



Application

181008 - FY 2026-2027 Regional Arts Council Documents - Final Application

181538 - FY 2026-2027 Regional Arts Council Documents
Regional Arts Councils

Status:	Submitted	Original Submitted Date:	04/01/2025 10:58 AM	Submitted By:	Anna Pollock
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Applicant Information

Primary Contact:

Legal Name*	Anna		Pollock
	First Name	Middle Name	Last Name

Alternate Name		
	First Name	Last Name

Organization Information

Legal Name:*	Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council, Inc.
Alternate Name	
City*	Waseca

Narrative

Title

Your council's name or acronym followed by FY 2026-2027 Preliminary Biennial Plan (e.g., Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council FY 2026-2027 Preliminary Biennial Plan)

(100 characters max)*

Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council FY 2026-2027 Preliminary Biennial Plan

Mission statement

The biennial plan must include the regional arts council's mission statement which must describe the overall philosophy and aims of the organization concerning local and regional arts development.

(1,000 characters max)*

The Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council serves the artistic communities of the 9-county area of south central MN by supporting the creation and presentation of diverse art forms, fostering equitable access to arts opportunities, and integrating arts and culture to enhance quality of life in our communities.

Region - Background, demographics, other context for the plan

(5,000 characters max)*

Provide any necessary context about your region (i.e., economic, demographic, geographic, cultural, etc.) or about your organization that has a meaningful impact on your planning or your programs and services.

Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council is situated in south central Minnesota and serves the 9-county region of Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, LeSueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca, and Watonwan counties. It is home to the Dakota and many other Indigenous peoples.

Our board consists of one representative in each county. Blue Earth County is by far the largest in our region with just over 70,000 in population as of 2023. Our least populated county is Watonwan with around 11,000 as of 2023. While we have more of an artist and creative hub in Mankato, other cities like St. Peter, Fairmont, New Ulm, and North Mankato also have representation on our board and have blossoming arts communities that are active with Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council.

As a generalization, our region is predominately white, however, due to migrant populations coming to our region for work, they also bring a rich culture and heritage that enhances our communities. Mankato is the most diverse city with 5.3% of the population being Spanish speaking or Hispanic. It's estimated 16.7% of the population is non-white. Meanwhile, Watonwan County has the highest population of Spanish speaking people at 30.6% as of the census estimate of 2023.

Income levels vary in the region, with Blue Earth coming in at the lowest median individual income level of \$34.4k annually. Le Sueur County is the highest with \$45.8k as the annual individual median income as of 2023. These estimates are still at the mid- to low-end of the state medians.

Additionally, we have a large population of elders over 55 in our rural towns in the region. The median age for Waseca County is 40.4 years, and higher in Faribault County at 44.6 based on the United States Census Bureau.

Lastly, we have six post-secondary colleges in our region; 4 in Mankato, 1 in St. Peter, and 1 parochial college in New Ulm. The population in these towns fluctuates with the school year, which causes the art and culture of the town to fluctuate, too. Minnesota State University - Mankato, South Central College in Mankato, and Gustavus Adolphus College in New Ulm all have arts focused programs and degrees.

Attachment (optional)

Needs assessment

(10,000 characters max)*

The biennial plan must be based on a needs assessment carried out in a manner which ensured input from the arts community and the arts involved public. The components of the needs assessment shall be determined by the regional arts council and may consist of any combination of constituent meetings, focus groups, program evaluations, mail, e-mail, online, or telephone surveys, individual interviews, or other evaluative tools. The assessment shall be conducted to assess and prioritize constituent needs, to evaluate appropriate community and regional resources to meet those needs, and to determine the practicality of continuing existing programming activities, service and grants assistance programs, or the feasibility of developing new programs, services, or grants by the regional arts council. The needs assessment shall be updated at intervals determined and announced by the regional arts council, but no less frequently than once every four years. The results shall be included in the biennial plan.

In this section, describe:

1. When the needs assessment was completed.
2. The process used to generate input from the arts community and the arts involved public.
3. The methods and/or tools used to gather input.
4. The key findings identified through the needs assessment.

Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council completed a Needs Assessment in December of 2022. Two different surveys were completed, and we distributed them using our internal email database of constituents totaling 2,000+ and through our Facebook page. We also had an article in our PLRAC Newsletter asking people to complete one of the online surveys. PLRAC received 25 Organizational survey responses and 22 Artist responses. This information was reviewed by the Prairie Lakes board and was included in our new FY 2024-25 Biennial Plan.

PLRAC hired a new Executive Director, Anna Pollock, in July of 2023. The results of the 2022 Needs Assessment were underwhelming, and focused on individuals that already received grants from us. While all feedback is appreciated, more needed to be done to understand how our programs have been affecting the arts community.

The new Executive Director met with over 200 arts organizations and individuals across the region in the last 18 months. For organizations, the questions involved:

- 1) What types of grants or funding do need as an organization?;
- 2) What is missing from the current arts funding system? and;
- 3) What changes would you like to see from Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council?

The conversations spanned over many topics, but there were a few areas that bubbled up multiple times:

A. Simpler applications.

This was overwhelmingly the majority of the requests by both organizations and individual artists. It was shared that so much time was spent on applications from volunteers, underpaid employees, understaffed organizations, and artists that are working two or three jobs to make a living. While we still need to supply information to the State, we went through the applications to reduce redundancy.

B. Simpler Programs.

A few of the artists we spoke with didn't understand what program they should apply for. This was the case with first time applicants or new organizations that were just forming. There was confusion about our Arts & Cultural Heritage Grant and the 3 categories that we once had. One of the first questions that we get from new applicants that contact our office is, "What grant should I apply for?" This signaled that we needed condense programs to better allow self-sufficiency to ease barriers and capacity for our organization.

C. More Operating Support, Less Project-based Funding.

When questions around funding opportunities were brought up, many smaller organizations noted that they were ineligible for operating support from the Minnesota State Arts Board due to their budget limitations. In the past, we have allowed operating costs to be included in our ACH grant if the organization was open year-round, however it was not advertised. We have a larger focus on this moving forward.

D. Overall More Outreach to New & Younger Artists/Organizations

In FY25, of the 157 organizations that received a grant, 26 have received a grant every year for the last five years. 50 have received a grant every year for the last three years. 16 were first time applicants due to the outreach of the Executive Director in the last year and a half. PLRAC has been awarding grants in the 90th percentile of applications received for the last 3 years. This all paints a story that more outreach needs to be done to new and existing organizations that do not know about funding. While more competition is not necessarily the goal, a more equitable award distribution will benefit more organizations.

PLRAC plans to conduct a Needs Assessment in FY26.

Attachment (optional) Needs Assesment Full Responses.pdf

Description of the planning process

(5,000 characters max)*

The biennial plan must include a description of the biennial planning process used by the council including a list of the steps included in the development of the biennial plan and the participants involved in the biennial planning process.

Throughout FY24, the board held two Strategic Planning sessions that gave some time outside of regular board meetings to ask ourselves questions about our organization. In February of 2024, the questions included:

- 1) Why do we exist?
- 2) How do we want our region to view us?
- 3) What does success look like for this organization?
- 4) How do we adapt for our future?

All of these questions allowed a board that has been through many changes in the last two years to pause and reflect on the purpose of Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council. A few things were pulled from these questions, and were reopened four months later at a follow-up meeting in June of 2024. Answers were shared out from the past meeting and discussed amongst veteran board members while welcoming new board members into the mix.

Here is a condensed compiling of the answers we received:

- 1) We exist to be effective stewards of funding from the Legacy Amendment and to enhance the artistic community in our region.
- 2) We want to be viewed as innovative, responsible, connected, trustworthy, and dependable as a funding organization.
- 3) Success looks like us meeting our budget for grants dispersed and a more connected, vibrant arts community in our region.
- 4) We continue to learn from a wide network of arts funders in and out of our region. We regularly get feedback from our arts community, applicants, and grantees. We consistently adapt and change with the community.

