

Illinois Equitable Grant Making Assessment Initiative
Constituent Survey Report ◀

Prepared for the Illinois Arts Council by the
National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

December 2023



Contents

Introduction	3
Who Responded to the Survey?	4
Summary Charts	4
Why Don't Organizations Apply?.....	11
Summary Charts and Comments.....	11
FY2023 Operating Support Process	14
Summary Charts and Comments.....	14
Ways to Improve the Operating Support Process.....	19
IAC's Equity Work	25
Summary Charts and Comments.....	25
Constituent Communities and Equity Work.....	30
Communities Served.....	30
Examples of Language Used to Describe Priority Populations.....	32
Ways IAC Can Support Organization Efforts in Underserved Communities.....	32
Section 504 Self-Evaluation Workbook Support of Accessibility Efforts.....	37

This report was prepared by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in partnership with the Illinois Arts Council.



Cover photo: Sun Foundation Art and Science in the Woods, summer program

Introduction

In 2023, the Illinois Arts Council (IAC) and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) embarked on the Equitable Grant Making Assessment Initiative (EGAIN). EGAIN is a collaborative effort to examine the agency's grant making through an equity lens, in order to identify funding gaps and recommend strategies that the agency can pursue to reduce barriers to arts support. EGAIN is a mixed-method assessment that includes both quantitative and qualitative components. The aims of the initiative are to:

- Analyze the demographic distribution of IAC's general operating support awards (unrestricted grants that provide support to an organization as a whole rather than funding a particular project).
- Engage IAC constituents in providing feedback about their needs, experiences and perceptions.
- Identify equity strengths and weaknesses in IAC's approach to general operating support funding.
- Recommend applied actions IAC can take to work toward greater grant-making equity.
- Serve as an evidence base in the agency's case for the resources needed to reach more Illinois communities with state support.

This report summarizes the findings of one component: the constituent survey. For this portion of the EGAIN assessment, an online survey was developed to solicit feedback about the impact of IAC's grant programs and how they can be more responsive to community needs. The survey was sent to all organizations that had applied for an IAC grant in the past five years. It was open from June 29 to July 17, 2023, and resulted in 376 complete and valid responses.

Top-line findings from the constituent survey were presented in a project briefing to select IAC staff and board members on July 27, 2023. This report is a complement to the briefing follow-up materials. It includes the same charts used during the briefing, slightly updated to reflect the exclusion of one survey response that was found to be invalid. It also includes summaries of written comments that were submitted; comments have been edited for clarity and to remove identifying information. A copy of the survey was provided in the briefing follow-up materials; text from the survey is provided here where it would provide useful context.

The charts presented here summarize responses from all respondents. Some demographic breakdowns were possible, in the categories below. When there was a sufficient number of responses to yield reliable data about differences among demographic groups, those differences are noted.

- Organization type: arts or cultural organization, non-arts organization
- Budget size: \$50K or less, \$50K-\$249K, \$250K-\$999K, \$1M+
- Geography: rural, urban; Cook County (Region C), Chicago suburbs outside Cook County (Region B), outside Chicago metro (Regions A and D)
- Years awarded grants: five years or more, less than five years

- Applied for fiscal year 2023 operating support: yes, no, not sure

Partners in Excellence (PIE) applicants were broken out as a subgroup where relevant.

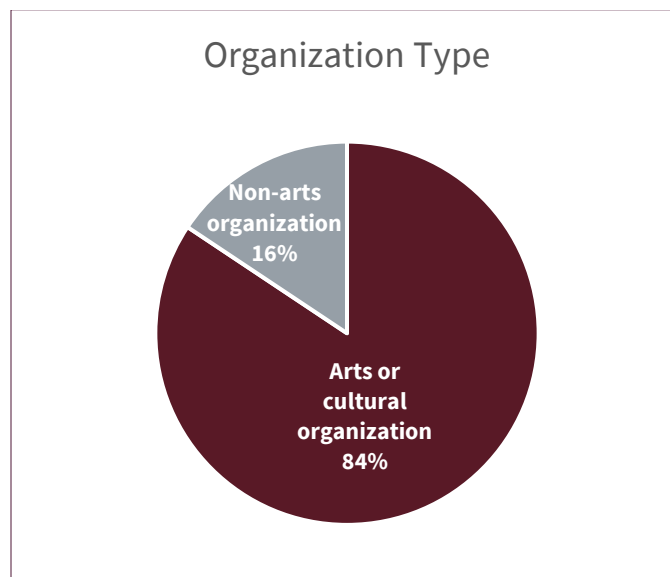
Another important function this report serves is to present detailed information about the qualitative data gleaned through the survey, which provided multiple opportunities for respondents to make open-ended comments. Constituents were very responsive to those invitations to weigh in, with more than 1,400 comments offered.

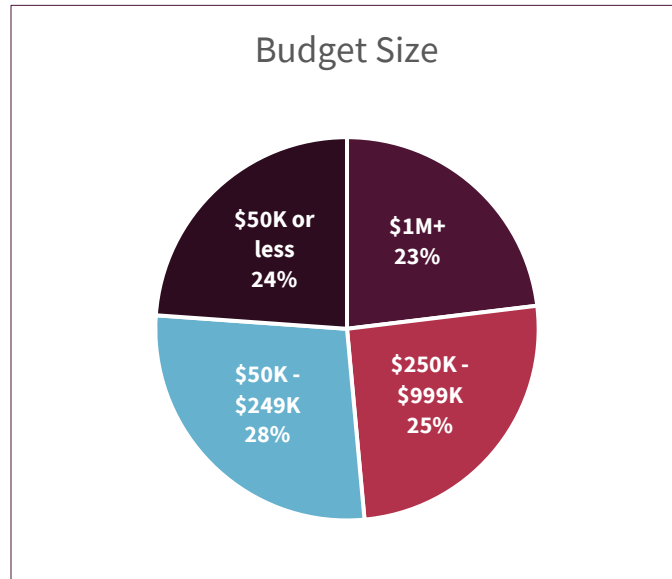
As might be expected in a state with the size and diversity of Illinois, many divergent needs and contradictory opinions were expressed. When using this data to inform IAC policy and practice, it is important to notice those variations as well as points of convergence. When similar ideas were expressed by multiple constituents, this report highlights themes emerging from the data.

Who Responded to the Survey?

