Mission Statement:
The Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC) improves arts access for communities in the seven-county Metropolitan area through support to artists and organizations.

Vision
● Artists and arts organizations thrive.
● Arts engagement takes place in every community.
● The public actively values and celebrates the arts and artists.

Guiding Principles
● We take into account the needs and interests of constituents in our region when developing programs and services.
● We strive to maintain transparent decision-making processes and accessible public information.
● We meet our constituents where they're at and recognize their unique needs.
● We act with integrity, ensuring that all constituents are treated in a fair, respectful and consistent manner.
● We're committed to advancing inclusion and racial equity in all aspects of our work.
● We work with our community partners to promote and advocate for the arts.

Region:
The Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC) serves Region 11 - also known as the metro - which includes Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties. Geographically, the metro only covers 3.5% of the state, but is home to an estimated 3,075,563 people, making up 55% of the state's population.

According to Minnesota Compass, the demographics of the metro in 2017 are as follows: Persons of Color 27.2%; American Indian .6%; Asian 7.9%; Black or African American 9.7%; LatinX 6.4%; Two or more races 2.7% and; White 72.8%. Individuals with a disability make up about 11%.

These statistics contribute to the 26% growth of Minnesota's population of color since 2010 – making up the fastest-growing segment of the state's population.

Additionally, Carver, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington Counties are expecting growth of at least 10 percent through 2030.

These growth trends are important for MRAC in understanding who is in the metro, how to best reach them and what we should prioritize to meet our mission and vision.

MRAC was established in 1994 as one of eleven Regional Arts Councils increasing access to the arts and serving every county in the state.

Specifically, MRAC serves arts organizations and fiscally-sponsored groups with budgets of less than $400,000; non-arts organizations with art budgets of less than $400,000 and individual artists in the metro. However, the majority of organizations that receive MRAC grants and services have budgets of less than $100,000.

In FY18, MRAC received 1,389 applications and awarded 520 grants totaling $3,460,670. Of which, 484 were organizations and fiscally-sponsored groups, and 36 were individual artists. Additionally, through a partnership with VSA Minnesota, the state organization on Arts and Disability, 14 grants totaling $114,256 were made to help make arts programming, activities and facilities more accessible to people with disabilities.

MRAC relies on community members from the metro area to serve as panelists that review grant applications and make funding recommendations to the Board of Directors. In FY18, 241 individuals contributed their time to serve as panelists. 20% were Indigenous and people of color - an increase of 45% since FY16.

In MRAC's FY16-17 biennial plan, it was stated that, "...the fact that the current staff of seven people has only one person of color, have prompted MRAC to develop some intentional actions..". Currently, MRAC has 8 employees and 13 Board of Directors. Of the staff, 6 are people of color and of the board, 7 identify as being a person of color or Indigenous. Having undergone internal analysis and intentional restructuring in relation to diversity, MRAC is better positioned to undertake informed and effective decisions involving intentional and strategic approaches to identifying disparities, being culturally informed, and responding to the region's needs.

Needs assessment
The biennial plan is based on a needs assessment of the region's arts community and the arts involved public. Regional Arts Councils are required to conduct a Needs Assessment at least once every four years. MRAC conducted a survey that only reached MRAC constituents in 2016 for the FY18-19 biennial plan. So, in 2019, MRAC conducted a new Needs Assessment process to include the arts involved public as well.

The Needs Assessment should:
- Assess and prioritize constituent needs
- Evaluate appropriate community and regional resources to meet those needs
- Determine the practicality of continuing existing programming activities, or the feasibility of developing new programs

MRAC's Needs Assessment process was conducted in two parts: 1) an online survey sent out to the MRAC list serve and; 2) a series of circles facilitated by outside consultants.

The design of the needs assessment process began in January and followed MRAC's guiding principles to accomplish the following goals:
   a. Collect demographic data about respondents so we can identify needs that are specific to the diverse groups of the metro;
   b. Gather insights about experiences with MRAC programs, services and staff so we can maintain positive relationships or make improvements where necessary;
   c. Reach MRAC constituents, that is individuals that have some experience with MRAC, as well as residents in the metro that are under-represented in MRAC's applicant, recipient and workshop attendee pools.

We developed a 27-question survey and sent it out to our listserve with 6000 emails in our February e-newsletter. Additionally, we shared it on our facebook page with 2,590 followers and received 383 completed surveys, which is a 65% increase from our 2017 survey.

Part I of the survey:
   ● Collected demographic data about respondents

Part II of the survey:
   ● Evaluated experience with MRAC programs and services
   ● Helped to identify gaps in programming and services - areas to improve and make adjustments

Additionally, in the effort to reach the arts-involved public beyond people that already know about MRAC- specifically from demographics that are under-represented in our applicant and grant recipient groups (ie. people of color and indigenous people, people with disabilities, ages 55+, etc), we hired three consultants to do outreach and facilitate 9 talking circles with 84 participants in Saint Paul and Minneapolis. Each circle was a minimum of 2 hours with the facilitator, then an additional 30 minutes for Q&A with an MRAC staff.

Consultants include:
Ini Augustine is the CEO of SocialWise Media Group. She was an Aspiring Businesswoman of the year for NAWBO Iowa, The National Association of Women Business Owners. She started her career with Dun & Bradstreet at the age of 15, and became the youngest Financial Data Consultant in the history of the company. In 2006, Ini Augustine was named Businesswoman of the year for her work on the Business Advisory Council to Congress.

Donte Curtis is the owner of Catch Your Dream Consulting/Coaching where he mentors, inspires, and trains individuals and teams nationwide on leadership development, racial equity, entrepreneurship, and making effective change. Donte supports his clients to excel in their dreams and discover new alternatives. With

over eight years of facilitation experience, Donte is adept at fostering the collective wisdom in the room and creates space to make sure everyone's voice is heard.

Candida Gonzales A Puerto Rican native of South Minneapolis, Candida Gonzalez studied Latin American Art and History and went on to get her M.Ed.. She is passionate about education, community engagement through the arts and equitable arts access. She is deeply invested in the concept of using art and community design as tools to wage love and healing. She is currently working as an independent art consultant developing community art projects with a social justice lens.

Key findings in surveys:
- 90% of the organizational responses identified as white with budgets under $100,000. 81% of these surveys scored MRAC in the Excellent range (8-10).
- 84% of the individual artist responses identified as white and 61% female. 80% of these surveys scored MRAC in the Excellent range (8-10).
- Top three services referenced most frequently in the positive comments include: staff assistance with grant programs, grant opportunities, and panel process.
- Most common critical feedback included: uninformed or biased panelists, and a mention of systemic racism.

Key findings in circles:
- There was a lack of knowledge about MRAC and/or about the state's arts grantmaking system. They cannot imagine themselves accessing resources if they cannot even imagine the resources in the first place.
- Participants voiced the need for MRAC, and funders in general, to engage with communities in different ways. To make the effort to go to communities to make connections more regularly.
- People are accessing arts online more than ever before. Reasons include: easy access, weather, physical ability to get out, time restraints, financial barriers.
- Art forms, art creation, arts access and connection and artist needs are different across cultures and communities. The one size fits all approach is not effective.
- Artists of color feel discouraged and left out, because most of MRAC programs are geared towards organizations and they feel like their art is not accepted.
- Older artists feel that it is harder to get funding.
- Artists need more support and opportunities for skill building.

Description of the planning process:
MRAC staff started the biennial planning on November 20, 2018 during our weekly staff meetings as outlined in the schedule below. Board members were invited and encouraged to join us for any of the meetings.

November
November 20 – <u>Biennial Overview</u> – covered purpose, required sections of the plan and timeline of planning so that everybody will share understanding of the process and their role in informing and implementing the plan.

December (links below are prezis used to discuss these topics)
4: <u>25 Year Framework</u> – we looked at language from 3 different guiding documents: MN State of Innovation, MN Legislative Guide and the MN State Arts Board.

11: <u>MRAC's FY18-19 Biennial Workplan</u> – Reviewed FY18-19 plan.

January
2: Analyzed needs assessment design by asking questions like: What do we want to learn? How do we want to learn? Who do we ask?

