



MANITOBA ARTS COUNCIL'S

# Granting Decision Process

**Manitoba Arts Council**

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## Introduction

The Manitoba Arts Council (MAC) is an arm's-length agency of the provincial government, established in 1965 by the Arts Council Act to promote the study, enjoyment, production and performance of work in the arts.

MAC provides grants to individuals, groups, and organizations in all art forms including:

- theatre
- dance
- music
- literary arts
- media arts
- visual arts
- craft

Through these grants, MAC seeks to balance the needs of existing infrastructures with support for new arts and cultural development in Manitoba. MAC is dedicated to preserving, supporting, and advocating for arts and culture as essential to the quality of life for all Manitobans.

MAC's governance structures and policies have been developed to ensure that funding is awarded in an objective, transparent, and equitable manner. Grants are awarded through applications to programs with published guidelines, and grant decisions are primarily made through a process of peer assessment with internal decisions made in some programs to support quick turnaround times.

This document outlines MAC's grant decision making processes. It also includes information about MAC's policies on conflict of interest and confidentiality (appendices 1 & 2), two key components of a fair and transparent assessment process.

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## What is peer assessment?

Peer assessment is the primary method MAC uses to make granting decisions. MAC engages members of the arts and cultural community in Manitoba and beyond to make granting decisions by assessing and ranking the grant applications it receives. Evaluations about artistic merit, impact, and feasibility are complex and depend on the aesthetic and cultural perspectives and artistic experience of the assessor. To ensure that such decisions are made fairly and informed by the arts and cultural community it serves, MAC engages qualified artists or arts/cultural professionals with experience and knowledge relevant to the applications under consideration.

## Who participates in the assessment process?

### MAC program staff

MAC has a team of Program Consultants with expertise in various artistic disciplines who are responsible for the creation, evaluation, development, and implementation of all MAC programs.

Program Consultants also:

- make eligibility decisions about applicants based on published guidelines;
- recommend peer assessors;
- facilitate the assessment panel meeting and ensure that each application receives fair and thorough consideration;
- ensure that the purpose of the program is clearly understood by all panel members and provide them with the guidance they need as they work through the assessment process;
- advise the panel of budgetary considerations after the applications have been ranked of applications so that award decisions are based on available funds; and
- record panel decisions.

MAC has a team of Program Administrators who play a critical role in the delivery of programs including:

- managing the submission of grant applications;
- managing correspondence with peer assessors;
- circulating all information including applications, support documents, and resource materials to the assessors before the meeting; and
- assisting in the planning and running of assessment panel meetings.

MAC's Director of Granting is a member of the management team and manages granting activities within the framework of MAC's strategic priorities.

## Peer assessors

The assessors that MAC engages to evaluate grant applications are responsible for the following:

- Creating or using an existing profile in Manipogo, MAC's online application system to assess applications.
- Signing and agreeing to a Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest agreement.
- Declaring any conflict of interest and taking appropriate action.
- Reading and reviewing all grant applications, support materials, guidelines, and communications from MAC prior to the assessment panel.
- Completing initial assessments prior to the assessment panel using the rubric provided.
- Being open, articulate, and committed to making consensual decisions while considering each application individually.
- Completing the post-assessment online survey following the panel.
- Expressing any concerns about the integrity of the proceedings in writing to the Executive Director of MAC.

## How does MAC choose its assessors?

### Assessor database

To ensure diversity of opinion and artistic expression, MAC maintains a database of potential assessors from Manitoba and across Canada. Any individual with an active profile in Manipogo, MAC's online application system, is included in this database.

MAC supplements the assessor database through:

- consultation with provincial arts service organizations and funding agencies in other provinces or territories.
- recommendations from current and former assessors, and other professional artists.

If you would like to be considered for a future assessment panel and you don't have a profile, we invite you to create a profile as an assessor in Manipogo.

## What does MAC consider when selecting assessors?

Program Consultants make every effort to ensure that each assessment panel fairly and adequately represents the applicants and the artistic expressions as provided within the applications, in terms of:

- Age
- Gender
- Geographic region
- Official languages
- Indigeneity
- Race and ethnicity
- Disability

- Membership in the D/deaf community
- Membership in other underserved communities
- Artistic discipline and genre

Assessment panels may be composed of individuals from one artistic discipline or from various disciplines, depending on the nature of the program and the applicants.

MAC engages assessors for over 50 panels each year and generally does not engage any assessor who has served on a panel within the past two years. Most assessment panels are now conducted online.

## How does MAC form an assessment panel?

When a grant application deadline passes, the Program Consultant reviews all of the submitted applications. The Program Consultant then selects a preliminary list of potential assessors, considering the diverse artistic expressions of the applicants and whether they may have a conflict of interest with any application being assessed.

The long list is then reviewed by MAC's Director of Granting and modified if necessary.

After the long list is approved, the Program Administrator contacts each potential assessor to determine their interest and availability. The exact composition of the final panel will depend on the availability of each potential assessor.

The Director of Granting or Executive Director approves the final list of assessors for each panel.

