

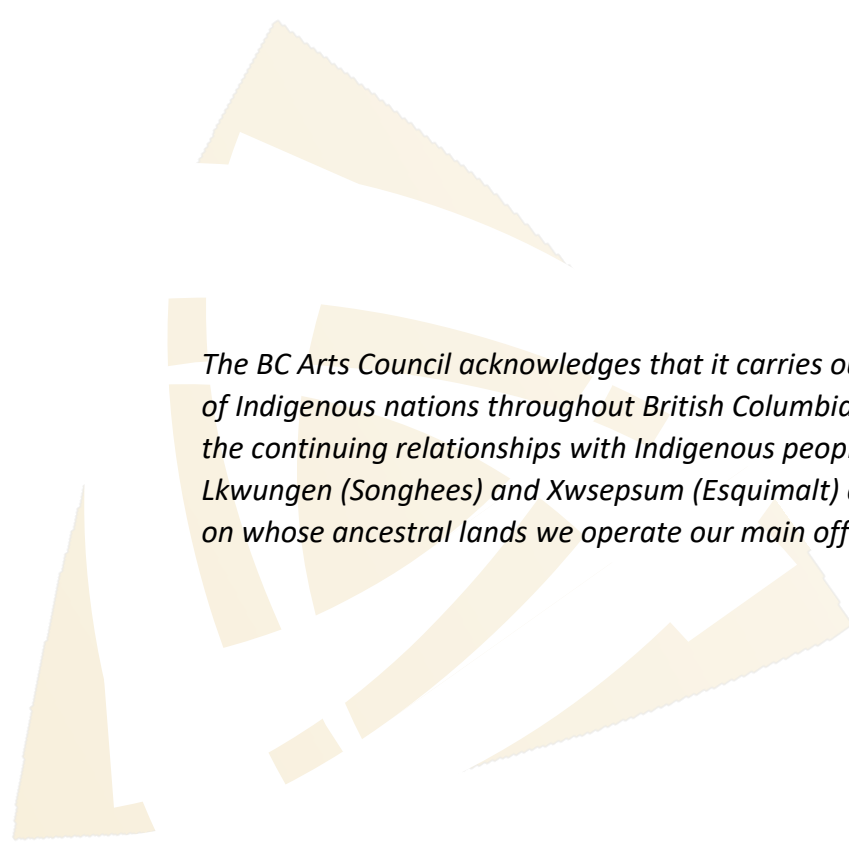
Guide for Assessors

The BC Arts Council nurtures and supports arts and cultural activity in communities across the province, enriching the lives of British Columbians. BC Arts Council funding supports professional artists and arts organizations, community initiatives, training, and scholarships.

In July 2018, the BC Arts Council released [New Foundations: Strategic Plan for the British Columbia Arts Council 2018-2022](#). In support of this strategic plan, the Council commits to facilitate more equitable access to arts funding and decolonize current programs and practices.

Peer assessment is at the core of how the BC Arts Council delivers its grant programs. We thank you for your commitment of time and energy to this invaluable process.

This guide intends to provide an overview of the assessment process. We hope you'll find it helpful.



The BC Arts Council acknowledges that it carries out its work on the land of Indigenous nations throughout British Columbia. We are grateful for the continuing relationships with Indigenous peoples in B.C and to the Lkwungen (Songhees) and Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) ancestors and families, on whose ancestral lands we operate our main offices.

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Peer Assessment Process

The peer assessment process supports the distribution of grants and allows for an open, accountable and transparent decision-making process.

For most funding programs, a panel of three to five artists and/or cultural practitioners is brought together to:

- review applications;
- consider which applications best demonstrate merit against the assessment criteria; and
- determine the distribution of the awards.

The whole process may take up to five weeks, including two to three weeks for the individual assessors to review applications and one to five days for the actual assessment meeting. The time required varies due to program type and number of applications.

Decisions on the allocation of funding made at an assessment meeting are final in all programs except Operating Assistance. Operating Assistance grants support annual funding for organizations and make up a substantial portion of the BC Arts Council's budget. Therefore, these assessment panels make recommendations to the BC Arts Council board for final decision.

Occasionally an individual with specialized knowledge and/or experience is asked to support an assessment panel (e.g. review or translate an application not written in English) or to provide an individual assessment on an application.

