



Finger Lakes Community Arts Grants

Criteria & Rating System



Council on
the Arts

What criteria are used to evaluate grant applications?

Panelists use the following statutory requirements to evaluate all grant applications.

Service to the Public

As a public funder, NYSCA must ensure that its grants support a broad array of cultural activity that fully represents the diversity of the state and that the supported events are accessible to the broadest possible public in every region of the state. In addition, it must ensure that the organizations and events it supports comply with public safety and accessibility laws. The following are considered elements of service to the public. Applicants will be evaluated based on their strength in these areas.

Promotion and Outreach: an organization demonstrates that it makes significant efforts to reach a broad and diverse audience through marketing and public relations efforts.

Audience Development: the organization offers thoughtful and well-designed educational and interpretive activities that help build audience appreciation and understanding of the organization and its work.

Audience/Visitor Participation: the organization's commitment to its programs and activities as demonstrated through attendance data (relevant to the population of the community served) as well as customer satisfaction surveys (if available and appropriate).

Safety & Accessibility: the activities and events that support is being sought for will take place in venues that are fully accessible to the public and comply with all safety and accessibility standards.

Diversity of Programming: programming reflects significant efforts to reach a broad array of artists and audiences.

Community Service: the organization brings value to its community through partnerships with local businesses and schools, free and low-cost events, and in other appropriate ways.

Artistic/Programmatic Excellence

NYSCA believes in artistic excellence without boundaries, and its evaluation process embraces the widest variety of cultural and artistic expression being offered to the public in a broad array of settings and contexts, including classrooms and community centers, parks, open spaces, and traditional venues.

NYSCA considers four dimensions of proposals when evaluating applications:

Idea: the concept or artistic impetus behind the artistic work or services proposed.

Practice: the effectiveness of the artistic work and the impact it has on those experiencing it, or in the case of services, the effectiveness of the services in practice and their impact on the community served.

Development: the contribution the artistic work makes to the development of the artists involved, the art form, and the arts generally, or for services, the contribution the services make to the development of a vibrant arts and cultural community in the state.

Context: the context in which the work or services are being presented and the appropriateness of the work or services in that context.

Managerial/Fiscal Competence

As a public funder, NYSCA must ensure that funded organizations are capable of carrying out their proposals and will be ethical and effective stewards of public funds.

NYSCA considers four dimensions of managerial competence when evaluating applicant organizations.

Mission: The organization's activities must relate directly to its written mission statement. A mission statement should (1) define the organization's purpose for being and core values, (2) determine its structure, functions and purpose, (3) be approved by the organization's board, and (4) be reviewed regularly and updated when appropriate.

Governance: The organization should have a governing board of directors or trustees, and that group should be diverse and appropriate to the mission of the organization. The board should provide administrative, financial, and ethical oversight for the organization by:

- Adopting enabling documents, including by-laws and a mission statement, both of which are reviewed at regular intervals
- Selecting a chief executive and annually reviewing her/his performance
- Reviewing and approving the annual budget and ensuring that proper financial controls are in place
- Engaging in adequate fundraising for the organization by making a personal contribution to the organization and actively soliciting support on its behalf
- Ensuring fiscal and programmatic integrity and maintaining accountability by upholding legal standards and ethical norms
- Maintaining and enforcing a conflict of interest policy
- Ensuring effective organizational planning by participating in an overall planning process and monitoring its implementation
- Recruiting and orienting new board members and assessing board performance
- Enhancing the organization's public standing and value
- Understanding, monitoring, and strengthening the organization's core programs and services

Organizational Management: Organizational management will be assessed based on the extent to which the leaders of the organization comprehend their roles, advance the mission, and plan for the future. Responsible management hinges on the:

- Existence of a professional staff appropriate to the size and mission of the organization

- Implementation of board policies by professional staff
- Comprehension, review, and revision of policies by staff and with the board as needed
- Preparation of a year-end statement of the organization's financial condition and program activities
- Offering of competitive compensation and health benefits to employees
- Appropriate compensation of artists
- Existence of personnel policies that include job descriptions and performance evaluations for board members, staff, and volunteers
- Development and implementation of a strategic plan incorporating input from the board, staff, community and other stakeholders.

Financial Management: The organization will be evaluated based on whether it provides adequate human and financial resources to enable the organization to work toward fulfilling its mission and managing those resources appropriately..Successful financial management includes:

- Raising adequate financial resources for operating costs, cash reserve, endowment, and short and long-term capital needs
- Developing a balanced operating budget which includes contingencies, contains realistic projections of revenues and expenses, and is approved by the board
- Reviewing revenues and expenses in relation to budget at regular intervals and taking steps to raise funds or cut costs when necessary to balance the budget
- Establishing a finance committee that meets regularly to review financial statements and that reports directly to the board
- Engaging an independent financial auditor that reports directly to board
- Engaging in cost-effective fundraising activities.
- Written financial policies exist that govern investment of assets, internal control procedures, purchasing practices, reserve funds, compensation expense account reporting, and earned income
- Internal financial processes are monitored, including handling of checks, petty cash, cash disbursements, and payroll management, in order to prevent errors and misuse of funds
- The use of restricted funds is monitored
- Reports comparing Adopted Budget to actual revenue and expenses are made available to appropriate staff in a timely manner
- There is a fund development plan that ensures a diversified funding base
- Financials demonstrate diversified funding base
- Budget variances of more than 10% are noted and explained
- Operating deficits are explained and there is a deficit reduction plan for accumulated deficits.

Rating System

DEC panelists use the following rating system to evaluate grant applications. Each of the three primary criteria are rated.

Rating System Score Chart

Score	Descriptor	Additional Guidance on Strengths/Weaknesses
9	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong (model and standard for field or discipline with essentially no weaknesses)
8	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
7	Excellent	Very strong with some minor weaknesses
6	Very Good	Strong with numerous minor weaknesses
5	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
4	Satisfactory	Some strengths but with some moderate weaknesses
3	Fair	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
2	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
1	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact.

Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact.

Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact.