

LOUISIANA PROJECT GRANT PANELIST HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION

Louisiana Project Grants are administered jointly by the Louisiana Division of the Arts (LDOA) and 9 Regional Arts Councils across the state. This program provides a system for funding arts projects in all regions of the state by giving artists, nonprofit arts organizations, nonprofit organizations, public and private schools, and local government agencies in each region the opportunity to develop arts projects that meet their local needs. The purpose of the program is to cultivate innovative arts projects that have a lasting impact within each region of our state.

Louisiana Project Grants are funded by the LDOA. Due to a substantial decrease in state general funds for the LDOA, Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser transfers \$1 Million from the Louisiana Office of Tourism to fund this program. Funds are provided to each region on a per capita basis utilizing the most recent U.S. Census figures. The Louisiana Division of the Arts oversees the Louisiana Project Grants program and disburses the funds to nine Regional Arts Councils (RAC), which in turn re-grant those dollars within their regions.

Panelists play an important role in the investment work and policy development of the LPG program. Their time, perspective, and knowledge allows for a transparent and thoughtful grant application review process. Panelists also assist in recognizing and rewarding excellent artists and artistic initiatives, as well as increasing the awareness of our state's rich cultural assets.

PANELIST SELECTION

Many factors may be considered when panelists are selected and approved for service, including (but not limited to):

- Professional qualifications and breadth of experience
- Broad-based arts knowledge at the local, state, national, and/or international level
- Ability to clearly articulate applications' strengths and weaknesses
- Ability to interpret and apply prescribed review criteria
- Past performance as a panelist and/or peer recommendation
- Ability to work well in a group

In addition, panelists are chosen such that each group adequately represents a variety of areas, where appropriate for the program being reviewed, including:

- Diversity of gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability
- Geographic distribution (representing multiple parishes of a region, including both urban and rural areas)
- Organizational type and budget size (small, medium, and large organizations, in both the non-profit and for-profit sectors)
- Organizational role and job function (board members, administrators, artistic directors, education specialists, and others, as well as individual artists)
- Artistic disciplines and sub-disciplines (for multi-disciplinary panels)

BEFORE THE PANEL MEETING

By the time the panel meeting convenes, a large amount of work has already been done by Arts Council staff to vet incoming applications and prepare them for review by the panel. Some constituents will have submitted all or part of their application for staff review prior to the final submission deadline. Many others correspond with us to verify that they are eligible for funding. After the program deadline, all applications are reviewed for completeness by Arts Council staff members. Applicants are notified that their applications have been received and, if necessary, asked to provide additional information. Panelists are only asked to review applications the Arts Council has deemed eligible for funding.

PANELIST RESPONSIBILITIES

Panelists have been chosen carefully to represent their areas geographically, ethnically, etc., and for various arts disciplines. Therefore every panelist's input is critical. Panelists agree to uphold a commitment to serve so as to maintain the integrity of the grants funding process.

Panelists take part in an online panelist orientation session. Sessions generally last one hour and consist of a brief review of this handbook, the grant guidelines, a walk-through of the navigation and scoring procedures in the online grant portal, and a question-and-answer session to address questions and ensure that all panelists understand expectations for the upcoming review.

Panelists are expected to review all applications in advance of the panel meeting, so as to contribute in a meaningful way to the discussion. They may also be asked to present several applications. Additionally, panelists are asked to attend the entire panel meeting to which they have agreed to serve, and to not leave the meeting until all business is concluded.

AT THE PANEL MEETING

During a panel meeting, panelists' deliberations are public, and attendance is open to anyone who wishes to attend (or, in many cases, listen online). Summaries of panelists' comments from all panel deliberations may be made available to applicants in written form, reinforcing the transparency of the panel process. This process allows applicants and other interested parties to better understand the review process itself, as well as the grant program's purpose. However, applicants are not permitted to interact with panelists at these meetings and it is important for panelists to discuss grant applications with candor to ensure that funding is fairly distributed. Should applicants ask you directly about the comments on the strengths and weaknesses of their proposals, refer them to the Arts Council staff.

Meetings begin with an introduction of panelists and Arts Council staff followed by a brief audience orientation. Panelists are then guided through a staff-facilitated application review discussion. Arts Council staff members participate in the discussion only to answer procedural questions, share objective information, or clarify LPG guidelines.