Summary Charts

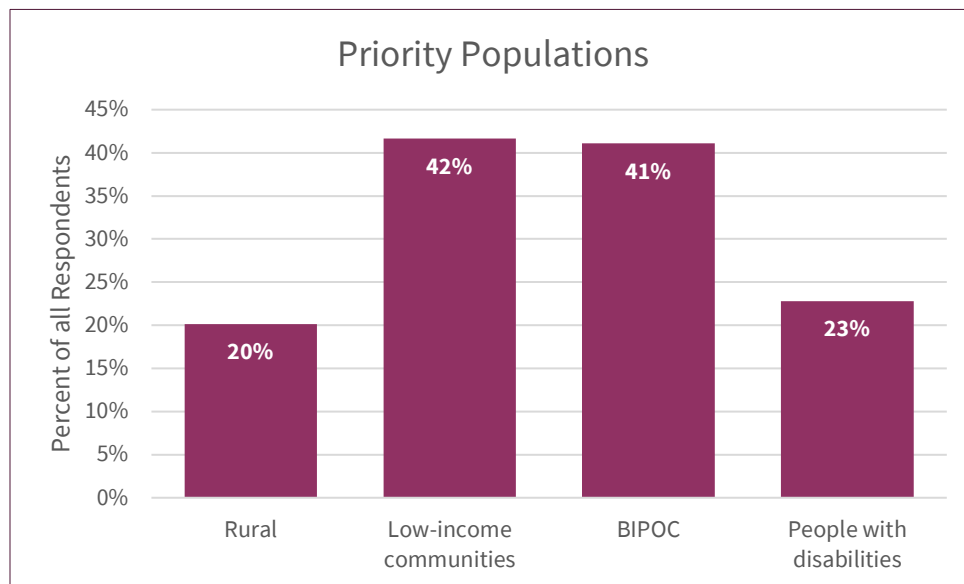
Organization Characteristics





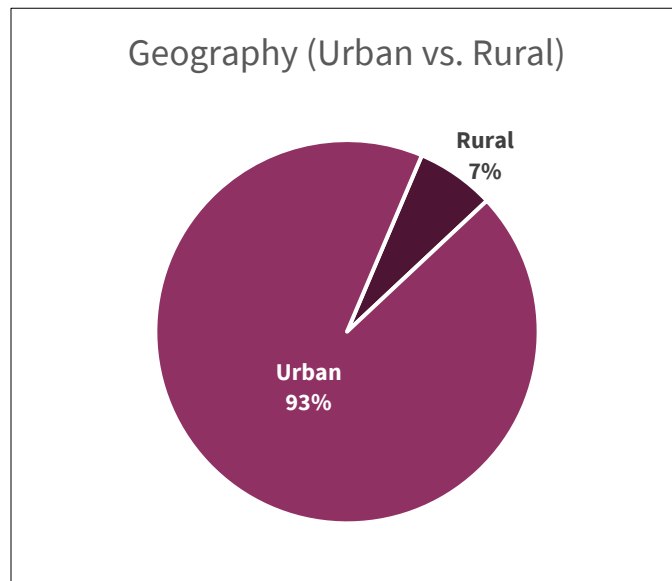
Priority Populations Served

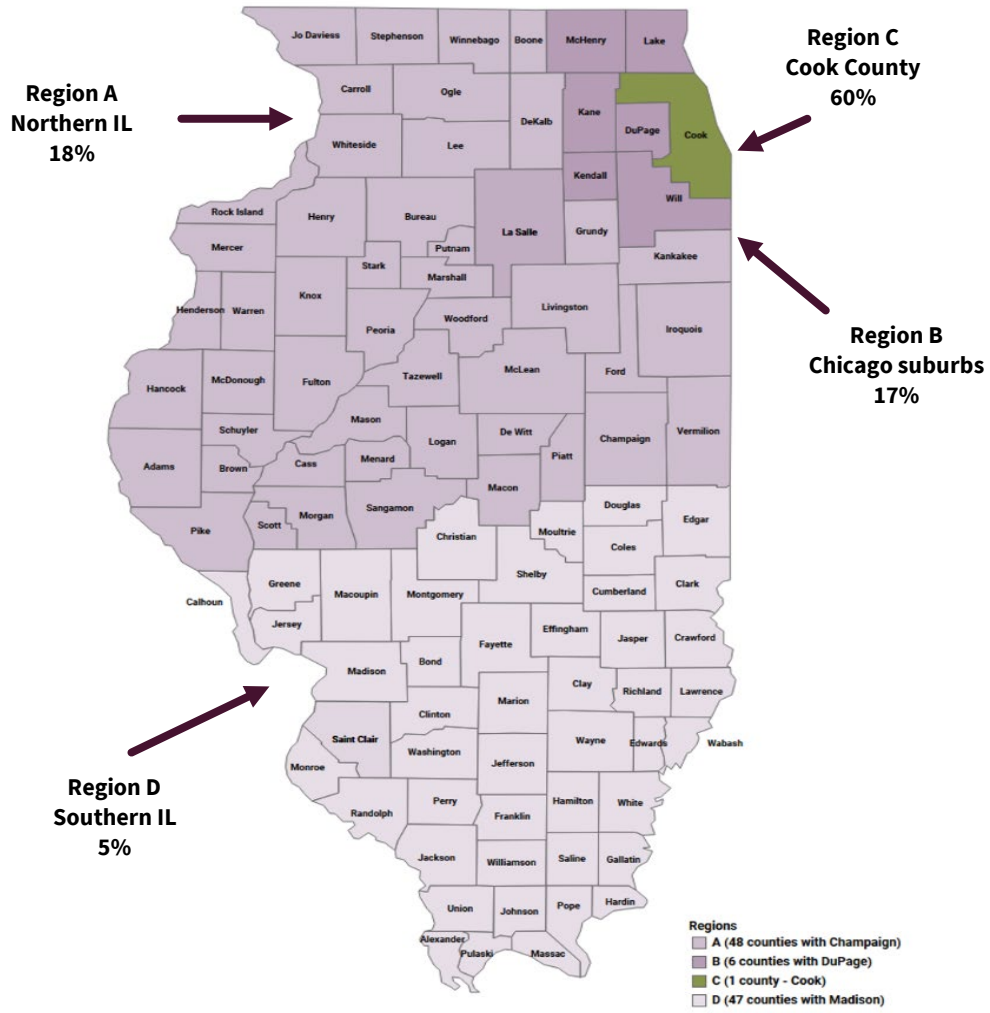
Respondents were asked "Does your organization primarily serve one of the specific populations listed below?" and were allowed to mark as many of the four options as were applicable. Note that 61% of respondents selected at least one priority population. (BIPOC is an acronym for Black, Indigenous and/or people of color.)



Geography

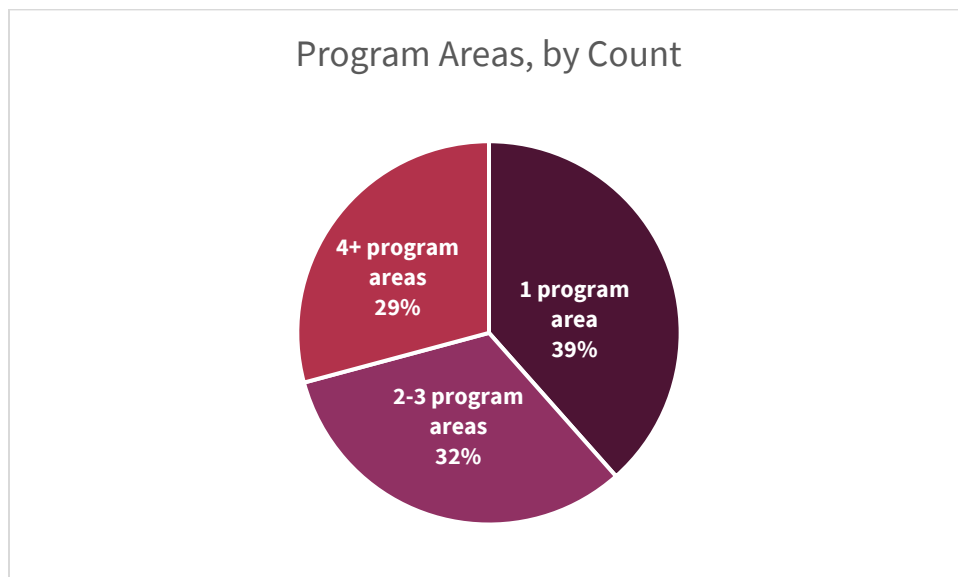
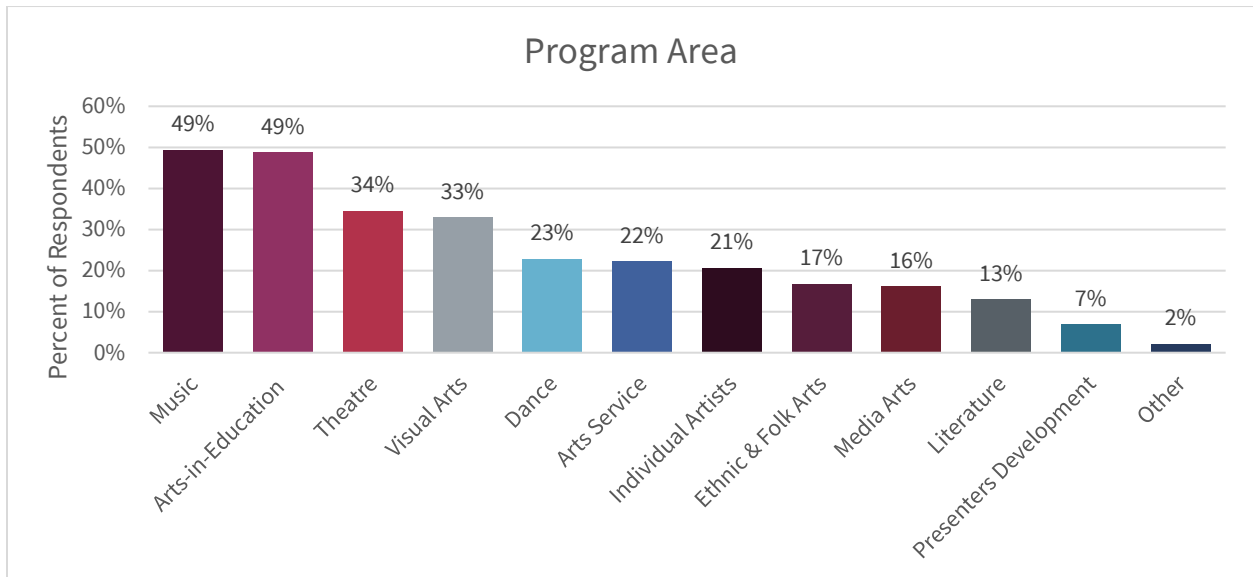
Respondents were asked to identify the county their organization was located in. Rural and urban designations align with the definitions used for NASAA's grants data analysis. Regional designations are those used by IAC for the Partners in Excellence program.





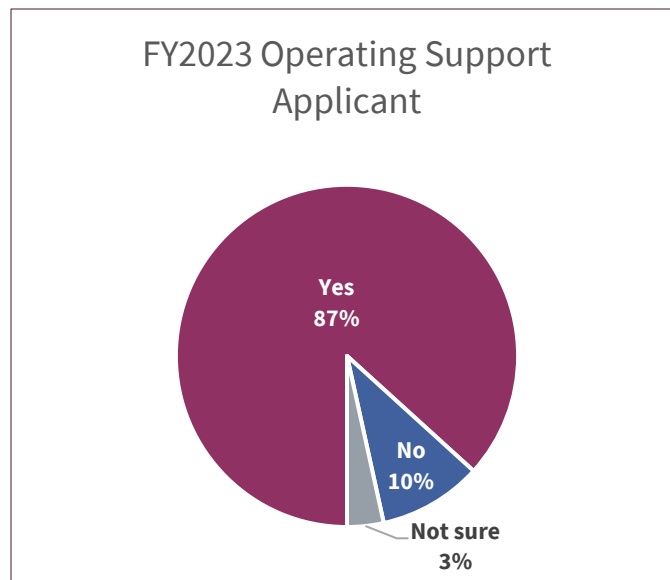
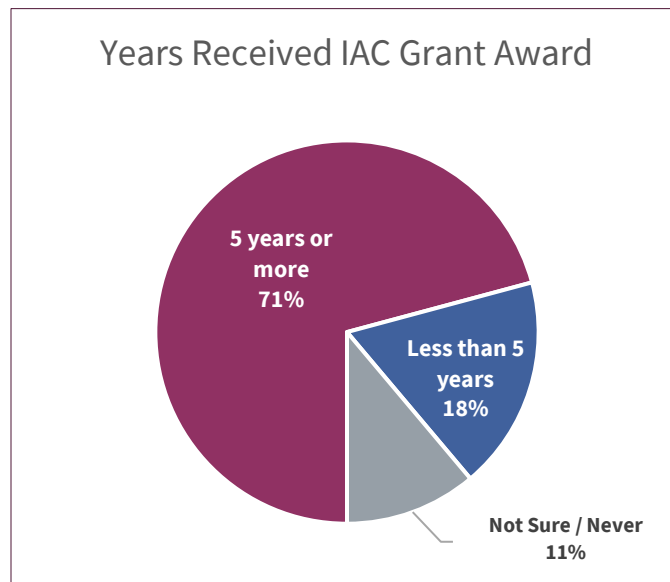
Program Areas

