

Who is Supporting Nonprofit Financial Sustainability?

Cuyahoga Arts & Culture

Ohio grantmaker using cigarette-tax funds to invest in arts and culture makes general operating support a priority.

Quick Grantmaker Stats

Type of funder	Public/government
Geography/Issue Area	Cuyahoga County, Ohio/Arts and culture
When founded	2006
Total assets (as of FY 2013)	\$25 million
Annual giving (as of FY 2013)	\$16.1 million
Number of staff	7
Website	www.cacgrants.org
Brief description of the program/ practice being discussed	Core, multiyear funding for arts and cultural organizations.

1. Describe the situation or practice.

In 2006, voters in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, approved a 10-year tax on cigarettes to support arts and culture organizations. Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, a political subdivision of the State of Ohio, is the organization that administers those public funds by making grants to qualified organizations based in Cuyahoga County. CAC is one of the largest local public funders of arts and culture in the nation, investing more than \$15 million each year in organizations of all sizes and disciplines. CAC devotes the bulk of its grantmaking budget to general operating support. Its General Operating Support grant program provides two years of unrestricted, core support for established arts or cultural organizations. In 2013, CAC approved \$13.7 million in general operating support grants. The grantmaker also provides smaller, project-based support to arts and culture projects in the county.

2. What is your approach?

The General Operating Support grant program funds Cuyahoga County-based nonprofits with a primary mission to create, produce, present or provide arts or cultural services for the public; a history of vibrant artistic or cultural

programming; and strong organizational capacity. In 2013, the grants ranged in value from \$11,609 to \$1,730,876. Through the program, CAC funds approximately 60 arts and culture organizations in Cuyahoga County each year, from world-class performing arts ensembles and museums to community-based arts and cultural organizations.

In addition to providing core support, CAC has partnered with the Nonprofit Finance Fund to provide grantees and applicants with wraparound services aimed at strengthening organizations' operations and improving financial health. These services include individualized consulting during telephone office hours with Nonprofit Finance Fund experts who help prospective grantees build their financial skills and knowledge in preparation for submitting an application for general operating support. Cuyahoga Arts & Culture also has hosted webinars for grantees and applicants on key finance topics.

Cuyahoga Arts & Culture also supports learning opportunities for grantees. A 2012 webinar and a 2013 in-person workshop with experts from the consulting firm Helicon Collaborative highlighted lessons learned from Helicon's Bright Spots research with the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation about successful frameworks for achieving "exceptional results without exceptional resources" in the arts and cultural sector.

"Multiyear general operating support grants strengthen our community by providing critical support to Cuyahoga County's arts and cultural organizations. These investments play a key role in keeping Cuyahoga County's great cultural institutions available and accessible to all in our community."

— Karen Gahl-Mills, Executive Director

3. What has been the result?

Since 2007, CAC has invested more than \$112 million in 259 local organizations presenting arts and cultural activities in Cuyahoga County. Because it is supported with tax dollars, CAC pays special attention to the public benefit its grants provide the community. CAC views its general operating support program as one way to strengthen the community, not simply support nonprofits. In 2011, CAC-funded organizations served nearly 6.2 million residents and visitors to the area, with 50 percent of those served gaining free admission. The number of children served that year topped 1.4

million, and CAC-funded organizations supported a workforce of nearly 9,000 jobs.

By offering flexible operating support grants, CAC's cultural partners (its grantees) are able to focus on improving and deepening the public value that they provide the community. CAC is currently evaluating and strengthening this focus on public value through an in-depth research project with the Helicon Collaborative. CAC will use the results to improve its grant guidelines and overall work.

One CAC grantee who has a clear understanding of the public value they provide to the community is the Progressive Arts Alliance, which enriches the lives of students, teachers and the general public through its arts-in-education programs in classrooms, community centers, libraries and other community spaces. In 2012, PAA served 1,100 students each week during the academic year in 80 programs throughout Cuyahoga County. "The quality of our programming has increased as a result of Cuyahoga Arts & Culture's investment. We're tracking outcomes better, building a more rigorous curriculum and improving service to our students. It's exciting that CAC's funding comes from our community and, in return, helps support and strengthen it," said Executive Director Santina Protopapa. CAC has posted videos about PAA and other grantees at <http://cacgrants.org/cac-annual-report-2012.php>.

CAC's Panel Review Process

All eligible applications for general operating support from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture are evaluated by a panel of arts and cultural professionals from outside the region in a transparent public panel review process. Panelists are appointed by the CAC board of trustees for each grant cycle. The CAC staff and trustees make every effort to ensure that the panel is diverse in all respects. Panelists represent a cross-section of professionals qualified to provide expert knowledge of specific arts or cultural disciplines, as well as for their management experience, professional knowledge of the sector and prior panel experience. All panelists receive an honorarium for their service. CAC staff chair the panel process, but do not score the score applications.

4. What are your key insights from doing the work?

CAC Executive Director Karen Gahl-Mills said the fact that CAC is receiving public tax dollars makes the grantmaker especially focused on delivering

public benefits and community impact. By devoting a significant portion of its funding to general operating support, she said CAC is ensuring that worthy organizations have the support they need to sustain and grow their programs over time as they see fit. “We are after long-term impact, and general operating support helps organizations achieve that,” she said.