



**Assessment of the City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture's
Fiscal Year 2018 Nonprofit Funding Process**

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Introduction

San Diego is home to a wide variety of arts and culture-related nonprofits that represent 31 percent of the total nonprofit sector in San Diego County. The City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture (Commission) administers City Council Policy 100-03 by annually distributing Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) dollars to local arts and culture nonprofits for organizational support through the Organizational Support Program (OSP) and for project support through Creative Communities San Diego (CCSD). In FY18, a total of 157 nonprofits applied for funding from the Commission.

Building on a comprehensive needs assessment conducted in the previous fiscal year, the Commission contracted with The Nonprofit Institute (NPI) to independently assess the Fiscal Year 2018 nonprofit funding process. The NPI team refreshed the existing survey instrument¹ with the overarching goal of understanding what worked, what did not work, and what could be improved in the Fiscal Year 2019 process. Specific assessment objectives were as follows:

- Document and capture feedback from the FY18 applicants (both funded and declined), identifying key themes and recognizing prevailing ideas and suggestions.
- Identify the most important components of the FY18 process to continue and/or improve.

Data Collection

Two sources of data were accessed to inform this assessment. A 24-question survey was deployed to both funded and declined applicants. A total of 82 surveys were collected (52 percent response rate). Additionally, nine one-on-one interviews were conducted over a two week period with each interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interviewees were selected to represent a cross-section of participants in the FY18 funding process including Commissioners, experienced grantwriters, first-time applicants, returning applicants, large-budget applicants, small-budget applicants, applicants to the OSP program, applicants to the CCSD program and panelists. All survey results, comments and interview summaries are provided in Appendices A and B of this report.

Findings

Overall, those surveyed and interviewed acknowledged that the application and contracting processes continue to improve, bolstered by new policies and procedures, refined systems and the improved ongoing support of City staff. **Of note, 63 percent of survey respondents who had applied in FY 2018 agreed that the process was improved over the prior year.**

¹ The needs assessment conducted in advance of the FY17 funding cycle included data collected from nonprofits that are eligible to do business with the City's Commission for Arts and Culture and Economic Development Department. This assessment surveys only those nonprofits doing business with the Commission in the FY18 funding cycle.

Timelines

Short timelines and inconvenient deadlines were the primary point of dissatisfaction for most respondents. Many respondents also expressed a desire for the Commission to maintain some consistency in the process next year. One person provided this comment that is representative of what many wrote: “We appreciate the difficulty in creating a new process and the dedication to improve it. We have endured several changes in the process in recent years including timeline adjustments. We hope in upcoming years the timeline is announced well in advance so we can plan better.” A different person said, “The separation of the RFQ and RFP was very helpful but the timeline seemed rushed and the RFQ submission deadline over the December holidays was less than ideal.”

Technical Assistance by Staff

City staff were viewed as accessible and very responsive. City-sponsored workshops and one-on-one technical assistance were appreciated. Seventy-four percent of survey respondents agreed that technical assistance workshops were a good use of their time and, as a result of attending, they felt sufficiently prepared for the application process. Considering an online webinar format, providing multiple sessions or videos for technical assistance workshops were options requested by some respondents.

Two-step, RFQ-RFP Application

The two-step process of submitting responses to an RFQ then an RFP was viewed favorably by the majority of survey respondents. Between 85 to 90 percent found the guidelines for both the RFQ and the RFP to be understandable and the submission processes to be clear. Although the addition of the RFQ added a new step to the application process, 71 percent thought the effort required to complete the RFQ was appropriate and over 70 percent found the evaluation of the RFQ to be fair and transparent.

Some individuals interviewed commented on a lack of transparency in the RFQ process. A few respondents perceived that organizations who passed the RFQ step may not have actually been well qualified rather, they just answered all the questions “correctly”. For example, one interviewee said that they knew of at least two organizations that had significant internal issues, yet they passed the RFQ evaluation step and received high marks on their subsequent RFPs. While this is an unsubstantiated statement made by one person, it could point to a need for additional education about the RFQ evaluation step. It should be noted here that a number of applicants did not meet the requirements of the RFQ at first, but a “cure” period was offered and most applicants were able to correct deficiencies and allowed to move forward to the RFP step.

Sixty-five percent of the respondents felt the effort to complete the RFP was appropriate and 74 percent agreed that the evaluation was transparent. However, fewer respondents, 64 percent, felt the RFP evaluation process was fair. Even fewer, 62 percent, agreed that the review panel fully understood their proposals. While 80 percent of respondents believed the information requested for the RFP was reasonable, many responses indicated that the ordering of questions and the character counts should be revised to allow for a more comprehensive explanation of the applicant’s programs.

RFP Evaluations by Panels

Interview respondents provided additional context related to the panels that evaluated the RFPs. All of the interviewees understood the necessity of the criteria, but suggested that there is room for improvement. The main concerns were related to applicants receiving a lower score if questions don't apply and/or not being able to communicate why certain questions do not apply. One interviewee noted that if an organization doesn't do outreach or if they do an unusual activity, they were scored lower. One interviewee expressed that, "the process has evolved into a one-size-fits all" which ironically, discourages creativity and innovation from arts organizations if a program or event doesn't fit easily into the standard RFP format.

There is a prevailing opinion that the criteria is applied punitively and inhibits panelists from seeing an organization holistically. One interviewee pointed out that, "It seemed like the City wanted to review the application rather than the applicant". Another interviewee mentioned that when the panelists asked questions about the organization, they were directed by staff to focus on the established evaluation criteria. Furthermore, one interviewee questioned the purpose of the criteria since the score can be changed by the panel at the end.

Some respondents believed that the RFP review should have included discussion of organizational finances. One stated, "There was absolutely no discussion about financials in any of the panel deliberations I witnessed, including our own. Having sat on panels of two states and three cities, I can say that never have I witnessed such an incomplete discussion." Another wrote, "Panelists need to see budgets to understand financial health of organizations. That informs decisions."

Other comments described what was seen as a lack of understanding and consistency among panelists. One interviewee shared the following observation: "The panels and scoring would be less subjective if panelists were required to submit their scoring matrix and justifying notes in advance, and the panel session was used more for discussing particularly high or low marks. For example, during the panel I attended, and in regard to multiple organizations' RFPs, panelists commented "I don't see why I didn't give it a 4 but I gave it a 3.' Another commented, 'I don't know why I'm saying 3 instead of 4.' Considering the amount of effort that goes into the application process from multiple staff members, subjective and baseless responses like this devalue the efforts that organizations invest in the process."

It was a general feeling that some panelists were uninformed about the arts and arts business models. One respondent provided this feedback: "They [panelists] weren't well trained or informed on how to score or how to read applications. Staff did not guide the process well. Panelists scored applications box by box and not on overall quality of content. One panelist couldn't read her notes and appeared not to have read some parts of the application. Panelists did not understand how to score properly and small errors were

made -- a small error shouldn't reflect on the overall quality of the application or the applicant's programs.”

Tailoring for Smaller Organizations

Similar to the findings of last year's assessment, many respondents feel the process should be simplified for organizations with smaller budgets and fewer staff. One person wrote, “It is altogether a very expensive, stressful and time-consuming process...small nonprofits could have a more simple, less expensive process.” Another person put it this way, “A small nonprofit has less resources, is eligible for less, but dedicates equal or more time than a million dollar institution. In fact, million dollar institutions can afford a grant writer, as we smaller organizations spend staff time during the application process. The application process for a \$5,000 contract should be less intense than one for a \$100,000 contract.”

Recommendations

Given that the majority of respondents viewed the FY18 process as an improvement over the prior year and the desire for continuity as expressed by numerous respondents, it is recommended that the funding process remain substantively similar for the Fiscal Year 2019 cycle. To pursue continuous improvement while balancing the applicants' requests for predictability year-over-year, it is recommended that the Commission address the following:

- 1. Improve lead time and choose convenient deadlines**
Provide more lead time when releasing process oriented announcements including information about the RFQ, Cure Period, RFP, and appeals process. Consider the timing of the process and where it falls on the calendar relative to other arts funding cycles and major holidays.
- 2. Tailor application requirements for applicants by size**
Tailor application requirements so that they are commensurate with the contract amount. For example, organizations eligible to receive funding under \$10,000 could be given a simpler application process than organizations eligible to receive \$100,000.
- 3. Educate about the purpose of the RFQ and the RFP**
Increase communication and education about the purpose of the RFQ and the purpose of the RFP. Improve understanding about the objectives and requirements of the cure period.
- 4. Improve the flow and usefulness of the RFP**
Consider changing the order of some of the questions and increasing character counts to facilitate higher quality responses.
- 5. Improve panelist education and refine scoring methods and tools**
Improve the process for selecting panelist to better ensure projects are reviewed by people with subject matter knowledge. Provide additional training in advance of panel reviews so that panelists are very clear about expectations and duties. Revise panelist scoring process to ensure consistency across panels and minimize

subjectivity where possible. Continue to refine rubrics to ensure measurement accuracy. Further define how the information requested ties to what is scored, especially budget information.