8: Continued Needs assessment design

15: Finalized needs assessment and began roll out of design

*additionally, we put out an RFQ, interviewed and hired 3 consultants to serve as Outreach and Facilitators for needs assessment talking circles.

February
5: Reviewed current programs and deadline calendar

12: Continued review of current programs and deadline calendar.

19: MRAC's Racial Equity Task Force (all staff and 4 board members) identified priorities, objectives, outcomes, indicators and evaluation method for next biennium

26: Board approved new calendar and programmatic adjustments

Throughout February, needs assessment survey went out and circles were happening in Saint Paul and Minnespolis.

March
5: Online surveys closed

8: Talking circle reports due

26: Board report on Needs Assessment results

28: Final meeting with Circle consultants

Throughout March, we analyzed survey and circle findings and began drafting our biennial plan.

April

22: Sent out invite for public meeting via e-newsletter

23: Board approved biennial plan for public review

24: Posted biennial plan draft on MRAC website for public review

Throughout April, finalize guidelines and deadlines for FY20 so they can be published by June

May

7: Public Meeting
8: Make any necessary changes
9: SUBMIT TO MSAB

MRAC's Goals for Fiscal Year 20 and 21:
Statewide Goals:
· People of all ages, ethnicities and abilities participate in the arts
· The arts are interwoven into every facet of community life
· Minnesotans believe that the arts are vital to who we are
· People trust Minnesota's stewardship of public arts funding
· The arts thrive in Minnesota

MRAC Goal 1: Support organizations and artists to be responsive to their artistic goals and community needs.

Objective 1a: Implement a grant process that is transparent and compliant

Indicators:

● MRAC has clear guidelines that describe the grant process, criteria and eligibility requirements to the public.
● MRAC guidelines comply with the Minnesota State Arts Board and state grant-making policies.
● MRAC has open communication and staff are available for public engagement.

MRAC Goal 2: Distribute state funds equitably throughout the region.

Objective 2a: Conduct an organizational evaluation of programs and services.

Indicator: MRAC will have accurate data and deep analysis of regional needs, and programmatic gaps to make informed decisions about future programs and services.

Objective 2b:Develop strategies to advance inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility in the arts.

Indicators:

- An equity framework is developed and applied to MRAC's work
- Operations will change
- Disparity gaps will decrease
- Underrepresented organizations and artists are connected to MRAC

Objective 2c:Become an accessible organization for people with disabilities

Indicators:

- Build accessibility capacity throughout organization (physical space, programming, staffing, etc)
- Develop an Accessibility grantmaking program for access to the arts for people with disabilities

Objective 2d:Establish strategic partnerships in communities across the metro

Indicators:

- MRAC is an engaged and trusted partner in the metro arts and arts interested community

Objective 2e: Develop communications strategy to share learnings

Indicators:

- MRAC is a reliable and trusted resource in the metro arts and artist interested community

MRAC Goal 3: Strengthen MRAC's organizational and staffing capacity

Objective 3a: Hire, support and develop staff

Indicator:

- MRAC will have appropriate staff capacity to manage all programs, provide quality services and attention to volume of applications.
- MRAC staff will feel supported, have confidence and grow their capacity to provide knowledgeable and quality services to the region.

GRANT PROGRAMS:

1. Management Training Fund: Up to $600 for fees and registration to access professional development opportunities.

2. Management Consulting Fund: Up to $1,750 for "bite-size" projects to assist with focused organizational issues.

3. Community Arts Grants: Up to $5,000 for arts projects.

4. Arts Activities Support Grants: Up to $10,000 for arts projects.

5. Arts Learning Grants: Up to $10,000 for projects for people of all ages to develop knowledge, skills and understanding of the arts, and to increase learning through the arts.

6. Organizational Development: Up to $10,000 for projects that strengthen the management and/or infrastructure of nonprofit arts groups.

7. Capital Grants: Up to $10,000 to purchase equipment and related supplies and services, or to make capital improvements.

8. Next Step Fund: Funded by the McKnight Foundation, provides project grants up to $5,000 to professional artists in any discipline for the purpose of career development and artistic achievement.

