

Panelist Handbook

INTRODUCTION

Panelists play an important role in the investment work and policy development of the Ohio Arts Council (OAC). Their time and expertise allows the OAC to maintain a transparent and thoughtful application review process. Panelists also allow the agency to recognize and reward excellent artists, arts and cultural organizations, and schools, as well as increase awareness of the state’s cultural assets.

This handbook provides some background on the panel process. If you will be serving as an OAC panelist and have questions, or would like to nominate yourself or a colleague to be a future panelist, we encourage you to contact a member of our staff for further information.

OPEN PANEL MEETINGS

The Ohio Arts Council began holding open panel meetings in 1975. During a panel meeting, panelists’ deliberations are public, and attendance is free and open to anyone who wishes to attend (or, in many cases, listen online). Summaries of panelists’ comments from all panel deliberations are 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 each grant program’s purpose. Other than a small number of staff-reviewed programs, all OAC grant programs use open panel meetings to generate funding recommendations to the OAC Board. The OAC Board is the only body empowered to make funding decisions and issue grants on behalf of the agency. Board meetings occur four times per year and are always open to the public.

PANEL APPOINTMENTS

The OAC’s enabling legislation states that individuals appointed to the OAC Board shall have broad knowledge and experience in the arts. The law also allows the Board to establish advisory panels to assist in its efforts to promote and preserve the arts in Ohio. The OAC Board and staff work together to ensure that panelists selected for these advisory panels have broad knowledge in the arts, arts education, and community development; possess a high level of expertise in their respective fields; and represent diversity in a variety of areas.

Section 3379-7-07(A) of the Ohio Administrative Code (“Code”) provides for the creation of advisory panels:

The council or the executive committee from time to time may create an advisory panel in any designated art field or other relevant professions. Each panel shall perform such duties as shall be specified by the council, including submitting from time to time recommendations to the council for courses of action designed to promote the functions and activities of the council. Each panel shall be advisory only and shall not have authority to commit the council financially or otherwise without the council's express consent.

Code sections 3379-7-07(B) and (C) provide for the appointment and tenure of advisory panelists:

A list of members of the advisory panels shall be compiled for council approval by the programs, panels, and public policy committee, a standing committee of council consisting of five council members who are appointed by the chair with council approval for a one-year tenure. The committee will review suggested names of panel members as submitted by the chair and director who, in turn, have had input from staff and the arts field or other relevant professions. Council members will submit suggestions for panelists directly to the committee prior to the council meeting where panelists are approved. After approval of the panel members, the council shall then appoint the members to the advisory panels.

Appointments to the advisory panel shall be for a term of either one or two years. The programs, panels, and public policy committee may recommend to the council that an advisory panel member be reappointed but such reappointment must be approved by council and shall not result in such member serving for more than four consecutive years on the same panel. When an advisory panel member serves four consecutive years on the panel, such member may not be appointed to any panel again until two years have elapsed.

PANELIST SELECTION

Prospective panelists are chosen after being nominated to serve on a grant review panel or contacted by OAC staff to discuss service. Formal nominations are accepted from the public and should include a completed nomination form for panel membership (available on the OAC website) as well as a copy of the nominee's current professional résumé and/or bio. Nominations are accepted year-round and interested individuals may nominate themselves. Prospective panelists are contacted by OAC staff to discuss panel service and confirm their availability for likely panel dates. The OAC Board approves panelist slates, and approved panelists are then asked to formally accept their appointment to panel service. If you are considering panel service, we strongly encourage you to consider submitting a nomination form; your service will be greatly appreciated!

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, and disability (reflecting Ohio's overall diversity)
- Geographic distribution (representing multiple regions of Ohio, 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)

Most OAC programs accept applications from a wide variety of applicants, so accurately predicting how many will be received in any given year – and from what types of organizations – is an inexact science. We therefore generally recruit and confirm more panelists than we expect to need, so that in the event of unexpectedly large application numbers, or last-minute panelist scheduling conflicts, panels can proceed successfully. After formally accepting a panel appointment, prospective panelists are asked to hold affected dates until after a program's deadline passes. At that point, OAC staff will contact all panelists to confirm the details of their service. This approach allows us to be both careful stewards of state tax dollars and sensitive to the professional workloads of prospective panelists.