Appendix A: Results of 24-Question Survey of FY18 Applicants

Overview

This appendix includes the questions and results for each question asked on the 24-question survey deployed to both funded and declined applicants. A total of 82 surveys from an invitation list of 157 were collected (52 percent response rate). Response counts and percentages are included for each question. Those surveyed were given the option to write free-form narrative answers as well and those comments in verbatim are provided.

Consent to Participate

Survey Question #1: Do you consent to participate in this survey?

Consent to survey response	Total Respondents
Yes	82

Survey Question #2: Did your organization apply to the Commission for Arts and Culture for FY2018 funding?

Response	Total Respondents
Yes	82
No	0
Not Sure	0

Respondent Status

Survey Question #3: To which program did you apply?

Response	Total Respondents	Percentage
Organizational Support Program (OSP)	57	69.5%
Creative Communities San Diego (CCSD)	25	30.5%
Not Sure	0	

Survey Question 4: What is the name of your organization?

This information is kept anonymous and was only accessible by the USD research team. Having respondents provide this information assisted in keeping the survey short.

Survey Question #5: What is your position in your organization?

Position	Total Respondents	Percentage
CEO/Executive Director	36	44%

Senior Management (e.g. Executive Director, COO, CFO, V.P., Development Director, etc.)	8	10%
Mid-Level Management (e.g. Program Director, Volunteer Manager, Development Manager, etc.)	14	17%
Support (e.g. Administrative Assistant, Program Assistant, Accountant, etc.)	2	2%
Board Chair	5	6%
Board Member	2	2%
Volunteer (Docent, Administrative Support, Program Volunteer etc.)	2	2%
Other (Please specify)	13	16%

Other: Grant Writer, Grant Consultant, Contractor, Artistic Director, Office Manager

Survey Question #6: In which of the following City County District(s) do you provide (or intend to provide) services? (Check all that apply)

Response	Total Respondents
District 1	37
District 2	37
District 3	48
District 4	31
District 5	28
District 6	31
District 7	28
District 8	30
District 9	38
Not Sure	8

The RFQ Process

Survey Question #7: Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statement... “Once our organization decided to apply for funding...”

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know/Don't recall
The RFQ guidelines were understandable.	0%	9%	43%	46%	2%
The RFQ submission process was clear.	2%	6%	37%	54%	1%
The RFQ eligibility requirements were clear.	1%	10%	28%	60%	1%
The information about the RFQ on the website was helpful	1%	10%	24%	56%	9%
The website was a useful tool for completing the RFQ	4%	12%	26%	52%	6%
The information requested on the RFQ was reasonable	5%	17%	27%	49%	2%
The effort required to complete the RFQ was appropriate	4%	23%	30%	41%	1%
The evaluation of the RFQ was fair	1%	10%	20%	55%	15%
The evaluation of the RFQ was transparent	7%	10%	15%	56%	12%

Survey Question #8: Approximately how many total staff hours were spent completing the RFQ process? Please round to the nearest full hour (ex. If you spent 15.5 hours enter than number 16).

Range	Respondents	Percentage
1-5 Hours	9	11%
6-10 Hours	18	22%
11-15 Hours	9	11%
16-20 Hours	17	21%
21-30 Hours	11	14%
31-40 Hours	6	7%
41-50 Hours	1	1%
51+ Hours	1	1%
Do Not Recall/Other	10	12%

Survey Question #9: Overall, do you have any suggestions and/or recommendations to improve the RFQ submission/application process?

- Overall, our concern with the RFQ process was: Preparing our DataArts profile takes approximately 40 hours, not the 8 hours per FY that is offered as common guidance. This remains a constant, and we have a CFO with 20 years of experience. In past years, the DataArts (previously the CDP) profile was submitted as part of the actual proposal, so our Finance staff scheduled the month of January for prep. This last year, we were informed mid-December about the new RFQ process requiring the DataArts profile to be submitted right after the New Year. This meant Finance staff had to prepare the DataArts profile over the holiday period, impacting their time with family. This year, now that are aware of the new system, we can plan accordingly.
- Because of the change in procedures, we didn't get a lot of lead time and ended up doing the RFQ and the Data Arts report in the middle of the December holidays. For our organization, that is a busy time already, so we were really stretched to get it all done. Also -- not sure if the 'RFQ process' time question included the time to complete the Data Arts Report. That would add a lot of time -- perhaps another 20 to 30 hours?
- The required submission of the CDP report much earlier than previously required was problematic for many.
- This overall process is much more time consuming than any other founder, including the National Endowment for the Arts. Additionally, we have no other funding process that is so complex it requires special training.
- Yes, there has to be intermediate feedback on RFP submitted. For example, if the reviewing body missed on item for review, the applicants should be able to clarify. Otherwise the decisions could be made on wrong assumptions. If the applicant forget to address, then the reviewers not need to consider additional information.
- Is there any way to save the info from the RFQ, if approved, in to the application - to save time for the applicant?

- Please simplify. The process is still too time consuming and burdensome especially to smaller non-profits with limited staff resources.
- More education about how to answer some of the questions
- The time frame of having to complete the Data Project information and application was rushed. A longer lead time for such an important application would be extremely helpful.
- It's an easy step.
- The RFQ process felt redundant when compared to the process in previous years. It felt as though we had to apply for this grant twice. The return on time investment is getting too much to bother applying. Getting up to speed with a new process, going through that process, and then having it be a two part process is too cumbersome. Next year we may reduce the art components for our event in favor of other earned income efforts.
- Clear expectations, Q&A with clear examples
- Please consider having a more streamlined application for small projects.
- The live training sessions were very helpful
- Leave more time to complete the application.
- It was due around the holidays last year. Change date to before or after. The new process was not clearly articulated or discussed in an open environment to assure changes were mutually beneficial
- It will get easier if we do it several times without too many changes to process. First time is always the hardest. I find the budget info on the one website to be the most difficult.
- The RFQ seemed simple but in fact answers that seemed sufficient were not. We were surprised that we had to resubmit. The scoring matrix was helpful but it would have been better to present those guidelines next to the questions.
- The RFQ process has made tremendous progress in the last few years under the new E.D. Most of the issues we had have been resolved, and I'm confident staff is always looking for continual improvement.
- Consistency. These application processes seem to change from year to year - making it difficult on smaller nonprofits who are already stretched thin on time.
- Some of the expectations of the evaluation committee were not clearly outlined in the instructions, which caused some to be kicked back
- Grant writers are expensive for small nonprofits...process could be more simple
- Next year, please don't require people to work over the Christmas Holiday. Many people are off work and traveling during this period, so it was difficult to get all of the required items completed during this time. Please consider changing the schedule for next year.
- The in-person training sessions were very useful because City staff were able to answer questions more clearly than the website explanations.
- I think the process for the RFQ was fair and appropriate.
- Simplify please

- Core purpose for this hurdle needs to be established, as does the need for ongoing RFQ. If an organization is a current contractor with the city then I am unsure of the need for this. Recommend a good step for any new contractor. Also, this now stops the budget for being considered by the panels, except there may be budget information that aids the understanding of the panels. This last year one panelist was advised that because they had been reviewing budgets for multiple applicants then they could continue to review the budgets as a part of their consideration during the panels. One direction please.
- Additional time
- As a small, volunteer organization, this information was not easily available, and especially not over the Christmas holidays!
- I wonder if previous, published IRS 990 forms should be used to compare data provided on DataArts to avoid errors that qualify or disqualify.
- It would be nice not to have to complete it over the holidays.
- 1) More warning - this was a new step with different requirements and it was due right after New Years. 2) I don't recall the details, but I do recall frustration about accounting terminology that wasn't being used in the way I was used to. The instructions might say to just do X and add it to Y, but in translating this to financials, it wasn't quite so clear.
- No except to do your best to cut down on the application where you can. Maybe have a couple of categories where you recognize organizations who have successfully applied and awarded contract for over 10 years... 15 years...
- The RFQ guidelines were delayed and finally released (I believe) in December, and then due in early January. I felt uncomfortable and stressed trying to get information from other staff when many were away on holiday, and also because the notice was so short. The Commission also needs to understand how intensive the Data Arts process in and that orgs need to have significant lead time for any application that will require the Data Arts funder profiles/reports.
- Do not request organizational chart with names. Titles only should be sufficient.
- The timing of the process was right around the holidays/new year. It would be fantastic if it were a bit earlier or later.
- Review panel should include individuals with nonprofit arts admin experience. Do not have this application open and due during Christmas week when many board members and staff have vacation plans in place and Data Arts was shut.
- The RFQ process is very flawed, especially since the panel process seems to have been anonymous. More disturbing is that results of the RFQ process, and especially informed, quantitative and qualitative discussion of financials, was then completely lacking in the RFP panel. To divorce financials from the final adjudication of an application is to cut out a key chunk of the story telling an organization does. And for RFP panelists to completely ignore financials is egregious, No peer arts panel should be without thoughtful, informed discussion of financials. I cannot emphasize enough that financials must be part of the entire application process. To separate in this manner is a fundamental flaw.

