

## **FY26 Feedback/Notes/Ideas**

*Note: These are only notes for the purpose of brainstorming discussion. None of these notes are endorsed/approved/recommended by Metro Arts or the Arts Commission, but are descriptive notes from preliminary, exploratory conversations with a variety of grantees about how to improve the grants process for FY26.*

### Fiscal sponsors

- Metro Arts should incorporate a set fee for sponsors, use CALN as an example. Don't have it come from the artists' grant, but a separate line. Takes out the consideration of an org deciding if they are able to sponsor if they must charge a fee.
- Smaller orgs would be more inclined to fiscal sponsor if there was financial support to do so
- At times felt like Metro Arts was shirking responsibility by being so open of "you can do it however you choose" without providing more guidance or specific ways it could work
- Is there any chance of repairing the mechanism or relationship with procurement, to rework the ability to use that method again? Chicago is an example of a city that does direct payment to artists.
- Fractured Atlas is a resource to look at their fiscal sponsorship structure and best practices
- Arts and Business Council has a volunteer lawyer program for art organizations under \$1M budget to talk with a lawyer about how to structure their org for fiscal sponsorship.

### Thrive funding

- Not all Thrive projects are the same in terms of budget needs, impact, etc. Should there be more distinction specific to project type?
- Should there be brackets for Thrive – like a top 50% and bottom 50% that get different award amounts?
- Should there be a distinction between individual applicants and organization applicants? Is there a meaningful difference in the type of projects that are proposed and the impacts?
- Would Thrive ever go back to a rolling schedule?

### Operating funding

- Funding formula details
  - Need to better understand the range of organization sizes and awards within each budget category
    - Seeing ranges/standard deviations can illuminate opportunities to be more responsive to the applicant pool
    - How are you thinking about supporting organizations at each phase? For example, is a \$100k cut off correct – what is the goal of supporting an org at that phase?
    - Medium category up to \$1M?
  - It's hard to conceptualize how to scale the available budget to the percentage model. The model was scaled to approximately 33% of the "full funding" ask, but in actuality, organizations were funded at the following:
    - Micro: 24% of budget
    - Small: 16% of budget
    - Medium: 8% of budget
    - Midsize: 5% of budget
    - Large: 0.6% of budget

- Should we assign percentages in advance to each size category? Could develop a hybrid approach by seeing the spread of scores within each category and applying funding within the range. Create relevant award amounts based on the scaled available funding.
- Transitions between categories
  - Measures could be put in place for smoother transitions between categories.
  - Budget categories could be the average revenue of 2 or 3 year period, that will make that amount a more stable predictor and not disincentivize growth from one category to the next.
  - There could be a midpoint measure for the award amount for those that go 5% or 10% over the budget threshold. For example, if an org was 4% over the threshold for medium to midsize transition, perhaps there is a midpoint measure in the award amount between them.
  - Should the minimum award amount in each budget category be no smaller than the maximum award of the category below it?
- Need more clarity on FY/year definitions. Instead of saying "most recent year," define what year we are looking for the tax return.
- Putting a cap on the total dollar amount for the largest category is about transparency and still predictability. For example, if the max award for anyone was \$50k.
- Scoring
  - Should there be more merit measures? Can there be flexibility within each category for merit based, based on what Metro defines for what we are looking for with regard to merit?
  - Eligibility funding threshold of 70% pass/fail
    - Should there be some ranking within this, to differentiate 70 to 80 to 90%?
  - Moving away from a pass/fail and to a more competitive scoring would mean there needs to be a quality evaluation process. Metro Arts probably does not have capacity or ability to do that for the next round of scoring. This needs to be thought of in a holistic way, rather than changing the scoring threshold.
    - A rank system was used in the past at MA. Panelists can have wide and disparate qualifications, which sets you up for being less objective and more biased in the scoring. This was expressed as a drawback of the ranking method, compared to the pass/fail scoring.
  - At the end of the day, this question is about whether the goal is to fund as many as possible, or find ways to cut some out?
- Application/Reporting
  - For larger orgs and larger grants, where is the following up /follow through for impactful work
  - The application and reporting became too simple for large organizations. Should require more proof and reporting to show what they are doing.
    - Could provide more concrete information and actual data on what is being supported by Metro Arts and how resources or impact are going back into the community.
  - Even for some small organizations, it feels like they can't fully tell their story within the simplified boundaries of the application/reporting.
  - Does reporting play into the next score? Or advocacy efforts? Is there a strategic funding rubric that is connected to our policy goals?
    - How are we using applications and reporting as a strategic advocacy point?

### Funding distributions

- Should micro and small be in Thrive? Thrive awards are larger. Micro and small orgs are typically made up of individual artists and need operating support, but the policy disallows that if they are going for Thrive funding
- Small orgs are the biggest "losers" in the way the funding distribution worked this year.
- Thrive is to serve artists. The policy intention is also to serve more small organizations, of which their grants are considerably smaller than Thrive awards this year. Is there a metric to show if small organizations are directly supporting artists, and to earmark some of that funding for small orgs?

### Timelines

- Hard to have a dead zone of July through October with no funding period
- Why can't you do applications as early as possible and score applications, and then apply a funding model when funding is confirmed? What is keeping you from moving now and trying to get back to July decisions?

### General

- Commissioners and staff need to better understand how arts organizations work – season planning, contracts, etc. For onboarding, could have people from different mediums come talk about what our years look like

### Arts Advocacy

- What can be done for case-making to Metro Council for more funding? The 1% for the arts has been going on for years, hasn't produced outcomes.
- How should we show that we put ~2x the amount of funding in arts grants last year and show outputs and outcomes?
- Many individuals or representatives have various hesitations about speaking up right now.
- Arts support is vulnerable at all levels of government and right now; some organizations are already being impacted by changes outside our direct control.