

# Creating a More Equitable Approach for Indiana's Arts Organization Support Grant Program

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Indiana Arts Commission  
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## PURPOSE

The approach and philosophy to the Indiana Arts Commission's (IAC) funding is one that has supported its vision - **Arts everywhere, every day, for everyone in Indiana**. Because of this, the IAC's funding strategy has been to distribute public funding as broadly as possible (upwards of 98% - 100% of organizations that applied were funded). Continuing to approach funding this way is unsustainable and does not allow the agency to fully align with its strategic priorities:

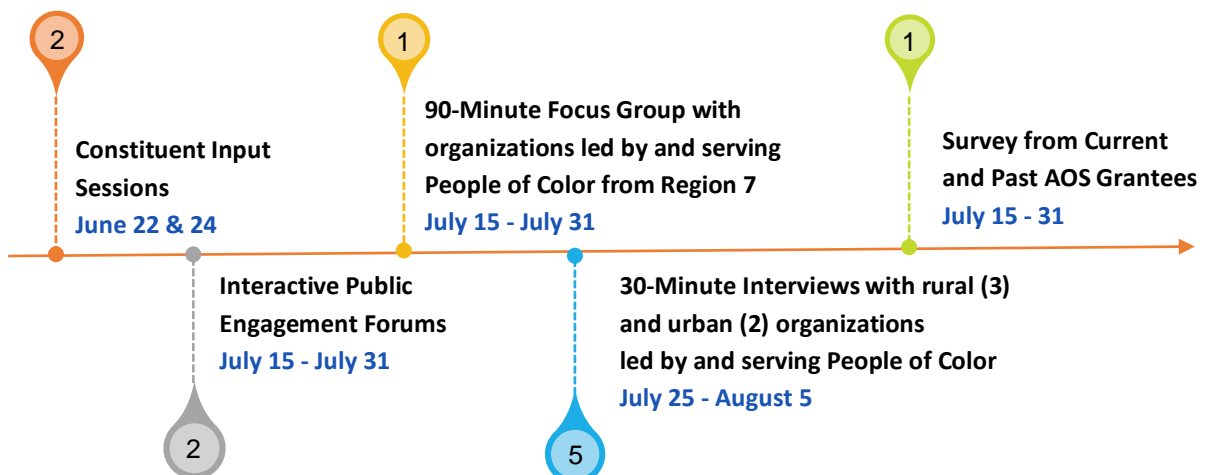
- Community Engagement
- Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access
- Authentic Artistic Quality

As the **Indiana Arts Commission** (IAC) desires a more equitable grantmaking process for the **Arts Organization Support** (AOS) grant program, it was critical to engage organizations of all sizes from across the state of Indiana for input and feedback. The approach to identifying a more equitable way to make grants through the AOS program included:



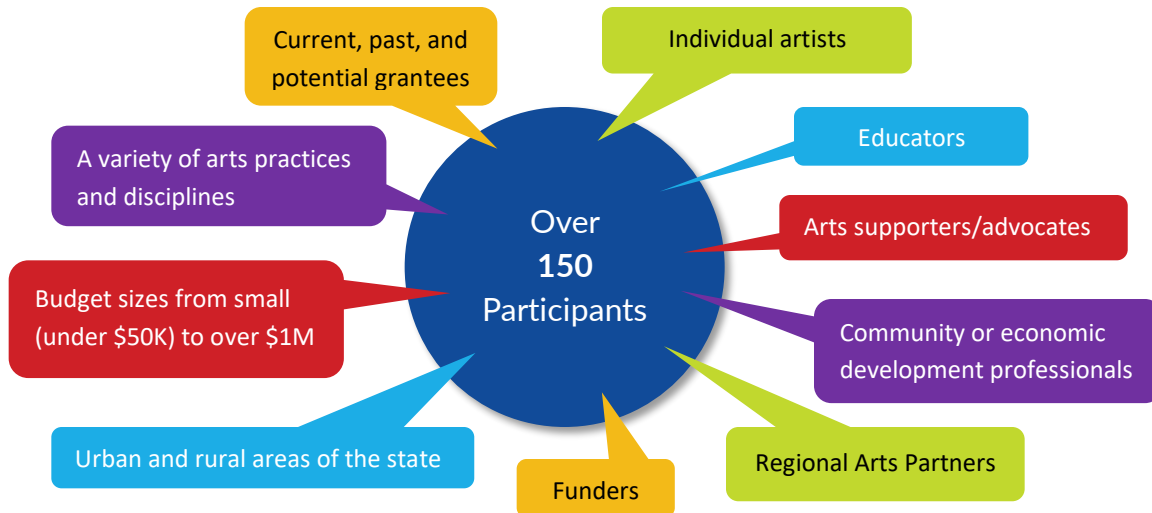
## HOW WERE PEOPLE ENGAGED?