- The RFQ process was just the first portion of the application from two years ago. The only difference were the ability to answer several questions with radio buttons. Some of the requirements to move forward were what I would consider none of the Commission's business and should not be required to proceed forward. They are internal board or organizational issues only.
- Spent a lot of time on CDP. This year was the first time since you required us to use the CDP that we were able to use it for a second grant application. It seems like this always takes a week to get all the data collected, entered, and accepted (30-40 hours)
- The timeline was submission was horrid for us. We'd so appreciate having the guidelines available much, much earlier. December is packed with performances and all staff is at the theater. Then we (were supposed to) take time off. It was challenging to accomplish the RFQ by the early January deadline.
- An improvement over the prior process with clear purpose and process. The RFQ process does still require quite a bit of effort to compile the necessary information.
- We already wrote the Commission at length on our questions and concerns with the RFQ. If you'd like, I can send you that correspondence.
- A longer timeline for completion would improve the process. Firm deadlines should also be a priority. The deadline for completion changed AFTER my organization submitted it. I think the slow response was a result of a short timeline for completion, announced prior to year-end holidays. It seems unfair to organizations that meet deadlines that others are not judged against meeting the same deadline.
- It needs to be streamlined. The period of time allocated to complete the RFQ was insufficient and fell at the wrong time of year. Most of the eligibility questions should be posed as statements, not yes/no, with the applicant attesting to the veracity of the statements. It is overkill to ask for liquidity for the last three fiscal years.

RFP Submission

Survey Question #10: Following the conclusion of the RFQ process, did you submit an RFP?

Applied For Funding	Total Respondents	Percentage
Yes	79	96%
No	3	4%

Part 2 - The RFP Process

Survey Question #11: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know/Don't recall

The RFP guidelines were understandable	4%	10%	43%	43%	0%
The RFP submission process was clear	1%	9%	32%	58%	0%
The information about the RFP on the website was helpful	4%	9%	32%	54%	1%
The website was a useful tool for completing the RFP	1%	14%	28%	52%	5%
The information requested on the RFP was reasonable	4%	16%	52%	28%	0%
The effort required to complete the RFP was appropriate	9%	27%	41%	24%	0%
The criteria used to evaluate the RFP (i.e. scoring method) was clear	13%	20%	30%	37%	0%
The RFP evaluation panel understood our proposal	13%	15%	32%	30%	10%
The RFP evaluation process was fair	15%	14%	31%	33%	6%
The evaluation of the RFP was transparent	11%	9%	22%	52%	6%

Survey Question #12: Did the proposal that you submitted through the RFP process receive funding?

Response	Total Respondents	Total Percentage
Yes	74	94%
No	4	5%
Don't know/Don't recall	1	1%

Survey Question #13: Approximately how many total staff hours were spent completing the RFP process? Please round to the nearest full hour (ex. If you spent 15.5 hours enter the number 16).

Range	Respondents	Percentage
1-5 Hours	0	
6-10 Hours	3	
11-15 Hours	4	
16-20 Hours	12	
21-30 Hours	16	
31-40 Hours	12	
41-50 Hours	6	
51+ Hours	13	
Do Not Recall/Other	13	

Average (66 Respondents) = 39.65 Hours

Survey Question #14: Did you attend and observe the panel session in which your proposal was evaluated?

Response	Total Respondents	Total Percentage
Yes	56	71%
No	20	25%
Did not know there was a panel session	2	3%
N/A	1	1%
We apply for funding from more than one city department	0	0%
We have not applied for city funding in the last five years	0	0%

Additional comments regarding panel session(s)

- Some of the questions need more word count. For instance, we lost points because we didn't fully explain how each member of the staff contributed to the work of the

organization, but we were given very limited space to describe it. If the standard is high for the question, there needs to be room to answer it.

- More training of panel members would be helpful to avoid big differences in scoring among members - who at times had unrealistic expectations based on the allotted space - especially for large organizations.
- Another volunteer attended the panel session.
- There were some comments about the application that weren't correct - and it is not possible to correct. Also - one panelist commented that the application had one of the best outreach programs that they had seen and then another panelist commented that we could have offered chamber music outreach for deaf children.
- It was informative and will help with next year's submission.
- My colleague attended in my place
- They are helpful to understand how individuals on the panel view the application. Some people understand the application others not as much or viewed it through a personal filter and had incorrect assumptions. The Arts & Culture staff do a great job managing the panel. Since the makeup of the panel is different from one year to the next it's not like you can adjust your application to fit anyone person's point of view. We did learn from applications the panel loved and didn't.
- In agreement with San Diego Regional Arts and Culture Coalition Ad Hoc Committee Members Panels: We urge the Commission to reinstate past best practices and improve the panel process in the following ways:
 - a. Financial information regarding each applicant should be reviewed by Panelists as well as staff. Having financial information is critical for Panelists to understand organizational health, operational model, capacity and programmatic focus.
 - b. Panelists should be fully trained so that they have a comprehensive understanding of the goals, objectives, and processes of application review and guidelines. They should only be allowed to participate if they have fully reviewed in advance all application materials.
 - c. Panels should be large enough so that if up to two people are unable to serve at the last minute, the panel can proceed with a fair number of panelists. Panels should consist of at least seven panelists. If more than two panelists do not attend, the panel should be rescheduled.
 - d. Scoring should be made more fair by eliminating the highest and lowest scores, which is made possible by having larger panels.
 - e. At least 50% on non-Commissioner Panelists should have first-hand professional experience in arts and culture with an in-depth, professional understanding of at least one art form under consideration. Panelists should hold an understanding of the business model of arts and culture organizations as either Board members or professional staff. These panelists can be selected from the organizations that are not under consideration during the FY 19 funding cycle. This peer-panel process has been used by public art agencies for more than forty years and has served the field well.

- I wasn't personally able to attend but our Board Secretary attended and took notes to report back to the Board of Directors. She sat through our evaluation and most others throughout the day. I have personally attended twice in the past.
- Panelist were a little bit strict on grammatical errors and wording. They should focus on the content of the application.
- It was unclear to me that we had to attend our panel session. This has not been a requirement in the past. Also, I attended a workshop for the grant process that started a half hour late and so I was unable to participate in the process fully.
- I personally did not attend. However, our grant writer did attend.
- I attended a session at the commission with staff to clarify some of the questions. I took careful notes and followed their advice. The panel discussion was and expectations was very different than the advice from staff as it relates to clarity of questions and appropriate answers
- Attending the panel session was really useful. I appreciate having the opportunity.
- I was disappointed that one panelist gave our proposal a low score and therefore brought my overall score down.
- The panelists did not seem to read the proposal thoroughly or they forgot what they read by the time the session happened.
- The panel sessions seem to be the part of the process that created the most confusion and consternation. Some of the panelists did not appear to have first-hand experience in the arts and culture field and did not seem qualified to evaluate the applications. There also appeared to be arbitrary scoring on the part of panelists which seemed subjective and not following a particular rule of thumb set out by the Commission (in our panel a panelist gave glowing feedback but then gave us low scores in comparison to their comments). Perhaps eliminating higher scorers and lower scorers on the panel would take care of this issue. A larger number of panelists may help here as well.
- There were a couple of disconcerting comments made by panelists. Two mentioned that we had not submitted a document when in fact we had. At times, panelists seemed to be easily persuaded by others with strong opinions.
- I was unable to attend, but our new Executive Director attended. It was instructive to hear the feedback, but part of it caused me to think that not all members had read all parts of our proposal.
- Where were the arts administrators or specialists in the field?
- Panelists did not seem to understand the language of the queries and did not seem to understand the limitations of the online system
- One staff member did attend evaluation. As usual, the group seems to favor orgs that deal with kids. That's not who we are. While the current app made it easier to judge us on who we are, the discussion still seemed to show a bias towards helping kids.
- We sent an RFP team member. We stay to hear several to learn how to do better each year. Panelist rarely understands programs that are outside their specific interest. One panelist said because they had never heard of a particular org it must

not be that good. That's not fair to that applicant. Statements like this are not an anomaly. Another example (fy2015 or 16) was when two similar orgs were heard back to back. The first org the panel was impressed by its board of directors, the next org had many of the same people as directors, yet the panel was no longer impressed and dinged it as not being a good enough board! A board who had accomplished tremendous things as evident by the application and even though the BOD was the same makeup, one got high fives, and the other got dinged, now that is just not right! Staff would never do that as they know every org so well.

It gives applicants little confidence in the panelist abilities. After all the hard work the applicant does, it' has never been a good ending to the process. I have seen people leave in tears because the panel was so wrong or unfair. You don't need a panel; you have a great staff. Is it a consistent treatment /process as the other types of contracts the city awards? Staff understands each org so well, they know important details the panel can never know, why can't staff handle the entire process from start to finish? They are professionals in the specifics and details of each org, why hand it off after all their careful work to a group of folks who are uninformed by the very nature of the process. I attended for 15 years, and the panel has never done a good job on all across the board, they absolutely how favoritism even when staff tells them not to.

