

## The Application Assessment Process and the Awarding of Grants

### Granting Policy

The [Granting Policy](#) adopted by the Canada Council effective 1 April 2017, sets out the core values for the Council's granting activities. The policy provides a general framework for the assessment of grant applications, as well as the grant awarding mechanisms.

### Peer assessment

#### The judgment of peers

The Granting Policy underscores the Canada Council's commitment to peer assessment. Indeed, most Council decisions as to which artists, projects or arts organizations will be funded are based on peer assessment.

#### Internal assessments

However, in order to speed up the assessment process and allow quick responses for certain types of applications, Council makes use of internal assessments carried out by program officers. Internal assessments are generally for grant applications submitted under program components focused on the impact of activities, and for applicants or projects whose artistic merit has already been regularly assessed by peer committees. The grants under these components are usually relatively small. Travel grants are an example.

#### The role of peers

While assessment by peers is essential to well-informed decision-making, Council does not ask peers to determine the grant amounts. It is the program officer that is responsible for recommending grant amounts to the appropriate Council decision-making level, based on the assessments and comments of peers, with due consideration to the budgets available. The peer committee's role is to provide a qualitative assessment of grant applications, not make financial decisions.

Council bases its funding decisions on the peer committee assessments, with due regard to any specific strategic priorities pertaining to factors like equity, Indigenous peoples or new recipients. Council is accountable for its funding decisions.

#### Composition of peer committees

Council always strives to ensure that all eligible applications submitted are examined by assessors who are best able to evaluate them.

Program officers suggest the composition of those committees for which they are responsible on the basis of three factors: diversity of professional specialization; diversity of artistic practices; and characteristics that contribute to the representativeness and credibility of peer committees, namely demographic diversity, Indigenous peoples, cultural diversity, gender, age, official languages, regions, and persons with disabilities and Deaf people. Final composition of the committee is approved by the

program director.

Council is, of course, well aware that no specific committee can represent every facet of Canada at any given time, but the overall composition of its committees in a particular year must reflect this diversity to the greatest possible extent. Council may also provide its committees with documentation and expertise, both internal and external, to help the peers make informed recommendations.

### **Standing committees of peers**

To strengthen the overall expertise of peers sitting on committees, Council makes use of standing committees of peers. While continuing to call upon a large number and a wide range of peers, those on the standing committees are appointed for a longer period of time, with the goal of enabling them to become familiar with a significant number of applications and thus be in a position to better exercise their judgment on a comparative basis. Their term will vary depending on whether they are assessing project grants or core grants; this ensures both continuity and renewal in committee composition.

The terms for peers assessing core grants are therefore four years (two competitions), with the renewal of half, or approximately half, of the committee members every two years. The terms for peers assessing project grants are for one year, with the renewal of one or two committee members following each competition. In the first few years of the new funding model, different terms may be necessary to help with the transition.

### **Disclosure of peer assessor names**

In order to make the assessment process as transparent as possible, the names of peers taking part in the assessments are made public at the same time as the release of grant/prize results.

### **Use of official languages**

In order to protect and promote the full recognition and use of both of Canada's official languages in assessing grant applications, Council makes use of either peer committees that work in both official languages or committees whose working language is French only or English only.

### **Conflict of interest**

The Canada Council's assessment processes reflect clear conflict of interest operational policies that comply with a strict code of ethics. Conflicts of interest may be real, apparent or potential.

The Canada Council recognizes that conflicts of interest may arise when it asks those active in the arts community to assess competing submissions.

Moreover, the Council's peer assessors, like all employees and members of its Board of Directors, are subject to Council's conflict of interest guidelines and must disclose any conflict of interest to ensure the integrity of the assessment and decision-making process.

Any peer assessors who declare a conflict of interest with respect to a grant application do not

participate in deliberations concerning that application.

### **Context Briefs**

While the Canada Council's peers assessors and staff have deep knowledge of the arts, not everyone will be familiar with all artistic practices or contexts. This is particularly true of practices rooted in Indigenous, culturally diverse, Official Language Minority Communities and Deaf and disability arts communities. Regardless, it is the responsibility of the peer assessors to assess all applications in a competition. To facilitate their responsibilities and complement their knowledge, it is important that committees are effectively equipped with information, context, or other appropriate resources related to these arts communities and practices. Context Briefs are written documents that help address this need. Their purpose is to:

- Ensure that internal and peer committees are equipped to make informed recommendations
- Foster understanding among peers assessors and staff of emerging, minoritized, or other less-well-known artistic practices
- Safeguard the ongoing integrity of Council's granting process

The topics of Contexts Briefs include a range of artistic practices and sectors, such as Artists and Community Collaboration, Circus Arts, Culturally Diverse Arts, Deaf and Disability arts, Indigenous arts and cultures, Official Language Minority Communities, etc.

