

# What Next

## Support for Independent Artists Program Review Process 2016

Final Recommendations



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# REVIEW PROCESS

The Saskatchewan Arts Board (SAB) began planning for a review of our Independent Artists (IA) program, which supports Saskatchewan professional artists as they pursue their creative work and careers, in early 2016. The term “independent artist” was intended to reflect individuals who were working outside the structure of established – and often funded – arts organizations, whether they were pursuing their practice independently or collaboratively.

We knew that the ways in which independent artists work have changed radically. Lines between disciplines are blurring, and independent artists are working in different types of collaborations. New works are being developed over much longer time periods, and technological changes are impacting both the production and dissemination of work.

Despite the many changes in how artists work, the manner in which the Saskatchewan Arts Board supports independent artists has not changed. A review of the IA program was undertaken between 2002 and 2004. While there were adjustments to the program after that review’s report was received in December 2004, and while there have been minor adjustments over the past 12 years, the program remains fundamentally the same as the Individual Assistance Program that was introduced by the Saskatchewan Arts Board more than 30 years ago.

We established an advisory committee to help oversee the review process. The panel was charged to act as a “sounding board” for SAB – to challenge us about the questions that we are asking, to reflect on what we are hearing from the community, and to help us keep the needs of the independent artist front and centre in this review process. We wanted the advisory panel to reflect the true diversity of artistic practice in Saskatchewan, with people from different artistic disciplines, different geographic regions, and at different stages in their professional careers. Accordingly, the Saskatchewan Arts Board held an open call for panel members, and prospective members submitted information about their background and the skills that they would bring to this panel.

We also wanted to engage more voices in this review process. Among the strongest values of the Saskatchewan Arts Board is a belief in open and transparent processes that allow input from all stakeholders. We invited the arts community, therefore, to attend a series of public consultation meetings about the IA program – to tell us what they thought of how we are doing, what we could be doing differently, and, equally importantly, what we are currently doing that we need to protect. From late May through mid June 2016, the Saskatchewan Arts Board held a total of eight consultation meetings with almost 150 independent artists and other members of the arts sector and general community. Two meetings were held in each of Regina and Saskatoon, and meetings were also hosted in La Ronge, Prince Albert, Swift Current, and Yorkton.

Following those consultations, we knew that we needed to engage with people who had not been able to attend those meetings and to explore some of the issues that were raised more deeply. During the months of September and October 2016, therefore, we conducted an online survey. Over 550 people responded. One third of those responses came from individuals who had never applied to the IA program, which suggests that we managed to reach a new audience with this survey.

Generally, it appears that the community is very happy with IA; there was little call for significant change to the program. People affirmed the types of activities that we support, the use of discipline-based peer juries, the criteria against which juries assess applications, and the separation of emerging and established artists in the assessment process. The majority of unsuccessful applicants recognize that their lack of success relates primarily to the inadequate funding available for the program.

# WHAT NEXT

A number of issues came up repeatedly in our review. This document – which reflects the results of our year-long review process – details the concerns that were raised during this review and speaks to the ways in which the Saskatchewan Arts Board will address these issues.

We are proposing the following 67 responses, dividing our actions into four categories:

- immediate – change to be implemented by the fall 2017 application deadline
- mid-term – action to be considered with suite of changes as the Saskatchewan Arts Board moves to online application processes in 2018/19
- under consideration – Saskatchewan Arts Board staff will consider implications of this change and may move in this direction over time
- communications – Saskatchewan Arts Board staff needs to build new mechanisms to clarify existing policies around this issue

Responses placed in the communications category are often actions that the Saskatchewan Arts Board is already undertaking but about which the review participants were unclear.

# PROGRAM ELEMENTS TO RETAIN

A number of current practices were widely supported by the participants in the review process. These items should be retained largely without change.