- So much time was spent on this process that - while I would have loved to attend - I could not take the time to do so.
- I ended up missing the discussion on my proposal since the time was moved up, but I did stay for discussion on other proposals - which was helpful.
- I enjoyed the panel session...very fair evaluations
- This year, I thought that the panelist did a great job.
- It was interesting to note the different perspectives of some of the panelists in terms of what criteria mattered most to them.
- It is unclear when writing the proposal what materials will be provided to the panel and what will not.
- I really enjoyed attending the panel session to hear feedback on our proposal but it was "stressful". Thankfully, we did fairly well.
- The panel discussion was confusing, lacked understanding of the art form or mission. Many times the interpretation of questions was decided at the meeting and evaluation was based on the interpretation panelist decided upon. Moderator commented on how great it was that some questions were more open to interpretation, so applicants could better tailor the answers to their specific needs. Unfortunately, panelists didn't see it this way and made up their own interpretation of the question and then evaluated the answers accordingly. Some comments were based on assumptions and not facts. Again, evaluators had little understanding of what our company does, our mission, and resources involved. The limited space we had available to explain our programs did not give them enough info to evaluate our work. For example we were taken off points for not performing operas by Asian or African composers. (We perform mostly 18th century repertoire - there has been no opera outside of Europe at that time.) We were also told our tickets (the cheapest

\$12 student or \$20 adult) are too expensive to list as "affordable" and for that price "one can go and see an opera at the Old Globe". (Old Globe does not perform opera, nor their tickets are in that price range.)

We were also given a comment that we are not accessible since we perform at an amphitheater that is located on the premises of a church - this comment is also absurd. There were several other organizations that received much higher ranking that only perform inside churches. Churches are standard and highly accessible venues for the arts around the globe for centuries, especially classical music. A letter that was submitted to prove the external evaluation of the company was not read fully, and was dismissed. (The paragraph specific to the company's work was in the second part of the letter.) Finally, the quality of the productions or the evaluation of artistic work was not discussed at all, and the quality of the programming or services not in any way were part of the discussion. I have not got enough space to write down here the full list of absurdity I encountered at the meeting.

- Character limits on some questions did not allow a complete answer. We were marked down by panelists in several instances for not providing more information.
- Thrilled with the briefing of the panel as our organization is somewhat complex and might not otherwise be evaluated accurately by some who may be less engaged in the community without that briefing. However some understanding of the Arts seems like it should be a prerequisite for engagement in the panels. Are engaged team members permitted to participate in (non conflict) panels? It is extremely difficult to sit through a presentation when inaccurate information is being spoken regarding your organization - particularly when that information is already correct in the application.
- The Panel sessions always occur when we are doing our programming. We don't yet have a qualified staff member to attend/observe on our behalf effectively.
- I could not attend as I was out of the country. But I was very relieved to hear that the panels were comparing "apples to apples" this year when it came to budget size. Excellent improvement.
- The panel had a couple of people who were not qualified and brought prejudices to the evaluation of our application. We know it's hard to find volunteers to spend the time on the panels evaluating but good qualified panel members is important.
- Most of panel had not thoroughly read/remembered our proposal (end of day; they were tired). Instructions should have emphasized priority importance of quantitative data, rather than indicating qualitative would be seriously considered - or panel should have given greater consideration to qualitative information. If appropriate, instructions should more clearly indicate need for ethnic diversity in programming - or panel should be instructed that it is not the only/main criteria for an award.
- We truly appreciate that the panels are public and have multiple reviewers. The downside is that I witnessed incorrect statements about organizations made by panelists, as well as misinformed statements. More training seems to be needed to ensure all the panelists are well prepared. I think the individual scores of panelists should be gathered prior to the group review. I will give one example from our panel

review. In the response to a question about how the museum provides access to the community, we began our response by listing the Museum's hours of operation. In prior years, we were ENCOURAGED to list our operating hours because being open to the public IS providing access, and it is also distinct from some other arts organizations without staffed public hours. But a panelist said he didn't think listing hours was access and cast it in a negative light (even though we also went on to list many other specific examples of access). This was not corrected by staff.

- The panel had been trained to understand the value and inherent difference between a service organization and a presenting organization. This illustrated good training. Overall the panel did not look at required budget information. One organization did not answer the last section correctly and their application should have been marked down but instead the panel overlooked this and gave them credit.
- Panel evaluation times were not sent out and were not easy to find on the website.
- Although completely nerve wracking, It was a wonderful example of civic participation and process in action. We very much appreciated hearing our evaluation and it helped us in many ways for future grant writing. Hearing others' evaluation was also helpful - what to do, what not to do.
- As noted above, there was absolutely no discussion about financials in any of the panel deliberations I witnessed, including our own. Having sat on panels of two states and three cities, I can say that never have I witnessed such an incomplete discussion. Of note, too: there was no discussion of support materials. Letters, media, brochures all tell something about an organization, often from a 3rd person perspective. A letter from an authoritative source can provide strong, objective support for an assertion in a grant. An informed panelist looks at and discusses support materials as part of a whole grant discussion.
- In past panel discussion there were over 5 people and I think our panel discussion this year there were only three. I am not clear on the panel process and how many reviewers participate.
- We normally try to attend the sessions but we could not manage it this year.
- I was surprised to learn there were different panels used to evaluate. So the evaluation was only based on the groups in that section, not all of the applicants in each level. I also learned the panels had a different number of people on them. I would think to have a fair evaluation process it should be the same people on the panel for each level.
- Very insightful to see first-hand the panel's observations, discussions, and feedback.
- While I was surprised how involved all panel members were in the discussion, some points (both positive & negative) about our program seemed somewhat superficial. I admired the guidance given panel in discussion by staff person.
- Although not directed toward us, we were appalled when one of the panelists gave a very low score to one application that received top ratings from everyone else, and their ranking was adversely affected. Didn't there use to be a control in place for that kind of discrepancy?

- We were also surprised that in the session we attended, the staff facilitator did not make any comments at all, when she could have answered questions or clarified issues. "
- The panels and scoring would be less subjective if panelists were required to submit their scoring matrix and justifying notes in advance, and the session used more for discussing particularly high or low marks. For example, during the panel I attended, and in regard to multiple organization RFPs, panelists commented "I don't see why I didn't give it a 4 but I give it a 3." Another commented, "I don't know why I'm saying 3 instead of 4." Considering the amount of effort that goes into the application process from multiple staff members, subjective and baseless responses like this devalue the effort that organizations invest in the process.
- Some panelists were uninformed about the arts and arts business models. They weren't well trained or informed on how to score or how to read applications. Staff did not guide the process well. Panelists scored applications box by box and not on overall quality of content. One panelist couldn't read her notes and appeared not to have read some parts of the application. Panelists did not understand how to score properly when small errors were made -- a small error shouldn't reflect on the overall quality of the application or the applicant's programs. Panelists need to see budgets to understand financial health of organizations. That informs decisions.

Survey Question #15: Overall, do you have any suggestions and/or recommendations to improve the RFP submission/evaluation process?

- It is an intensive process, but the funding from the Commission is a critical source of funding for us, so I'm fine with the requirements and the effort that it takes to complete them.
- Our recommendations have been communicated through other channels.
- The translation of rating and budget information to an award amount seems very opaque. We received a 10% cut in funding this year over last even though 1) our rating was the same, 2) our annual operating budget was higher and 3) the Commission's budget was cut by only 3.5%.
- The long form is a daunting process to submit every year. The short form had plenty of information involved in the submittal. I think it would be good to go back to the old process of long/short forms. It would be good to have the application at the beginning of the fiscal year - so that we know what is expected. Sometimes - it is difficult to decipher what is expected in an answer to a question - and it can make all the difference in the scoring. And I understand that this is a very difficult process to curate.
- Please simplify for smaller organizations.
- Last year's RFP was new so it will be clearer going forward.
- Not every organization fits the template and not sure it can ever do so. We struggle to provide some of the information requested. I think we could improve our outcomes if we had the opportunity to discuss it with A&C at some point after during the year to hopefully get their suggestions. One thing I am positive about is that Arts & Culture staff are very, very helpful and do a great job.

