

Executive Directors Peer Session – Breakout Report

NASAA Assembly 2008, September 11-13

PANEL REVIEW PROCESSES

Saturday, September 13, 2008

State Changes to Panel Processes

- Michigan is working to increase constituent engagement in the panel process as a learning experience for applicants. Panels are now open for a question and answer session (panel to applicant). That improved the attendance by applicants from 4% to 60%. The state arts agency (SAA) also added a distance-learning interface to provide opportunities for people to observe the proceedings and to interact with panelists. By working through the college/university network, this hookup didn't cost anything. The question and answer period added some time (but not more than about 5 minutes) to each application's review. Michigan is also working on setting up a networking room for the applicants to use while waiting for their application to be reviewed. The agency is further considering providing professional development opportunities (such as "how to write a grant application") during this networking time.
- On the plus side of greater applicant involvement in panels is increased transparency and professional development. However, some SAAs expressed concern about the impact of this on the panel process. Panelists need to feel free to be frank and objective. Some states are finding more appeals when more applicants hear what the panels are saying. Other states are seeing fewer appeals.
- Tennessee is broadening the scope of experience represented on the panel to include more lay people.
- As a cost savings measure, Missouri conducts panel meetings via conference call. Constituents can listen in by coming into the council office. Considering letting applicants listen in on mute. Applicants send the support materials directly to the panelists.
- Some agencies have commission members review the applications. As with having commissioners serve on panels, this helps to educate council members and build their appreciation for the application and panel process. (But could this pose a conflict of interest problem? Be sure to check with the attorney general's office.)
- A number of agencies have eliminated site visits. Delaware gathers information on what events, performances are going on by applicants, and encourages panelists to attend some of these events.
- Some SAAs do not use panels for all awards. For instance, in Michigan the partnership applications go to a committee of the council.

Electronic Application Review

There was general consensus that use of the Web is changing the panel process:

- South Dakota is setting up a Web site to present support material to the panelists. Michigan is setting up a secure site for support material.
- Nebraska is moving to an on-line application review, and also is considering paperless systems that provide panelists with computer stations during the review meeting.
- Montana is investigating www.slideroom.com. This service offers the ability to run a fellowship review process – slides, audio and video. Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation also offers states an on-line fellowship review system (supported by Carnegie Mellon). This service is available to states outside of the Mid Atlantic region.
- One advantage of on-line review is that panelists prepare all comments before the meeting. All comments are shared in advance. If panelists don't agree with one another, that becomes

the focus of the discussion. This can result in some scores changing. Michigan found that some applications were saved by this discussion, but it also hurt a couple of folks.

- Alaska does on-line grant applications. They have also used laptops at panel meetings, which the staff loves. But Alaska has found that when they do this there is less interchange between panelists.
- Delaware they surveyed their panelists to see how many wanted a printed copy of the applications and materials. The survey revealed that 80% of the panelists would want a paper copy. Some panelists like to "mark it up" as they read.

Application Fees

Some agencies collect application fees. South Carolina charges \$20. Michigan charges 3% of the request or \$300, whichever is less. Michigan finds that this fee drives a number of organizations to the regional regrant program.

Supporting Materials

- Many states encourage organizations to think about their Web sites as the primary sample of their work.
- Some states also encourage grantees to develop a "for funders" page on their site to contain annual reports, Guidestar links, financial reports, etc.
- South Carolina doesn't accept support materials. The panelists found it wasn't a problem for the organizations.
- Nebraska requires all supporting materials to be submitted in PDF format. Working from the assumption that the artistic quality of all applicants is high, Nebraska has eliminated the submission of CDs, etc., from the major arts applicants.
- Several other states reported that they, too, have limited the amount of supporting materials that they will accept.

Financial Data

- Montana uses IRS Form 990s for financials.
- Delaware does an independent review of Form 990 information. Grants are based on those financials on a formula basis.

Participants agreed that panel procedures are an important issue, with a number of states experimenting with different approaches. All would like NASAA to consider organizing a conference call on this topic and to collect more information on this issue.

To make additions or corrections to these notes, contact Kelly.Barsdate@nasaa-arts.org.