Grants and Funding Committee
Meeting Minutes
Date: November 25, 2024
Time: 12:30 PM – 2:30 PM
Location: Howard Office Building
Sonny West Conference Room A/B

Present: Tim Jester, Leah Dupree-Love, Carol McCoy, Dawana Wade & Interim Executive Director Dr. Paulette Coleman

Staff: Sydnie Davis and Vivian Foxx

A. Call to Order, Roll Call & Welcome (12:30 PM)
The meeting was called to order by Chair Commissioner Jester

B. Public Comment (12:35 – 12:45 PM)
There were no public comments submitted online in advance of the meeting, and no members of the public registered to speak during the in-person comment period.

C. Approval of Minutes – October 14, 2024
The committee approved the minutes from the October 14 meeting without amendment.

D. Action/Discussion Items

1. Allocation of Funds Between Organization Grants and Thrive Awards (Action)

The committee voted to allocate **$900,000 to Thrive Awards** for FY24–25, maintaining funding levels from the previous fiscal year. Dr. Coleman explained that this decision reflects a commitment to equity, balancing Thrives' community-driven model with ongoing needs for operational support.

2. MHRC / Public Engagement / Communication
Ashley Bachelder from the Metro Human Relations Commission gave an overview of public engagement efforts, highlighting past successes but raising concern about the lack of communication with grant applicants since January. Chuck Beard followed with a summary of the November 6–8 engagement sessions, which included two in-person and one virtual event. The sessions provided context on historical grant practices and previewed proposed FY25 guidelines.
Committee members discussed frustrations voiced by the community about the long communication gap. Sydnie Davis outlined communication challenges with Submittable and email coordination. Dr. Coleman acknowledged the need for improvement and proposed hiring a temporary communications specialist. Chair Jester stressed that ongoing silence wasn't acceptable: "If people are confused, it's on us to fix it."

3. Metro Arts Operating Grant Implementation (Action)

- **Commissioner Heather Lefkowitz** presented a new operating grant model informed by previous community engagement and policy analysis. Her proposal included visual data on historical funding patterns and a scalable formula.
- **Discussion**: Commissioner Love raised concerns about process transparency, suggesting that staff should have been consulted in advance. Dr. Coleman echoed this and recommended clarifying commissioner-staff communication at a future retreat.
- **Staff Proposal**: The committee also reviewed a staff-recommended **proportional funding model** that balanced awards across organizational categories while maintaining competitive scoring elements.
- **Decision**: After legal review by Tessa Ortiz-Marsh regarding fairness in distinctions between new and returning applicants, the committee approved the **staff's proportional funding model**.

4. Metro Arts Thrive Awards Implementation (Action – Incomplete)

Discussion began on Thrive award implementation, focusing on whether to issue flat $5,000 or $10,000 awards. Commissioner Wade expressed concern that higher flat awards may exceed what some applicants request and increase burdens tied to fiscal agent use.
Due to time constraints and a **loss of quorum**, no final action was taken. The committee agreed to reconvene to complete this discussion.

5. Fiscal Agents

The committee approved **panelist criteria**, including residency, arts experience, and conflict-of-interest disclosure. Panelist compensation was set at **$350**, and legal counsel offered to help formalize COI documentation.

E. New/Old Business

Dr. Coleman shared updates on her outreach to Metro Council, including recent and upcoming presentations to the APLE Committee, the Women's Caucus, and the Minority Caucus. She emphasized the importance of continued engagement with elected officials and the broader community.

F. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately **3:30 PM** due to loss of quorum. A follow-up meeting will be scheduled to finalize remaining items, particularly Thrive implementation.