## The Assessment Process

Once the panel is formed, the assessors review the program guidelines and each application that's being considered for funding.

### Orientation meeting

A few weeks before the panel takes place, the peer assessors participate in a brief orientation meeting to meet with the Program Consultant to discuss the assessment process.

### Independent review of the applications

Before the assessment panel meeting, each assessor will independently review each application and score them based on the grant's evaluation rubric. A copy of the evaluation rubric is available at the end of each set of program guidelines. Assessors then submit their initial individual scores to MAC before the assessment panel meeting.

### Assessment panel meeting

The assessors meet either online or in person at the assessment panel meeting. The meeting is facilitated by the Program Consultant, who is responsible for ensuring that each application receives due consideration.

As a group, assessors will discuss each application, share their individual perspectives on the merits of the application, and reach a decision regarding whether to fund the proposed project or not.

## Assessment criteria and assessment statements

Assessors decide which applications are awarded based on the grant's unique **assessment criteria** and **evaluation rubric**.

### Assessment criteria

Common assessment criteria for MAC grants include:

- artistic merit (the project's artistic value)
- impact (how it will affect the applicant and their communities)
- feasibility (how possible it is to complete the project)

Other criteria considered may include educational and/or project merit. These criteria are weighted differently across programs.

### *Artistic merit*

MAC defines artistic merit as “a standard exhibited by creative work or artistic product or practice that may be characterized by such qualities as experimentation, clarity, rigour, relevance, and cultural integrity.”

However, MAC recognizes that notions of artistic merit evolve and that decisions based on aesthetic values will vary from one peer to the next.

### *Impact*

The impact criteria consider whether:

- the proposed project develops meaningful connections with the potential to generate future artistic/cultural opportunities, and
- the proposed project will contribute to the applicant's artistic/cultural development; or
- In the case of an organization, the proposed project will strengthen its ability to fulfill its mandate.

The Impact criteria may also consider:

- how the project impacts the communities, participants and audiences.
- the project's potential benefit to marginalized or under-served communities who face barriers to accessing the arts (if applicable).

### *Feasibility*

The feasibility criteria consider whether:

- the proposal illustrates thorough research and planning,
- the budget accurately acknowledges the likely costs and revenues, and
- the applicant has the resources to complete the project.



The feasibility criteria may also consider whether:

- The applicant's level of skill is appropriate for this project;
- the applicant's ability to find practical and creative ways to overcome obstacles; and
- the applicant has confirmed support from presenters, partners, and/or host organizations.

## Evaluation Rubric

Assessors complete an evaluation rubric for each application. This rubric is a series of statements related to the application that an assessor must rank from 1 to 5.

The answers are ranked as follows:

Answer	Score
Strongly disagree	= 1
Disagree	= 2
Neither agree nor disagree	= 3
Agree	= 4
Strongly agree	= 5
Does not apply	---

The assessors' individual scores are combined to provide an average score for each application. The applications are then ranked from highest score to lowest. Awards are then determined based on these rankings. Assessors are required to sign off on assessment awards and rankings.

## What is not considered by assessors

- an applicant's or their proposed project's eligibility\* to the program
- an applicant's financial need
- an applicant's grant history
- an applicant's reporting history

\*The eligibility of each applicant and their proposed project is determined by the Program Consultant before the assessment panel meeting, and therefore not part of the assessors' discussions.

## Internal Assessments

Some programs with small grant amounts and quick turnaround times are assessed by MAC staff. In these cases, a panel of MAC Program Consultants assess and rank applications using the same processes as detailed above.

## French language assessment

Applicants have the option of submitting their application in English or French. When an application is submitted in French, parts of the application are translated into English. Assessors are encouraged to read the application in its original language, if possible.

To maintain the artistic integrity of the work, MAC will never translate support material from its original language.

## Composition of bilingual assessment panels

When applications are submitted in French, MAC selects French-speaking assessors who are familiar with the discipline and activities in consideration.

The number of French-speaking assessors on a panel depends on how many French applications are received for that intake:

- **One** application written in French: MAC will engage a minimum of one French-speaking assessor to sit on the panel.
- **Two or more** applications written in French: MAC will engage two or more French-speaking assessors to sit on the panel.
- **Over 50%** of total applications: MAC will conduct the panel in French.

MAC prioritizes selecting assessors with an understanding of the complexities of the Francophone community in Manitoba.

## Assessment decisions

The granting process is competitive and funds are limited. Not all applications submitted to MAC can be funded.

There are three possible assessment decisions:

- Awarded
- Declined with merit
- Declined

Award amounts are determined by assessors based on the rankings of the applications. The decisions of assessment panels, including the amounts of the awards, are final.

## Applications that are awarded

A grant can either be awarded the full amount requested or it can be awarded at a partial amount. Those awarded will be the applications that the assessors ranked the highest.

## Applications that are declined with merit

In some cases, the assessors may wish to fund a project, but the application is not ranked highly enough to receive funding before the budget is expended. In this instance, the application would be declined with merit. The highest ranking of these grants may be awarded later if more

money becomes available. Applications that are declined with merit remain confidential unless they are later awarded.

