How Panelists Review Applications

Your application is reviewed by a panel of arts and community professionals from across South Dakota and beyond. Panelists read applications carefully and score them using a shared rubric so every applicant is evaluated fairly and consistently.

What Panelists Look For

Panelists focus on six main areas:

1. **Who you serve and why it matters**
   They look at who your organization reaches and how your work benefits your community.
2. **What you do and how well you do it**
   They review your programs and activities and look for evidence of quality through your narrative and support materials.
3. **Community impact**
   Panelists consider how your organization makes a positive difference and how your work aligns with SDAC's goals, such as access to the arts, lifelong learning, and community vitality.
4. **Support for artists and learning**
   They look at how you pay, hire, or otherwise support artists, and how you contribute to arts education or learning opportunities.
5. **Organizational capacity**
   Panelists review how your organization is staffed and managed, and whether you have the systems in place to carry out your work and manage grant funds responsibly.
6. **Financial stability**
   Panelists review a staff-prepared financial summary to see whether your projected budget is realistic and balanced. They do **not** review your raw financial documents.

Important Things to Know

- Panelists **only review the materials required for your category**. They will not expect or look for extra documents.
- Staff calculate your eligible operating expenses and request amount in advance, so panelists are not deciding how much you should request.
- Applications are scored based on clarity, completeness, and how well they respond to the questions—not on writing style or grant-writing experience.
- Smaller organizations are **not held to the same documentation expectations** as larger organizations.

What Makes an Application Strong

- Answer each question clearly and directly
- Use examples to show impact
- Include relevant, easy-to-understand support materials
- Show realistic planning and budgeting
- Match the scale of the organization

The goal of panel review is not to compare organizations to one another, but to understand how well each applicant uses public funding to serve their community through the arts.

General Organizational Support – Review Rubric

Total Possible Score: 100 points
Panelists score each category based on how clearly and convincingly the application responds to the questions asked, using the materials required for the applicant's category.

1. Community Reach & Public Benefit (20 points)

Who the organization serves and why it matters

Strong applications:

- Clearly describe who they serve (communities, regions, age groups, or populations)

- Show how programs are accessible and relevant

- Demonstrate public benefit aligned with SDAC's goal of expanding access to the arts

Scoring guide

- **18–20**: Clear reach, strong relevance, clear public benefit

- **14–17**: Good description, some evidence of benefit

- **10–13**: Basic description, limited context

- **0–9**: Unclear or minimal information

2. Program Quality & Artistic Activity (20 points)

What the organization does and how well it does it

Strong applications:

- Clearly explain programs and services

- Demonstrate consistent, thoughtful artistic or cultural activity

- Provide support materials that show quality and care

Scoring guide

- **18–20**: Strong, well-explained programs with clear quality

- **14–17**: Solid programs, some evidence of quality

- **10–13**: Programs described but not fully developed

- **0–9**: Programs unclear or unsupported

3. Community Impact & Alignment with SDAC Goals (15 points)

How the organization makes a difference

Strong applications:

- Explain how their work benefits the community

- Describe what success looks like and how they know they're meeting goals

- Align with SDAC priorities such as access, lifelong learning, community vitality, or support for artists

Scoring guide

- **13–15**: Clear impact and alignment with SDAC priorities

- **10–12**: Some impact described, limited measurement

- **7–9**: General statements, little evidence

- **0–6**: Impact unclear

4. Support for Artists & Arts Education (15 points)

How artists and learning are supported

Strong applications:

- Show how artists are paid, hired, or supported

- Describe education or learning opportunities (formal or informal)

- Reflect SDAC's commitment to artists and lifelong learning

Scoring guide

- **13–15**: Clear, consistent support for artists and/or education

- **10–12**: Some support described

- **7–9**: Limited or indirect support

- **0–6**: Not addressed

5. Organizational Capacity & Planning (20 points)

Ability to carry out the work and manage funds responsibly

Strong applications:

- Clearly explain staffing, volunteers, and partners

- Show sound management of operations and finances

- Demonstrate planning appropriate to organizational size (strategic plan, calendar, or clear goals)

Scoring guide

- **18–20**: Strong capacity and realistic planning

- **14–17**: Adequate systems and staffing

- **10–13**: Limited detail or uneven capacity

- **0–9**: Significant concerns

6. Financial Stability & Sustainability (10 points)

Responsible use of public funds

Strong applications:

- Show a realistic, balanced projected budget

- Demonstrate diversified income where appropriate

- Indicate how GOS funds will help sustain operations over two years

Scoring guide

- **9–10**: Clear, realistic, and sustainable

- **7–8**: Mostly sound with minor questions

- **5–6**: Budget unclear or incomplete

- **0–4**: Significant financial concerns

Minimum Score for Funding Consideration

Applications must score **50 points or higher** to be considered for funding.