

Chapter 24

Saskatchewan Arts Board—Awarding Grants Impartially and Transparently

1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Saskatchewan Arts Board provides funding and support to the arts sector by awarding grants to professional artists, art organizations, and art communities. Examples of its major grant programs include Artists in Communities, Indigenous Peoples Art and Artists, and the Professional Arts Organization Program.

By April 2024, the Arts Board implemented the one outstanding recommendation we first made in 2018 related to awarding grants.

The Arts Board implemented a documented scoring process for its 10 grant programs and provided its grant application reviewers with consistent evaluation criteria and scoring guidance. Applicants also have access to evaluation criteria on the Arts Board website.

Well-documented, consistent evaluation criteria and well-designed scoring tools are crucial for assessing grant applications impartially and ensuring a fair evaluation process.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Established in 1948, the Saskatchewan Arts Board, now operating as SK Arts, is the oldest public arts funder in North America, and second oldest in the world after the Arts Council of Great Britain.¹ A Cabinet-appointed Board of Directors, with at least one-third nominated by the arts community, governs the Arts Board under *The Arts Board Act, 1997*. It receives the majority of its revenue from the Ministry of Parks, Culture, and Sport.

The Arts Board provides grants, programs, and services to individuals and groups whose activities have an impact on the arts in Saskatchewan and ensures that opportunities exist for Saskatchewan residents to experience all art forms.

Figure 1 summarizes grant funding provided between 2019 and 2023. The Arts Board is responsible for establishing review processes to ensure qualified persons assess grant applications.

¹ www.sk-arts.ca/about/about/who-we-are.html (10 May 2024).

**Figure 1—Saskatchewan Arts Board Grant Funding for 2019–23**

Program	Frequency of Adjudication	Type of Rubric (scoring tool) Used	Funding per Fiscal Year				
			2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
			(in thousands)				
Professional Arts Organizations Program	Triennial	Single-Point	\$ 3,595	\$ 3,540	\$ 3,591	\$ 3,591	\$ 3,591
SaskFestivals	Triennial	Single-Point	840	771	754	842	860
Independent Artists	Semi-annual	Single-Point	901	901	900	901	696
Indigenous Peoples Art and Artists	Semi-annual	Single-Point	410	232	250	200	200
Artists in Communities	Triennial	Single-and Multi-Point ^A	290	290	285	339	355
Artists in Schools	Triennial	Single-and Multi-Point ^B	188	194	176	249	255
Scholarships	Annual	Single-Point	25	25	25	25	25
Equipment Purchase Fund	Annual	N/A – Lottery ^C	99	50	-	-	-
Micro-Grant Program	Monthly	Single-Point	120	120	118	120	120
75 th Anniversary	N/A ^D	N/A ^E	44	-	-	-	-
Other granting initiatives	Various		70	70	70	70	71
Grants returned			(6)	(19)	(2)	(68)	(36)
Total			\$ 6,577	\$ 6,174	\$ 6,166	\$ 6,271	\$ 6,137

Source: Adapted from information provided by Saskatchewan Arts Board.

^A One stream of this program, Artists in Communities-Residencies, still uses multi-point scoring tool.

^B One stream of this program, Artists in Schools-Residencies, still uses multi-point scoring tool.

^C No assessment for this program. Artists apply and are chosen through a lottery selection process.

^D Special Edition celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Saskatchewan Arts Board.

^E No assessment for this program. One-time grant to foster the future of art in Saskatchewan. Seventy-five emerging young artists were nominated by established artists from Saskatchewan to receive the grant.

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our second follow-up audit of management's actions on the recommendations we first made in 2018.

We assessed the Saskatchewan Arts Board's processes to award grants impartially and transparently for the 18-month period ended June 30, 2018, and concluded that the Arts Board had effective processes except for the areas reflected in our six recommendations.² By May 2021, the Arts Board implemented five of six recommendations.³

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Arts Board's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. Arts Board management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To carry out our follow-up audit, we interviewed Arts Board staff responsible for awarding grants. We examined management's grant policies and records, including program review meeting notes, and guidance for scoring grant applications for its major grant programs. We tested samples of grant panel reviews and examined the appropriateness of its evaluation criteria for scoring and ranking grant applications.

² 2018 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 22, pp. 119–134.

³ 2021 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 31, pp. 229–234.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION

This section sets out the recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at April 30, 2024, and the Saskatchewan Arts Board's actions up to that date.

3.1 Application Evaluation Criteria Established and Scoring Guidelines Communicated

We recommended the Saskatchewan Arts Board give evaluators detailed written guidance about scoring grant applications against evaluation criteria, and make its guidance available to applicants. (2018 Report – Volume 2, p. 132, Recommendation 5; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 26, 2020)

Status—Implemented

The Saskatchewan Arts Board provided adjudicators (panel reviewers) with consistent evaluation criteria and scoring guidelines to use while adjudicating applications for its grant programs. Applicant guidance is also made available on the Arts Board website.

After conducting research, a jurisdictional scan and consultations, the Arts Board adopted evaluation scoring tools as a standard for its grant programs (see **Figure 1**). In the spring of 2021, the Arts Board began implementing a single-point scoring tool into its panel review process for its various grant programs (e.g., micro-grants).⁴ The Arts Board also provided panel reviewers with its updated scoring guidance and other relevant information.

We tested whether Arts Board staff provided panel reviewers with evaluation information for 10 program panels conducted in 2023–24. We also examined how 18 panel reviewers adjudicated six applications for five different grant programs. In all those panels, staff ensured panel reviewers had all the information necessary for the adjudication process (e.g., scoring tool, scoring guidelines, panel review manuals). For all grant applications tested, panel reviewers assessed the applications based on the scoring tool established by the Arts Board and properly used the scoring system to score applications.

Grant applicants have access to evaluation criteria through application guidelines on the Arts Board's website. Information includes the criteria panel reviewers will be using, covering categories such as quality, impact, and achievability.

Well-documented, consistent evaluation criteria and well-designed scoring tools are crucial for assessing grant applications impartially and ensuring a fair evaluation process.

⁴ A single-point scoring tool defines one performance metric category (middle-point) for a particular program. The Arts Board's single-point scoring tool has three ratings (e.g., does not meet standard, met standard for this assessment, exceeds standard) for its categories.