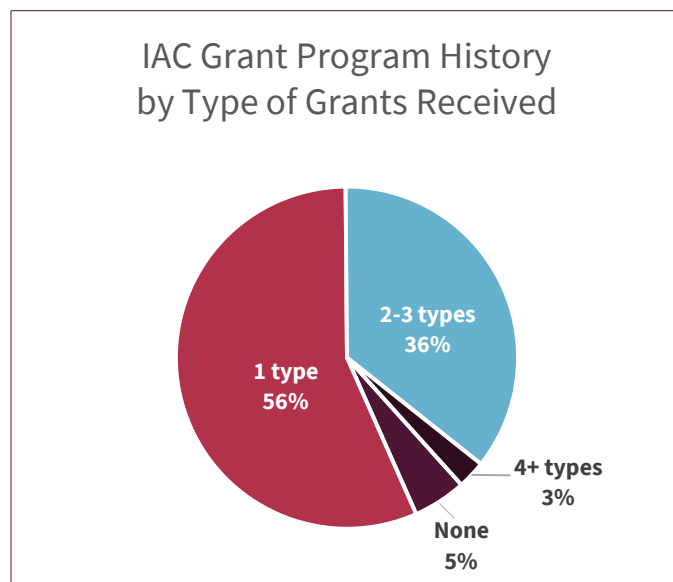
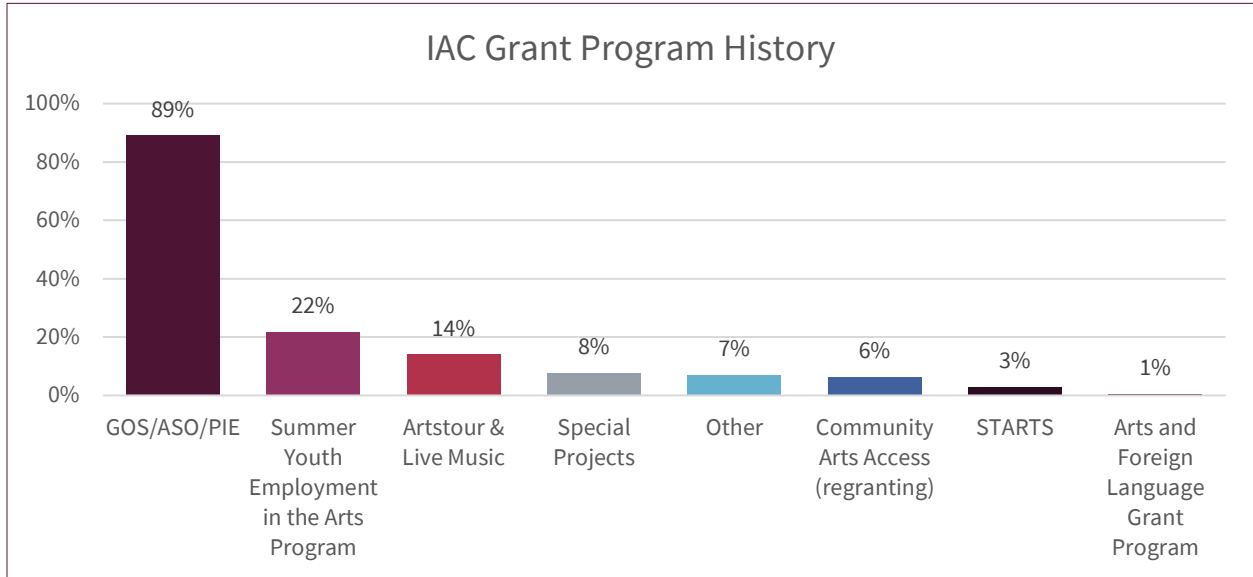
Respondents were asked to select all of the program areas that their organization worked in; options presented were the artistic disciplines and areas that IAC uses to organize grant-making programs. When applying for a general operating support grant, organizations are required to choose one program area. Note that 61% of respondents indicated they work in more than one program area.



History with IAC

Respondents were asked how many years they had received IAC grant awards, the types of grants received and whether they had applied for FY2023 operating support. Note that some questions in the survey were relevant only to respondents who indicated "Yes" to this question and some were relevant only to those who indicated "No" or "Not Sure." Note also that GOS refers to a general operating support grant, ASO refers to IAC's Arts Service Organizations grant and STARTS refers to the agency's Short-term Teaching Artist Residency program.

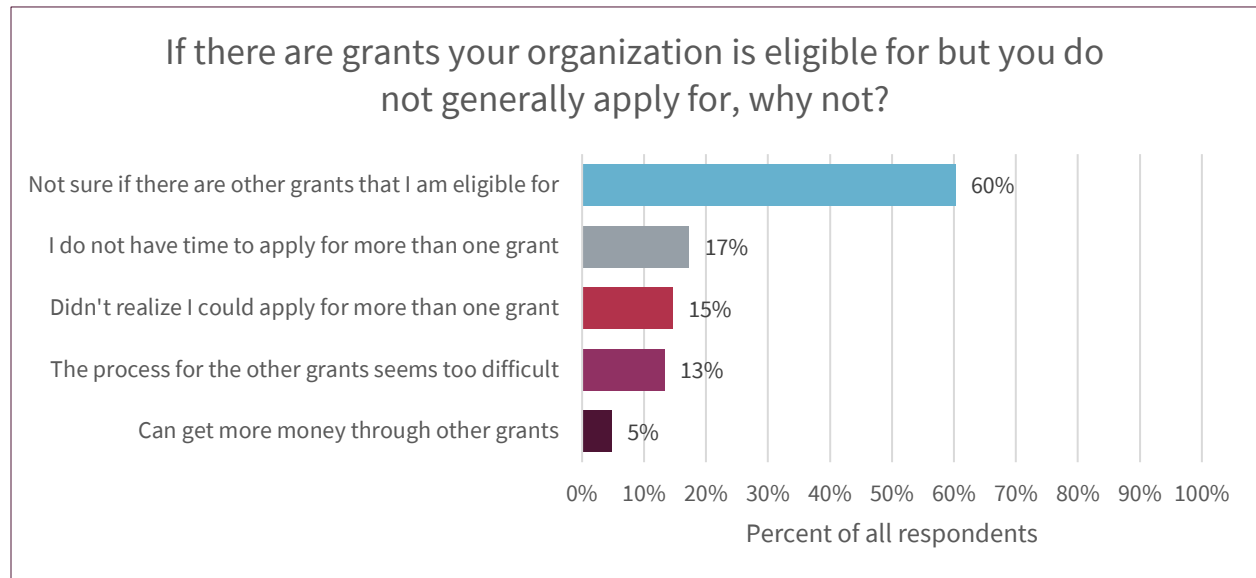




Of the respondents who indicated receiving only one type of grant, most (but not all) had received an operating support grant.

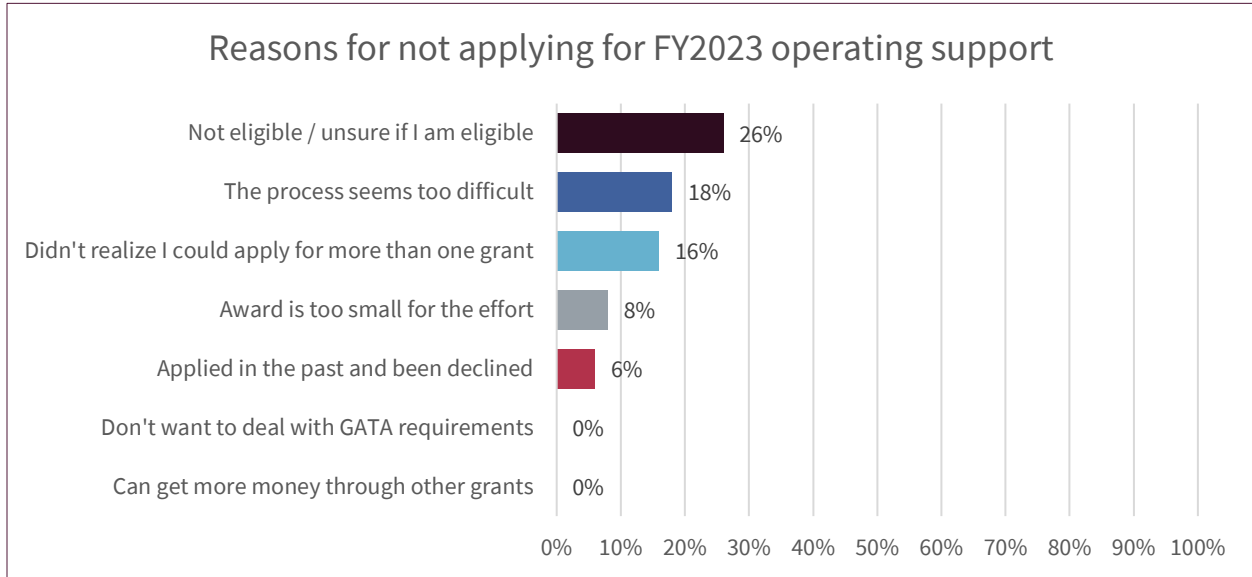
Why Don't Organizations Apply?

Summary Charts and Comments



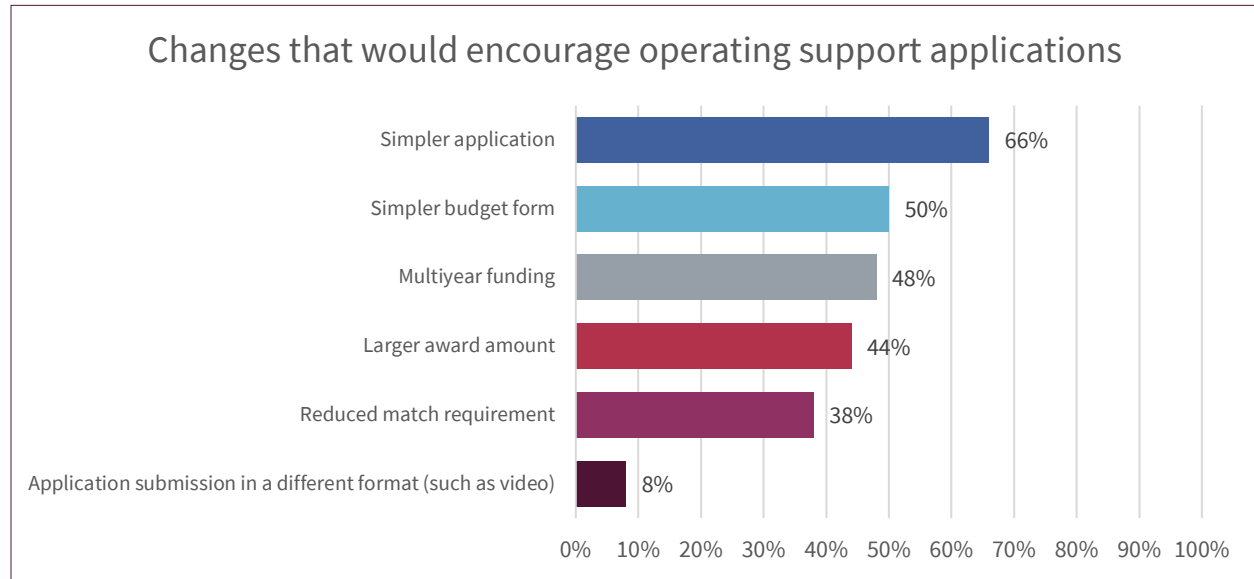
"Not sure if there are other grants that I am eligible for" was by far the most frequent response, regardless of respondent demographics. Groups that were most likely to state this were organizations with a budget size of \$50K or less (68%) and that had received grants for less than five years (68%).

The remaining charts and comments in this section are from the 13% of respondents who did not apply for an operating support grant in FY2023. Note that GATA refers to the Illinois Grant Accountability and Transparency Act.



In addition to the options presented in the chart above, 17 respondents provided write-in responses. Write-in responses included reasons related to:

- Organizational capacity: staff shortage, staff turnover, time constraints, understaffed, missed deadline
- Organization transition/newness: transitioning mission statement, just received nonprofit status
- Existing IAC policies: could not meet match
- Misconceptions: did not have a project that would apply, virtual programming during pandemic



In addition to the options presented in the chart above, respondents were provided the opportunity to write more substantial feedback about what changes would encourage an operating support application. There were 17 relevant responses.

Many suggestions were related to the **application** content and process:

- A simpler application process with an interview in step with our [IRS Form] 990s and our historical story
- An interview as a way to apply would be awesome!
- If it is an easy process with easy recordkeeping we might be able to apply more often.
- More frequent deadlines, perhaps quarterly
- Simplicity is the most important factor for us.... A simple form to determine eligibility/ acceptance would be very helpful, even if we had to complete additional steps after receiving [an] initial confirmation.