How Assessment Panels are Formed

In selecting peer assessors, BC Arts Council staff look for a mix of broad professional knowledge, experience, geographical representation, and varied aesthetic, institutional and cultural viewpoints, including those from Indigenous perspectives. Further consideration includes:

- Diversity of artistic practice, styles, and philosophies;
- Diversity of professional specialization or roles (e.g. creators, administrators, directors);
- Professional recognition and/or a demonstrated range of knowledge in their specific field of arts and culture;
- An active member of the arts and culture community;
- Ability to work in a group environment providing critical content and a fair-minded evaluation while respecting other points of view;
- Ability to articulate an opinion, and to comment upon an applicant's role in its artistic, geographic, or cultural community;
- Reflection of contemporary British Columbia by balancing representation with respect to:
 - Indigenous and culturally diverse communities,
 - Gender identity,
 - Age or those from different artistic generations;
- Absence of conflict of interest with a significant number of applicants.

The BC Arts Council recognizes that no single assessment panel can represent all the above characteristics, but over time, it works to achieve diverse perspectives throughout all the grant allocation processes.

Assessment Commitments

To ensure the integrity of the peer assessment process, there are five commitments assessors should embrace and understand. These principles underpin both the process of assessing applications and the nature of interaction with fellow panel members.

Fairness and Trust

Peer assessors are expected to be fair minded and objective while offering a critical and knowledgeable analysis of each application.

Avoidance of Conflict of Interest

Peer assessors are asked to declare any conflicts of interest – both direct and indirect (perceived) – related to the applications they are assessing as soon as they are known.

A direct conflict of interest may arise where an assessor, assessor's family member/partner, or assessor's organization could obtain material or personal gain from an application, or applicants under review.

Instances of direct conflict of interest may include, but are not limited to, board membership, ownership of assets, receipt of gifts, employment, and/or other financial, or professional affiliation.

Indirect or perceived conflict of interest arises when an assessor's professional or private interests may appear—to a reasonable person—to affect their ability to provide impartial decision-making.

Confidentiality

Peer assessors are required to maintain the confidentiality of all assessed materials, opinions, nature of discussions, and results relating the assessment process.

The identities of assessors are also confidential until names are publicly released. See section below.

Anti-Racism

As supported by the BC Arts Council [strategic priorities](#), we are committed to confronting the systemic racism that Black, racialized, and Indigenous members of our communities face. We have committed to building principles of equity and diversity throughout our organization to better support meaningful and genuine forms of engagement, through collaboration and co-creation with underserved communities. This includes implementing actions such as targeted funding strategies and the allocation of appropriate resources to better serve historically underfunded groups.

We have publicly committed, and are accountable, to continuing to listen and to learn from those who are leading the way in the sector and will work in partnership to make the necessary change.

We are taking our lead from Indigenous artists, organizations, and communities, and respecting the principle of self-determination and committing to decolonization and reconciliation.

Our commitment to anti-racism also influences our expectations of assessors and the manner in which the assessment process will proceed. Assessors are asked to:

- Take time to reflect on personal biases and assumptions before assessing and providing comment on applications and/or applicants.
- Take care to ensure comments and discussion points are respectful and thoughtful with regard to both applicants and fellow assessors as part of this panel.

- Consider diverse lived experiences and respect the potential challenges and/or additional labour this may present for individuals during this process.

Respectful Workplaces

The BC Arts Council, like other arts funding agencies and cultural organizations across the country and around the world, is committed to its role in promoting safe and respectful workplaces within the organizations and the projects it funds.

BC Arts Council's Respectful Workplace policy intends to ensure funding goes to applicants committed to providing respectful working conditions and fostering a workplace free from discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct.

This policy requires applicants to declare their commitment to a respectful workplace and answer questions about their policies and/or processes to support and promote a safe and respectful workplace as well as having assessment criterion around appropriate human resource policies.

The policy also supports the process of addressing concerns about respectful workplaces brought forward in an assessment meeting and ensures applicants are fairly evaluated.

Any concerns about an applicant's ability to provide a respectful workplace can only be discussed in reference to what is provided in the application against the assessment criteria, legal responsibilities, and the applicant's governance, capacity and/or human resource policies.

Bringing forward claims that are speculative or unsubstantiated poses the risk of slandering individuals and could compromise the integrity of the assessment process. Only substantiated claims or those within the public realm can be discussed as part of the assessment process.

Any substantiated concerns about an applicant's ability to provide a respectful workplace should be brought to the attention of the program officer. It will then be determined whether the concern is relevant to the assessment criteria, is substantiated, and can be brought forward for consideration.

If a circumstance or claim makes a peer assessor unable to evaluate the application fairly, they should, as per process described above, declare a conflict of interest.

Getting Started

Online Grant Management System

The BC Arts Council uses an online grant management system to support all aspects of the assessment process including the management of assessor's contracts and expenses.

To access the system, assessors must [register](#) with the online system as an INDIVIDUAL (registrant type).