Constituents from across Indiana shared their experiences and reflections through a range of facilitated and independent engagement opportunities.



## WHO PARTICIPATED?

More than 150 constituents were recruited on a volunteer basis, and all sessions were conducted virtually or through online interactive data collection tools. Participants represented:



## FINDINGS


### Priority Areas for Consideration from Field Input

#### What Were They Asked?


Participants provided input and critical feedback about the AOS program to clarify how well it is aligned with the IAC's IDEA values. Seven key questions were used to frame the input gathered and determine specific feedback during the engagement with field participants.

- 1 Who should the Indiana Arts Commission be reaching in the Arts Organization Support (AOS) program?
- 2 How should Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) be included in the AOS applications?
- 3 How should Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) be included in the AOS award implementation?
- 4 How should Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) be included in the AOS reporting and evaluation?
- 5 What support would help applicants during the AOS grant process?
- 6 What meaningful information about underserved communities should the Indiana Arts Commission collect?
- 7 What would you like the impact of the Arts Organization Support Grant (AOS) to be? In other words, what is the impact you'd like the IAC to have on the Arts in Indiana through this program?


Across all data collected, the following three major takeaways resonated the most with the consulting team and are recommended to prioritize in future AOS grant planning:

 **Targeted support is needed to increase organizational capacity in the sector.** [Key Questions 1, 5, 6]

- A gap in support was identified among prospective applicants, smaller organizations with budgets under \$50K, and organizations with limited staff. Organizations like this require increased resources to grow their operational infrastructure for the administrative workload of government grants. Comparatively, larger institutions often have the knowledge and capacity to navigate complex funding opportunities without additional resources of this nature.
- Specific skill-building, training, and workshops will address a significant gap in capacity most urgently experienced by smaller organizations.
- Opportunities to learn from and potentially partner with peers, identify local resources, and/or share revenue strategies could significantly impact smaller arts groups that do not currently have the capacity or aspiration to become a 501c3 nonprofit organization.

 **Grant procedures place a significant burden on administrative operations.** [Key Questions 2, 3]

- Current AOS applications and reports require a considerable amount of resources and staff time to complete compared to other grant opportunities inside and outside of the state.
- Complex questions and language barriers make the process increasingly difficult for less experienced applicants to comprehend, and data collection requests exceed what organizations understand how to measure and manage.
- Streamlining the application processes by removing repetitive questions and automating some aspects of the process could save both time and staff capacity for applicants and the IAC staff.

 **AOS awards are not substantial enough to have meaningful effects on operating budgets of all sizes.** [Key Questions 4, 7]

- Limited award amounts impact grantees' ability to realistically address operational expenses at their organizations, particularly long-term staff costs, and artist/volunteer stipends.
- For smaller organizations that need to hire contracted grant writers, the cost of services to submit and manage a grant application can often negate the revenue received from grant awards for organizations.

- The strategy of expanding AOS eligibility by lowering the threshold for organizations with operating budgets under \$50K would further limit the funding amounts each grantee receives. This would go against what 85% of field participants wanted from AOS funds, which was to, “provide meaningful impact to organizations.” However, the support needed for organizations with budgets under \$50K will need to be directly addressed to achieve the IAC’s IDEA goals.

## AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT TO GRANT MATERIALS AND PROCESS

A review of the AOS guidelines, application, panel reviews, and reporting processes with the insights from the field participants revealed a few distinct areas for improvement. The most recent materials from FY 2022 and FY 2023 were used for this process.