Other suggestions were more **policy** focused:

- Grants that support living wages for artists and which are not tied to the output of work
- The grants are not going to people who need grants the most, the individual artists.
- Any outreach to add more collaborative projects with larger-budget organizations would help small and midsize companies.
- The creation of dance requires more resources than most other art forms ... more support for dance artists.

Some responses stated **misconceptions** about IAC and the operating support programs:

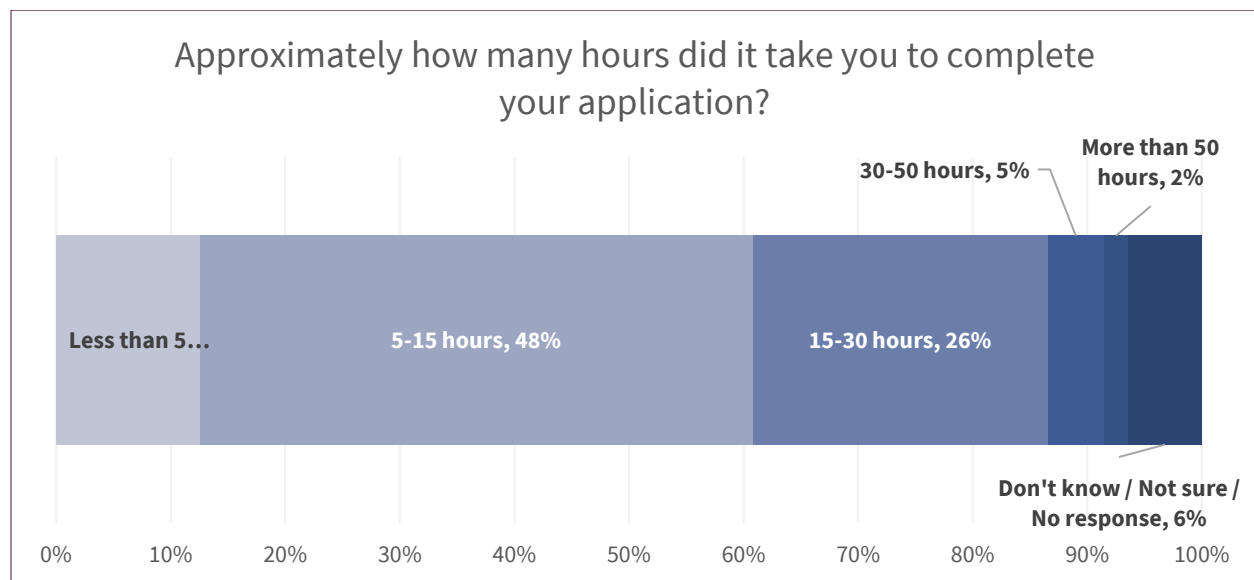
- [City] is not within the Chicago city limits and may not be eligible for an application.

- The continuing emphasis on underserved populations seems to apply mostly to [racial] minority groups.
- Due to the age of the organization, we were ineligible ...
- We believe our program is ignored and intentionally denied ...

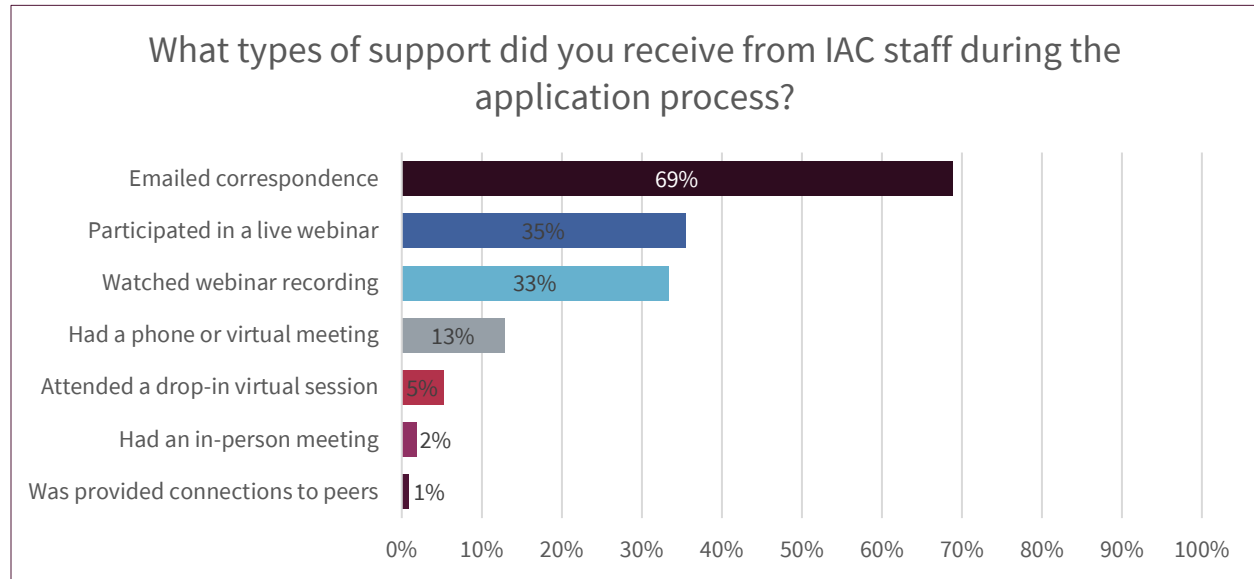
FY2023 Operating Support Process

Summary Charts and Comments

The charts and comments in this section are from the 87% of respondents that applied for an operating support grant in FY2023.

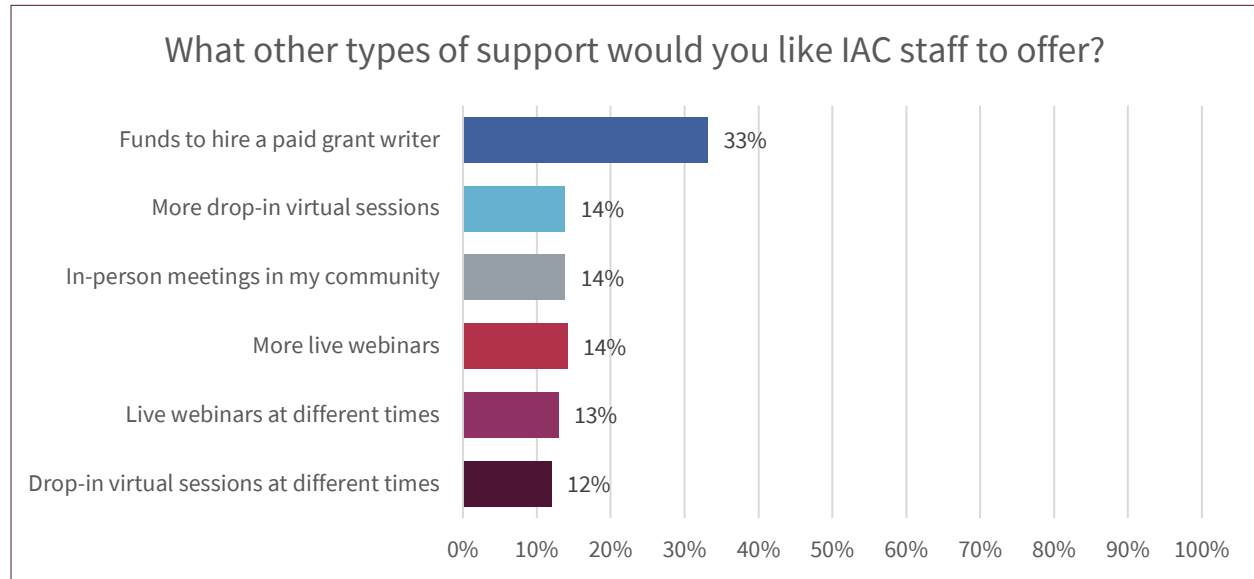


Respondents who were more likely to say the application took more than 15 hours to complete were non-arts organizations and those in the \$250K-\$999K budget range. Note that there were not enough responses from first-time applicants to determine whether they spent more or less time than the general applicant pool.



Some demographic breakdowns:

- Emailed IAC staff: This was the most frequently selected option. Regardless of demographics, more than two-thirds of respondents indicated they received this type of support.
- Participated in a live webinar: The largest-budget organizations (\$1M+) and non-arts organizations were more likely to participate in a live webinar (40%). The smallest-budget organizations (\$50K or less) and those outside the Chicago metro area were less likely to participate (28% and 30%, respectively).
- Watched a webinar recording: More likely to watch a webinar recording were organizations in the \$250K-\$999K range (43%) and those in the Chicago suburbs (39%). The largest-budget organizations (\$1M+) were less likely (26%).
- Had a phone or virtual meeting: More likely to have a phone/virtual meeting were organizations outside the Chicago metro (17%) and non-arts organizations (25%).



Respondents more likely to select "Funds to hire a paid grant writer" were those who have received grants for less than five years (53%), those with budgets of \$50K or less (46%) and non-arts organizations (38%).

In addition to the options presented in the chart above, 32 respondents provided write-in responses.

Many of the responses requested specific **types of technical support**:

- Live chat
- Live telephone support
- Office hours for phone-in help with specific issues
- Help with technology
- Example grant applications
- Feedback regarding both successful and unsuccessful applications
- Recorded webinars on specific topics available on demand
- Video tutorials focused on specific elements of the application/report process, similar to the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts]
- Opportunities to interact with other applicants to learn about any tips and tricks they have come up with for navigating the process
- Timely responses to questions would be great. It was a HUGE challenge to get through to staff. Would you consider hosting an event for us to meet the staff?

