

MEETING MINUTES

Metro Arts Commission Grants & Funding Committee

December 5, 2024, 10AM-12PM

1417 Murfreesboro Pike, Green Hills Conference Room

[Meeting video](#)

Present:

Commissioner Tim Jester (Chair), Commissioner Dawana Wade, Commissioner Carole McCoy, Dr. Paulette Coleman (Interim Executive Director), Vivian Fox (Staff), Tessa Ortiz-Marsh (Legal)

1. Call to Order, Roll Call & Welcome

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Tim Jester, who noted the meeting was being held pursuant to the provisions of code 2.68.030 of the Metropolitan Code of Laws.

2. Public Comment

Ashley Bachelder from MHRC provided public comment, expressing several concerns about proposed changes to the Thrive program. She highlighted that the stated rationale for excluding nonprofits from Thrive eligibility (that they can apply for operating grants) was incorrect, as many non-arts organizations are not eligible for general operating grants. She emphasized this was an equity and access issue for organizations that do not have access to arts funding for arts programming. Ms. Bachelder also expressed concern about potential retaliation given the active Title VI complaint monitoring phase. She concluded by stating that narrowing criteria could have negative impacts on equity goals.

3. Action/Discussion Items

a. Metro Arts Thrive Awards Implementation (Action)

Dr. Coleman presented the staff recommendations, noting that Sydnie Davis, Grants Manager, was absent due to illness. She provided context about Thrive's 10-year history and recent funding increases from \$178,600 in FY23 to \$908,000 in FY24.

After discussion, the committee approved several changes to staff recommendations. Initial staff proposals to exclude 501(c)(3) organizations and community public art projects were reconsidered following public comment and committee discussion. Dr. Coleman noted that with the shortened grant period, fewer changes would be beneficial.

The committee discussed options and approved the following recommendations for full commission:

- Retain eligibility for 501(c)(3) organizations and artist collectives
- Allow Thrive recipients to serve as fiscal agents
- Continue inclusion of community public art projects
- Institute one submission per applicant policy to spread funding more broadly
- Require background checks for youth-engaging projects, noting this aligned with standard practices
- Establish priority funding for underrepresented council districts, acknowledging eight districts have received no funding
- Implement use of fiscal agents for non-501(c)(3) entities
- Reduce audit requirement from proposed 35% to 10% to mirror operating grants

b. Grant Funding Amounts

Extensive discussion occurred regarding funding models. The committee considered several options including percentage-based funding and various flat rate proposals. After deliberation, they approved a funding model that would:

- Set flat funding cap at \$10,000 per grant
- Fund applications scoring 70% or higher
- Fund requests under \$10,000 at full ask amount
- Fund requests over \$10,000 at \$10,000 cap

This model was chosen as it would allow for broader distribution of funds while maintaining substantial support levels.

c. Fiscal Agents

The committee discussed fiscal agent implementation. Key points of discussion included:

- Fiscal Agent Capacity: The committee decided against setting limits on the number of artists each fiscal agent could represent, allowing organizations to determine their own capacity
- Selection Process: Discussion emphasized artist autonomy in selecting fiscal agents, either from Metro Arts' recommended list or their own choice
- Contract Structure: Significant discussion occurred regarding the relationship between Metro Arts, fiscal agents, and artists. Legal counsel

clarified that Metro Arts would contract directly with fiscal agents, while maintaining oversight of fund distribution

- Template Agreements: The committee reviewed draft agreements while noting these would serve as templates that could be modified by parties
- Financial Oversight: Extended discussion on audit requirements and financial responsibility, with emphasis on Metro Arts' ultimate oversight role

A key point of discussion centered on whether fiscal agents should be eligible for Thrive awards themselves. After deliberation, the committee decided to allow this dual role, acknowledging the service aspect of fiscal agency.

d. FY25 Additional Grant Cycle Items

Dr. Coleman led a discussion of timeline considerations and implementation challenges. Key points included:

- Timeline Adjustment: The original January implementation target was deemed unrealistic given multiple required steps:
- Fiscal agent identification and training
- Panelist selection and orientation
- Technical review of 202 Thrive and 107 operating grant applications
- Council approval process
- Two-week grant orientation and training period
- Two-week adjustment submission period

Process Alignment: Discussion emphasized the importance of processing operating and Thrive grants in tandem, with panel reviews scheduled for two days per category instead of the previous four-week review period

Implementation Challenges: The committee discussed the compressed timeframe for fund distribution and project completion, given the June end date

4. New/Old Business

No new or old business was brought before the committee.

5. Adjourn Meeting

Commissioner Wade moved to adjourn the meeting, which was approved by unanimous consent.

*Note: Pursuant to the provisions of § 2.68.030 of the Metropolitan Code of Laws, decisions of the Arts Commission may be appealed to the Chancery Court of Davidson County for review under a common law writ of certiorari. Any appeal must be filed within sixty days after entry of a final decision by the Commission. *