1. Adjudication criteria, with the emphasis on artistic merit/excellence and merit of the proposed activity, were largely supported. While continuing to consider the quality of planning as a criterion, it should be combined with another criterion (like merit of activity) or given less emphasis than other criteria in the assessment process. IMMEDIATE
2. Reaffirm commitment to assessment by peer juries with discipline-specific knowledge. IMMEDIATE
3. Reaffirm commitment to seek and incorporate advice from additional appraisers for “outlier” applications that cross disciplines or may not be adequately assessed by the expertise of a given jury. IMMEDIATE
4. Continue to consider collaborative submissions from groups of independent artists in this program. IMMEDIATE

# FUNDING LEVELS

**There is incredible demand for more IA grants. We need a higher allocation to the budget for this program.**

5. Acknowledge that all SAB programs are underfunded but that, at least for the foreseeable future, the Arts Board is unlikely to receive additional funding. **COMMUNICATIONS**
6. Despite the current climate of economic restraint, commit to maintaining current allocation to the IA program while continuing to advocate for new money. **IMMEDIATE AND ONGOING**

**Maximum grant levels need to be revisited on an ongoing basis.**

7. Make a modest increase to IA grant levels until additional funding is available for IA. For creation, new granting levels should be \$7,500 for emerging artists and \$18,000 for established artists until new funding is found; production/presentation grant maximums would all be raised to \$18,000. **IMMEDIATE**
8. In conjunction with the change above, raise four-year funding cap to \$36,000 for any individual artist. **IMMEDIATE**
9. Combine Professional Development and Research grant streams with a new maximum request of \$5,000 for all artists. **IMMEDIATE**

**Maximum grant levels are too low. Some respondents suggested that imposing a maximum grant level in IA negatively impacts the art created in Saskatchewan. Instead of creating art freely, artists are limited in the scope and type of work they undertake by the amount of funding available. Given current financial restraints on the program and the SAB, however, it is not possible to raise maximum grant levels significantly.**

10. The Arts Board will seriously commit to considering this issue. If additional funds become available for the program, IA grant maximums will be addressed. **UNDER CONSIDERATION**
11. The Arts Board will advocate for additional funding for this program and will prioritize the IA allocation as any new funds become available. **UNDER CONSIDERATION**

# FUNDING LEVELS

There is consensus that subsistence amounts are too low. The amount of \$2,000 per month allowed in the current IA program has not been increased to reflect cost of living in many years. Nonetheless, while \$2,000 per month for full-time work on a project is insufficient to sustain an artist or their family without other sources of income, increasing the living allowance, given the current financial constraints on the program, would either shorten approved project terms or decrease the number of grants awarded.

12. Allow applicants to request full subsistence without pro-rating the \$2,000 to reflect less than full-time work on the project. Instead, require a declaration or statement about the artist's intention to devote significant time to the project throughout the IA term by reducing their workload and/or other commitments. IMMEDIATE
13. Commit to revisiting the subsistence level when additional funding becomes available for IA. UNDER CONSIDERATION

There was much discussion regarding the impact of juries awarding grants less than the requested amount. Both the community and juries are divided on this issue. Some juries award full funding to a few top-ranked applicants, while others pro-rate the requests and make partial awards based on the applicants' rankings in order to support more projects. The value of partial funding varies depending on the artistic discipline, type of project, and the manner in which artists are being paid for the project (subsistence or artists' fees).

14. Reaffirm the discretion of peer jury panels to determine grant awards by consensus, based on ranking and considering the viability of the projects. Develop a statement, to be included in the charge read to the jury before the grant allocation process begins, outlining their options and the factors to consider when deciding between full and partial grant awards. Beyond delivering this statement, ensure the Arts Board staff does not influence the jury's right to exercise the discretion afforded above. IMMEDIATE
15. In order to ensure viability of a supported project, retain the requirement for a revised budget and project plan before paying out grants awarded at less than 60% of the original request. IMMEDIATE

# FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDING

**There is a perception that the same artists seem to receive the majority of the grant funding or that the same artists receive grants in every grant round.**