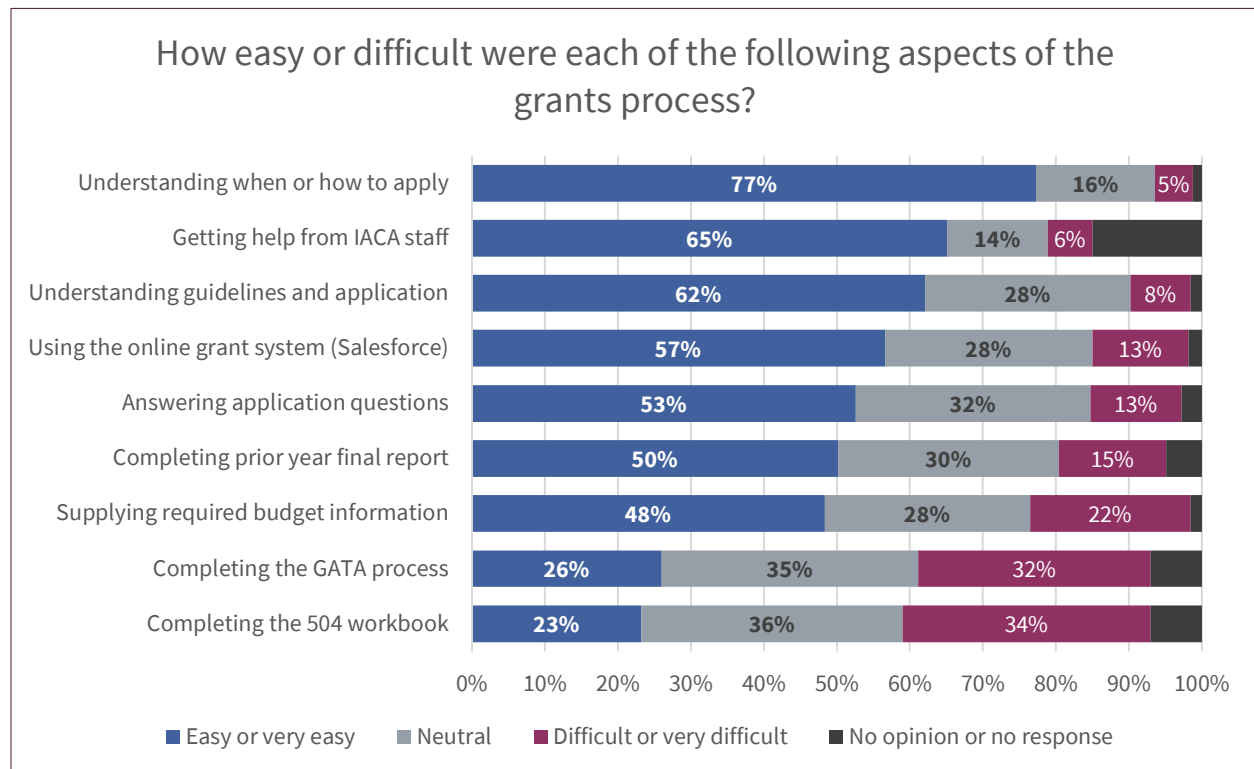
Several suggestions were about **improved documentation, communication and technical changes**:

- Enable Salesforce to allow more than one user per application.
- Flexibility in forms for when data doesn't easily match categories
- More clarity if receiving multiple grants - it's hard to track dates and deadlines for multiple [awards].

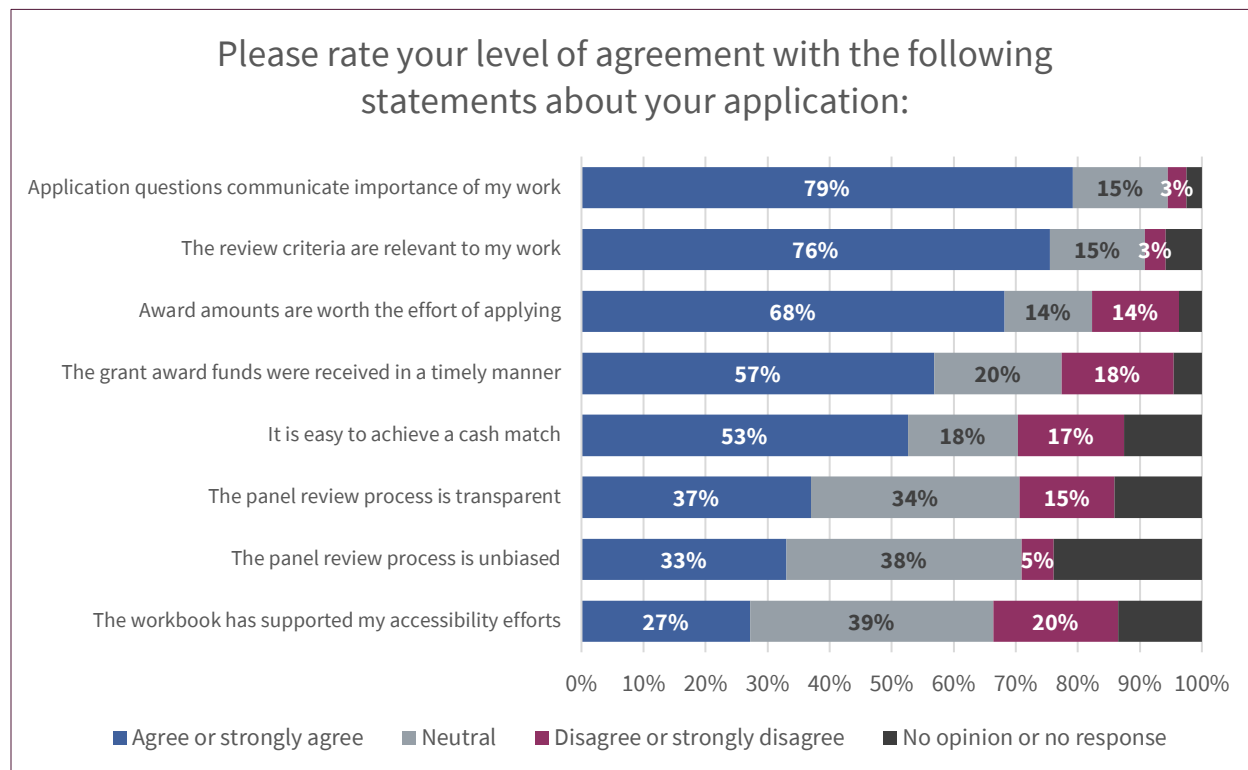
- Continue and improve explicit instructions for logging into online applications and submitting applications or reports. The website is occasionally ambiguous (to me, anyway) and I would have made mistakes if I hadn't listened to the oral instructions in the webinars.
- More written guidance about the budget submissions - unclear as to the time period.
- Printed guide showing Salesforce data entry requirements. Right now, you have to just start filling it out without knowing what will be asked.
- Website links to be streamlined/fixed
- Printed FAQs on the website

There were also suggestions for **changing the application process:**

- A simpler/easier application process
- Automatic funding
- I think for returning grantees, there could be an interview process instead of an application where staff from IAC can reference your previous year's application and discuss whether or not things have changed. No additional paperwork on our end.
- Less complicated application and a more current/updated and flexible 504 [the section of the Americans with Disabilities Act covering entities receiving federal financial assistance] worksheet.
- More grants
- More streamlined applications that could be applied to other funders



Organizations with the smallest budgets (\$50K or less) were most likely to have difficulty completing the GATA process (40%) and completing the 504 workbook (45%).



Among these application factors tested, the transparency of procedural information about IAC grant decisions and the utility of the accessibility workbook received the fewest favorable ratings. Timely distribution of awards, ease of meeting the matching requirement and impact of the accessibility workbook received the most "disagree or strongly disagree" ratings.

Some demographic breakdowns:

- Application questions communicate the importance of my work: PIE grantees were less likely to agree with this statement.
- The review criteria are relevant to my work: Organizations less likely to agree/strongly agree with this statement were those with budgets below \$50K and those outside the Chicago metro.
- The panel review process is transparent: Organizations with budgets below \$50K and \$50K-\$249K were less likely to agree/strongly agree, while PIE grantees were more likely to agree.
- The panel review process is unbiased: Organizations with budgets below \$50K and \$50K-\$249K were less likely to agree/strongly agree.
- The [504] workbook has supported my accessibility efforts: PIE grantees were less likely to agree with this statement.

Ways to Improve the Operating Support Process

Survey participants were invited to write in responses to this statement:

Please provide any suggestions about how IAC could improve the application process or make operating support grants more responsive to your needs.

There were 181 responses, which were categorized and have been summarized here.

The most frequent type of comment was a request to **simplify the application process** (33 responses). Comments that were specific or actionable:

- It would be very helpful for organizations such as ours, that have applied and received grants for many years, to not have to re-state our history, mission, goals, etc. every year. Maybe short updates for some of these categories would suffice.
- It is ironic that the grants that give out the most money have the shortest applications, and the ones that give the smallest grants have the longest applications with multiple reports, worksheets and attachments.
- Shorten application process for those organizations who have received funding more than 5 years.
- This year's expedited process was very helpful as it did not require us to resubmit previous information that had not changed.
- In an ideal world, there would be a "common app" (like college admissions) that can be used across all kinds of funders so that smaller organizations don't have to spend a huge amount of time tweaking language from one grant to another.
- Narrative sections (e.g., "To what degree goals were met" and "Details as to the methods used") might be more useful in a multiple choice format with space for additional comments, rather than in narrative form.
- The application is really long. We would love to see it shortened. For instance, asking for history/mission and key leadership bios in three sentences or less (or some other short blurb) respectively. It would also be helpful if the Final Report more closely aligned with the application itself and was more direct to the question "did your organization do what it said it would do in the application, yes, or if not, why?"
- I hope you drop the requirement to have a D&B number to complete GATA, as that is a significant hurdle for a small non-profit organization with no real estate holding.
- It would be helpful to simplify the application based on operating budget. The amount of time to thoughtfully answer the questions can be challenging given the volunteer status of our grant team.

- The application for small organizations that do not have paid staff or own or rent space should not be as complicated.

A specific aspect of the application process that generated feedback was **budget information** (15 responses).

- We very much need to be able to put in audited in-kind figures inside of budgets. Our donated services are quite large and would affect grant awards.
- Our budget headings and the form are really tough to reconcile. It's the most time consuming part of the grant process. Our budget is totally public and FOIA able so it would be great to upload that instead of trying to jam our numbers into a form that mostly doesn't apply.
- Accept alternate documentations as is (like an audit).
- My biggest frustration is the requested budget since the categories do not match our organizational budget structure. It should be enough for us to submit our annual budget in our own template.
- Final prior year report is challenging for us because our budget cycle which operates by fiscal year is incongruous to the grant budget cycle.
- Budget format needs to be standardized in a way that aligns with other grants. Currently, IAC application budget form tries to be both a P&L statement and Balance Sheet: it asks for income, expenses and also cash forward. I fail to understand why cash forward exists in a P&L form. What ever happened to DataArts? It was a great idea.
- Many applicants don't know how to fill out their budgets, and many panelists do not know how to read them, and there is no review process to filter or standardize this information. So, without standardization or supervision from an accountant, budgets on the application form might not as useful as it might be expected.
- Reformatting our financials to meet your requirements has often been a time consuming process. Thank you for simplifying it recently.
- A Financial Summary template that follows the format of standard 990 reporting would be a great simplification. A lot of time is spent reworking financials into the IAC template format.
- The form did not work easily for us because of the large amount of money we had to draw down from our endowment.
- For small organizations, it's time consuming to have to justify all 25% differences in budget line items between fiscal years.
- Three years of financial information is difficult.

- We have received plenty of feedback from the financial side about the awkwardness of the timing with the fiscal years/calendar years/grant timeframe not lining up.... If this process can adapt to a common fiscal or calendar year, this would greatly simplify the process.

