

Metro Arts Grants Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: February 13, 2025

Time: 11:00 am – 2:00 pm

Location: Metro Southeast Building – Green Hills Conference Room

Meeting recording: [Metro Nashville YouTube](#)

Meeting Materials: [Revised Timeline FY25 Grant Cycle](#); [Timeline FY25-26 Grant Cycle](#)

Commissioners: Heather Lefkowitz, Tim Jester, & Shawn Knight

Absent: Dawana Wade & Jilah Kalil

Metro Arts Staff: Ashley Bachelder, Sydnie Davis, & Vivian Foxx

Metro Legal: Tessa Marsh-Ortiz

A. Call to Order, Roll Call & Welcome

Chair Lefkowitz called the meeting to order at 11:05 a.m.

B. Public Comment

No public comment was received. Public comment is available at all commission and committee meetings and can also be submitted online through the Nashville.gov website.

C. Approval of Minutes: January 15, 2025

A motion was made by Commissioner Knight to approve the January 15, 2025, minutes and was seconded by Commissioner Jester.

D. Discussion Items

1) FY25 Grants Update

- **Timeline Review and Status Update**

Ashley Bachelder (Interim Executive Director) provided a detailed update on the FY25 grants process timeline, including the application period, fiscal agent recruitment, and panelist evaluation and selection process.

"So, what you all have as a handout and again as posted on the public meeting notice page...is a table that updates you on the activities that have been undertaken by staff and others since our last meeting."

- **Submittable Reopened**

Submittable is reopened for updates to applications for Thrive and General Operating Grants.

- **Grant Clinics**

Staff has conducted 53 scheduled one-on-one grant clinics, not including additional communications with applicants.

"As of yesterday...our count was that we've done 53 scheduled one-on-one grant clinics... and that is an undercount of the communications that we've had."

- **Fiscal Agent Recruitment**

A resource guide with 18 organizations willing to serve as fiscal agents has been created and is available on the Metro Arts website. Being on the directory is not a requirement to act as a fiscal agent.

"The resource guide that we have updated on our website right now has 18 organizations who said that they are open to being contacted by Thrive applicants to have a conversation about fiscal sponsorship...it is not a requirement to be a fiscal agent [to be on the Metro Arts directory]."

- **Panelist Selection**

Panelists for the grant review panels have been selected and will be notified soon. There will be two Thrive panels and one Operating panel.

- **Contract Period Extension**

The contract period for grants was extended to June 30th in the best interest of applicants.

"The original guidelines had the grant period ending on June 1st, but there was no reason why we couldn't extend that to June 30th."

- **Technical Reviews**

Technical reviews of applications are scheduled for February 19th to confirm eligibility and ensure all required documents are submitted.

"The technical review is like eligibility. So it's ensuring, for example, are the letters of determination from the IRS submitted for nonprofits, are the required documents included."

- **Upcoming Meeting**

At the February 28th meeting, staff will present a list of applicants who received qualifying scores and request recommendations to present to the full commission for approval.

2) FY26 Grants Update

- **Early Planning Stage**

The committee acknowledged that planning for FY26 needs to begin immediately, despite the current focus on FY25.

"We are already quote-unquote behind in terms of thinking about that."

- **Timeline Draft**

Ashley Bachelder presented a draft timeline for FY26, highlighting key areas for community engagement, guideline finalization, application periods, panel evaluation, and contract allocation. The goal is to create a comprehensive timeline for FY26 by March.

"All this is is a roughly linear list of the general types of things that need to happen, starting chronologically where we are, in March."

- **Community Engagement**

Prioritizing community engagement throughout the entire cycle was emphasized. The committee discussed multiple modes of engagement and the importance of lead time.

"Where are the opportunities or the needs to improve details in the Thrive or Operating guidelines? And just generally, how can we improve our processes from start to finish throughout all of this... What policy questions were tabled or left unclear from the current cycle? How can we prioritize community engagement throughout the entire cycle as we start this again for 26?"

- **Tabled Policy Questions**

Several policy questions from the current cycle require further discussion:

- **Under-represented Council Districts:** The committee intends to revisit the policy around under-represented council districts.
- **Background Checks:** The background check policy needs further review and clarification. The committee discussed mirroring MNPS policies and seeking research into best practices.
"We pulled that discussion of under-represented council groups... But the commission indicated that that is something they want to consider. So that would be up to our committee to think about how that might happen...the other one is background checks as a policy."
"There wasn't clear guidance on what exactly applicants are being asked to upload. Is it confirmation that a background check has been done? Is it something more detailed? We didn't have a robust plan to operationalize that."
- **Fiscal Sponsorship:** Further improvements to the fiscal sponsorship process are needed.
- **Community Engagement Strategies:** Proposed strategies include weekly office hours in different areas, visits with grantees, planned engagement events, recorded videos about the process, etc.

I. Procedural & Administrative Matters

Background Check Policy Update

- **Attestation Form:** An attestation form is now required for Thrive and Operating grantees, stating that all adults participating in the programming or instruction of minors have satisfactory background checks within the last two years. The attestation is meant to simplify the process, and is all that needs to be submitted in lieu of providing actual background check clearance documents. The Executive Committee authorized this decision on February 11, 2025.
- **Liability:** The liability for the accuracy of attestations lies within the contract.

Community Engagement Strategies & Feedback

- **Multiple Modes of Engagement:** The committee emphasized the need for multiple strategies, including public events, virtual sessions, and two-way communication.
- **Importance of Lead Time:** Sufficient lead time is necessary for successful engagement.
- **Clear Objectives:** Community engagements must have defined objectives.

Action Items & Next Steps

- Committee members will email Ashley Bachelder with thoughts on community engagement strategies.
- A fleshed-out plan for community engagement will be presented at the March meeting.
- March calendar dates for engagement will be scheduled.

- Commissioners are encouraged to connect with Ashley Bachelder one-on-one for input.

Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m.