

New York State Council on the Arts Transparency Plan

I. Review of Agency/Authority's Current Public Engagement

Founded in 1960 as the first state arts agency in the country, the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) is a leading source of funding for the vibrant arts and cultural sector across the state. New York is home to over 500,000 arts workers and a creative economy that generates \$123 billion per year. NYSCA funding is a valuable catalyst for the growth of New York's creative ecosystem and a critical driver of the well-being of all New Yorkers and the state's economy.

NYSCA's core focus is grant making to non-profit arts and cultural organizations and artists. In 2021, NYSCA awarded \$41 million to approximately 2,500 organizations and artists in all 62 state counties. NYSCA is immensely grateful for the Governor and Legislature's historic \$105 million investment in the arts for FY2022. Since June, NYSCA has worked expeditiously to provide almost \$40 million in FY2022 funding across all 10 regions of the state through our first two rounds of funding, including much-needed support for live performance.

Routine review of internal policies, external communications, and public-facing materials is crucial to NYSCA's key strategic priority to lead in promoting fairness and access. Included below are examples of agency-wide practices that are vital to NYSCA's transparency initiatives.

NYSCA is pleased to provide the following summary of how the agency interacts with the public. NYSCA's executive team reviewed agency policies and procedures on transparency in preparation for the following report.

- ***What public meetings does NYSCA hold?***

NYSCA's meetings of its appointed Council, Committees of its Council, and its delegated appeals panel are public meetings subject to the New York State Public Meetings Law. NYSCA meetings are open to the public at the NYSCA office in New York City.

- ***What information does the agency make available on its website and in social media?***

Our Website: NYSCA external communications aim to be clear, concise, and informative. Our website is continuously updated to reflect the most current information, and quickly adapt to changing circumstances. Examples include regular updates to our Resources Pages; expansion of our non-agency grant opportunities pages to include [Relief Funds and Business Support](#); and reorganizing our website to make a centralized FY2022 grant opportunities page on our website that featured all guidelines, technical manuals, and updates in a simple and accessible format. All NYSCA press releases are available on the NYSCA website, [here](#).

Meeting Archive: The NYSCA public meetings archive is maintained on our website for public reference, [here](#). This archive includes the meeting agendas, which are posted at least 3 days before each meeting, and meeting transcripts and a recording, which are posted following distribution of grant notification letters. The primary activity of Council and Committee meetings is the approval of grant awards, each of which are publicly posted promptly after each meeting, and the distribution of award letters, in a searchable format on the NYSCA website.

Letters to the Field: NYSCA is committed to disseminating regular letters to the field from our Executive Director and the NYSCA team. Any member of the public is welcome to sign up to receive letters on our website or by emailing a staff member. We regularly encourage any member of the public that reaches us to sign up to receive the latest NYSCA updates. Updates we share through our mailing list are also made public on social media and or on our website.

Social Media: Our social media portfolio has grown over the last year to reach our grantees in new ways as COVID-19 made in-person convening more difficult. Information we share on our website is also shared across our social media profiles. We aim to post at least once a day, and always convey urgent arts and state messaging. NYSCA hopes to continue to elevate its social media presence to reach the maximum number of New Yorkers via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

- ***What access does the public have to engaging with the agency leadership and providing input?***

NYSCA leadership and staff regularly participate in meetings for the public, applicants, and grantees.

NYSCA Meetings: All staff attend each Council and Committee meeting, and executive and program staff regularly participate in Council and Committee Meetings, providing valuable context for grant recommendations and trends across the arts sector.

NYSCA FY22 Grants Opportunities: Prior to March 2020, NYSCA staff hosted in-person information sessions across the state which are important opportunities for the public to learn more about NYSCA and meet our staff. This year, all FY2022 sessions (7 live webinars and 2 recorded technical webinars) were held virtually to meet the current health and safety requirements. These virtual sessions, which included live Q&A portions, were hosted by NYSCA staff members and recorded and shared on our YouTube channel and our [FY2022 Webinars Page](#). The final FY2022 opportunity webinar for Capital Projects will be held in the fall.

NYSCA staff also participated in 8 virtual “office hour” sessions, providing direct support to applicants. NYSCA offered these sessions at various times, including 8AM and 5PM, to accommodate applicants’ various work schedules.