### GUIDELINES – FY 2023 ARTS ORGANIZATION SUPPORT

- **Streamline the guidelines into one document and add a section noting the regional differences in funding allocations.**

Applicants are frequently overwhelmed by the grantseeking process and cannot always find the information they need in the grant guidelines. All processes and expectations from application through reporting should be included.

- **Provide relevant examples.**

Applicants want to see tangible examples referenced in the guidelines so they can model and understand what data collection processes are required throughout the duration of the grant cycle.

- **Expand information that is not fully explained or missing in the guidelines.**

Details not mentioned in current guidelines (or linked to external sources) include ADA compliance requirements before receiving the grant award; examples of application questions, financial documents needed, and letters to government officials; the role of the Regional Arts Partners in the IAC grantmaking process; and an explanation of reporting requirements for federal and state agencies.

- **Significant notice of changes between grant cycles and standardization of how changes are notated in materials.**

Widely circulating any significant changes to the application between grant cycles before they take effect is a priority for grantees. Also, consistent and clear notation of application changes will help grantees plan and develop compelling proposals.

## APPLICATION – FY 2023 ARTS ORGANIZATION SUPPORT

- **Create a separate application for first-time applicants.**  
One process that streamlines the eligibility questions and the application questions since there are several places where the information requested is duplicated.
- **Improve online portal navigation and add auto-populating features.**  
Simplifying the applicant experience of online tools like the eligibility questionnaire and application form could improve efficiency for applicants and the IAC staff (e.g., auto-generating a Grant ID, determination/notification of eligibility, etc.).
- **The eligibility questionnaire should focus on items that directly correspond to what is listed on the IAC website.**  
Currently, the eligibility questionnaire includes information that is not clearly identified as a condition of eligibility listed on the IAC’s website or asks for information that is duplicated in the application.
- **Add evaluative panel scoring to the application sections.**  
Evaluative panel scoring is not labeled near the application questions and therefore when applicants are listening to their panel review, they lack the understanding of what areas are weighted more than others.
- **Add an open field to describe community engagement and the progress of IDEA.**  
The need for more narrative space to describe how organizations are addressing the components of IDEA and other community engagement through external programming is vital to explain organization-specific challenges and progress.

## PANEL REVIEW - FY 2023 ARTS ORGANIZATION SUPPORT EVALUATION FORM

- **Provide a transparent scoring rubric with clear scoring criteria.**  
Creating a simple scoring rubric with a numeric scale and concise descriptions will reduce panel biases and support the interpretation and analysis of information in the application.
- **Define and strengthen Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) assessment criteria.**  
Developing a rubric for IDEA criteria will also help panelists understand what they need to look for in applicant proposals, especially if they are unfamiliar with IDEA concepts.

- **Rationales are missing for why specific impact questions are being asked.**  
The final report uses a variety of question types (e.g., multiple choice, narrative, and point scales) to assess the impact of AOS awards. Descriptions of why questions are being asked, especially those not required by federal agencies, would provide greater transparency for grantees to understand how their responses are being used by the IAC.
- **Additional narrative fields will help grantees describe how the grant affected their organizational work.**  
Questions focused on audience engagement do not consistently include options to discuss responses in detail. Questions on topics like “Creative Aging,” “Relationship with Schools,” “Arts Integration,” and “Community Development” are presented as multiple choice without the opportunity to provide further context.
- **Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) progress is not adequately measured.**  
The primary question focused on IDEA in the final report asks which process documentations are active at grantee organizations (e.g., IDEA inclusion in strategic plans, candidate hiring procedures, staff training, and/or equity statements) but does not ask how the AOS grant influenced IDEA advancement.
- **Merit awards incentivize IDEA as criteria for additional funding is not recommended.**  
Aside from the question referenced above, goal setting related to IDEA is limited to the competitive merit award criteria, which may encourage “favorable” responses over authentic reflection. This reinforces a fear shared by field input that they may be penalized for less-developed IDEA progress.
- **Notification about specific expectations for data reporting when grants are awarded.**  
Advance communication of final reporting data collection needs (e.g., audiences, artist involvement, population demographics, financial information, etc.) will help organizations track this information during the grant period.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH THIS INFORMATION?

The IAC will use these findings and subsequent research to inform future planning for the AOS grant program.