16. Add restrictions so that no artist may have more than one IA grant open at a time; artists will no longer be allowed to apply to another discipline or for another project with an overlapping IA grant term. IMMEDIATE
17. Consider the manner in which the restriction above applies to collaborative projects where artist is not the lead applicant. UNDER CONSIDERATION
18. Maintain the limit on IA funding for any artist over a four-year term; find new ways to make this restriction clearer to general applicants. COMMUNICATIONS
19. When building the new database for online applications, incorporate a mechanism for tracking subsistence paid to an artist involved in multiple collaborative projects. Ensure that individual artists are not receiving subsistence payments under multiple grants. MID-TERM
20. Be clearer in communicating information about Arts Board assessment processes. A new jury is engaged for each program deadline. If one artist receives grants at multiple deadlines, therefore, it means that different peers are recognizing the merit of their work. There continues to be strong support in the IA review for maintaining artistic excellence as a primary criterion for assessment. COMMUNICATIONS

**There is a concern that university professors, who typically have greater access to resources than most independent artists, also have access to IA grants.**

21. Require professors and other full-time faculty members of academic institutions to provide a letter from their department confirming that the proposed project is not related to their paid university contract, and that the independent artist (as opposed to their employer) retains full creative control over the project. IMMEDIATE
22. Require professors and other full-time faculty members to provide proof that they will be on unpaid sabbatical or leave throughout any proposed project/grant term for which they request subsistence. Without that proof, these individuals may apply for IA funding to cover project expenses, but they are not eligible for subsistence. IMMEDIATE
23. Faculty members (on paid leave) may be lead or collective applicants in collaborative projects, but they may not request subsistence or artist fees for themselves. IMMEDIATE
24. Clarify restrictions to ensure that sessional lecturers and part-time or short-term contract instructors are exempt from the above restrictions. IMMEDIATE
25. Require a statement/letter from academic institutions confirming that an IA project involving any faculty, including sessional and part-time/short-term instructors, is not receiving SSHRC funding. SSHRC-funded projects are not eligible for IA support. IMMEDIATE



# FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDING

Concerns were also expressed that regular or contract employees of organizations funded by Arts Board programs are eligible for IA grants; people felt that these individuals had access to funded resources and production/presentation opportunities that were unavailable to other independent artists.

26. Require employees of funded organizations to include a letter from their arts organization confirming that the proposed project is not related to the applicant's paid employment, nor is it being developed for presentation, production, or publication by the arts organization at which they are employed, and that the independent artist (as opposed to their employer) retains full creative control over the project. That letter should detail the resources that company is providing for creation/development of the project (eg. free or discounted rehearsal facilities); expenses supported by the funded company are not eligible for funding under IA.

IMMEDIATE

27. In order to be eligible for subsistence support through IA, full-time employees of funded organizations must include a letter from the arts organization confirming that the applicant will be on unpaid leave throughout the IA project term. Without that proof, these individuals may apply for IA funding to cover project expenses, but they are not eligible for subsistence.

IMMEDIATE

There are concerns that people with abundant personal resources are taking IA funding away from artists in need. Although this concern was expressed, people strongly affirmed existing criteria for assessing grants and there was not widespread support for assessing applicants based on financial need.

28. Develop statements regarding privacy concerns related to the disclosure of financial status and the challenge of determining relative need quantitatively. COMMUNICATIONS
29. Clarify procedures around assessment of grant applications, reminding people that *The Arts Board Act* mandates merit-based grants as opposed to needs-based funding and of the principles behind *The Arts Professions Act*, which affirms that professional artists deserve to be paid equitably for their work regardless of personal financial status. COMMUNICATIONS

# APPLICATION PROCESSES

**The application process is too time-consuming. The application package is overly complicated and daunting, particularly for first-time applicants. Terminology used by funders is difficult and unfamiliar to many applicants; it can be particularly challenging to applicants for whom English is a second language.**

30. Develop a single, streamlined application package for all disciplines. Ensure that package is clearly labelled for applicants to find information specific to their project or discipline. IMMEDIATE
31. Conflate the Research and Professional Development grant streams into a single Research/Professional Development category. IMMEDIATE
32. In conjunction with the streamlined application package, develop and distribute a supplementary guide to completing the grant application. IMMEDIATE
33. Request only information essential to confirm applicant's eligibility, to allow the jury's comprehensive assessment of an application, and to comply with legal and audit responsibilities of the Saskatchewan Arts Board. IMMEDIATE
34. Revise IA package using clear language, including simpler questions like:
  - a. Who are you?
  - b. What do you want to do?
  - c. How do you want go about it?
  - d. Why do you want to do this work?
  - e. Who will be involved?
  - f. When do you want to do it?
  - g. How much will it cost?

