Grants and Fiscal Officers Peer Session
September 16, 2016

Notes

How Do We Ask the Questions and What Do We Do with the Answers?
The Relationship between Criteria, Data and the Pursuit of Equity

Introduction

Facilitated by Shelly Gilbride and Tina Lilly, the introduction asked for brief descriptions of current major challenges being experienced by the attendees. These themes guided the open discussion below.

Data Collection

Facilitated by Shelly Gilbride, this discussion surfaced issues regarding the collection of demographic data by state arts agencies (SAAs):
- overview
- demographic data collected by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Final Descriptive Report (FDR)
- new data collection tools

How do we best serve the diverse artistic and cultural communities in our states? How do we navigate changing demographics in our states?

How are we serving the diversity of our states and representing people of color? How can we collect better data to understand how we are serving different populations?
- New FDR Populations Benefited by Race/Ethnicity fields may help.
- Cultural Data Project (CDP) funder's reports can be helpful for CDP users.
- Grantee final reports

Some SAAs collect demographic data on the application side, but there was concern about legal restrictions on collecting demographic data prior to funding a grantee.

In FDRs, there was too much reporting of code 99s. The new Populations Benefited threshold of 25% is looking like it may lead to some better reporting in California and hopefully some other states. Grantees have trouble collecting demographic data for reports. Culture representation is not the same as audience demographics.

Review Criteria: Balancing Artistic Merit and Community Impact

Facilitated by Tina Lilly, this discussion was about the changing contexts and priorities of the artists and arts organizations in our states.

How are states balancing community impact and artistic merit in grant criteria? Is one or the other weighted more heavily, or are they equal? Does great art automatically mean the community will benefit from it? How should panels evaluate the quality of art in the case of community projects?

A poll of session participants asked which has more weight in the review criteria.
- Artistic Merit   7
- Community Impact   7
- Both equally   7
- Different by grant programs 4

Comments by different participants highlighted both sides of the argument:
- Some states rate artistic quality first and then ask what communities are being served in order to evaluate impact.
- Some states feel that taxpayers prefer emphasizing community impact over artistic merit because this shows that the public is getting something from the tax dollars spent on grants.
- Arts service organizations are at a disadvantage when it comes to artistic merit because their work doesn't create art.
- Some states do less extensive reviews so it's harder to judge artistic merit.
- Artistic merit is relative, especially with the wide diversity of art forms.
- Applicants must include their own definition of artistic quality in their applications.
- Most states allow panelists to input personal knowledge about applicant organizations, while a few disallow it because it would be unfair to small and rural arts organizations that are not as well known as those in urban areas.
- Some states set up panels by discipline while others use budget size to set up panels.
- Some applicants have limited Internet access, which tends to penalize small organizations such as tribal groups.
- Some states penalize applicants for spelling and grammar mistakes, while others allow for these errors.

- Some applicants have language barriers with applications, and people who do not speak English fluently may not submit applications with no grammatical errors.
- Grant-writing ability is an impediment for smaller amateur organizations.
- These are all equity issues.
- Get larger organizations to lead grant-writing workshops for smaller organizations.
- Involve legislators in the grant-making process.
- States face problems in reaching culturally specific organizations.
- Some small states weigh artistic merit more because the community being served is small.
- Some states have an "intend to apply" form.
- Some states allow grant applicants to speak at panel meetings.
- Some states do not accept work samples or support material.

Biggest Challenges Facing Grants Officers

Top vote: Technology
- Participants reported problems with GO, Pearl and e-Grant.
- Some states moved from Pearl to SalesForce, but it is too expensive for some SAAs.
- One SAA partnered with other another small state agency to buy SalesForce together.
- Some other states moved to SmartSimple.
- Some use SlideRoom for on-line data collection.
- Others use Flux, WiseHive and Foundant.
- Some SAAs report that their state on-line grant systems are not compatible with the needs of the SAA for arts grants.
- Participants suggest SAAs that use the same grants management system can band together to communicate to save on troubleshooting and tech support. NASAA has data on which states use which systems, but the information needs to be updated.

Grant Applications
Issues that participants brought up about grant applications and applicants:
- challenge of switching from paper to online applications
- challenge in verifying DUNS. Other participants said that DUNS numbers could be checked through the Dun & Bradstreet website, but no one knew of a way to automatically check the numbers within an application or database system.
- challenge with applicants who can't comprehend instructions
- challenge of applicants entering incorrect data

- Some SAAs use an on-line eligibility quiz so that potential applicants know immediately whether or not they are eligible before they start working on an application.

Other Challenges
- Data integrity and cleaning: It's difficult to analyze data from applicants when incorrect information is submitted, and it is time consuming to try to correct everything.
- State match: One SAA was worried about not being able to match the NEA grant. Other states that have faced that problem offered to answer questions about how they dealt with the issue.
- Board diversity in grantee organizations: How can SAAs assist grantees in achieving greater board diversity?
- Overhauling guidelines and complying with administrative rules
- Small versus large applicants. Small organizations can be too dependent on SAAs for their funding
- Internal controls: CFR200 subrecipient
- Looking up applicants on SAM
- Most participants have issues with work load and capacity issues.

Grants and Fiscal Officers Peer Session Coordinators

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