### **Applications that are declined**

An application is declined if the panel does not believe the proposal merits funding. If an application is declined, applicants are invited to request feedback from a MAC Program Consultant to learn how their application can be improved. Declined applications remain confidential.

### **Notification of results**

Applicants are normally advised of the results by email within 3 months of the program deadline.

### **The appeal process**

Funding decisions of the Manitoba Arts Council are final. Decisions cannot be appealed unless *evidence* suggests a procedural error has occurred during the assessment process. In this case, applicants can submit an appeal request via MAC's complaint process.

## **What information is released from the panel?**

### **Applicants**

The names of awarded applicants and the grant amounts they received are published publicly on our **Grant Results Table** and in our annual **Grants Listing** document. The names of applicants who have been declined or declined with merit are never released.

### **Assessors**

The names of assessors are published annually in the Grant Listing document. Assessors are listed in alphabetical order. MAC does not reveal on which panel the assessor participated.

### **Feedback**

Some feedback, as determined by the assessment panel, may be provided directly to applicants by a Program Consultant, upon request.

### **Post-panel assessor survey**

Assessors complete an online survey following the panel. This helps MAC evaluate and improve the granting process and its programs.

## Assessor compensation

MAC offers assessors an honorarium as compensation for the time it takes to review each application and meet as a panel.

Here is a breakdown of MAC's reimbursement for assessors:

- Application review and initial assessment: \$15/application
- Orientation meeting and assessment panel day: \$50/hour
- Dependent care (if required): \$10/hour, up to a maximum of \$100/day

All assessors may claim \$20 for lunch, unless lunch is already provided by the Manitoba Arts Council.

Assessors who must travel to participate in the assessment panel may claim additional compensation for breakfast (\$20) and dinner (\$35).

## Appendix 1 - Conflict of interest

For the purposes of grant assessment, MAC defines “conflict of interest” as either technical or perceived.

### **Technical conflict of interest:**

A situation in which an assessor could be affected by an assessment decision, whether that decision is to award or decline an applicant. This benefit or detriment may be personal, professional, or financial.

### **Perceived conflict of interest:**

A situation in which an assessor could be perceived as being biased in favor or against an application.

Assessors will be informed of MAC’s Conflict of Interest Policy and must complete an online Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest agreement prior to the panel meeting. Assessors are asked to contact the Program Consultant regarding potential conflicts of interest.

The Program Consultant will consider the nature and extent of the conflict(s) declared by the assessor. If a conflict exists, the Program Consultant may remove the assessor from the panel.

If the Program Consultant has determined that a potential conflict can be managed without the assessor leaving the panel and that their participation is crucial, the assessor will:

- Declare the conflict of interest at the meeting;
- Withdraw from the meeting during discussion of the application in question; and
- Not attempt to influence the panel’s decision on the application.

## **MAC board and staff**

The MAC Board and staff are also bound by Conflict of Interest Policies because of their role in policy development, in ratifying and awarding grants, and in administering the grant process.

Prior to starting their work at MAC, new Board and staff members are required to make written disclosures of conflicts of interest. These written disclosures are updated annually or as conflicts of interest arise.

The Executive Director and Director of Granting will consider the nature and extent of the conflict(s) declared by Program Consultants. If a conflict exists, the Director of Granting may remove the Program Consultant from the panel.

If the Executive Director and Director of Granting have determined that a potential conflict can be managed without the Program Consultant leaving the panel and that their participation is crucial, the Program Consultant will:

- Declare the conflict of interest to the peer assessors;
- Withdraw from the meeting during discussion of the application in question; and
- Not attempt to influence the panel's decision on the application.

Conflict of Interest Policies for MAC Board and staff are available upon request.

## Appendix 2 - Confidentiality

MAC's Confidentiality Policy is designed to protect the applicants to its programs, the assessors, and the integrity of the peer assessment process.

Specifically, this policy protects:

- the private information of the applicants;
- the assessors from retaliation; and
- the granting system from unwarranted allegations of favoritism and the misuse of private information.

Assessors agree to a Confidentiality Agreement that prevents them from disclosing that they have been selected to serve on an upcoming panel. They may not contact applicants before or after the panel and may not disclose any information about the deliberations and decisions. If an assessor is contacted by an applicant regarding a decision, the assessor will refer the applicant to MAC and immediately notify the appropriate Program Consultant.

Breach of confidence may result in removal from the panel.

### MAC board and staff

All MAC Board and staff members must sign a Confidentiality Agreement at the time of their appointment or hiring which restricts them from disclosing the private affairs of the Board or its clients. This restriction remains in effect during the term of their appointment or employment and at all times thereafter. Any breach of confidence is considered a serious matter.

### Freedom of information and protection of privacy

As a government agency, MAC is subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Under the Act, any person may request documents, correspondence, applications, and reports, particularly those relating to a requestor's own files. However, unless a third party specifically consents to the release of information, the Act's exemptions apply, particularly with respect to third party information.

If you have any questions about the collection of your personal information, please contact:

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