Use terms which will be familiar to artists working in any discipline, minimizing the use of grant-speak. Strive for language that expands the artist's ability to conceive, rather than curtails their imagination. IMMEDIATE

35. Move toward aligning key components of the IA application with corresponding Canada Council for the Arts applications in order to simplify application processes for artists applying to multiple funders. IMMEDIATE
36. Consider adapting Canada Council's terms and definitions for key components of the application process. IMMEDIATE
37. Develop a simpler and more flexible budget template with an optional breakdown page for projects where additional details might be required. Indicate clearly on the budget template which expenses will require receipts in Final Report. MID-TERM

# APPLICATION PROCESSES

38. Simplify navigability of website for ease of access to program information, contact information for Program Consultants, application packages, and FAQs. Create more effective FAQ pages on the SAB website. MID-TERM
39. Move toward an online application portal. MID-TERM
40. Make provision for online applications to include an artist profile with standard materials required in a number of applications (résumés, work samples); this would eliminate the need to enter this same information on subsequent applications. Allow opportunities for applicants to update that material easily. MID-TERM
41. Consider allowing applicants to reuse support materials (letters of reference, résumés, work samples) from prior applications for the same project. MID-TERM
42. Reduce requirements to only one letter of recommendation (appraisal) for emerging artist applicants or consider other mechanisms for appraisers to submit that recommendation. Consider ways to simplify the language in the appraisal forms. UNDER CONSIDERATION
43. Minimize the list of ineligible activities and, whenever possible, include directions to other funding sources that might support the activity. UNDER CONSIDERATION

## Independent artists need greater assistance with grant writing.

44. Provide other tools to assist applicants with grant applications, including ongoing grant writing workshops (live and online) and booklet and video guides to assist first-time applicants. IMMEDIATE
45. Promote grant-writing workshops more effectively through website, social media, newsletters, and our associations with organizations like the Saskatchewan Craft Council or the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild. IMMEDIATE
46. Have SAB staff prioritize consultations (in person or telephone) with first-time or unsuccessful applicants. IMMEDIATE
47. Raise Program Consultants' presence in the community through increased attendance at arts events and presentation of independent artists' work. Use these as opportunities to connect with artists. MID-TERM

# APPLICATION PROCESSES

**There is unequal access to SAB staff and/or assistance, particularly in rural or remote communities.**

48. Communicate more effectively regarding the availability of SAB staff to conduct workshops, to meet with artists (in person or by telephone), to provide consultation in advance of application deadlines, and to provide feedback on successful or unsuccessful applications.

COMMUNICATIONS

49. Provide better access to Arts Board staff and grant-writing assistance to artists in rural and remote communities, both in person and online. When visiting communities for grant-writing workshops, allow time for meeting with individual artists or for opportunities to see work created in that region. IMMEDIATE

50. Consider implementing a program that would allow Arts Board staff to be in residence for up to a week in smaller communities. This would allow them greater opportunities to meet with artists and to see work created in that region. MID-TERM

**The practices around juries – recruitment, adjudication processes – lack transparency. Grant applicants need more information regarding the people who are helping the Saskatchewan Arts Board review their submissions.**

51. Make information about the recruitment and composition of jury panels readily available. Increase transparency by publicly stating the rules governing jury service, our conflict of interest policy, and the role of jurors. Address such issues as the Program Consultant's initial review of applications, rationale for jury selection, roles of specific individuals in the jury room, and the processes of ranking applications and allocating funds. IMMEDIATE
52. Develop an FAQ about juries and jury process to address questions such as how someone is asked to sit on a jury, whether there is a list of potential jurors, how frequently an individual juror might be used, and training provided for potential jurors. IMMEDIATE
53. Expand the jury pool by asking artists and arts professionals to apply for consideration or to recommend potential jurors through an online form. Maintain SAB control, however, over jury composition in order to ensure the quality of assessment received by applicants.