Throughout the discussion, panelists must maintain a high level of professionalism and specifically describe the ways in which the application meets or does not meet the program's review criteria. Applicants to the LPG program are often passionate, believing strongly in their planned projects' ability to make a positive impact on their community. While every application cannot be funded, we encourage panelists to keep this in mind as they engage in the sometimes delicate process of providing candid, objective, and thoughtful feedback on each proposal.

After all comments have been shared for a given application, discussion will be drawn to a close by the staff facilitator. Panelists will be given a moment to update and, if necessary, resave their scores. The panel will then move to the next application.

Following each application's discussion, panelists finalize their scores and meeting notes are recorded. After the final application is reviewed, all scores will be finalized and applications will be ranked by score.

At the conclusion of each panel meeting, Arts Council staff members lead panelists in a brief policy discussion about the grant program, panel procedures, or other agency business. Comments recorded at policy discussions will be used when considering future refinements to LPG Guidelines or other agency policies.

AFTER THE PANEL MEETING

Following the distribution of scores, Arts Council staff determines funding recommendations. These recommendations take into account panel scores, the number of applicants, and the amount of funding available for the region.

Funding recommendations are presented to the Arts Council's Board for approval at its next meeting. After the Board meeting, applicants are notified of award decisions and provided instructions for managing their grant.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Because many times grant panelists are professionally involved in the arts – and may represent organizations that are themselves applicants – we adhere to a strict conflict of interest policy. Panelists are asked to declare conflicts upon receiving application review materials, or before the panel meeting begins. In determining whether or not to declare a conflict of interest with a given application, panelists should follow these guidelines:

1. Panelists must declare professional conflicts of interest to avoid any action that could be interpreted as a use of their panel membership to further their own interests, the interests of a spouse or partner, or the interests of an organization with which they or a close family member are affiliated.
2. A panelist may also declare a personal conflict whenever he/she/they believe(s) his/her/their background or past associations will make it difficult to be impartial in reviewing an application (e.g., if a spouse was a board member of an applicant in the recent past, or if a close friend recently accepted a leadership position with the applicant). Past personal or casual knowledge of an applicant – having attended a performance, viewed an exhibition, read media coverage of an event, etc. – does not typically constitute a conflict of interest.
3. A panelist may take part in projects that receive LPG funding, but should not personally receive any pay for their services in connection with the project from those LPG funds. If a panelist plans to participate in a project supported by the LPG program, the applying organization must clearly indicate the nature of that participation in the application.
4. Panelists are asked to leave the room during the discussion of any application with which they have a conflict of interest.

NOTE: Panelists affiliated with a college or university will be considered to have a conflict of interest with applications from any department or campus of that college or university.

RESTRICTIONS ON USAGE

In the process of reviewing applications, panelists may come into contact with a wide variety of electronic support materials, including evaluation tools, planning documents, financial materials, marketing materials, and audiovisual or other work samples. Some may be considered proprietary, having been produced or developed for applying organizations at considerable expense, while others may be of a sensitive nature given their subject matter or the competitive marketplace of ideas. All items, once submitted as part of a formal application, become public records, and can thus be requested for inspection by members of the public at any time. Items may also be discussed in the public panel meeting. However, no LPG panelist may directly distribute, share, transmit, reproduce, represent, or display any material or information, either electronically or in print, whether personally identifiable or not, submitted by any applicant, unless he/she has obtained express, prior permission from the applicant to do so. While the panelist process is a valuable professional development opportunity, it is nonetheless important that applicants know that their submitted program designs, project plans, evaluation innovations, or other strategic work will be used only for evaluation purposes. The best examples may provide inspiration, promising practices to consider, or models to consult, but should not be seen as blueprints available for copying and reuse without permission.

OUR THANKS

Panelists play a critical role in guiding LPG investments, and helping the LDOA fulfill its mission to serve as a catalyst for participation, education, development and promotion of excellence in the arts. Without the assistance, expertise, and time of talented panelists year in and year out, an open panel process would be impossible. The LDOA and our 9 Regional Arts Council partners sincerely appreciate these efforts.

If you have any questions or comments about serving as a panelist, or any of the information contained in this handbook, please contact an LDOA or Arts Council staff member.