21 of the 30 grants applications we tested had received grants in the past. We found that the Arts Board had verified that all 21 applicants had submitted the reporting required under their previous grant.

4.9 Knowledgeable Peer Evaluators Selected

The Arts Board's process to select peer evaluators (jurors, independent assessors) who possess industry-specific knowledge is generally similar to those used by other Canadian arts granting jurisdictions.

The Arts Board has an adjudication session for each grant deadline for each program. It engages new jurors for each adjudication session. In addition, the program consultant may decide an independent assessor is necessary to assess certain applications (e.g., applications for funding for graphic novels). In these cases, the program consultant follows a similar process as used to select jurors.

Program consultants identify professional artists to participate in each adjudication session based on applications from interested individuals, suggestions from past jurors or professional artists, and their own personal knowledge of relevant professional artists. Once program consultants identify potential individuals for a particular program and discipline (e.g., visual art, media, music projects for Independent Artists Program), they identify discipline-specific expertise necessary to evaluate a diverse pool of applications. Program consultants look for individuals possessing expertise related to the grant program who also represent a diversity of age, gender, and geography, and Indigenous people. Jurors must be able to participate in a collaborative and consensus-building process to discuss applications, objectively assign scores, and make funding recommendations. Program consultants ask potential jurors to informally agree to participate in a jury.

Once potential jurors have informally agreed to participate in the jury, the program consultant gives the list of recommended jurors along with the rationale for selection and jurors' biographies to the Chief Executive Officer for approval. The Chief Executive Officer approves the proposed jury for each adjudication session.

We found program consultants prepared a comprehensive rationale and list of jurors recommended. They obtained the approval of the Chief Executive Officer to use the recommended jurors in the adjudication sessions for the 30 applications we examined.

4.10 Application Evaluation Criteria in Place but More Guidance Needed on Scoring Applications

The Arts Board uses grant evaluation criteria to assess applications, but guidance for evaluators on scoring criteria is too generic.

The Arts Board developed evaluation criteria specific to each grant program that were consistent with application criteria. It used the results of program review to help confirm



the suitability and clarity of its criteria. For example, using the results of public consultations and program review, the Arts Board revised its evaluation criteria for the Independent Artists grant program. It created the following two criteria instead of the previous three—assessing applications against artistic merit (i.e., the artistic quality of work, the potential artistic impact), and project merit (i.e., appropriate goals, timeline and work plan for the project term, a feasible financial plan and appropriate budget).

The Arts Board shared evaluation criteria with applicants in the related grant program guides and application packages.

We found the grant program guides and application for each program contained sufficient and clear information about evaluation criteria to enable applicants to know, in advance of applying, what criteria would be used to assess their grant application.

The Arts Board requires peer evaluators (i.e., jurors and independent assessors, if used) to consider applications against each program's evaluation criteria and score applications. It expects evaluators to assign scores to applications based on a one-to-ten ranking for each evaluation criterion.

For each program, while the Arts Board developed scoring guidance for peer evaluators (jurors and independent assessors) to use when assessing applications against evaluation criteria, it was not sufficiently comprehensive to help ensure evaluators score applications consistently. Unlike some other Canadian arts granting jurisdictions, like the Ontario Arts Council, the scoring guidance provided did not include a detailed explanation of what each ranking means.

In addition, the Arts Board does not make its guidance available to applicants. Having these scoring guidance available to applicants (e.g., posted online) promotes transparency and openness of the adjudication process.

Not providing a comprehensive and explicit explanation of how to assign scores increases the risk of evaluators not assessing applications consistently. This may result in different scoring amongst evaluators (e.g., one person's level 3 score may be another's level 6). Having a detailed evaluation guide would assist in scoring applications equitably and transparently.

5. We recommend that the Saskatchewan Arts Board give evaluators detailed written guidance about scoring grant applications against evaluation criteria, and make its guidance available to applicants.

At each adjudication session, the jury discusses assigned scores, and ranks applications based on assigned scores.¹⁵ Using the assigned scores, the jury decides for which applications to recommend funding and the amount of funding.¹⁶ They then assign grant funds to applicants working from the top of the ranked list. Many times, the total of funding a jury recommends exceeds the amount of funds available for that program. This results in placing applicants into one of three categories: applicants recommended with available funds, applicants recommended without funds available, and applicants not recommended. All decisions regarding funding applications are unanimous.

¹⁵ Jurors receive the scores of independent assessors at the face-to-face peer adjudication session.

¹⁶ For the Professional Arts Organizations Program, the jurors only rank the applicants and recommend either to increase or decrease operative funding comparing to the last grant cycle. The Arts Board staff assigns the funding based on the jury's recommendation.

Administrative staff of the Arts Board are present at each adjudication session, and record the minutes of jury discussions along with the scores and ranking.

We observed one jury meeting and saw that the discussions were fair, objective, and free of any impartiality. For all 30 applications we tested, we noted appropriate documentation of jury decisions.

The Board approves all grants that exceed \$20,000. The Chief Executive Officer reports the sum of awarded all other grants less than \$20,000 to the Board.

Of the 30 applications we tested

- Seventeen grant applicants received funding consistent with jury recommendations and grants were appropriately approved
- Thirteen grant applicants did not receive funding consistent with either the jury recommendation and/or availability of funding for the related grant program—this was comprised of 11 grant applications recommended for funding with no available funds, and 2 grant applications not recommended for funding.

4.11 Applicants Notified of Adjudication Results

The Arts Board provides timely notification to applicants whether they receive a grant.

The Arts Board posts on its website the timelines to notify the applicant of the jury results. For example, the Arts Board will notify applicants applying for a grant under the Independent Artists, Artists in School, or Artists in Communities within 90 days after the submission deadline.

The Arts Board sends notification letters to applicants:

- Who are awarded a grant
- Whose application was recommended for funding, but there was not enough funding available
- Who were not awarded a grant.

For all 30 applications we reviewed, the Arts Board sent notification letters within established timelines and consistent with jury decisions.

The Arts Board does not give written feedback to unsuccessful applicants. The Arts Board, consistent with other Canadian arts funders, does not do so because applicants may take written feedback to mean that if they make the suggested changes, they will be successful in their next application. Rather, in notification letters, the Arts Board encourages unsuccessful applicants to contact the program consultant for feedback.

4.12 Tracking on Complaint Resolution Needed

The Arts Board does not give staff guidance on how to respond to, or document complaints received about its granting programs. The Arts Board also does not track the number or nature of complaints received.



Arts Board staff noted they receive few complaints about its granting programs, as in their view, artists understand that the funding for grants is limited and understand the adjudication process. They note that a few unsuccessful applicants may call the Arts Board and express dissatisfaction with a jury decision. Staff handle complaints on a case-by-case basis through conversation.

Having a documented process to resolve complaints helps staff consistently and appropriately resolve complaints received. This can mitigate the risk of escalation of a complaint. Tracking of complaints helps management to identify whether there are any common themes the Arts Board should take into consideration when revising its programs.

6. We recommend that the Saskatchewan Arts Board track receipt and resolution of complaints about its grant programs.

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