

New York State Council on the Arts

Council Meeting Minutes

November 8, 2023 1:35PM-3:20 PM

Held at the NYSCA Office: 411 Fifth Avenue, Suite 700, New York, NY 10016

Present: Monica Angle, Lisa Baker, Carolee Fink, Aaron Flagg, Joan Hornig, Janet Kagan, Eric Latzky, James Lemons, Laudelina Martinez, Elsie McCabe-Thompson, David Alan Miller (attending virtually in a non-voting capacity), Mahnaz Moinian (attending virtually in a non-voting capacity), Katherine Nicholls, Catherine Schwoeffermann.

Quorum present: Yes

Others in attendance:

Megan White, Deputy Director of Programs, NYSCA
Karen Welch, Deputy Director of Operations, NYSCA
Abby Adler, Manager of the Executive Office, NYSCA

Before the meeting was formally called to order, Abby Adler (NYSCA Manager of the Executive Office) conducted a roll call of present Council members. The meeting of the NYSCA Council was called to order at 1:35PM by Chair Katherine Nicholls.

Chair's Welcome

Katherine Nicholls (Chair): Good afternoon and welcome to the New York State Council on the Arts' November 8, 2023 meeting. I am Katherine Nicholls, the Chair of the New York State Council on the Arts. As we have a quorum of Council Members present, I hereby call this meeting to order.

To remind all in attendance; this is a public meeting that is being recorded. A recording and meeting minutes will be made available on the NYSCA website.

Today, Council comes together to review and vote on funding for New York State's support for the following FY2024 opportunities: Support for Organizations, Support for Artists, Targeted Opportunities, and Re-grants and Services. We are considering approximately \$46.5 million in grant making which will be distributed across all 10 regions of our state. Council will also review and ratify the FY2024 panelist rosters. The materials for today's meeting were sent to Council on November 3, 2023.

The application portal for the opportunities we are reviewing today opened June 1, 2023, and closed July 11, 2023, at 4PM. Between August 28 and October 24, NYSCA staff conducted 38 peer review panels and welcomed over 100 panelists from all 10 regions of the state. I would like to take this moment to thank Council Members who were able to join me in attending one or more panel sessions. We applaud the incredible cohort of FY2024 peer review panelists for their time, insights, and commitment to this most important part of our grant making process. As we know, the work that goes into just getting to the panel stage begins with careful review and consideration, scoring and note making. Our panelists are truly our independent experts from across disciplines in our field, and we would not be here today without them! Thank you, Panelists, on behalf of Council for your service to New York State, and to our field! Without you today would not be possible.

Council also wishes to recognize the NYSCA staff led by Deputy Director of Programs Megan White, and Deputy Director of Operations Karen Welch. Your leadership has ensured a seamless panel process and we acknowledge your professionalism! To our Program Directors, and program team, and to our operations department, thank you for everything you do to manage NYSCA's grant making. You provide thoughtful guidance for our applicants and carefully steward our panelists in preparation and in panel sessions. Your stewardship is what gives us confidence in our role as Council in reviewing your recommendations today. Thank you all so very much.

And finally, thank you to our applicants who do such incredible work in the field that all New Yorkers benefit from. Your contributions are truly what makes New York the State of the Arts.

A reminder that in-person attendance is material to conduct the business of this Council and ensure the timely distribution of vital funding across our state. We greatly appreciate your attendance at our next meeting on Wednesday, March 20, 2024, during which we will review and vote on the FY24 Capital Project grant recommendations and Appeal Panel recommendations. Please inform us as soon as possible of any conflicts you may have so that we may plan appropriately.

NYSCA Staff and Council Updates

Now moving on to recent NYSCA staffing and Council Updates. Following the departure of Mara Manus in August, the search is ongoing for the new Executive Director of NYSCA. During this time of transition, I, along with Megan White, Deputy Director of Programs, Karen Welch, Deputy Director of Operations, Ann Marie Sekeres, Director of Communications, and Abby Adler, Manager of the Executive Office, are providing oversight for all agency matters.

Council Member Andrea Louie resigned from the NYSCA Council in October following her appointment as Assistant Commissioner for Program Services at the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. On behalf of the NYSCA Council and Staff, we thank her for her service to the arts and culture sector of New York and we wish her immense success in this exciting next chapter!