In FY20, MRAC staff, board and an ADA Advisory Committee, will begin to develop an ADA Access to the Arts program. By FY21, MRAC will have hired a new Program Director and will launch the new program.

CRITERIA
MRAC grant programs are evaluated on a set of criteria to advance the legacy goals established by the Minnesota State Arts Board and Regional Arts Councils. Applicants are asked to consider the following questions when writing their applications.

All Programs require the following criteria:

Project & Goals

- Describe the concept and design of your project (who, what, where, when). How many learning sessions will be presented? How many learners will benefit? Be specific.
- What are your artistic goals? How do you define artistic success for this project? Be specific.
- Who are, or will be, the artists and project leaders? How are, or will, the artists be selected?
- Describe the focus of your project. Where will artistic energies/resources be directed?
- Primarily on process (audience/participant learning, creating or otherwise engaging in the arts experience), or on the quality of the artistic product, or both? Explain.
- Why did you select this particular project?
- In what ways will your project be artistically relevant to the artists, the audience, attendees and/or participants? For example, will it stretch artistic skills of the artists involved? Or, in what ways will the event engage or stimulate your audience?
- What outcomes do you hope to achieve through this project?

Community Need & Support

● How do you define your community? Describe the individuals this project will serve.
● What shared interest, need, or demand exists within this community as it relates to your work? How will your project benefit the community that you have described?
● In what ways have members of the community shown their support for your project?

Equity & Inclusion
● Within the context of your community, describe how your project identifies and addresses barriers to engaging historically marginalized and underserved people may otherwise have limited access to your proposed activity.

- If your community is based on geography, how are the above people represented throughout your geography? In what ways is this project inclusive of that diversity?
- In what ways does your project ensure that people with disabilities can participate?
- If there are financial costs associated with your project, what considerations are made for those who may find such costs a barrier?

Ability

- Describe the planning process for your project.
- What is the timeline for your project?
- How will you promote your project?
- How will you evaluate the project and its outcomes in relation to your stated artistic and community goals?

Capital & Organizational Development also includes:
Organizational Challenge
- Describe the underlying situation – problem, opportunity, issue, or need – that your project intends to address.
- What is compelling about this situation? How will addressing this important opportunity/need have a significant, long-term impact on your organization? How might this project lead to an enhanced ability for you to accomplish your artistic vision? Why is this a priority at this moment in time?

Organizational Solution
- What is the solution your group proposes to address the organizational challenge?
- What is your work plan and timeline? What activities will you undertake? Who was involved in the planning? What are the specific activities or steps in this organizational development project? When will these activities take place and how long will they take to complete? Who will participate in this project?
- Who are the key personnel involved in this project?
- If your project includes equipment purchases, describe how the equipment will help you accomplish the overall goals of the project. If total equipment purchases, including supplies and service, are $1,000 or greater, a vendor bid form with three vendor bids needs to be uploaded and included as part of this application.

Arts Learning also includes:
Educational Value

- What are the learning objectives for your project? What learner needs are you seeking to address and what specific outcomes will occur?

- How will your project provide arts learning opportunities over an **extended** period?
- If you are partnering with another organization for this project, how will your partner(s) contribute to the learning objectives?
- Describe the focus of your project. Where will artistic energies/resources be directed – primarily on process (participant learning, creating or otherwise engaging in the arts experience), or on the quality of the artist product, or both? Explain.
- Describe the qualifications of the artists and project leaders to provide high quality arts learning experiences and activities.
- In what ways will your project be artistically, culturally, and/or educationally challenging for the artists and participants?

TRAINING SERVICES AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to our grant programs, MRAC offers a series of free Arts Management Trainings to help arts groups and organizations be as strong and effective in their work as possible.

Also, MRAC Program Directors host monthly **First Fridays** gatherings as space for constituents to work, share ideas, and build relationships with MRAC staff and others in the arts community.

Grantmaking and monitoring process

Grant process

1. MRAC grant guidelines and deadlines are shared with the public by June 1.

2. Grant application workshops and draft reviews:
MRAC Program Directors provide grant application workshops to help applicants prepare grant applications. Workshops cover MRAC programs, funding, eligibility, program scope, and the details of applying.