- In agreement with San Diego Regional Arts and Culture Coalition Ad Hoc Committee Members: Since it seems that the Commission staff does not foresee any substantial changes to the guidelines or questions for FY19, a short form should be made available for FY 19 for those eligible organizations that wish to retain their rank for a three-year funding cycle. This will allow arts and culture organizations to focus on their important work of serving the people of San Diego through arts and culture programs and services rather than dedicate many hours of staff time to prepare the application. This was the Commission's policy until FY 17 and we request that it be reinstated for this coming FY 19 application cycle.
- Lead time with the application will help to formulate thoughtful responses and give ample time to ask for review from the Commission. We did receive some great help and guidance from staff.
- The goals and objectives guidelines were different from the previous form. Applicants were used to that type of format. However, as long we stick with that format applicants will adapt to that type of format.
- The process was cumbersome and overly labor intensive. The process is unclear. I also heard that the panel members openly criticized certain types of organizations as not "artistic" enough.
- Please try to not have deadline close to the California Arts Council, County of San Diego and National Endowment for the Arts deadlines. Everything is due around the same time and it's a challenge for a small nonprofit like ours.
- Better train the review panel with in advance so as they review (prior to the panel discussion) they are all reviewing similar criteria. it was clear in the discussion that some panel members were not on the same page during the discussion and ranking.
- This was the third year we have submitted. Each year the application has been really different. I would like it if the application could settle down so we didn't have a steep learning curve every year.
- I felt the process was very rigorous for the amount of the award. Maybe because it was the first time we applied...
- It was very confusing to figure out the differences and relationships between question 2 (What are the goals and objectives of the project your organization is proposing?) and question 4 (What are the measurable impacts of the project and how will the impacts achieve the stated goals and objectives?)
- Please release...even if only in draft form...the questions earlier. The tight time frame was very difficult to meet with volunteers having scheduled vacations, etc. The effort was reasonable for the amount funded but the tight time frame made it impossible to produce best work.
- "The appeal process should be well publicized and allow adequate time for organizations to apply. A public review process could also help with transparency during the appeals process.
- Rumors also circulated after the panels that some organizations received notification of a different score from the one they received at their panel, which caused confusion.

- Separating the RFP process from the RFQ process was very helpful and also ensured that unqualified panelists did not review financials that they may not have been able to adequately assess without in depth knowledge of the non-profit business model.
- I would be interested in learning what qualifications are needed to be on the panel. I'm grateful for the work that City staff have put in to streamline the process - I think there's been much improvement. And I've found the staff to be very responsive.
- I absolutely understand a rigorous process for these grants/contracts. However, I think the attachment part of process could be much clearer. If attachments are required, it would be helpful to have what should be included in them spelled out succinctly. I felt that the questions could have been posed in such a way that no attachments would be needed. As I mentioned above, I felt like perhaps some of the panel did not receive all of our attachments. It might be an easier process for the panel as well if the questions in the grant covered the material needed to review the organization versus giving orgs the open-ended attachment process.
- Small orgs have to complete that same application as larger orgs with more hr support and are held to the same standards as the orgs with more capacity. If your funding potential is less than 75K there should be a more streamlined process.
- Too many last minute amendments and changes issued by the Commission; the list of links to amendments is too chaotic: some directions are circular: a FY calendar with all deadlines ought to be published within the first month of the fiscal year (during which org will apply) if not sooner (by the end of the prior fiscal year) so that orgs can allocate appropriate personnel resources in the fy budget; the OSP application process is a very dissatisfying and negative experience.
- For a multifaceted organization (many different programs) we found the character limits difficult. During the review process we received feedback from panelists wanting more info on a particular topic but we couldn't cover everything in as much depth as we would have liked.
- Have staff handle the entire process from start to finish, not panels.
- Consistency. These application processes seem to change from year to year - making it difficult on smaller nonprofits who are already stretched thin on time.
- Continue to condense the amount of information requested. Some questions felt like they were asking for similar narrative but in a different way.
- Not to improve the process, but to change the underpinnings of the grant itself.
- I think improvements are being made in the right direction. A monthly reminder and template to track/update numbers for the purposes of the final report might be helpful. With focus on programming and events, the extra step for consistent and prompt recording is sometimes missed.
- Simplify to make it more economical for small non profits
- Splitting the process into the RFQ and RFP didn't save any time. If anything, more time was required. The process that the Arts Commission requires takes a lot of time to complete ... it is comparable to major government grants. It may be too difficult for volunteers and people who are not well versed in the grant application process, so my guess is that the process favors larger organizations that have the staff to complete the Art Commission's rigorous application process.

- In Section 2, I would switch the order of questions 2 and 3. This keep the items about goals and objectives to follow each other. I would allow more characters for Section 4 Question 3.
- A small non-profit has less resources, is eligible for less, but dedicates equal or more time than a million dollar institution. In fact, million dollar institution can afford a grant writer, as were smaller organization spend staff time during the application process. The application process for a \$5,000 contract should be less intense than one for a \$100,000 contract.
- This was the first time I submitted this proposal, so there was a learning curve for me. However, I was told that previous guidelines were much more cumbersome. I would like to see the guidelines and submission process remain the same for the most part. However, there needs to be much more allowable space for Section 4, question # 3. It was VERY challenging to give an accurate answer with the allotted space. At the panel, several organizations including ours were dinged for not having more pertinent information included.
- 1. Reevaluate the formula how organizations get funding. Large organizations receive disproportionate amounts and small organizations that need the most help never get enough support. The current formula helps somewhat to count for the difference but does not go far enough at all. 2. Please, please, please bring in evaluators, who have first hand knowledge and understanding about the arts. Every panel should have at least some experts in the performing arts (theater, classical music, dance, etc), fine arts, conservation, etc, who can inform the rest of the panel about applicants and provide some facts to the discussion when questions arise. Quality of programing should be at least part of the discussion since work samples and outside reviews were requested. 3. Provide an opportunity for a 2 minute correction/comment to the company representatives present at the meeting to be on the record. 4. The point system, while seems very transparent, is actually very subjective. Panel members need to provide a better narrative and clearer criteria why and how they take off points and how many points they can take off. Interpretation of questions and the amount of points taken off for ""offenses"" seemed arbitrary and was highly subjective to the personalities and specific preferences of evaluators. This must change. 5. Evaluators were adding up their own points. Several times it was reported that they made a mistake and the score was changed. It is possible that mistakes were not discovered every time and some applicant's funding could have been subject to panelists' basic math skills. Points given to each question need to be reported individually to a third person with a calculator/computer and publicly added up to a score.
- Allow more characters for some questions so we can make our case. Also, panelist opinions were wildly divergent, and some negativity was caused by not being able to provide more complete information.
- It seems to me that with the very significant number of applicants being considered, then panel resources are being severely taxed unnecessarily. I understand the "short form" is being considered for reintroduction in 2020 however I am unsure why that could not be returned for this coming year. This would immediately relieve pressure

on the process and staff, satisfy the needs of many contractors and save countless hours of administrative work.

- Additional time
- Yes, the evaluation process looks too largely at budget size versus sustainable programmatic relevance, overall and projected impact. In fact this year I feel like we were ask to speak even less about what we do, how well we did it and who we served.
- The evaluation process also does not take into account multiple city generated funding streams, in-kind support and benefits certain contractors receive housed on city property, facilities which directly offsets, reduces their expenses substantially compared to contractors not in the same position. This creates an immediate unequal, inequitable position and condition.
- Several membership organizations who directly serve and benefit particularly oriented funded contractors are also funded to provide their services to these particular funded contractors. Therefore, and as a result these contractors are benefitting more than once from this funding stream and thru this evaluation process. I am not sure, or I don't understand how or why membership organizations that have exclusive focuses in who they are serve are being funded at all. My understanding is that contractors should be working to serve everyone thru their work."
- Process seemed much more reasonable than the previous year. Nonetheless, rearranging of questions and character limit very much limited the ability to "cut and paste" answers.
- It seems strange that one year you are evaluated for the same event and you submit better and better applications year to year (or you should with 17 years of submitting the application each year and being awarded funding). This process should make life easier for all by providing either 3- 5 year contracts for proposals that are just an exact repeat for years. We can cut and paste from the previous year's application but that seems like a waste of valuable time for all. Maybe create "signature events" that have a proven track record and provide significant return on investment and tot. You can create the criteria for becoming a "signature event" that would preclude making the same application year to year.
- Make sure the guidelines are very clear and released with plenty of time to respond. The RFQ seemed unnecessary. It seemed aimed at weeding out only a few very small organizations. Ensure the review process has clear scoring. Have panelists provide and share individual scores prior to group review. Maybe group review score is weighted differently (I don't know-- perhaps research other panel review processes). Keep panels public -- this is important. Keep looking at streamlining the application, it continues to require many hours of preparation.
- For a small organization there is a lot of repeating of the same information. It takes the same amount of time as for a larger non-profit with a grant writer vs one with 2-3 staff members.
- Apply consistent evaluative process for panel review.
- Better communication on panel times and review process.