Regarding the NYSCA Staff:

- NYSCA welcomed Zatarra McIntyre as a new Program Director in June. Zatarra previously served as a Program Director at FreeArts NYC and brings with her over a decade of experience and service in the non-profit arts field. She is also an accomplished visual artist with work that has been featured in numerous key galleries and museums.
- We also welcomed Lindsay Turley as the new Program Officer in Capital Projects, who joins us from the Shaker Museum and brings almost 2 decades of service in the non-profit arts field with significant experience in the museum and archive areas.
- Claudine Lee was promoted to Program Officer in Operations for Finance and Compliance. She had previously served as an Arts Team Associate in Operations.
- Gabi Nail, who was serving as a temporary Communications and Executive Office Assistant, and Ian Byrne, who was serving as temporary Operations Program Assistant, have both officially joined the NYSCA staff as Arts Team Associates in Operations.
- Brandon Phillips officially started as a temporary Communications and Executive Office Assistant yesterday.
- And finally, it is my pleasure to share that Karen Welch has officially been appointed Deputy Director of Operations of NYSCA. In her time as Director of Finance and Interim Deputy Director of Operations,

Karen has proven to be a thoughtful and inspiring leader, demonstrating considerable skill in her oversight of the Operations team and the stewardship of our complex compliance, contracting, and reporting processes. It is especially affirming to work with Karen in this official capacity and Deputy Director of Programs Megan White as we continue through this time of transition. Please note that we plan to do a public announcement for our field as well. Karen, you have been a critical member of this team since you joined us, and this official announcement is celebrated all.

We welcome our new agency staff members and celebrate our staff members who are working with us in new capacities.

Capital Project Opportunities

I am pleased to share with Council that our FY24 Capital Project funding opportunity is well underway. NYSCA is immensely grateful for the opportunity to fund small, mid-size, and large capital projects through our FY24 Capital Appropriation of \$20 million thanks to Governor Hochul and the New York State Legislature. We are also reappropriating \$17 million, bringing our total capital fund to approximately \$37 million. Our current capital opportunity launched on September 13 and will close on January 11, 2024 at 4PM. On September 20th, we held our Capital Opportunity Webinar which brought 471 unique attendees. Our Capital office hours will run through January 2024, and to-date have welcomed 106 attendees.

As we continue our multi-year recovery, capital projects remain a key priority for the State. NYSCA is keenly aware of the ongoing needs of cultural organizations across New York, especially as organizations continue to work to meet evolving health and accessibility protocols.

Previous rounds of capital funding have illuminated the incredible demand from the arts and culture sector for capital resources for organizations of all sizes. Capital investments affirm the pivotal role arts and culture play in our state's economic prosperity, drive employment, and have a wide ripple effect on Main Street stores, restaurants, and hotels across our state. These projects create opportunity for sustainable growth and ensure the longevity of vital cultural anchors across the state for all New Yorkers and our visitors.

At this time, I will turn the meeting over to Ann Marie Sekeres, Director of Communications, for updates.

Communications Update

Ann Marie Sekeres (Communications Director): Our different communications vehicles – from social media to webinars—are targeted to reach specific members of our audience – from applicants to panelists, educators to legislators, and of course, the broader arts field. Over the past year, our efforts have increased exponentially, and I am pleased to share the milestones we have reached with you all.

Over the past year, NYSCA has amplified its communications through consistent e-blasts to over 13,000 subscribers, a dynamic and responsive social media plan, and placements with media outlets across NYS. NYSCA now develops a strategic content calendar to maintain an active social media presence. Organized by NY State regions, each week features grantees from a single geographic area. We also began reposting grantees who tagged us to our Instagram and Facebook stories and boosted select posts to rural communities. This resulted in a tremendous response from the field and grew our engagement exponentially.

Recently, NYSCA has updated our content strategy. Our first update is to repo to organize our content calendar by discipline and include flyers about different grant opportunities. These flyers have increased our

engagement by 80% on Instagram and 53% on Facebook in the past 30 days. Our followers have also grown on social media over the past year (5,500 to about 8,500 on Instagram, and 8,500 to 10,000 on Facebook).

First, I wanted to show you some examples of these flyers. These are very simple flyers, some are created by our regrant partners – some I make myself when there is no media available. These engagement numbers are terrific. I reposted the NYSCA/NYFA one just to see if it wasn't a fluke – and you can see it wasn't! I'm so glad these are opportunities are getting such terrific attention – and also how they underscore the tremendous reach of NYSCA grant dollars on a community level all over the state.

Second, here are some examples of the discipline posts! Shown here is a video posted of a performance from a small student-focused ballet company in Brooklyn from ballet week, a poetry reading from the Just Buffalo Literary Center, and for installation/art campus week – an installation from the student interns at the Art Effect in Poughkeepsie.

NYSCA has updated text-heavy eblasts to a more dynamic format, with photos, links and visuals. Our open rate is an astonishing 52% to nearly 13,000 subscribers (an increase over the previous 38-42%). This strategy, which included increased messaging about mandatory application requirements, has resulted in a 40% reduction of disqualification for missing elements.

