

Dear Dan, Mike, and Leadership Team:

Please read, despite length.

As some of you may know, I attended an information session at the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC) yesterday evening (Wednesday Dec 2, 2009), the purpose for which was to gather information regarding the Community Arts Grant program. A lot of information was covered in the course of two hours, but I wanted to share with all of you some highlights.

The first thing I learned is that MRAC does not provide grants to support an organization's ongoing operational expenses; their grant awards are project-specific. Hence, when a grant is awarded, the project must have a specific start and end date, and the start date cannot precede the date that the grant is awarded. So for instance, our project with the Minnesota Chorale would not be grant-eligible because the award date is March 24th, and we will already have begun rehearsals by this time. We could, however, seek a grant request for a summer-time project, or for Fall 2010, provided it met the other eligibility criteria.

Second, the presenter made it clear that MRAC does not exist to provide blanket funding for every arts organization; their mission is to provide arts access, and the projects most likely to be selected are those that most closely align with the mission of MRAC. MRAC is also a 501(c)(3) non-profit, and they receive foundation money along with money from the State of Minnesota. (I'm not sure about federal funding). But they basically view themselves as the over-seers of state arts funds, thus the reason for being such rule-sticklers; they need to be consistent and equitable in how they award dollars.

Some of the eligibility criteria are:

- The organization must have a total annual operating budget of less than \$300K. No problem there!
- The org must have a board of directors or an advisory committee that provides oversight.
- The org must have either a 501(c)(3) letter, or have a fiscal sponsor. Again, we're covered here.
- The funds awarded from MRAC must be matched, dollar-for-dollar. They do recognize "in-kind" services (such as free rehearsal space, free or reduced-cost printing, that sort of thing), but the applicant must justify the dollar amount placed on what are referred to as "in-kind" services on the grant application.
- The project event must happen within the seven-county metro area. (Hence, our road trip to Willmar could not be funded with MRAC grant money.)

Once the eligibility criteria are met, the grant request goes before a review panel, and that panel evaluates and puts a numeric assessment on each project based on six selection criteria:

1. Artistic Quality: what are we trying to do. This would be our project description.
2. Artistic Challenge: hurdles that need to be overcome.
3. Artistic Ability: how will we meet the artistic challenge of #2.
4. Community Need/Support: whom are we intending to serve, and where, and how.
5. Diversity: this means more than simply racial/ethnic diversity. We have to show how our project meets diversity needs to the community served in #4 above. (We must define what WE mean by diversity.)
6. Access: is our venue ADA-compliant? Yes; No; or It Will Be.

And all of that must fit within 5 pages!!

THEN the grant request must include the complete project budget, with an expense and income break-down, for which they have a form.

And then, if we receive an award, we must submit a final project expense report, due two months after the project ends, to see if we were over- or under-budget, and by how much. (Basically it's a test to see how fiscally responsible the organization is. I believe this is used primarily to determine future eligibility.)

So that's it, in a nutshell. I have more information, if anyone wants to see it.

Here is my recommendation: there is no sense in applying for a grant for anything this year, because we have already started. We could submit a request for a summer project or a fall project, but the plans for such a project need to be well underway in order to properly complete the grant application by the January 11th '10 deadline. And since I am not on the Leadership team, I have no idea what's coming down the pipe for SIA. (Oh yeah, that's another thing: grant requests MUST be in hand at the MRAC office by 5p of the deadline date; no exceptions.)

A more realistic goal might be to apply for the Arts Activities Support Grant. The application deadline for that is April 5th, and it's all pretty much the same eligibility and selection criteria; and it's a bigger grant award: up to \$10K. The caveat is that with a bigger grant award comes more competition. But by April, the Leadership Team may have more solidified plans for future projects.

One final thing: whomever writes the grant requests, be it for MRAC or any other, that person needs to be on the Leadership Team, or at the very least, be present at the planning meetings. Grant writing requires information that most members of SIA are not simply not privy to.

Thanks for reading all of this. If anyone has any questions, just shoot me an email.

Best regards,

Mark Countryman