

FY24-26 McKnight application, narrative questions 7.20.23

Organization's Mission Statement

"The mission of the Lake Region Arts Council is to encourage and support the vitality of the arts in west central Minnesota."

Organization's Work

What is the work of your organization? Please include your organization's purpose or focus, the challenges and opportunities your work addresses, the communities or geographic areas your work serves, and how you engage those communities.

1. Goal: to Provide equitable distribution of grants and services to artists and organizations providing arts activities.

McKnight funds will support this by funding a portion of LRAC general operating expenses.

2. Goal: To offer McKnight Foundation funded grants that provide financial support to artists and organizations providing arts activities. In FY 24 Artist Quick Start Grants of 5 grants @ \$1000, Career Development Grants of up to 6 grants of \$2000 each, and Fellowships of one \$5,000 award per year. In FY25 there will be 8 Artist Quick Start Grants of \$1,000 each and 10 Career Development grants of up to \$2,000 each and one \$5,000 Fellowship awarded. This alternating of the number and amount of Artist Quick Start and Career Development grants every other year, allows LRAC to offer the Artist of Color Cohort program every other year.

3. To offer services that provide support to artists and organizations providing arts activities. We will offer McKnight Foundation funded services to the regional office of Springboard for the Arts, workshops, networking opportunities. McKnight funds will support these services by paying for the rent of the Springboard office in Fergus Falls and a portion of LRAC general operating expenses and the Artists of Color Cohort.

Offered every other year, starting in FY22, the Artist of Color Cohort Program, will be a cohort of 3 BIPOC artists selected to participate in a 10-month program. We realize that economic hardship is a barrier for emerging artists of color. LRAC would pay participants \$1,000 for their time and to cover costs of supplies and equipment related to their career goals.

In our conversations with BIPOC artists, two main needs emerged that we felt LRAC could address:

- The lack of access to resources that could help artist of color advance their careers
- The lack of support and encouragement for their artistic journey as artists of color. Artist participating in the Cohort will have greater access to resources and support by participating in the following:

- One on one career coaching
- Professional 1-2 minute video for self-promotion
- Reserved registration for the 12 session Work of Art series by Springboard for the Arts,
- Grant proposal proofreading and editing
- Professionally photographed samples of their work
- Talking Circles, where members of the Cohort will share struggles, successes, ask questions and hear the stories of other artists of color who have successfully navigated these challenges.

4. Goal: To act as responsible stewards of McKnight funds. McKnight funds will support this through funding a portion of LRAC general operating expenses.

5. Goal: To act as strong advocates for the arts. McKnight funds will support this through funding a portion of LRAC general operating expenses.

Which populations, communities, and/or stakeholders are priorities for your work and how do you engage them?

LRAC serves all the artists in our nine county region, emerging, mid-career and well established. Through surveys, feedback on final reports and comments collected throughout the year, LRAC is finding that artists want help both financial and non-financial for reaching their goals to improve their skills, reach a wider audience and have access to resources beyond our region.

Identifying our constituency for our Goal of providing equitable access to our grants and services. The nine counties we serve have the following racial makeup:

Becker County: 7.9% American Indian and Alaska Native alone; 2.4% Hispanic or Latino;

Clay County: 5.1% Black or African American alone; 5.0% Hispanic or Latino; 1.9% American Indian and Alaska Native alone; 1.4% Asian alone;

Douglas County: 2.0% Hispanic or Latino;

Grant County: 2.4% Hispanic or Latino;

Otter Tail County: 3.8% Hispanic or Latino; 1.6% Black or African American alone;

Pope County: 2.0% Hispanic or Latino;

Stevens County: 8.5% Hispanic or Latino; 2.1% American Indian and Alaska Native alone; 2.0% Asian alone; 1.4% Black or African American alone;

Traverse County: 6.7% American Indian and Alaska Native alone; 5.1% Hispanic or Latino;

Wilkin County: 3.9% Hispanic or Latino; 2.0% American Indian and Alaska Native alone;

In FY 24-26 the Board will have continuing opportunities to build relationships with members of underrepresented groups and learn about challenges and barriers that exist within the LRAC systems. Board members will have access to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion information and workshops and will be engaged in ongoing EDI evaluation of LRAC as an organization.