Additionally, with the help of the information received from the community and the internal work from the board, it was clear that the organization had been running "business as usual" for an extended period of time, which allowed those who have historically excelled in our programs to continue to excel, however, it left out a large population of the arts community that simply didn't know we existed - or if they were "allowed" to apply for our funds.

This was the genesis of our program's overhaul. Staff combined programs from other regional arts councils and the MSAB, had conversations about funding strategies and demographics, and spoke to other programs staff about the capacity needs for the programs. Overall, we wanted more flexible support for organizations that includes operating support, more equitable competition for similar sized organizations, more collaboration, and a wider audience for artist grants, which use McKnight funding.

In planning for more equitable competition, we understood that to larger organizations, our grant dollar amounts weren't moving the needle, but if we did large dollar amounts for small organizations, there was an inequality of capacity. Smaller organizations may be run by volunteers or 1-2 full time staff, while larger organizations may have a dedicated staff person to apply for funding opportunities. Because of this, we split our main program into three tiers: \$0-\$74,999 annual operating budget, \$75,000-\$199,999 annual operating budget, and \$200,000+.

In order to understand how much funding to delegate for each tier, we used resources like ProPublica's Nonprofit Explorer to understand our current funded organizations budgets and learned that we have many more in the \$200,000+ tier than originally thought. We believe that the mid-tier level will be the most competitive, however, in the past we have been able to award over 90% of our applications, which

paints a picture that we may have a bit more competition for these dollars as our outreach efforts improve.

Lastly, we want to encourage collaboration in our region, which is the reasoning behind the Pilot Collaborative Support program. This came from past experiences where two organizations would come to us to inquire about combined project, but with our current guidelines, we were unable to support such endeavors because we only allowed one grant per year. Rather than opening up multiple grants for every organization, we decided to try something new and offer a large dollar amount grant to produce something in collaboration with two counties and two eligible organizations. In having conversations with current grantees about this idea, many reacted positively and were excited about the thought of “thinking bigger” with our funds.

As a whole, we are hoping to reach new audiences, and a part of that is happening through McKnight funding, which goes directly to artists. This biennium, we are opening a grant program that allows any creative type to apply for funding to attend arts activities and classes in our region. In turn, this will directly benefit arts centers and teaching artists who provide these activities and classes. Our other artist grant will look similar to our current artist grants, but with a larger emphasis on community impact rather than personal technical growth.

Attachment
(optional)

Work plan for grants, programs, and services - Overview

(4,000 characters max)*

The biennial plan must include a work plan which contains a description of services, programs, and grants available from the council, and the goals and objectives of these activities as related to the needs assessment, and the 25-year arts legacy outcomes.

Based on the information gathered from the community, grantees, artists, and staff, below are the goals of Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council for the next biennium.

Attachment
(optional)

Are you ready
to work on
work plan
priority 1?*

Yes

Work Plan Priority 1 (2,000 characters max)

Sustainability: More operating support and flexible support will allow arts orgs to use these funds to keep their doors open and programs viable.

State one measurable outcome the council expects to produce through Priority 1 activities.

Measurable
Outcome (150
characters
max) Arts Organizations will have more flexibility with their dollars, allowing them to sustain programming that already benefits the community and region.

Which of the 25-year arts legacy outcomes will this measurable outcome address (select all that apply)?

The arts are
interwoven
into every
facet of
community
life

Minnesotans
believe the
arts are vital
to who we
are

People of all
ages,
ethnicities,
and abilities
participate in
the arts

People trust
Minnesota's
stewardship
of public arts
funding

The arts
thrive in
Minnesota

Yes

Plan for
measuring
results (1,000 Follow-up feedback will be received during FY26 needs assessment and final reports.

characters
max)

Is there a
second work
plan priority? Yes

Work Plan Priority 2 (2,000 characters max)

Access: Expand outreach by supporting artists in our region through marketing, spotlights, and storytelling. In turn, this will allow the public to have more ways to connect with Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council to learn about our programs and grants.