Due to the digital format of this process, assessors need access to a private computer. However, if this poses a barrier to participation, contact the program officer about possible alternative arrangements.

Contract Process & Eligible Expenses

Once an assessor has registered with the online system and agreed to serve, a formal contract will be issued via the system. The contract will outline the terms of participation, fees, and eligible expenses as well as request sign off on clauses about confidentiality and conflict of interest.

The BC Arts Council will reimburse assessors for direct costs related to the assessment process, including reasonable costs that remove barriers to access and allow an assessor to participate in the assessment process (e.g. childcare, ASL translation). All expenses must be pre-approved and reflected in the contract.

Orientation and Responsibilities Meeting

Assessors are formally briefed with the responsibility to make funding allocations on behalf of the BC Arts Council. The panel will be informed of BC Arts Council's priorities, program objectives, and assessment criteria. This also offers an opportunity to ask questions about the process.

This meeting is mandatory for all assessors and takes place online prior to receiving applications for assessment.

During the meeting, staff will review the online meeting platform (Microsoft Teams) and the grant management system. It is a great opportunity for assessors to become familiar with these systems and address any technical requirements or issues that may arise.

Technology Survey

Due to the impacts of COVID-19, all assessment meetings will be held online, through Microsoft Teams, using assessors' private computers and/or devices. Staff will send a survey to assessors to ensure everyone is able to fully participate in the online environment.

Individual Assessment Period

Before applications are made available to assessors, staff review each application to ensure eligibility.

Once the full application package is prepared, it is made accessible to assessors through the online system. Assessors will evaluate and provide a score for each application in advance of the meeting.

To support this initial assessment, assessors receive information on:

- Program guidelines, including program purpose, eligibility requirements, and assessment criteria;
- Scoring matrix for each area of assessment on the Review Forms;
- [BC Arts Council strategic plan and priorities](#) as recommended reading to provide context for assessment and feedback to applicants;
- Reading order for the applications, as applicable;
- Staff write-ups providing analysis of financial position of the applicants, as applicable; and
- Deadline for submission of initial scores.

Peer assessors are asked to consider application details with respect to the stated assessment criteria. Assessors are encouraged to write notes on the review form for each application, including questions, observations or highlights, and indicate if/where applicants are exceeding or failing to meet criteria. These notes will be helpful during discussions at the assessment meeting.

When scoring each application, only whole numbers are accepted (i.e. no fractions or decimals), and it is suggested that assessors use the full range of scores available for the assessment criteria.

During Online Assessment Meetings

The online assessment meeting convenes at the appointed time and are accessed via a Microsoft Teams link sent by staff. Each meeting may be three to seven hours long and will contain short breaks each hour (or as needed).

The panel considers the list of applicants in ranking order based on initial scoring provided by each assessor. This list shows which applications may not be competitive and the panel may agree to remove them from further consideration.

The panel then discusses the remaining applications against assessment criteria. Assessors may also view, read, or listen to additional support material provided by the applicants (e.g. images from visual artists, audio recordings from musicians). Where relevant, they consider written assessments prepared by independent assessors. Based on these discussions, assessors may change their scores.

At the end of the meeting, the assessors agree on a ranking order for funding and use this list as a tool to make funding allocations.

Role of Staff

The meetings are staffed by program officer/s who manage all aspects of the assessment process. They ensure that each application is examined with respect to program guidelines and assessment criteria, that the weighting of the criteria (as applicable) is respected, and that all applicants are treated equitably. Staff manage conflicts of interest and oversee compliance with BC Arts Council policies while encouraging assessor participation and helping the group to reach final agreement.

Staff do not comment on artistic merit but are able to provide factual or background information on issues such as organizational management and financial position, if requested by the assessors.

Staff record the discussion and proceedings of the meeting and take specific notes on each application. These notes are available to applicants however, comments are aggregate and not attributed to individual assessors.

Wrap Up

Once the assessment process is complete, assessors are asked to sign off on their final decisions. Staff will give direction on destroying all meeting materials and assessors' notes (both written and electronic).

If time permits, assessors are consulted on the process, program guidelines and any noted trends from the applicant pool. Other process and/or policy questions may also be raised in support of the BC Arts Council strategic planning or new programs. Additional staff may join this part of the meeting.

Results are processed and successful applicants are notified of results within two to four weeks.

Submission of Expense Claim

Expense claims are submitted through the online grant management system and are expected within 10 days of the completion of the assessment meeting. Reimbursements may take up to 30 days once a claim is received.

Public Disclosure

Under the direction of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPAA), the BC Arts Council proactively discloses the names of assessors each year as a supplement to its annual report. Names are posted on bcartscouncil.ca in the fall following the fiscal year of an assessor's appointment.