LRAC will engage these communities as follows:

1. By including questions in our Needs Assessment survey that identify barriers to our grants and services.
2. Contacting underrepresented individuals and organizations and asking to meet with them to discuss their experiences, activities and jointly identify how LRAC can support their work.
3. Inviting underrepresented individuals and organizations to meet with the LRAC Board/staff to help deepen LRAC's understanding of their challenges and experiences.

How will McKnight funds be used, and how does your organization make decisions on which individual artists receive funding?

McKnight funds will be used to:

- Support a portion of LRAC's general operating expenses.
- Fund the LRAC Artist Quick Start and Career Development grants, which are grants to individual artists for materials, training or for time to create new works
- Fund the LRAC Fellowship award for advanced career artists, to recognize their work and contributions
- Fund the Artist of Color Cohort, a 10 month long program to help BIPOC artists achieve their artistic career goals

To choose the artists who participate in these McKnight-funded grants and programs, applicants complete a series of questions regarding their artistic needs, impact that the funding will have, what they will use the funding for and they provide samples of their artistic work. Applications are then reviewed by the LRAC Board and ranked by the following criteria:

- A. Overall excellence of the artwork, and demonstration of exceptional talent.**
- B. The project's contribution to the artist's professional growth.**
- C. Evidence of serious professional commitment.**

Grants are awarded to the highest ranked applicants, until funding runs out.

How is your organization learning and adapting, and what are some recent learnings or adaptations you can share with us?

In the last 5 years Lake Region Arts Council has committed to bringing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to our priorities and our program planning. We see this both as a challenge and an opportunity. Based on feedback from underserved artists, here are the two main barriers the artists are experiencing: The lack of access to resources that could help them advance their careers. The lack of support and encouragement for their artistic journey.

LRAC has developed the Artist of Color Cohort. Modeled on our successful Artist Cohort program, the first Artist of Color Cohort was held in FY22. Feedback from the participants was that the program was very valuable and beneficial. The program will be held again in FY24.

LRAC also continues to simplify our grant application process and to address barriers in our application system for underrepresented groups. Currently, we have an Equitable Access program for underrepresented groups to request and receive up to \$2,000 to fund arts activities. Groups apply by writing a request letter and if the request is approved they are issued the funds and the group writes a follow-up letter when the project is done to let us know what the money was spent on and how the event helped the community. No lengthy online application questions, no detailed budget, no receipts are required. This has been a successful way for smaller groups that work with underrepresented populations to make a connection with LRAC and build a relationship with us. Through this program we have supported activities for Native people in White Earth, the Hispanic community in Morris, and multi cultural programs in Moorhead and Pelican Rapids.

McKnight recognizes the limitations of the questions and data we are asking for here. Are there additional ways you identify the demographics of your board and/or staff that are important to your work that you would like us to understand? (For example: more nuanced ethnic/racial identities, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc.)

The LRAC Board also includes one person who has a physical disability, and one person who identifies as gay. All Board members are from rural areas, most from towns under 20,000 population and from economically low-income counties.

How is your organization building an inclusive workplace culture? For example: How are you building awareness of difference, practicing inclusion, and/or combatting bias within your workplace? Please include any specific policies or practices that support this.

LRAC staff have participated in IDE training every year, offered by the Forum of Regional Arts Councils, and have taken the IDE inventory. LRAC will be working with a consultant in FY24 to develop a leadership transition plan as the Exec. Director will be retiring on July 1, 2024. Part of that transition plan will be updating our hiring process to be inclusive and equitable.