State one measurable outcome the council expects to produce through Priority 2 activities.

Measurable Outcome (150 characters max) There will be an increase in new applicants, and more funding going towards underserved organizations in our region.

Which of the 25-year arts legacy outcomes will this measurable outcome address (select all that apply)?

The arts are
interwoven
into every
facet of
community
life Yes

Minnesotans
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are

People of all
ages,
ethnicities,
and abilities
participate in
the arts Yes

People trust
Minnesota's
stewardship
of public arts
funding

The arts
thrive in
Minnesota

Plan for measuring results (1,000 characters max) Monitoring new applications and data for existing grantees via Foundant.

Is there a
third work
plan priority? Yes

Work Plan Priority 3 (2,000 characters max)

Collaboration: Our Pilot Collaborative Support program will encourage more geographical and artist collaboration in our region to benefit the public.

State one measurable outcome the council expects to produce through Priority 3 activities.

Measurable Outcome (150 characters max) Organizations will collaborate and have the resources to think creatively about partnering with other organizations rather than compete for dollars.

Which of the 25-year arts legacy outcomes will this measurable outcome address (select all that apply)?

The arts are
interwoven
into every
facet of
community
life Yes

Minnesotans
believe the
arts are vital
to who we
are Yes

People of all
ages,
ethnicities,
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Minnesota's
stewardship
of public arts
funding

The arts
thrive in
Minnesota

Plan for
measuring
results (1,000
characters
max)

Final reporting will include attendees, learnings from collaboration, and process.

Is there a
fourth work
plan priority?

Yes

Work Plan Priority 4 (2,000 characters max)

Engagement: Continue to offer funds that benefit youth in our region and allow opportunities for every person in our region to engage with the arts by increasing outreach efforts.

State one measurable outcome the council expects to produce through Priority 4 activities.

Measurable
Outcome (150
characters
max)

Dollars are prioritized to serving the youth population and education is increased on our funds is available easily to all.

Which of the 25-year arts legacy outcomes will this measurable outcome address (select all that apply)?

The arts are
interwoven
into every
facet of
community
life

No

Minnesotans
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to who we
are

People of all
ages,
ethnicities,
and abilities
participate in
the arts

Yes

People trust
Minnesota's
stewardship
of public arts
funding

Yes

The arts
thrive in
Minnesota

Yes

Plan for
measuring
results (1,000
characters
max)

Final reports from youth and monitoring newsletter & social media engagement.

Is there a fifth
work plan
priority?

Yes

Work Plan Priority 5 (2,000 characters max)

Support: Peer groups and workshops will allow other arts organizations to work together on better practices for their programs and events.

State one measurable outcome the council expects to produce through Priority 5 activities.

Measurable
Outcome (150
characters
max)

Arts organizations have better access to resources to reach new populations to support the arts in their communities.

Which of the 25-year arts legacy outcomes will this measurable outcome address (select all that apply)?

The arts are
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into every

facet of
community
life

Minnesotans
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People of all
ages,
ethnicities,
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participate in
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People trust
Minnesota's
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funding

The arts
thrive in
Minnesota

Yes

Plan for
measuring
results (1,000
characters
max)

Needs Assessment in FY26 will ask questions around effectiveness of support groups and feedback will be requested continuously after individual workshops and sessions.

Program information

(7,000 characters max)*

Describe the grants and other forms of assistance the council will provide, the review criteria for evaluating grant requests, and eligibility requirements.

The attached document includes an overview of all grant programs and services that will be offered in FY26-27. We've also included a sample guidelines document for our Youth Scholarship and Flexible Support program.

Attachment
(optional)

Biennial Plan Program Information PLRAC.pdf

Grant making and monitoring process

(5,000 characters max)*

Provide a detailed description of the council's grant making process including the review process, the terms of the grant contract with grant recipients, the time needed and process followed in paying grant recipients, the responsibilities of grantees, and the grant monitoring process.