The second most frequent type of comment was about understanding the mechanics of the application process, including requests for **clearer documentation** (25 responses).

- It is also a little confusing to have to flip between the application and an outside pdf with the application instructions which is found on a different website. It would be nice if all the instructions were included on the application itself.
- The last application appeared to not allow us to do partial updates and come back later to finish updating. This is necessary since multiple people work on the various sections.
- For the grant report, the format was such that we were not aware of character limits until we got to that part of the report in Salesforce. Since there were initial screens that took longer for me to complete, this resulted in me writing answers to the report narrative questions, which I only discovered had to be cut down by 30+% when I was going to submit the report.
- Sometimes it takes a long time searching to find pertinent information, and sometimes links go nowhere. If no information is available, a simple link to a page still working is better than a looped cycle that seems like I, "the user," am searching in the wrong place; or that the information exists but the site link is incorrectly listed (meaning I could be missing information that the IAC has but the page is hiding from public view).
- Allow for more information carry-over and profile saves.
- Instructions for access to the online application and submitting applications or final reports are not clear on the web page.... Clear instructions about this were given in the webinars and later repeated in some written instructions, allowing me not to make errors, but the web page itself could be improved.
- [When] receiving multiple grants it's confusing to navigate deadlines.... I would like Salesforce to be the only method of communication.
- It is crucial to know before submitting the application what we are committed to: things like guaranteeing a match, GATA registration and accessibility requirements, etc.
- Allow the entire package to be downloaded for easier review and accessibility.
- The multiple places information lives - GATA, Salesforce, IAC and passwords needed is a lot for one grant. Would be easier if all lived in one space.
- The current system only allows you to go through certain sections in one pass – any time you exit, you have to start over. Also being able to print out/PDF export a quality copy of all the responses with attachments helps a ton for file-keeping purposes.... If the plan is to keep

Salesforce, it may help to send out a template of the most recent application/reports each year so that we can pre-fill everything ahead of time.

There were many comments about the **funding formula**, including questions about the current formula and suggestions for how it could be changed (20 responses).

- Don't know if general operating support is tied to organizational budget size, but it seems like it is. I discourage this practice because it rewards those organizations that already have the most resources with the wealthiest communities of supporters, directing more funding to wealthier and Whiter organizations rather than poorer organizations/communities and organizations of color.
- I have been doing this 8 years and I still don't know where the grant amount comes from.
- I think evaluating the funding formula for operating support grants would be helpful.
- It would be helpful to know what factors the review panel considers in determining the amount of a grant to be awarded. Our grants have decreased in the last two years and have been below what we had budgeted. More transparency in this area would allow us to forecast our grant revenue better.
- If weight is placed on self-reported in-kind contributions and volunteer hours, more guidance to the determination of these values should be provided ...
- Based on the evaluation of their annual performance reports, gradually and significantly increase the allocated amount each year.
- Increase funding annually at least at the rate of inflation.
- Publish the grant formula. How is 'who gets how much' determined?
- I am unclear on the review process for funding at this point.
- The ability to include a specific financial amount requested could improve the process.
- We strive for high standards, and we would like to know that the quality of our work has an impact on the amount and availability of our funding.
- Provide ANY feedback on why the grants are so small.
- I think the percentage plan for awards needs to be reviewed for smaller organizations.
- Larger grant amounts not tied to a percentage of previous year's budget as this hinders organizational growth
- A more apparent discussion of the panel/review process and how the final dollar amounts are assigned would help with the transparency and overall understanding of the process.
- The fact that we can't request a specific amount of funding for General Operating Support and are locked into a low percentage of our annual budget makes growth next to impossible.

Organizations with a history of fiscal responsibility and a convincing proposal should be able to request larger amounts of funding than are currently made available to us.

Several comments (13 responses) mentioned **multiyear funding**. A few that included specific feedback on this shift:

- Would love the continuation of multiyear support for returning application through a less time-consuming process (like what was offered this year).
- Loved that you did automatic renewals this year – Multiyear general operating funds better help organizations to plan ahead and also free up staff time to do the work.
- Multiple year grants take some of the pressure off the process.
- Multiyear grants for established applicants with simple report and reapplication process in subsequent years
- It would be extremely valuable, especially for smaller arts organizations, if operating support grants were renewable for at least two, preferably three, years.
- For previously supported orgs, it would be nice to predict what funds are coming and maybe make operating grant support over 2 year period to reduce staff effort in grant writing and follow-up.

Several comments (12 responses) were about the **grants time line**—the length of it, the uncertainty around specific milestones or long waits for payments. Examples of comments:

- It would be helpful if the turnaround time between the grant being approved and receiving payment were shorter.
- Receiving the payment as late as January of the next year is very difficult from a cash flow perspective.
- If anything, I would suggest more notice as to when the applications are due, if possible. I think the time line has been around two months time from getting the instructions to submitting the proposal.
- The FY2024 grant process was very simple. However the fund disbursement seems delayed.
- A lot of the hard part has to do with the timing of the applications and the grant monies. It is very confusing trying to keep track of which year the application is for (we operate on a calendar year) it would be simpler if the FY was calendar based.
- I don't mind the extensive application. Not having to wait quite as long for funds to be disbursed would be helpful.
- More clear and consistent information on the time line for receiving notification regarding status of grant and when funds will be received. Our General Operating Grant still says submitted and I have not received word about the status. The process was streamlined this

year and it seemed like we would automatically receive the same award as last year but I have not received an approval of the grant or a grant award.

- Being more timely with receiving awards would make it easier to budget for expenses – it doesn't help when we receive funds close to the end of the performance season.
- It would be nice if there was a time line available for when we should expect to learn if we received a grant, when the acceptance of the grant would be due, and when we can expect the award to be received.

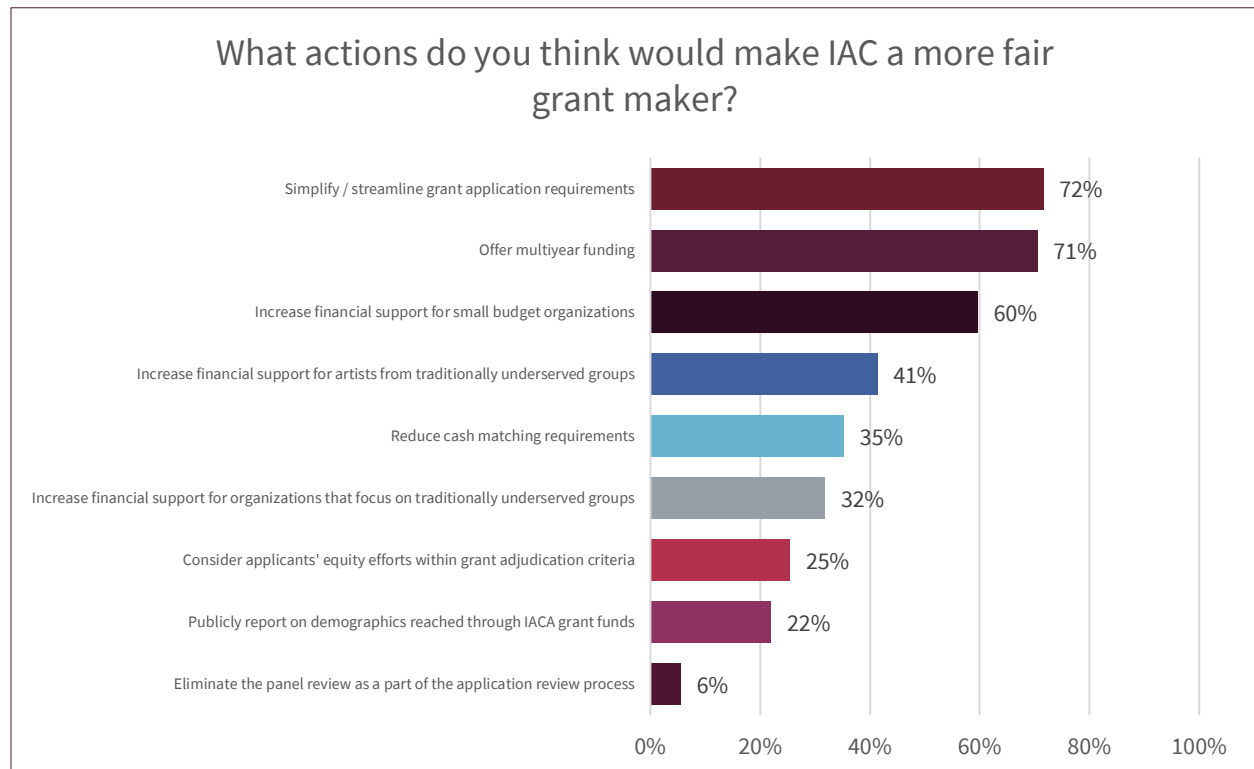
There were some comments about the **panel process** (10 responses), primarily expressing a desire to observe the process.

- The review panels used to be open to watch. Since the pandemic, the panels have gone into closed sessions and feedback is much harder to get.
- Would like clearer notification of when the grants are discussed so that applicants can sit in and learn from the process.
- It would also be beneficial if organizations were given their scoring so that they would have the ability to improve in those areas where they scored lower.
- Invite us to the review hearings so we can learn how to improve and can meet IAC staff.
- The peer review is not always transparent. We used to be able to go in and hear what reviewers say about our organization. That was helpful to us. It would be nice to attend peer reviews again via Zoom.
- A more apparent discussion of the panel/review process and how the final dollar amounts are assigned would help with the transparency and overall understanding of the process.
- Receiving any rubrics or scoring from the review could help us better identify areas to improve, rather than guess.

IAC's Equity Work

Summary Charts and Comments

These questions were asked of all respondents.



The top three choices were the same regardless of respondent demographics, with two notable exceptions. Both organizations with budgets \$1M+ and Partners in Excellence grantees were much less likely to choose "increase financial support for small budget organizations," at 26% and 35%, respectively.

In addition to the options presented in the chart above, respondents were provided the opportunity to write more substantial feedback about what actions would support IAC's efforts to become a more fair grant maker. There were 76 responses. Excerpts of the majority of responses are provided here. Much of the written feedback reiterated the desire for a simpler application process. Some offered specific **ways to make the process easier**, as well as other changes:

- Use a two-phased adjudication process – and test for eligibility in the first one.
- Allow for site visits, interviews, and videos to provide information on the organization instead of formal academic writing of essays.