MEETING ARRANGEMENTS & PANELIST HONORARIA

Most panels meet for between one and two days in Columbus, depending on the number of applications received. Panels may also be conducted virtually using teleconferencing or other technology. Panelists receive honoraria in exchange for their preparation for, travel to, and service on the panel; no reimbursements for individual expenses are issued. Honorarium amounts vary by length of panel meeting and are specified in the appointment letter sent to each panelist. OAC staff members work with nearby hotels to secure room blocks and can assist with travel and meal arrangements, etc. All expenditures are the responsibility of panelists and are not reimbursable by the OAC.

BEFORE THE PANEL MEETING

By the time the panel meeting convenes, a large amount of work has already been done by OAC 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 applying in an appropriate program and are eligible for funding. After the program deadline, all applications are reviewed for completeness by staff members in the Investment Office. Applicants are notified that their applications have been received and, if necessary, asked to provide additional information. Applications are also reviewed by an OAC coordinator for a more in-depth review. Coordinators may also choose to contact applicants prior to the panel meeting to clarify any confusing aspects of their application or verify their eligibility for funding. **Panelists are only asked to review applications the OAC has deemed eligible** for funding in the program in which they are applying.

Several weeks before the panel meeting, panelists receive an electronic panel packet via email which includes several items, including:

- a cover letter outlining meeting logistics and other details,
- a meeting agenda,
- instructions for accessing and reviewing materials in the ARTIE online grants system,
- a Scoring Guide describing the evaluation and scoring process to be used, and
- a panel docket containing copies of all applications to be reviewed (noting primary and secondary reading assignments) in PDF format.

*Hard copies of any of these materials can be mailed to panelists upon request. Support materials must be reviewed electronically via ARTIE.

IMPORTANT: Panelists are asked to review all applications and support materials prior to attending the panel meeting and enter comments and preliminary scores into ARTIE. Each application receives four component scores from each panelist – in Program Quality, Community Engagement, Defining and Measuring Success, and Resource Management – that are added together to create a final score. Explanatory written comments may also be added.

Panelists also take part in an online panelist orientation session, typically scheduled to take place shortly after application packets are emailed. Sessions generally last one hour and consist of a teleconference with online presentations led by OAC staff. Discussion topics generally include a review of packet materials, discussion of ARTIE navigation and scoring procedures, and a question-and-answer session to address questions and ensure that all panelists understand expectations for the upcoming review.

AT THE PANEL MEETING

Orientation Session

At the start of each meeting, OAC staff conducts a brief review of program policy and notes any panelist conflicts of interest. In some cases, a program's coordinator(s) may wish to share updates on applications received since the deadline date. Panelists can also spend time becoming acquainted with the meeting venue, agenda, and logistics, and ask procedural or other questions. OAC staff may also set aside time and equipment to assist panelists with any

pieces of electronic support material (audiovisual or otherwise) that were problematic for them to access or review prior to the panel meeting.

At the conclusion of the orientation session, panelists are asked to finalize their preliminary scores, which are saved by the ARTIE system. There is no evaluative discussion of applications during the orientation session.

Open Session

The discussion portion of the panel is open to the general public. An online audio stream of the discussion is typically broadcast as well, with applicants encouraged to listen remotely if they cannot attend in person. Meetings begin with an introduction of panelists and OAC staff followed by a brief audience orientation. Members of the audience are reminded that they may observe the meeting but may not take part in discussions. Panelists are then guided through a staff-facilitated application review discussion. Following each application's discussion, panelists finalize their scores in ARTIE. Laptop computers are provided for each panelist to log into the ARTIE system and participate during the meeting (or they are free to bring their own). Meetings are not recorded.

For one-day meetings, the orientation portion of the meeting is typically scheduled for the morning, followed by an open session in the afternoon. For two-day meetings, the orientation portion is typically scheduled for the afternoon of the first day, followed by a full-day open session on the second day. Two-day meetings also afford panelists and staff the opportunity to share a meal together after adjourning from the first day, which, in addition to being a worthwhile networking opportunity, also tends to build panel cohesion and rapport that improve the following day's review process.

At the conclusion of each panel meeting, OAC staff members lead panelists and audience members 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 OAC *Guidelines* or other agency policies.