### **Assessment of project grant applications**

#### **Preliminary assessment**

Council makes use of a preliminary assessment stage for project grant application components that are assessed by peers. In this initial stage, each committee member (individually and without consulting the other members of the committee) is asked to identify which applications are in their opinion less competitive in terms of the assessment criteria for that component, and which they feel do not feel should be discussed at the committee meeting. Applications that have not been supported by any of the committee members are then deemed unsuccessful.

#### **Peer assessment meetings for project grants**

At the beginning of the meetings, the program officer responsible reminds the committee members of the program objectives and assessment criteria for the component, along with Council's strategic priorities, notably in matters of equity.

The committees review and discuss each application that has been accepted at the preliminary assessment phase. The committee members then assign a score to each category of assessment criteria.

Each program component has three or four categories of assessment criteria. With a combined total score of 100, there is a minimum threshold assigned to each category. This minimum must be

achieved in each category for an application to be recommended for a grant.

The overall score, which is the total of the scores in each of the categories, is used to establish a ranking of projects which, depending on available funds, will either be awarded a grant or be recommended. These may receive a grant at a later time, should funds become available.

For information about the weighting of the assessment criteria for project grants, please consult the program component guidelines.

### **Transition from Project to Core Funding**

Organizations that are interested in applying for core grants should continue to apply for project support until they are successful in attaining a core grant. If an organization receives a project grant and then, later, is awarded a core grant that includes or overlaps with the project grant's activities, Canada Council will examine the situation on a case-by-case basis and discuss options with the organization.

### **Assessment of core grant applications**

#### **Committee meetings and assessment of organizations**

As with project grant applications, the committee meetings begin with a reminder to committee members of the program objectives, assessment criteria for the component concerned, and Council's priorities, notably in matters of equity.

Core grant applications from organizations are judged on the basis of assessment criteria grouped into categories, with a combined total score on 100, and a minimum threshold for each category.

The scores will determine the ranking of these organizations into three groups. The first (GREEN) indicates that the committee recommends increased funding or initial core funding; the second (YELLOW) indicates a recommendation to continue existing funding; RED indicates that the committee sees one or more of the following: serious shortcomings with respect to the assessment criteria for the component, a significant decrease in the level of the applicant's activities, or that their status is deemed to be a cause for concern.

The minimum threshold for each category must be met to be ranked in the GREEN or YELLOW groups.

For information about the weighting of the assessment criteria for core grants, please consult the program component guidelines.

#### **Concerned Status**

Concerned Status may be assigned to an organization whose organizational health is unstable and may place Council's investment at risk. Concerned Status does not necessarily lead to reduced core funding, but allows Council to inform the organization of its expectations and monitor the situation.

### **Decrease in core funding**

Further to an assessment, a peer committee may recommend a decrease in core funding for an organization showing serious shortcomings in terms of the criteria for the component, or a significant ongoing decline in its level of activities. The decrease in the grant is from 5% to 15% of the previous level of core funding, and the new grant is for a two-year period.

If an organization has its core grant decreased twice in a row because of negative assessments, a third negative assessment will automatically lead to a Major Warning.

### **Major Warning**

A committee of peers, as part of the assessment process, may recommend that an organization be issued a Major Warning owing to a highly negative assessment of the quality of its activities or of its organizational viability. A Major Warning is a serious measure that may result in the complete withdrawal of Council's financial support.

An initial Major Warning leads to an annual grant rather than a multi-year grant, as well as a 15% to 20% reduction in the grant amount. A further Major Warning, resulting from a second assessment, leads to an additional decrease in the core grant (percentage to be determined by the Council) or complete cancellation of the grant. A third Major Warning leads to a final decrease or cancellation of the core grant.

Notwithstanding the above, the awarding of a grant is at the sole and absolute discretion of the Canada Council. The amount of a grant may be reduced or cancelled if there is a reduction in Council's parliamentary appropriation or for any other unforeseen reason.

### **Major Changes to Artist-Driven Organizations (Explore and Create)**

Although, in the absence of special circumstances, any decrease in funding must be based on a negative peer assessment, Council may also review its grant or the amount of a grant in the event of major changes within an artist-driven organization.

This may involve a significant change in the very nature of an organization, which may lead Council to decide that it should be transferred to a different component, such as Artistic Catalysts or Support Organizations. The organization would then be assessed on a comparative basis using the assessment criteria for the new component.

A change might also involve the departure and replacement of the artistic leadership. In such instances, the new leadership will be compared to the previous leadership as well as to other grant recipients under this component.

In all instances, Council will request recommendations from a peer committee.

### **Decisions**

The Canada Council's Delegation of Authority sets out the responsibilities of Council staff and the

various authorities at Council for awarding grants.

For internal assessments, program officers recommend grant recipient and amounts to the program director for approval.

For all other funding, the officers recommend grant recipients and amounts on the basis of peer committee assessments. These recommendations are approved according to the Canada Council's internal delegation of authority.

### **Communicating results**

Council strives to inform artists, groups and arts organizations who have submitted applications of the outcome of competitions as quickly as possible.

The results may not be given by telephone, but only in writing. The information provided may include general criteria-based comments, drawn from the assessment, about the strengths and weaknesses of the application.