NYSCA began tracking its traditional media placements and actively pursuing placements for its press releases. We have totaled over 1,300 mentions and media placements since September 2022, with focused articles about grantmaking in the Albany Times Union, Newsday, local public radio stations and Spectrum news network.

Outreach and ongoing communication to state legislators is an important element of our strategy. We recently sent letters to all members of the State Legislature about our current Capital Project Fund opportunity with a graphic flyer, for them to share with their audiences. We will also be sending letters to the Legislature informing them of the grant awards to their districts.

I'm also happy to share with you our current stats for webinars and office hours. As a reminder, these virtual opportunities are available for all prospective applicants. Webinars are recorded and posted to our website (along with the webinar presentations).

To-date, we've held 6 webinars and 12 virtual office hours with NYSCA staff – bringing 3,345 engagements with NYSCA FY2024 opportunities. This breaks down as:

- 1,276 live attendees at our webinars
- 1,783 webinar recording views on Youtube
- 286 Office Hour attendees

These numbers compare well with our FY2023 opportunities, for which we had approximately 3,318 engagements across webinars, office hours, and views, not including Capital or the Regrowth and Capacity Enhancement grants.

I am also delighted to share with you some great NEW empirical data that confirms the powerful impact of the arts and culture on our economy. The first is the Center for Urban Future's *Upstate's Creative Spark: How the Arts is Catalyzing Economic Activity Across Upstate New York*.

One incredible highlight is that upstate New York's resident artist population has expanded across the state in recent years, countering decades of population losses among residents under age 65. The growth of the resident artist population has outpaced total population growth in nearly every major city in the state. For example, In Albany, the resident artist population grew 50 percent, while the total population increased just 3 percent. In Buffalo, the resident artist population grew 45.3 percent, while the total population rose only 2.4 percent.

The second data point I wanted to share was how employment growth in the arts and culture sector far exceeded overall employment growth – this time by about 30%.

Lastly, how this incredible growth exceeds other industries, such as healthcare, manufacturing, retail and construction. Though the pandemic certainly damaged our sector's growth, according to the report -- there has been signs of great comebacks, especially in the Mohawk Valley, Buffalo, and Rochester.

The report provided case studies of the Capital Region, Buffalo, The Hudson Valley, Rochester and Syracuse. The entire report is available to the public at nycfuture.org

The next study is Americans for the Art's recent "Arts and Economic Prosperity 6". This study provides detailed findings on 373 regions from across all 50 states and Puerto Rico. In 2022, nonprofit arts and culture organizations and their audiences generated \$151.7 billion in economic activity. This included \$73.3 billion spent by the organizations, which leveraged an additional \$78.4 billion in event-related spending by their audiences. The impact of this economic activity is far reaching, supporting 2.6 million jobs, generating \$29.1 billion in tax revenue, and providing \$101 billion in personal income to residents. The entire report is available at the Americans for the Arts website. Both these reports confirm what we've known for a long, long time - that the arts are crucial to the health and growth of New York State.

And as you can see from this overview of our Instagram page -- we've been including these data points in our eblasts to the field and our social media messaging. Along with our deliberate efforts to create increasingly dynamic and visually engaging posts, this is boosting our reach among our stakeholders, carrying the message of what the arts do and also, what this agency does, to support our creative sector across New York State.

A copy of the communications update presentation can be viewed, [here](#).

Katherine Nicholls (Chair): For our next order of business, I will turn the meeting over to Deputy Director of Programs, Megan White, to review the FY2024 Panelist Rosters.

FY2024 Panelist Roster Recommendations

Megan White (Deputy Director of Programs): Thank you, Katherine. NYSCA relies on the breadth of expertise from a diverse group of individuals to review applications, share their expertise with one another through panel discussions, and provide guidance as we make funding recommendations. Each panel is composed of 5-7 individuals and their collective, complimentary skillsets foster a rigorous and thoughtful review of every application we receive.

Each year, NYSCA solicits nominations from NYSCA staff, Council members, current panelists, current grantees, and the general public. This year, we launched a more robust call for nominations – sharing information more broadly on social media through targeted boosted posts – resulting in over 250 nominations that were approved at our previous meeting.

Today, we bring forward 53 additional panelist recommendations that have been added to the roster since our last meeting for Council's review and vote. As a reminder, all panel members serve single year terms, and may be reappointed for a term of up to three years.

Advisory panelists are required to act with impartiality with respect to the evaluation and rating of applications and to protect panel deliberations from any potential conflict of interest or the appearance of such a conflict. Prior to serving, panelists are required to acknowledge any affiliations with organizations making applications to the Council and must comply with New York State Ethics Laws.