Application Review

Two panelists – a primary and secondary reviewer – are assigned to each application and conduct the most in-depth review of the application narrative, budget, and support materials. The primary reviewer begins the review of each application by describing the applicant's programming and assessing its strengths and weaknesses using the program's review criteria and Scoring Guide. The secondary reviewer then presents additional information or differing opinions. Finally, remaining panel members who wish to add comments of their own may do so. This approach encourages a thorough review of all applications without placing a heavy workload on any one panelist and ensures that many viewpoints are considered. Panelists are free to update their ARTIE comments or component scores at any time during the application review discussion.

OAC staff members participate in the discussion only to answer procedural questions, share objective information, or clarify OAC policies. Audience members who believe a panelist has misstated a piece of *factual information presented in the application* may approach an OAC staff member to request a verbal correction; requests are reviewed and acted upon at staff's discretion.

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 OAC are passionate, believe strongly in their planned programming, and set out to make a positive impact on the state through arts and cultural experiences. 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, re-save their scores. The panel will then move to the next application.

After the final application is reviewed, additional time will be provided for panelists to make final adjustments to previously entered scores (if necessary). No discussion of individual applications will take place during this time. ARTIE allows panelists to sort their scored applications into rank order, allowing each panelist to view similarly scored applications together. When all scores are finalized, the meeting will be closed and scores will be final.

AFTER THE PANEL MEETING

Within several days of the meeting's conclusion, staff emails a report to all applicants showing each application's average score (individual panelist scores are not shared). Applicants are also provided with averages of their own application's four component scores. Later, OAC staff compiles a summary of key panel comments from the application review discussion that become part of the application's record in ARTIE and are shared with the OAC board. (No comments are attributed to individual panelists.) Staff may consult panelists' written comments in the ARTIE system to augment these comment summaries, but priority is given to the public conversation.

Following the distribution of scores, staff determines funding recommendations. These recommendations take into account panel scores, available program budgets, and, for some programs, the most recently completed fiscal year income of applying organizations.

An appeals process is available to applicants who believe a procedural error, such as a miscalculation of score, mishandled conflict of interest, or other technical issue, adversely affected their review. Appeals must be submitted in writing to the OAC executive director within 30 days of the panel meeting and are reviewed and acted upon by the OAC Board after consultation with OAC staff. Appeals may *not* be made purely on the basis of an applicant's

disagreement with the panel's assessment of the artistic quality or the perceived merit of any portion of the proposed project or program.

Funding recommendations are presented to the OAC Board for approval at its next meeting; the Board is the only body empowered to make grant awards on behalf of the agency. After the Board meeting, applicants are notified of award decisions and provided instructions for managing their grant.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Because many OAC panelists are professionally involved in the arts – and may represent organizations that are themselves applicants – the agency adheres to a strict conflict of interest policy. Panelists are asked to declare conflicts upon receiving application review materials, or before the panel meeting begins, and discuss details in the orientation session. 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 believes his/her 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 OAC funding, but should not personally receive any remuneration from those OAC funds for services in connection with any such project, unless both the panel and the agency know the approximate amount of direct or indirect remuneration before they act on such applications. The propriety of receiving remuneration depends on the nature of the organization, the amount of OAC funding in relation to the total budget of the organization, and other relevant factors. If a panelist plans to participate in a project supported by the OAC, the applying organization must clearly indicate the nature of that participation upon request.
4. Panelists are asked to leave the room during the discussion of any application with which they have a conflict of interest. The ARTIE system allows panelists to select "Conflict of Interest" in lieu of scoring these applications.
5. Panelists are asked not to interact with audience members during the open panel review so as not to create the appearance of lobbying or create perceived conflicts of interest; audience members are notified of this during their orientation. Panelists

should notify OAC staff immediately if any person attempts to lobby for an application(s) or otherwise influence a panelist(s) before or during a panel meeting.

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, strategic 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 to the OAC 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 OAC 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 OAC investments, and helping the OAC fulfill its mission to fund and support quality arts experiences that strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally, and economically. Without the assistance, expertise, and time of talented panelists year in and year out, an open panel process would be impossible. The OAC Board and staff sincerely appreciate these efforts.

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

For more information about the Ohio Arts Council, visit our website at oac.ohio.gov.