Prairie Lakes uses the Foundant online grant management platform for applications and monitoring. Applications are posted online July 1st for the yearly programs and can be accessed through our website. Our website includes a PDF document of guidelines and Word document of application questions for all programs. After the deadline, applications are reviewed by staff for completeness and eligibility. All eligible grant applications are reviewed by the full board at the next regularly scheduled board meeting. The PLRAC Board meetings are open to the public and we abide by a strict conflict of interest policy, based on the state's definition of conflict of interest. If a conflict of interest arises in an organizational grant, the board member would abstain from voting and scoring that grant. If a conflict of interest arises in an individual grant, that board member would abstain from voting and reviewing all applications in that specific grant.

In FY 2024- 25 we will continue to have hybrid meetings.

Grant review procedures, review criteria, grant recipient responsibilities, grant termination, revocation of funds, are included in the attached document. There is not much change from FY24-25. This document will be reviewed by the PLRAC Board in FY26 to ensure its relevancy and benefit to the applicants and grantees. Any updates will be submitted accordingly.

Attachment
(optional)

Grantmaking and Monitoring process FY26-27.pdf

Public meeting

(1,000 characters max)*

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.
Provide the date(s) and location(s) of the public meeting(s). How was the public informed? Who participated in the meeting (types and numbers of attendees)?

Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council held a public meeting via Zoom on February 20th, 2025 at 4:00pm. Announcements were made on Facebook, LinkedIn, in a dedicated email newsletter, and displayed on the homepage of the PLRAC website for one week leading up to the meeting. There were 20 registrants and 13 attendees. Attendees included past grant recipients, organizations, artists, city leaders, and the press. The meeting was recorded and slides were provided to attendees after the meeting.

Attachment (optional) Attendee Report Biennial Planning Public Meeting PLRAC.pdf

Attach Files Here

Required attachments

Council's bylaws* BYLAWS PLRAC 5-18-23.pdf

- Board information**
- Names and affiliations
 - Arts experience and background requirements for membership
 - Nomination process - including a statement of the council's commitment and methods used to identify, recruit, and appoint board members to provide representation from all counties
 - Rotation system - to ensure replacement of members on a regular basis

Board information* PLRAC Board Information.pdf

- Staff information**
- Names and titles
 - Job descriptions

Staff information* PLRAC Staff Information.pdf

Is council part of a regional development commission?
If yes, attach a memorandum describing the policies and procedures under which grants will be made including a statement that the regional development commission agrees to fund only organizations or projects which have been recommended by its arts advisory council and that the recommendations will be based on the regional arts advisory committee's review of the application's artistic merit, the applicant's ability, and the need for the project or program

Is council part of a regional development commission?* No

Is council using a 501(c)(3) fiscal agent?
If yes, attach a letter of agreement between the council and its fiscal agent stating that the fiscal agent has no jurisdiction over the council's review and awarding of arts grants.

Is council using a 501(c)(3) fiscal agent?* No

Projected budget

Click here to download a blank: Biennial Plan Budget Template.

Biennial budget* Updated PLRAC fy2026-2027-rac-biennial-plan-budget-template.xlsx

Certifications and Signature

Certify that the nonprofit organization is registered and is in good standing with the Office of the Secretary of State. Applicant can check the nonprofit's registration status using the following link: Minnesota Secretary of State Business Search.

The applicant is in good standing with the Office of the Secretary of State of Minnesota* True

Attach a PDF file containing a list with the names of the applicant's

- Current board members,
- Staff members with authority to access grants funds or determine how those funds are used.

Attach PDF file here* PLRAC Board and Staff with Access to Grants and Applicants.pdf

None of the individuals in the list provided have been convicted of a felony financial crime in the last ten years* True

The signature of an authorizing official certifies that all information in the application is true and correct, the applicant meets all program eligibility criteria, and the applicant intends to use any granted funds only for allowable purposes.

Authorizing Official* Anna Pollock

Title* Executive Director