- Round Two of the panel I witnessed was inadequate. There was no discussion of panelist ranking anomalies, as had happened for our application. In all other panels I have witnessed or in which I have participated, Round Two, specifically looks at such divergence of ranking, with a discussion to follow. This was not raised by the facilitator, whose job it is to raise such concerns, or by any panelist.
- Perhaps my greatest concern is the lack of an appeals process, which is now only about fundable/nonfundable, and goes to staff not Commissioners. This policy closes off contact between contractors and Commissioners, and takes away a reasonable avenue of process from applicants. Past criteria about appeals were very clear and fair to applicant, staff, Commissioners, and panelists, and discouraged frivolous or petulant appeals. The current system seems arbitrary and non-transparent, bordering on arrogance or laziness."
- In the past, applicants were given a review of comments by the panel. This year, we were given their score sheets, which often had no comments, just ranking. To improve what was considered a low score without comments on how to address those rankings, is worthless.
- More transparency on the process.
- My recollection is that we thought the timeline was tight for the RFQ, but the RFP was fair to give another month. Ask these survey questions closer to the end of the process. Calculating hours spent is just a guesstimate over 6 months later.
- Some sections asked a number of items to be addressed, but the allotted space was large enough, which then required more time trying to edit the answers to fit. It was time consuming to try to answer the questions asked, but in a limited space. This might not be a problem with smaller organizations, but the space allowed for biographies was too small.
- As the guidelines were adjusted for this year, some of the scoring elements were not clear as to how they would be reviewed, what elements would have priority, etc. As an organization that focuses on many programs and an extremely large and diverse audience, we found it difficult to capture all of the data that was desired while still sharing the narrative along with it. Ultimately, we realized that we might have actually been able to share more information if we used bullet points instead of narrative, especially as the space provided was limited. It appeared that more data points were desired in many cases. In some areas, our answers focused on a specific program or audience whereas ultimately the panel more often sought broader answers. In observing their discussions, we would have definitely focused our responses in different ways had we known that was how it would be judged. Ultimately, we found that a gap exists between what we were able to record in the limited space for answers vs. the depth of the actual programs delivered."
- Sadly the only suggestions I could make right now would require additional time for both panelists & applicants, which I'm sure is simply not available. Specifically, the overall process is directed towards the City's mission, which is appropriate: it's the City's money, its policy. The RFP does ask how the org's mission fits in with the City's, but there are a lot of little orgs whose mission, while requiring a professional

polish, still is very hometown. Might be interesting to see if or how the City's mission fits in with the org's.

- I know the Commission has the best of intentions for improving, clarifying and simplifying the process, but it feels like the exact opposite is happening. It also feels far more demeaning to applicants and far most discriminatory toward small/grassroots organizations, which it the exact opposite of the City Council's express request to the commission several years ago. I know the city and the commission must safeguard the use of city funds, but....
- Panelists should be more informed about the arts and arts business models. Applications are too long making it hard for panelists to review them carefully. Panelists should be trained and prepared for carefully. Panels should have an adequate number of panelists or not move forward. Staff need to be more involved in panel process. Panelists must see financials. Suggest highest and lowest scores be eliminated to ameliorate extreme scoring or personal biases.

Communication and Technical Assistance

Survey Question #16: If you attended any Technical Assistance Workshop(s) prior to submitting your either part of the application, please rate the extent to which you agree with the following:

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know/Don't recall	Did not attend a TA workshop
The information presented was clear	1%	4%	20%	58%	2%	15%
The information presented sufficiently prepare us for the application process	6%	4%	28%	46%	1%	15%
The information session was a good use of our organization's time	4%	6%	22%	52%	1%	15%

Meeting dates / times / locations were convenient	4%	6%	31%	46%	1%	12%
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Are there any changes to Technical Assistance Workshop session(s) that you would recommend?

- I see the benefit of doing the workshops in person (good for networking and hearing other orgs concerns), but it seems like a lot of the training could be done online. It's hard for us to get away from the office for the workshops.
- I wasn't available for any of the workshops - but I did study the PowerPoints - very, very helpful.
- My colleague attended so I am unable to provide accurate feedback without his input.
- I think the sessions are good. I think it would be good to have a more detailed session about answering the open ended questions.
- The workshops I attended consisted of people reading slides of information that is readily available on the internet. There was no reason to go in person.
- Great staff
- The meeting I attended started a half hour late. It was difficult to find. I literally had to step over a barrier to get into the room. I had to leave before it concluded and so missed information that would have been important.
- The workshops are really valuable.
- Technical assistance session was crucial. Any organization that doesn't take advantage of the session is doing their organization a disfavor.
- Move up earlier so there is more time to complete the application after attending the workshop.
- Try and treat applicants as equals, felt like there was some 'talking down' on occasion.
- Kudos to staff members.
- There was inconsistency between what was stated and emphasized at the RFP Workshop and how the panelists evaluated the applications.
- I like the slides being available online. Keep it short but keep it informative!
- Staff does a great job.
- A few in different locations, reaching a bit further north, if possible.
- Simplify
- Perhaps having them a little earlier (before deadlines).
- None.
- Some information presented was misleading. Both in terms of formatting and in terms of the way proposals were evaluated.

- The sessions cover many topics very quickly (and are talked through very quickly) and the new information/changes were not always clear or detailed enough to plan for.
- We need a webinar. I have been requesting this for a while now to accommodate those of us who have conflicts due to our programming schedule.
- If at all possible, I would always like a little more notice. I feel that less than 2 weeks notice is tricky to schedule.
- I attend the presentations to get a heads up on things that might be different-- I appreciate when those are emphasized.
- No as this is well presented and executed by your staff.
- Please see comments on previous page.
- More lead-time for announcing TA workshops would be appreciated.
- Questions were answered but presentation had an aire of "talking down to arts groups", as if our expertise in grant writing was not good enough to write this application.
- I think there should be three options: a morning, a lunchtime, a late afternoon/evening. Many people who need to attend these are volunteers and can't justify time away from work to attend this important info session.
- A little more advance notice to meetings would be helpful. We are a very small organization (unpaid staff of 1) and so arranging my schedule was difficult. That's just me though.
- Generally I find current Commission technical assistance workshops to be overly long and chummy. Virtually all written materials coming from the Commission are way too long and not concise. Just the information, please.
- Be clear about what is being presented in each workshop prior to holding the workshop. Had I known the RFQ workshop was only for the RFQ, I would not have attended. Albeit, while attending, they did not cover all the concerns about the RFQ, which came up while completing the application. So the workshop was worthless for two reasons.
- Liked the new city library as a site
- Very informative.
- I tried to attend the workshop, but I could not find the location and missed it. I did speak to others that attended and they felt the workshop was helpful, since the application was different from the previous year and the year previous to that one.
- We'd like to start the process earlier. I'm sure the future pattern will be more regular & have fewer deadline changes, although all deadlines always are mortifying.
- I think that the workshops should be consistently held in locations that accommodate the size of the group anticipated. It seems that instead they are scheduled to get participants to visit/explore non-central areas of the city.
- The application was entirely new at this point, so the staff didn't have all the information. Staff was friendly, open and professional, but they were unfamiliar with the application and process.

Survey Question #17: Prior to submitting the RFQ and/or RFP, did you have any direct contact with a City staff member?

Response	Total Respondents	Total Percentage
Yes	70	85%
No	12	15%

No Staff Contact

Survey Question #18: Briefly describe any reasons your organization did not make contact with a City staff member prior to submitting the RFQ.

- We have submitted applications four years in a row. We are sure of the requirements. The application was straightforward.
- Didn't need any assistance.
- We have submitted proposals in past years and are familiar with the process.
- All the information presented at the meeting was clear enough that we did not feel the need to ask any questions.
- I think we might have asked one question but we only contact when we need to. Some years we've been confused.
- Didn't need to
- No need
- No reason to, until the RFQ was kicked back to us.
- Not needed

Survey Question #19: Briefly describe any reasons your organization did not make contact with a City staff member prior to submitting the RFP.

- Same as above
- Didn't need any assistance.
- We have submitted proposals in past years and are familiar with the process
- All the information presented at the meeting was clear enough that we did not feel the need to ask any questions.
- I think we might have asked one question but we only contact when we need to. Some years we've been confused.
- Didn't need to
- No need
- No reason to
- Not needed

Communications and Technical Assistance

Survey Question #20: Prior to submitting the RFQ and/or RFP, which of the following communication methods were used to reach City Staff? (Check all that apply).

Response	RFQ	RFP
Phone	28	29
Email	42	47
1:1 Office Hours Appointment	4	13
Don't know/Don't remember	4	2

Additional Comments

- Staff was patient, helpful and considerate
- staff was very helpful
- These were done by our Admin.
- City staff are very responsive and very helpful always.
- Specifically Anjanette and Whitney were both very helpful.
- Whitney was quick in responding
- Communication with the staff was poor. Mostly my questions resulted in a "we'll get back to you" type of comment. They didn't get back to me.
- The staff is great... very helpful and patient
- Very helpful.
- I believe I spoke to Whitney regarding uploading attachments.
- Great response time and helpful.
- Staff are accessible, responsive, and seem very motivated to serve the public.
- Staff was very helpful
- Staff works hard!
- Personal time meeting
- staff is timely respectful with responses
- The staff people at the Arts Commission are very helpful and knowledgeable.
- Whitney's customer service is excellent. She was responsive, patient and helpful.
- All of these communication methods were satisfactory. Responses were timely.
- Responses are timely and helpful!
- Staff was extremely helpful with my questions.
- Whitney is terrific. Answers questions almost immediately.
- Whitney is phenomenal: super responsive and helpful
- Whitney was great, answered all my questions and returned call very promptly!
- Contact with Whitney, always provided timely and accurate feedback
- Staff was helpful, pleasant and responsive.
- Implementing the recommendations of staff, lead to a lower ranking.
- Great options
- Anjanette was extremely accessible and her help was clear and concise.