Foremost, NYSCA's primary objective is to provide grants to arts and cultural organizations within the state of New York. Grantmaking is our fundamental mission, and the panel process serves as its core and essence. It represents the pivotal stage where decisions are reached, and essential information is exchanged. The panelists involved in this process play a critical role in determining our success.

A copy of the FY24 panelist roster recommendations can be viewed, [here](#).

Abby Adler, Manager of the Executive Office, confirmed the in-person attendance of Council Member Lisa Baker and confirmed quorum for the meeting at approximately 2:10PM. Council Member Mahnaz Moinian also joined the meeting in a non-voting capacity through teleconference.

A motion is made and seconded to enter into Executive Session per Section 105(1)(f) of the Open Meetings Law to discuss: "...the ... financial, credit or employment history of a particular person or corporation." The meeting continues in Executive Session for Council members and invited guests until 3:10PM.

Katherine Nicholls (Chair): Welcome back to the public portion of the Council meeting for the New York State Council on the Arts. I am Katherine Nicholls, Chair of the New York State Council on the Arts. Thank you all for joining us. To remind all in attendance; this is a public meeting that is being recorded. I'd like to welcome back Megan White, Deputy Director of Programs.

Megan White (Deputy Director of Programs): Thank you, Katherine. I'd like to express my deep appreciation for the NYSCA staff's tireless dedication in ensuring the success and thoroughness of this grant cycle. From the moment the guidelines were first posted, my colleagues have collaborated diligently to provide crucial information, address inquiries, manage prequalification processes, host webinars and office hours, respond to numerous emails and phone calls, interview and pre-screen panelists, schedule meetings to evaluate countless applications, meticulously review applications for completeness and eligibility, coordinate and facilitate meetings, take detailed notes, and assess the recommendations presented before you today. The list of their commendable efforts goes on, but I won't delve into all the details. It is essential to acknowledge that this agency is truly exceptional within the state and the nation, and our remarkable staff is a driving force behind this distinction.

At the request of Chair Katherine Nicholls, a motion is made and seconded to ratify the FY2024 Panelist Rosters. The motion is unanimously approved by all present Council Members.

At the request of Chair Katherine Nicholls, a motion is made and seconded to approve the FY2024 Support for Organizations, Support for Artists, Targeted Opportunities, and Re grants and Services grant recommendations. The following conflicts are noted for the record:

Application Type	Organization	Council Member Conflict
Support for Organizations	Buffalo Fine Arts Academy	Monica Angle
Support for Organizations	Soloman R. Guggenheim Foundations	Lisa Baker
Support for Organizations	Cornell University	Lisa Baker
Support for Organizations	The Juilliard School	Aaron Flagg
Support for Organizations	Lake Placid Association of Music, Drama, and Art	James Lemons
Support for Organizations	Asia Society	Mahnaz Moinian
Support for Organizations	Westbeth Corp. Housing Development	Elsie McCabe Thompson
Support for Artists	Lake Placid Association of Music, Drama, and Art	James Lemons

Following the reading of the conflicts, the motion to approve the FY2024 Support for Organizations, Support for Artists, Targeted Opportunities, and Re-grants and Services grant recommendations is unanimously approved by all present Council Members.

ADJOURN

Katherine Nicholls (Chair): Thank you NYSCA Panelists, staff, leadership and Council for your ongoing service and commitment to our state! Today, Council has had the privilege of reviewing and voting on over \$46mm in vital public arts funding that will support artists, organizations and communities all across New York State. We acknowledge Governor Hochul and our State Legislators who continue to advocate for the arts and culture sector and who made this funding possible. In doing our civic duty today, we ensure that all New Yorkers and visitors will continue to experience and benefit from our dynamic and world-renowned creative community.

This Council has been together for several years and I thank them for their ongoing service. Through the dark days of the pandemic through to our current, ongoing recovery, we are keenly aware that engagement with the arts has changed. We did not simply return to pre-pandemic levels of participation. And yet our field is resilient and seeks innovation in reaching its audience. We recognized excellence in the funding approved today. We applaud their dedication, persistence, and ingenuity.

Finally, we meet at a time in history where conflicts raging far away are also touching us here at home. We are citizens of the world, and our hearts are heavy. It is during these trying periods when artists' expressions can help us decode our emotions, while opening our minds and hearts. We can escape to worlds of music, dance, theater, literature, and all forms of art to replenish our spirit. New York is home to peoples and artists from across the world, we are diverse, and we are inspired. And sincerely, we are grateful. As this is our last Council meeting of 2024, I wish everyone good health and a peaceful and Happy New Year.

At the request of Chair Katherine Nicholls, a motion for the Council to adjourn the meeting is made and seconded. The motion carries unanimously by the Council members. Meeting adjourns at 3:20PM.

End of Council Meeting Minutes.

All grants approved at this meeting are available on the NYSCA [website](#).