- Consider similar-sized budgets of organizations together so that size is tiered. Consider city/town sizes, type of industry in the service area, rural versus city/suburban.
- Consider the major funding loss spanning multiple years that many arts organizations are experiencing that threatens to reduce programming capacity and/or staff size.
- Make sure awards aren't based on budget size. This is inherently inequitable.
- Increase the amount of possible awards by increasing the percentage allowed. With a cap for organizations with an annual budget of over \$1M
- It has always seemed a bit unfair that legacy arts organizations that have huge budgets and large staffs ... have been receiving some of the highest grant amounts.... Those same amounts for a medium or small organization can be game changing.
- Put less emphasis on revenues/expenses of the organization and more on the impact to the communities served in Illinois.
- Raise the minimum amount you give out.
- Give as many general operating grants as possible to as many Illinois organizations as possible.
- The in-kind donation section has always been somewhat confusing and ... odd. Not sure how that adds to value or if it would somehow reduce grants.
- We would like to see more oversight of local arts council utilization of IAC funds intended to address the needs of local arts organizations.

Specific comments about the **panel process** were offered:

- I have no sense of who is on the review panel, but, if you're not already, perhaps inviting panelists from different companies to serve on the panels (obviously with an honorarium for their work) would bring in some diverse perspectives?
- I really love the panel adjudication process and would be sad to see it go. While I also think it's a valuable way to decentralize decision-making and bring multiple perspectives to the table, it was also tremendously helpful professional development for me to hear how an application I wrote is read and perceived. Few other funders offer this opportunity.
- Share review panel comments.
- Pay special attention to the selection of panel members for grant allocation to avoid the risk of favoritism, retaliation, injustices and inequity.
- Reveal how peer reviewers are selected and change them each year. Not sure you are already doing this.
- Transparency in the grant panel rankings, sharing the overall score of each section so we know what area to focus on.
- Perhaps stream the panel review. Traveling [for] hours and spending parking money for a short discussion is not a good way for us to spend our resources.

Several responses provided more insight into respondents' thoughts about **multiyear funding**:

- Multiyear funding is a great idea since the nature of the programs does not change. However we completely understand the diligence needed in yearly process.
- Multiyear funding of 3-5 years would be SOO helpful, with yearly interview check-ins.

- Multiyear funding sounds like a good idea for the organization, but it is not necessarily good for monitoring/evaluating the use of state funding, especially for smaller and newer arts organizations.

These comments were about providing support for **smaller or new organizations**:

- Start-up funding for agencies in their first 5 years could be beneficial, especially to underserved groups.... There is a learning curve to the IAC process, so such a category could, for example, be the place where application requirements are simplified and streamlined, and where panel or staff reviews could more of a teaching time than a judgement.
- Applicants that are new to grant writing will need assistance, preferably from locally based mentors.
- Grants to small organizations are extremely worthwhile and well spent.
- I have to imagine small budget organizations have been one of the biggest sufferers of the pandemic.
- I think IAC's efforts would be more helpful to smaller organizations who may not be making the majority of income from selling tickets to shows, but rather are doing work in which those they are reaching either don't have exposure or resources to have the arts as a part of their communities.
- IAC could help small organizations by providing a staff of grant writers who could be assigned to help complete the application. This would provide real support to small organizations working with minuscule budgets to serve marginalized communities.
- Organizations that are just starting are often the ones that need the most help, but as I understand it, an organization cannot apply for a grant unless they are at least a year old.

There were **geographic concerns** expressed:

- I'd like to stress that the economic strains on our [specific downstate region] are ramping up. Requiring matching funds from rural and low income populations at the same level as the well-funded and more elite institutions will only increase the distance between the haves and have nots.
- Increase funding for downstate organizations. So much of the funding seems to be dedicated to Chicago and surrounding areas.
- My concern in terms of fairness is equity between the Chicago area and the rest of the state. Until recently everyone south of I-80 was considered less viable.
- While we understand the large number of arts organizations in Cook County, the percentage of IAC funds that are awarded to these organizations seems skewed. The majority of people that have served on the review panel also seem to be from Cook County.

Some respondents expressed concerns about **taking away money from existing grantees**:

- All performing arts orgs need subsidization.
- Please recognize that arts organizations still need help presenting art to traditionally well-served populations.... The reality is that ALL arts need support and funding to be possible.

- ... not at the expense of existing grants. Similar to the new school funding formula, maybe the existing base could be kept and a portion of new funding could be directed to diversity efforts.
- Advancing equity is extremely important. It is, however, often framed as a zero sum narrative. This reduces the process and the goal and obfuscates the fact that the pie should be made bigger, not that it should just be kept the same and cut up differently.
- It is necessary to fund organizations who might have been traditionally under-served or under-funded, while continuing support for grantees with a strong track record of excellence, utilizing Illinois artists, and reaching under-served populations.

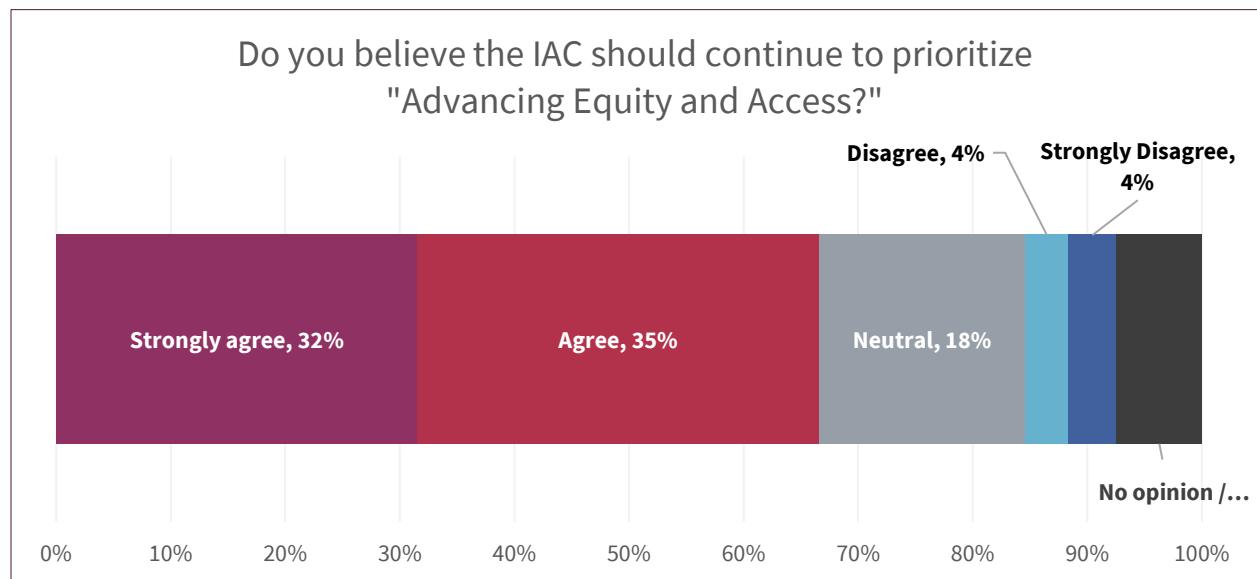
There were **divergent ideas about what constitutes equity** and how it could be measured:

- If you are located in a market that is not very diverse, it is impossible to meet all equity and access requirements.... If 13% of your market is non-white, this means a small percentage of the non-white are engaged in the arts.
- Rural orgs like mine will likely show less outreach to BIPOC communities ... we work really hard to increase access for seniors and veterans ... and both of these are important underserved groups that sometimes go unnoticed in these discussions.
- Lots of organizations can come up with language about their equity work, but I'm curious how you would truly measure it.
- Develop a better understanding of what equity challenges exist for populations outside of major metropolitan areas.
- Ensure that organizations that are serving artists are able to pay their staff an equitable wage, and that they pay artists appropriately as well.
- We are finding in equity work that reporting demographics is difficult due to the positive trend in only reporting demographics that are received through self-elected reporting. This is great, but it often means that we are missing reporting on groups we are serving that fall into traditionally underserved communities because the self-elected reporting is inconsistent.
- It is important to define what it means to belong to or provide service to a group that qualifies as "underserved" [or] "BIPOC" in a manner that is considered "Equitable." All these terms are very fluid, very difficult to measure quantitatively, and different organizations express their level of involvement and success in this area with various degrees of confidence in their rhetoric.
- The IAC needs to continue to evaluate an organization's equity work within the context of that organization's mission.
- We believe that the awarding of a grant should be a reflection of the value and quality of the work that a recipient does, in accordance with certain well-established artistic and educational standards.

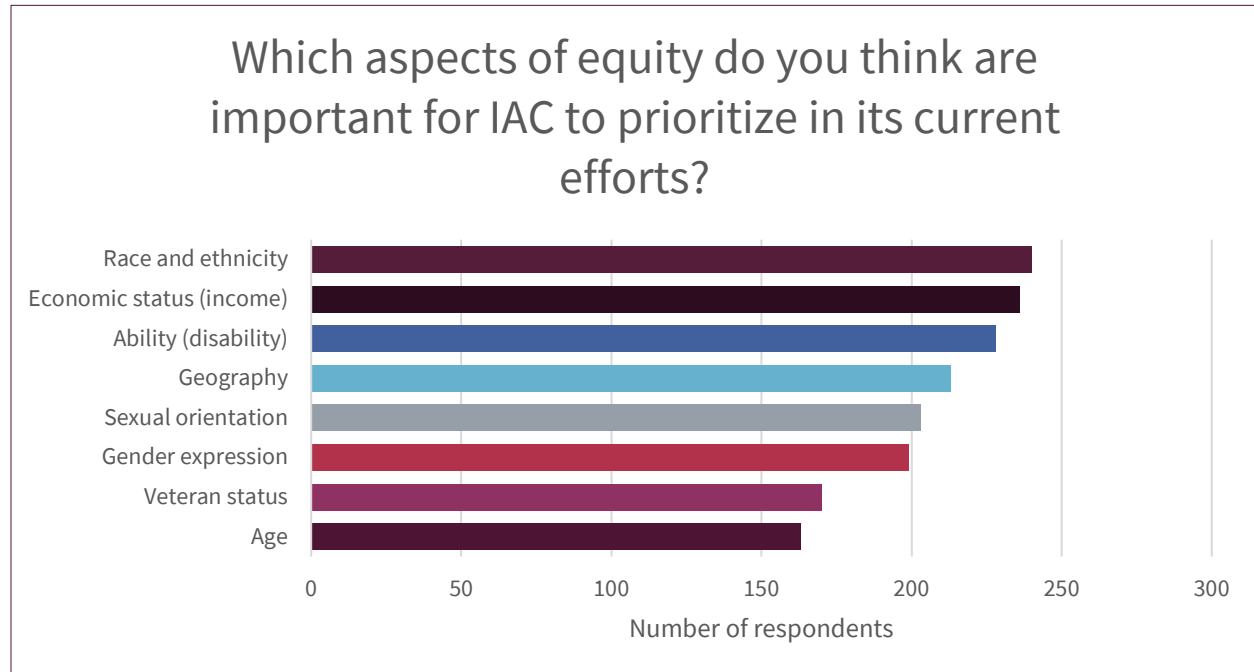
Echoing points made earlier, there were requests for IAC to increase its **transparency**:

- I would like to see demographic breakdowns of where grants are awarded.
- I would need to have a much greater understanding of organizations that apply to IAC to give you an answer.
- Make your mission and vision extremely clear in the grant guidelines.

