

6/13/11

Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission Grant Program Policies & Practices

This past winter and spring, the Commission conducted several listening sessions and an online survey seeking feedback about its grant program. Reasons for this undertaking included desire to: 1) better align Commission's limited grant funding with community needs, 2) move toward greater efficiency for grant applicants, reviewers, and Commission, and 3) increase transparency associated with Commission's funding availability, grant review process, and award decision making. Thank you to all who participated in these sessions and surveys.

Based upon what we learned, several policies and practices will not change at this time.

- *3 grant cycles/year* with 2/1, 6/1 and 10/1 application deadlines
- *Project and Capital Grant* opportunities offered each cycle
- *2-step review process*---first engaging citizen-composed advisory panels and second the Commission, with Commission ultimately making grant award decisions
- *Online* (WebGrants) grants administration system

Conversely, several changes in policy and practice are being instituted.

- *Arts in Education* category replacing *Arts in Schools* (Project Grants Advisory Panel) representing broader opportunity and less restriction
- Among 5 grant review criteria applied to all applications, 5th criterion *Impact and influence of grant award to overall success of project* applied by Commission in award decision-making, but not by advisory panels in first step of review process
- *Cap limits* related to grant amount requests adjusted each grant cycle based upon best estimate of supply vs. demand for grant dollars
- Minimize *partial funding* of grant amount requests and move toward more *full funding*
- *Targeted funding opportunities* for specific areas of interest, e.g., *Jenni & Kyle Preserve Mural* in 2010 and *Distinctly Dane* in 2011 only offered occasionally when special circumstances arise
- *Applications* streamlined
- *Two-pathway* Project Grant application model explored, i.e., simpler application for smaller grant awards and more robust application for larger grant awards (but if adopted and implemented, no change prior to 2012)
- *Status report* (formerly known as *Final Report*) streamlined
- Grant recipients encouraged to directly reach out to and thank *Commission's grant program funders*
- Enhance *grant review process* by applying several best practices, e.g., clarify steps and roles, elevate training and preparation, grow transparency
- Internal strategies for reducing *grant processing time* explored

In the spirit of continuous improvement, Commission members and staff value input and always appreciate feedback. Please continue to speak up and let us hear from you. In the meantime, the Commission strives to fulfill its grant making goals: 1) provide equitable access to arts, culture, and local history activities, 2) offer opportunities for creative expression, engagement, and connection with one another, and 3) support excellence, in service to all citizens and residents of Dane County.