IMMEDIATE

# APPLICATION PROCESSES

**Requirements for final reports are challenging, inconsistent between disciplines, and can feel excessive for the amount of funding awarded.**

54. Introduce consistent requirements for IA final reports across various artistic disciplines. Emphasis should be placed on reporting on the proposed activity, the outcome(s), and the impact on the applicant's artistic practice. As with the application form, simplify the types of questions that are asked in the final report form. IMMEDIATE
55. Add a short section to the final report form that asks grant recipients to summarize, in under 25 words, what was accomplished with the funding. These summaries could be used by SAB in promotion of the results of public funding for the arts community. IMMEDIATE AND ONGOING
56. Be more specific in requirements for final reports, including the provision of minimum word counts for the narrative sections. Consider allowing support materials – excerpts of works created, documentation, programs, reviews – to confirm completion of a project and replace other final report requirements. IMMEDIATE
57. Review practices related to the requirement for receipts. Continue to exempt subsistence allowance from receipt requirement. Reconsider requiring receipts for expenses in excess of \$100. Accept receipts for professional development courses and artist retreats as proof of completion of those activities. MID-TERM

**Concerns were expressed that final reports are not being used as effectively as possible by the Saskatchewan Arts Board. Stories of exceptional work could be used as the basis for stories on the website, in social media, in the annual report. A more complete picture of the activity undertaken with SAB funds could provide valuable advocacy and promotional information.**

58. Provide IA grant recipients with information regarding how and why to acknowledge SAB/public support of their work. IMMEDIATE
59. Add a line to the final report approval message encouraging artists to inform the Saskatchewan Arts Board about exhibitions, performances, publications, presentations, and nominations related to the funded project that occur after the final report has been submitted. IMMEDIATE
60. Develop accessible mechanisms for grant recipients to update the SAB about the impact and success of their work, such as a website portal, blog, or list serve. MID-TERM
61. As an indication of the SAB's ongoing interest in the artist and their work, attend or send congratulations whenever a project supported by IA funding is publicly presented. MID-TERM

# EMERGING & ESTABLISHED ARTISTS

IA review respondents overwhelmingly support the practice of assessing emerging artists and established artists separately. Current practice, however, allows applicants to self-designate as emerging or established, with some IA discipline packages providing guidelines. Some artists struggle to place themselves — do they have to perform or be exhibited outside the province, do they need solo exhibitions, film credits, or to have a book published?

62. Maintain the categories to assist with assessment of the merit of applicants' work in a peer context, but continue to allow juries to move an applicant between categories if the résumé and work indicates they would receive a fairer assessment. IMMEDIATE
63. SAB staff should discuss and consider revisions to current definitions of “emerging” and “established.” Develop guidelines to help artists place their work and/or applications appropriately into emerging/established categories, emphasizing the importance of résumé and body of work. IMMEDIATE

Questions were raised about the different maximum grant levels for emerging and established artists. While some people recommended a single funding level, that proposed change was not supported by the majority of the arts community.

64. Reaffirm the rationale of providing higher support for artists who have established and maintained a significant practice in the province. They have created a substantial body of work, gained peer recognition, and contributed to the creative community, and their work is likely to have a wider audience and impact, which is important for maintaining levels of public funding. The work of established artists can also provide opportunities for deepening the practice within a specific discipline, which can be of value to both the arts community and the general public. COMMUNICATIONS
65. Strengthen message that a smaller grant maximum enables juries to fund more projects by emerging artists; fewer grants, in total, could be awarded support if grant amounts for emerging artists were equal to those for established artists. COMMUNICATIONS

There was a great deal of discussion during the program review regarding opportunities for supporting mentorships.

66. Mentorship opportunities are currently supported through the Professional Development stream of the IA program, and would continue to be supported under the proposed combined Professional Development and Research stream. Find ways to speak to artists regarding the opportunities under IA that go beyond support for the creation of work. COMMUNICATIONS

# MICRO-GRANTS

**Artists need access to micro or kick-starter grants with more nimble criteria and processes.**

67. Investigate opportunities to create a new, micro-grant program accessible to independent artists. Given the limited resources in the current IA program, however, it is imperative that such a program be enacted without drawing budget away from existing grant programs.

MID-TERM

# SASKATCHEWAN ARTS BOARD

[www.saskartsboard.ca](http://www.saskartsboard.ca)