NYSCA Presents: NYSCA launched our NYSCA PRESENTS webinar series in May 2020 to discuss topics relevant to our field, including the Excelsior Pass, the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG), and the New York Forward Loan Fund. Recordings and presentations are available on the NYSCA website, [here](#). Members of the public could ask questions to presenters and agency leadership as part of these events. All of our webinars are free and open to the public.

Outreach: NYSCA staff members are also encouraged to identify possible cross-sector collaborations, such as NYSCA’s Creative Aging initiative, and to facilitate convenings to discuss trends and needs within our field, such as the Diversity in Orchestras (DiNO) meetings and the Arts and Technology Breakfast.

- ***What are the information requests most commonly sought from the agency and the areas of greatest public interest?***

The direct contact information for all staff members is included on the NYSCA [Contact Page](#). NYSCA also maintains a help email box which is monitored during business hours and inquiries are directed to the appropriate staff member for response. All staff members frequently respond directly to inquiries of all types. The most frequently asked questions are about our grant application and awards process. NYSCA regularly updates its FAQ pages on its website to reflect questions that are commonly sought from the agency.

NYSCA responds to FOIL requests as received in compliance with the FOIL law. The most common request is for information regarding NYSCA's current and past arts and cultural grantees. NYSCA typically has only one or two pending requests open at any given time.

- ***What does the agency do to solicit input from the public?***

Over the last five years, NYSCA has taken significant steps to streamline our application process and to create greater avenues for access to NYSCA funding. Feedback from the field is crucial to this process and planning. To achieve this, applicants and grantees are highly encouraged to reach us directly with their feedback and NYSCA regularly disseminates grant process surveys to both applicants and panelists.

NYSCA recently conducted a survey to all FY2022 Round 3 applicants regarding their experience throughout the FY2022 application process, which received almost 500 responses. These findings will be utilized to plan for FY2023. Additionally, in 2018, NYSCA hosted ten in-person meetings across the state and two virtual meetings as part of our strategic planning process, reaching almost 800 individuals.

The panel review process is a cornerstone of NYSCA grantmaking and vital to centering the public's voice in our work. NYSCA selects a diverse group of professionals from across the state to fulfill the advisory panelist role. Panelist nominations are received on a rolling basis and approved by Council annually to serve 1–3-year terms. Panelists' expertise spans every discipline represented in NYSCA's grant programs as well as many facets of non-profit management. NYSCA regularly solicits feedback and reflections from our panelists, and panelists are regularly invited to share their experiences at our Committee and Council meetings.

II. Proposed Plan to Expand Transparency and Expected Timeline

NYSCA is pleased to provide the following information on the processes and policies we have identified for improved transparency and public accountability.

- *What plans does your agency have to improve transparency with respect to expanding information you make available to the public, filing timely reports with the legislature, complying with Project Sunlight, timely compliance with FOIL, compliance with Open Data NY, reducing costs for and easing access to for agency data and records, expanding agency participation in public and community events and increasing access to and public participation in meetings, hearings and decision-making?*

NYSCA has identified 3 immediate goals for the period through December 2022:

- Relaunch state-wide listening series as part of annual grantmaking planning.

- Conduct a review of the NYSCA website to assess functionality, accessibility, and clarity of materials.
- Conduct a review of NYSCA's [FOIL webpage](#) to update the subject matter list and post frequently requested information.

NYSCA staff will carry out these goals using existing resources.

III. Measures of Success and Long-Term Monitoring

In this section, you can explain how your agency/authority intends to monitor and assess the changes implemented, including any metrics you will use, to ensure that your initiatives are serving to increase transparency and expanding opportunities for public access to information and participation in government meetings and decision-making.

NYSCA will implement regular communications updates to Council as part of the public meeting. This will include any substantive changes to available materials on the NYSCA website as well as metrics from our website and social media platforms to assess high-traffic pages and engagement. When available, we will also share any findings from NYSCA-developed surveys as well as new studies and research pertaining to the arts. This information can also be readily shared at virtual and in-person events.

NYSCA looks forward to continuing virtual events and expanding meeting accessibility capabilities. We also look building upon our established webinar structure to develop hybrid meeting models once we relaunch in-person meetings. A hybrid in-person/virtual model will provide contact and support for organizations and artists in more remote areas that experience limited internet service.