Additionally, Program Directors offer draft reviews and one-on-one consultation with applicants while preparing applications.. Draft reviews and consultation are based on a first come, first serve basis.

3. Panelist recruitment:
MRAC staff make no decisions about grant applications beyond basic eligibility. MRAC uses a peer-panel process to thoughtfully evaluate applications and make funding recommendations to the board of directors. Each panel consists of up to nine people recruited by staff from the broadest possible range of artistic disciplines, professional experiences, county representation from within the metro, age, gender, ability, race and cultural background. Panelists are required to attend a two-hour orientation approximately one month before the panel meeting and a re-orientation on panel day. Each panelists will have up to 25 applications to review at

least 3 weeks before the panel meeting. Panelists are offered a $125 stipend at the completion of the panel review process. We anticipate convening approximately 32-35 panel meetings with up to 315 panelists in FY20 and FY21.

4.   Panel meetings and scoring applications:
MRAC panel meetings are public, open meetings. Constituents are encouraged to attend and listen to the reviews to gain a fuller understanding of the process and hear the panelists' comments directly. Applicants may listen, but may not make presentations or interact in the panel's discussion. All grant reviews are recorded and available to applicant groups. The panel discussion is moderated by MRAC staff. Panelists are asked to declare any conflicts of interest before the discussion begins. Any panelist with a conflict is asked to leave the room, then remaining panelists comment on how applicants address the criteria in their application. After up to 10 minutes of discussion, panelists use a 6-point scale to rate the application. At the end of the day, all the scores are averaged and applications are ranked from highest to lowest. All of the highest ranked applicants are funded until the funding runs out for the day. All panels are observed and monitored by an MRAC Board liaison for consistency and oversight of panel process.

5. Board Approval:
Summaries of every grant application and their score is compiled into a rank summary document for MRAC's Board of Directors. MRAC staff reports on the recommended applications for board discussion and approval. Board members with a conflict of interest cannot vote for that recommendation. The board's funding decisions may be appealed solely on alleged procedural errors. There is no right of appeal based on the size of the grant awarded or on disagreements with the review panel's assessment of an application.

6. Communications:
Applicants receive notification via email of the board's decision, usually the day after the board meeting. A list of funded applications is also posted on the MRAC website, facebook page and via e-newsletter. Applicants receive an audio file of the review and may request feedback from a Program Director.

Every grant recipient receives an auto-email 2 weeks before project end date to remind them of final report and check in on progress and completion on time.

7. Grant agreements and final reports:
After board approval and notification, recipients have 30 days to fill out the grant agreement and provide a current Form W9. Once received, MRAC executive director approves the grant agreement and initiates the payment process. Payments are paid in full and issued twice a month.

Grant recipients have two months to submit a required final report with a narrative about the activities and financials about how the funding was expended before the grant is closed.

Responsibilities of grantees:
- Executing the project as written and approved by the board of directors.
- Crediting legacy funded projects with logo and language.
- Communicating any project changes for approval by Program Directors. All communications and changes are documented in recipients grant record through Foundant grant interface.
- Submitting a final report with a narrative about the activities and financials about how the funding was expended before the grant is closed.

Public meeting
Each council must hold at least one public meeting to solicit reaction to its preliminary biennial plan before it is approved and submitted to the Arts Board.

MRAC sent out the first public meeting notification on Friday, April 19, 2019 via e-newsletter to our listserve with 6000 email addresses.

The plan draft was reviewed and approved by the MRAC board on April 23, 2019 and uploaded to the MRAC website on April 24, 2019.

MRAC held a public meeting at the MRAC office (2324 University Avenue, Suite 114, Saint Paul, MN 55114) on May 7, 2019 from 5:30-7:00pm to share the biennial plan draft and to allow for questions, concerns and feedback. There were 10 people in attendance, of which, 6 were applicants, 4 have served as a panelist, and 2 were from the art-involved public.

The Public Meeting Prezi can be found here.
https://prezi.com/view/lHCS8gDyehG7BaSckFkY/

Overall, we received positive feedback about the meeting and the plan. As a result of the discussion, I added an objective around sharing learnings to goal 2. There was interest in learning about MRAC's work as a resource.