- City Staff have always been exceptional in providing guidance, direction, and support in many ways. They are always open to take questions and provide clarity in many cases.
- It's clear staff is really busy and also learning new procedures, but they've always tried to be helpful.
- I do remember asking questions about the applications, but cannot remember if they were by phone, email, or both.
- Staff is accommodating and open.

Survey Question #21: Approximately how much total time did you spend with the City of San Diego staff member(s) throughout the entire funding application process?

Response	Total Respondents	Total Percentage
Less than 5 minutes	4	6%
More than 5 minutes but less than 15 minutes	21	30%
More than 15 minutes but less than 45 minutes	19	27%
More than 45 minutes but less than 1 hour	6	9%
Between 1 and 2 hours	9	13%
More than 2 hours	5	7%
Don't know/Don't recall	6	8%

General Feedback

Survey Question #22: To what extend do you agree the FY 2018 (RFQ/RFP) process was an improved over the previous FY 2017 process?

Response	Total Respondents	Total Percentage
Strongly disagree	13	16%
Somewhat disagree	14	17%
Somewhat agree	32	40%
Strongly agree	14	17%
N/A – Did not apply for FY2017 funding	8	10%

Additional Comments

- Our organization applied for funding the year before, but I was not here then. From what I see from the application, it was a lot more straight forward in 2017.
- Can't recall specific reasons.
- The process seems to becoming more complex, though assistance is available
- I think that submitting a long form every year is a lot to ask of small organizations. It was difficult to put aside the time when the questions weren't ready until 4-5

weeks before the due date. At least for my schedule - I am actively presenting and performing. I had set my schedule for 2 slower weeks to write the grant - then the due date changed. It is important to know what is expected early in the season and to know the deadline well ahead of planning a season if possible.

- Much better.
- The process in total is greatly easier in many ways and a great improvement. Still, with the change in the open ended questions are subject to interpretation thus could use more education
- The FY2017 process was horrible.
- Having a two-step process allows smaller organizations a better use of their time.
- Breaking it into two parts was helpful, and saved any organizations who were not eligible a lot of work.
- The process was more time consuming. There were more meetings, more paperwork and at the end, less funding. There is discussion among the street fair community that the panel is openly biased against us. The ROI for this type of funding is becoming less and less.
- Less steps would be easier for nonprofits with limited staffing/capacity.
- Making the RFQ more substantive than the old Letter of Intent made the process a little easier since it made the application itself simpler and moved organizational qualifications out of the project evaluation/scoring.
- The RFP process was still time consuming and I think this year it was more time consuming than in prior years.
- Too many last minute surprises in terms of questions and requirements.
- The separation of the RFQ and RFP was very helpful but the timeline seemed rushed and the RFQ submission deadline over the December holidays was less than ideal.
- The FY17 process was even worse, so this not saying much.
- It allowed us to define ourselves a bit more
- I didn't understand the need for the RFQ process. There seemed to be redundancy between the RFQ and RFP.
- The process gets better every year. Things that we have quietly complained to ourselves over the years are no longer a problem. In the past changes were never helpful, just changes. Now when changes are made the reasons are evident. I can't state enough just how much this process has improved since the new E.D. has come on.
- The amount of the grant and match made a small project like ours implausible. What we actually need is a revision of the parameters of the grant to include educational programs or we need the OSP exclusion of organizations that also serve outside of San Diego to be changed.
- It is altogether a very expensive , stressful and time consuming process...small nonprofits could have a more simple less expensive process
- As I said before, I thought that separating out the RFQ and RFP process was not all that helpful; if anything, I think it increased the work rather than reduced the work. And having the RFQ process over the Christmas Holidays was not a good idea ...

many people travel during this time, so it was more difficult to gather the necessary information for the RFQ. I ended up working over much of the holiday, as I was the only one around to do the work.

- Yes, the process as reported to me was much improved over FY 17.
- Last year's RFP was brutal. We spent hours more staff time than we could really afford. But this one felt that we did not have enough space to adequately explain our programs.
- The timing of the RFQ was a bit strange - didn't set up the consideration of the process for success.
- Except that we would have qualified for short form!
- Too much focus on budget and not enough on programmatic impact. I appreciate the need to understand an organization is sustainable and fiscally sound however the interest in us completing our goals and objectives need to be far more balanced with the other. Particularly, how we serve the underserved.
- Night and Day!!!
- But it could be improved with adding a category for applicants that are only repeating their application for years and in our case 17 years.
- The RFP is still too repetitious.
- The narrative questions were much clearer.
- It's been frustrating to have the questions/structure of the application change every year for the past few years. I understand it's all with the goal of improving the process, but it'll be nice once it's settled.
- "The FY17 grant was singularly the worst grant I've ever encountered from a government or private funder, hammering governance (and governance) over artistic and service content without any differentiation between large, medium, and small group. So the FY18 application was a big improvement. That said, the questions, while simpler than in FY17, were still redundant and did not ultimately allow for comprehensive storytelling, which is the heart of grant writing.
- Our organization in prior years have ranked at its lowest a 3+ and at its highest a 4. Using the same people to complete the application, consulting with Commission staff about the few questions that seemed confusing, resulted in a ranking of 2+ with no clear reasons for the ranking in comments. We did not attend the panel review as the previous year's comments and our own personal understanding while at the panel review were different. Rather that sway our understandings of panel comments, we opted to not attend. Had we known in advance that their comments would not be shared, we would have attended. In addition, the amount of work for an application less than \$10,000 is the same as an application for \$80,000+. To work hard for such little money does seem to be ridiculous.
- Applied in prior years, thought this process was a big improvement
- We appreciate the difficulty in creating a new process and the dedication to improve it. We have endured several changes in the process in recent years including timeline adjustments. We hope in upcoming years the timeline is announced well in advance so we can plan better.

- From discussions with our staff, the process was certainly an improvement over the more complicated process in the past. Continuing forward, we feel better prepared to answer the questions in ways that will relate to the panels as well.
- The effort to make applicant arts organizations, especially small ones, conform to standards found in major funding agencies, will inevitably be difficult for both sides. And the amount of effort & expertise required of these orgs is huge & unwieldy for them. The current process is a compromise, but if we want the City (or any funding agency) to provide more support - especially if it's tax money - there does need to be some way of establishing equivalency among applicants. No process will be easier, but I have to say, if an org has established a successful track record, it would be useful to reduce the load for both sides.
- The only positive that I remember is that this past year we were not required to refer to our organizations in the third person, nor we were cautioned that applications would be downgraded if there were mistakes in grammar and spelling. There are many grassroots organizations that do wonderful work in the community who are led by those whose first language is not English, and whose work should be encouraged rather than discouraged by the city. We are a multi-cultural society.
- The questions in the forms were clearer, though to get the desired answers the applicant needed to have attended the workshops for context. The timelines for completion, and moving deadlines for both processes were not an improvement at all.
- After completing this application, I was ready to reconsider my career choice. It was the worst grant writing experience I have had in my 22 years of working in the nonprofit sector. The online application constraints were cumbersome; many questions were redundant and so it was hard to continually restate the same thing in different ways; the character limits were too restrictive (example: section 4, question 3), the amount of time given to complete an entirely new application and to create the support materials was too short. Guidelines for support materials were very unclear. Important questions about organizational capacity were missing. Previous applications asked more meaningful and relevant questions.

Survey Question #23: To what extent do you agree that the amount of effort put into the total RFQ/RFP application process was appropriate for the size of the funding award you received?

Response	Total Respondents	Total Percentage
Strongly disagree	10	12%
Somewhat disagree	18	22%
Somewhat agree	33	40%
Strongly agree	19	23%
N/A – Did not apply for FY2017 funding	2	3%

Survey Question #24: We welcome any additional comments, observations or opinions that you wish to share.

- I really appreciate the support I've received from the staff during this whole process. They always got back to us immediately, and provided a calm and very helpful presence during the whole process.
- We congratulate the arts and culture staff for their help in making the process easier.
- The process is just that- more process-oriented rather than results oriented. In its beginning, the commission was focused on and emphasized the end-product and the positive impacts of the arts and culture for the public rather than staff qualifications, administrative capacity, and "programmatic excellence". Some organizations and activities are simple or grass-roots level and do not have "artistic teams" with technical expertise but still do an excellent job of hosting artistic and cultural events.
- Our organization has appreciated the support offered to help us keep growing, learning and understand how to submit stronger proposals.
- It was frustrating that we spent more time applying for this grant and received less funding. However, interesting that when the Mayor proposed cutting arts funding, I started getting calls asking me to lobby the Mayor to save the funding.
- Thank you City of San Diego for your much needed support!
- I would like more transparency on how funding allocation is made.
- Great job on continuing to improve the process
- Thank you for working on making this process less painful!
- Our application received a very strong score and we are honored to be funded. I do think the process could be improved by making questions explicit versus asking for so many attachments. I was not 100% certain what the attachments needed to contain whereas explicit questions could garner the same information in a more expedient many. I think the technical workshop was very helpful and staff very willing to help us along the way. If possible, it would be nice to not have to complete part of the applications during the holidays. I thought the RFP was very specific and easy to follow.
- The process...and evaluation...and system improvement should be an annual event. Better every year!
- The process needs to be improved.
- Timelines for all grant years in operation should be on website. If I'm concerned that we have reporting for a previous year due soon or that we have a new year coming up, I should be able to look and see it all in one easy place on site. I worry I'll miss something with the previous year, the current year and the future year all overlapping all the time.
- Thanks for the opportunity to provide comments.
- Please find a way to make the entire process less expensive , stressful and time consuming for tiny nonprofits who have been around for a long time and do not have the resources for "development teams"

- This new process worked well for our organization and we look forward to such a streamlined process again next year. The two part process is an excellent addition!
- Will try again this year. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.
- Efficient process most of which is not difficult to understand and comply with.....just need additional time as the RFQ/RFP process comes at our peak activity time.
- The criteria and evaluation process needs a serious evaluation. Larger budgeted orgs will only continue to claim too large a portion of the pool and the smaller budgeted orgs will never grow larger within the current formula. Do a couple of practice calculations. It prevents smaller orgs from growing to institutional capacity altogether which is part of the mission statement of the commission.
- The Commission has put together an incredible team and I am especially impressed with staff's work. They are ALWAYS courteous and extremely helpful.
- Any thought to giving a special category to funding events that are "significant" for generating TOT. Maybe funding based on TOT generated provided a third party has independently evaluated the economic impact.
- The Commission has done many things to reach out to the community and solicit feedback. This is commendable. Unfortunately, it does not always seem to be reflected in the resulting processes and application. Keep the transparency by summarizing the feedback that you gather and helping us understand why certain decisions are made. There is a lot of frustration among contractors with the continual shifts to the process without it feeling more streamlined or simple.
- Strongly suggest return of short form process for stable organizations. Contracting process needs reform as the paperwork is excessive.
- It was a great learning and growing experience for me personally and our organization. Here's to many more years...
- My comments are an indicator of my grave concerns about the direction of the Commission and its increasingly flawed application and panel process. I would prefer that there be a facilitated meeting between contractors and Commission and staff rather than a Survey Monkey survey administered by a third party.
- That said, I must take you on your word that our organizational name remains anonymous, and that what I have written is delivered to Commissioners and staff as an indicator of at least one constituent who has concerns and sees little avenue for genuine airing of these concerns. The Commission matters so much to our organization and to the field. It matters to me personally, too.
- In the end, with open discussion and collegiality, it is possible to find consensus amid shared love of the work of the Commission. Without openness and facilitated, frank discussion, I fear further erosion of trust. My worst fear is that Commission could fall apart and be dissolved by a Mayor who may denigrate its value to citizens.
- I believe staff feels they do not value community events and only wishes to support arts organizations. Questions are geared towards arts organizations more than community enhancing and neighborhood involvement.
- This year's funding award level was about 50% of what our last funding application received. A disappointment for us, but the process was easier and consumed much less admin staff time. I confess that we never counted the hours of work to get this

done in prior years, but it was massive. I made a rough guess as to hours put into this year's process.

- I felt like the new and open communications and process was a welcome change to previous years.
- We recommend the possibility of a 2-year funding process. If this is not possible, we suggest submitting a short form application for previously funded organizations and then every 3 years submit a long form, if programming and staff hasn't changed.
- Our org got marked down - in our opinion - because at least one panel member either did not read or forgot some of our statements. It may be the case that we failed to appropriately articulate or emphasize certain points, but we had written answers to some questions at least one panelist found unanswered. Not sure if there was some animus in that, not that it's critical. Watching sausage making, as has been said, is not the same as eating them. We appreciate the work done by Commission & staff, enormously, & feel that the current growth struggles are important and fruitful. No matter how much we might like an easier process, the engagement makes our whole organization grow & learn more about who we are & how we can best fit into the community.
- Apologies for the negative evaluation. My mother always taught me that if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. But, she also taught me not to lie. With your repeat request to submit our feedback, we are finally doing so, in hopes that the process can be improved, and that our future applications will not be negatively impacted by what we said here. We are most grateful for City funding. It makes our work with underserved populations possible.
- We are happy to assert much work and effort into an application that provides an important source of funding to our organization. However, the changes made to the application process, that weren't publicly vetted and were incomprehensible, and the panel review process were ill-conceived, hastily created and adopted, and created undue strain on our organization.

Appendix B: Interview Summaries

The following feedback is a result of nine one-on-one interviews conducted over a two week period with each interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interviewees were selected to represent a cross-section participants in the FY18 funding process including Commissioners, experienced grantwriters, first-time applicants, returning applicants, large-budget applicants, small-budget applicants, applicants to the OSP program, applicants to the CCSD program and panelists. Two interviews were conducted in person and the remaining seven were conducted by phone.

Overall, the feedback was mixed: While almost all of the interviewees lauded the City's efforts in soliciting feedback and that the willingness to improve the application experience was a step in the right direction, several areas consistently emerged that warrant the City's consideration for future funding cycles. These areas include the lack of transparency in the scoring and review process, rigidity of the criteria, technical aspects of the application itself, and funding priorities.

Review Process

The interviewees shared that the newest version of the application and the corresponding scoring process may not provide an accurate picture of an organization's capacity. These concerns stem from the interviewee's feedback around transparency about the scoring process and panelist qualifications and engagement. Several interviewees perceived a lack of transparency specifically in the RFQ scoring process which led some to believe that some applicants who were approved in reality lack capacity. There was also some concern about panelist qualifications and those that are not familiar with arts organizations, may not understand the nuances which could have negatively affected an applicant's score. One interviewee recalled that they witnessed a panel give the same organization disparate scores - a one and a four. There seemed to be some connection of the disparity with concerns about the change in the appeal process that is now an internal decision rather than a public process.

Concerns about transparency focused on the RFQ, and not knowing how applicants actually scored other than pass/no pass. It seemed that applicants who passed the RFQ step, may not have actually been well qualified, they just answered all the questions "correctly". One interviewee noted that they knew of at least two applicants that had significant internal issues, yet they passed the RFQ and received very high marks on their applications

Rigidity of the Criteria

The rigidity of the criteria was expressed by almost every interviewee. All of the interviewees understood the necessity of the criteria, but noted there was room for

improvement. The main concerns were related to receiving a lower score if questions don't apply and/or not being able to communicate why certain questions do not apply. One interviewee noted that if an organization doesn't do outreach or if they do an unusual activity, they were scored lower. One interviewee expressed that, "the process has evolved into a one size fits all" which ironically, discourages creativity from arts organizations if a program or event doesn't fit into one of the questions or criteria.

There is a prevailing opinion that the criteria is applied punitively and it inhibited panelists from seeing an organization holistically. One interviewee pointed out that, "It seemed like the City wanted to review the application rather than the applicant". Another interviewee mentioned that when the panelists asked questions about the organization, they were directed by staff to focus on the established evaluation criteria. Furthermore, one interviewee questioned the purpose of the criteria since the score can be changed by the panel at the end.

"They tend to focus on what's not there, rather than what is" (applicant)

"Hard to judge qualitative responses into a quantitative score" (applicant)

Technical Aspects of the Application

The interviewees spoke about several technical elements about the application itself such as short deadlines, providing information that is not considered during the review, the constant revisions to the application and process, and the amount of time it takes to complete the application as areas for improvement. The changes were so intense this past year that one interviewee expressed, "after more than 20 years of grantwriting, I wanted to give it up".

Interviewees noted that only pertinent questions should be asked so as to reduce the amount of time required to fill out the application and suggested allowing the use of the previous year's application for most of the information that remains the same from year to year (e.g. history, mission, programs, etc.). Most interviewees suggested that whatever changes are made should be mindful and intentional and relevant for the review process and one interviewee suggested that, "whatever data is collected should be used, not just make busy work for the applicant".

In terms of applicant equity and useful questions, one interviewee noted that applicants were asked to answer two of the last six questions of the RFP. However, one question was worth four points, while the other five were worth two points, so the majority of the applicants responded to that question, even though it may not have applied, just to get more points.

Funding Priorities

The interviewees expressed the hope that the City fund organizations that are qualified.

There were some concerns about funding larger festival-type events (e.g. Gator by the Bay)

that although had a big splash, were not year-round activities that the City could invest in for more long-term impact as well as the lack of equity for the community to attend. Related to this is the high costs of these events seem to benefit businesses (security, permits, bathrooms, etc.) more without any incentives to cut costs through donations, in-kind, and negotiating.

Those interviewed expressed mixed emotions about the tendency to fund larger organizations. Some participants felt that the larger organizations provide higher quality arts and culture experiences, but with higher overhead, and potentially squeeze out the smaller competition. While others expressed that smaller organizations provide a greater diversity for much less, potentially enabling more awards for small organizations. As in year's past, there was some concern expressed about the lack of diversity of the organizations that receive funding. However, this year, respondents tended to comment more on the need to fund organizations that reach underserved populations.

But, the concern was noted about how to measure cultural impact and the frustration with what passes for arts and culture. One participant noted that, "someone's idea of cultural impact may just be another's hobby" and that "the applicants define what is arts and culture for San Diego, rather than the City defining what it is".