- More transparency in the review process and providing a greater understanding as to how the grant amounts are determined.
- You could increase transparency by publishing a report on the grants awarded. The grant end report information could focus on how the grant benefited the organization. The report could be furnished to grantees prior to the next grant application to allow them to improve their submissions.
- Keep applicants informed when there are overall budget increases from the state.
- Understanding the rubric of how the grant amount is determined



Organizations more likely to agree/strongly agree were those with budgets \$1M+ (79%) and Partners in Excellence grantees (80%). Organizations less likely to agree/strongly agree were those with budgets less than \$50K (52%) and those in the Chicago suburbs (55%).



A few respondents wrote in additional categories: artists (3 write-ins), citizenship status (2 write-ins) and language (2 write-ins).

Constituent Communities and Equity Work

Communities Served

Respondents were asked to write in a response to the prompt below. The word cloud graphic represents the most frequently used words in those responses; the more frequently the word was used the larger it is in the word cloud. As can be seen in the word cloud, many responses described populations served in general terms.

Please describe the community your organization serves. Your community may be based in a specific geography, culture, and/or artistic discipline. It may also be based on other factors, such as shared life experience or creative interests. Please be as specific as possible so we can better understand the types of people that benefit from your organization.

Examples of Language Used to Describe Priority Populations

BIPOC communities: People of color, BIPOC, minority, artists of color, non-white, black and brown, Black and Brown folks, African American, African-American, Black, African, African diaspora, Latino, Latine, Latinx, LatinX, Latino/a, Hispanic, Hispanic/Latino, Mexican descent, Puerto Rican, Native American, Indigenous, Asian American, Pan-Asian, South Asian, South Asian American, Pakistani, Indian diaspora, Indian, Korean, Korean American, Japanese American

Disability communities: Disability Community, mental illness, hearing impaired, autism and other neurodiverse conditions, developmental and physical disabilities, trauma related to military service, developmentally disabled, intellectual and developmental disabilities, disabled community, Deaf and disabled, Down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, special needs, people with disabilities, people with Autism, visually impaired

Rural communities: Rural, an area that traditionally lacks access to the arts, downstate rural, farmers and blue collar workers, agricultural-based, small farming community, geographically underserved, shrinking population and increasing poverty, [many references to town and county populations]

Low-income communities: People with limited financial means, low-income neighborhoods, inner-city, economically distressed, at or below the poverty line, family income no more than 300% of the federal poverty level, lack of perceived employment and education opportunities, low-income families, neighborhoods with a high occurrence of Factors of Social Vulnerability, low-income communities, poverty-level households, constituents self-identify as being in financial need, household income under \$50K

Ways IAC Can Support Organization Efforts in Underserved Communities

Respondents were invited to write in responses to the statement:

How might IAC further support your efforts to reach and include traditionally underserved populations in your organization's work?

There were 297 responses, which were categorized and have been summarized here.

Many responses were requests to **continue providing operating support** (43 responses) and to **increase the amounts of awards** (33 responses). A few examples:

- Operational and capacity support from IAC greatly impacts our ability to reach and include traditionally underserved populations.

- Increased funding from IAC could help us connect with additional venues to reach new audiences and to help us increase our marketing efforts.
- Increase grant sizes allowing for program growth and staff retention.
- General Operating funds continue to be a game changer for our organization.
- If we could secure more cash and even get back to our funding levels from 20 years ago—that would take the pressure off of the budget to pursue new initiatives and to take risks.
- Additional grant funding, multiyear funding

By far the most common type of feedback offered (68 responses) was **support for a specific project or aspect of the organization**. While many offered suggestions that were particular to the needs of their organization at this time, many did specifically state that having a project grant opportunity to fulfill this need would be welcome. It is important to note the many different needs and project ideas expressed in these comments. The lack of a single recurring or unifying theme here suggests that constituents want highly flexible funding—whether it be organizational support or project support—that can be readily deployed to address either programmatic or operational needs.

A representative sample of responses:

- Offer grant opportunities of significant amounts that allow for physical accessibility.
- If there were programs that were directly related to transportation costs to get people here that would be helpful or ticket sponsorship programs that allowed us to grant tickets to underserved populations more.
- Funding that would allow us to create community space and events for underserved populations would increase the overall awareness of our diverse programming.
- We need additional funds for marketing to a wider community. We would like to reach out more, but the cost is prohibitive for advertising. We don't have staff who could handle that assignment, so perhaps a part-time stipend for that person would help.
- Additional funds that would be earmarked to serve those who cannot afford to either attend or participate.
- Our greatest need in this area would be support of salary and benefits for dedicated engagement staff.
- Provide special grant funding for programs targeted specifically to underserved populations.
- Allow project grants for collaborative projects.
- For this to happen, we would need to have an outreach coordinator throughout the year.
- Support for transportation and discounted/free tickets.
- Funding to hire a community outreach person
- Provide specific grant program funding for close-captioning, ASL interpretation, and free performance programming to very small organizations (< \$50K - \$100K annual budgets)
- Include funding support for community engagement initiatives designed to help connect those with limited access to the arts with world-renowned artistic programming and productions.
- Special funding opportunities to support targeted efforts would also be extremely helpful.

- We need funding to increase touring for these small shows to now return to the facilities which have been closed to performers for years. They no longer have the budgets of \$200-300 to cover the shows.
- If we were to expand our offerings beyond our studios to better serve underserved populations (via a satellite program for example) we would need to be in the position to pay additional staff to coordinate the program and hire specifically trained faculty.
- If there were funds to help offset the costs of transportation, housing and meals for youth, that would be extremely helpful.
- Additional funding from IAC would allow for expanded marketing efforts to under-served and under-resourced communities; subsidies for tickets to under-served patrons; subsidizing transportation costs.
- Project support that is limited to programming targeting underserved populations
- With the support of special grants, we can make it possible to implement programs that involve visiting schools and community centers situated in underserved communities.
- IAC might be able to connect and align organizations' work in this type of scenario through accessible "Special Projects" types of grants.
- Significantly more funding to support our marketing efforts to reach the communities where we perform would be the most helpful at this time.
- Capacity building - more money for Engagement positions who spend most of their time working with community partners and assessing needs of community
- Specific funding (or direction to other grants) for increased accessibility, such as assistive hearing devices, the price of which is prohibitive given our population and income/expense margin.
- Offer support beyond organizational support, such as community engagement grants to gen-op recipients.
- Could you provide funding for us to offer fellowships or residencies specifically for artists from groups who bring diverse viewpoints, such as younger artists, non-white artists, artists who come from traditionally underserved communities? I'm imagining a program offering funding on a periodic basis similar to the funding offered, for example to employ teens during the summer - which is an amazing opportunity to teach young people that working in the arts is a viable career choice!

Many comments were about **capacity building** (31 responses). There were requests for help in developing relationships with priority underserved populations, but there were also requests for other types of capacity building.

- Offering consultants on how to make our new space fully accessible
- Any assistance IAC may offer to help us build new relationships and reconnect with lapsed key donors would be greatly appreciated.
- Technical assistance and best practices for reaching Spanish speaking population beyond translating materials
- IAC can further support our efforts by encouraging other grantees and community partners to incorporate access needs and the disability perspective into their work and programs.

- Assistance or resource support to help an organization create an endowment
- We need to recruit more members and board members from diverse communities. We need help making these experiences beneficial for the participants. Our local government is undergoing cultural competency training. Maybe something like that would help?
- Assistance with grant writing. We are an all volunteer organization with no grant writing experience.
- Amplify the importance of artists in neighborhoods and support organizations building the capacity to collaborate directly with communities to support their desires/interests and give resources to those communities.
- Could provide some equity trainings to grantees, or coordinate partnerships with other orgs (like ArtsEquity or Enrich) to provide no- or low-cost equity trainings for staff and boards, or even artists.
- Research and assessment tools to assist in quantifying our impact would also be helpful as we attempt to grow support.
- It would be helpful if the IAC could provide more information about communicating with traditionally underserved populations. The IAC has previously published some helpful sources of information about agencies that provide visual or audio aids for people with disabilities. More of this type of information would be useful.
- The IAC could provide guidance on how to engage specific groups. We have some difficulty in reaching the Hispanic residents.
- Could the IAC provide workshops on how to attract volunteers and train volunteers? Could the IAC create a database/website to recruit volunteers?
- We struggle to attract BIPOC to our chorus, maybe the music is not appealing, or as a very white-presenting chorus, we don't look appealing. Breaking down such social barriers is something we could use help with.

Raising visibility was an aspect of capacity building that was mentioned in several comments (15 responses).

- More promotion of the amazing and important work of arts educators
- I think it would be helpful if IAC shared more opportunities with funded organizations to share their information with underserved populations.
- IAC can also assist in marketing and communications of grantee work to these populations, messaging our free admission and programming.
- Sharing information about our organization as a grantee of IAC would be very helpful.
- Assistance with messaging and visibility would help us broadcast the good work we do more broadly.
- Any marketing that could be done to make sure our BIPOC and low-income communities know about us would be helpful.
- Help arts organizations publicize relevant programming directly to the communities through marketing/visibility campaigns.
- A marketing effort to let potential schools/partners know about the work that organizations like ours do would be very helpful.

- Any opportunities to promote our work and programming in traditionally underserved communities can bolster our impact.
- We are in close contact with school social workers and teachers to help us identify students in need. IAC could help with promoting our program to those professionals.

There were also many comments (29 responses) that expressed a desire to **learn about promising practices** and **connect** with other organizations and artists.

- Providing best practices and ideas from other successful programs around the state
- Helping us connect with Chicago-based companies that have interest in rural issues would be a great step.
- The IAC can assist us by helping find the musicians and craftsmen that we lack in our area and possibly help cover some of the costs of bringing them into our region.
- Providing a list or "catalog" of artists or programs that would be willing to come to our area would be extremely helpful to us.
- It would be interesting if IAC asked grantees for specific metrics around their outreach efforts, even if attaining those metrics is not a contingency for funding.
- Provide research/information/ideas about programs that have been successful in other communities—and host a webinar series with panel members from those organizations.
- The IAC has the best overview of what is happening in the arts in Illinois and therefore could help facilitate relationships between arts organizations. Some of this already takes place, but a more hands-on approach would help organizations support and participate in activities that are meaningful to traditionally underserved populations.
- Be the hub of collaboration for the fine arts colleges across the state. Create a shared graduate assistantship to provide the research and data to support our programming and diversification goals.
- Provide information on ways our students can access artistic performances for free.
- Help connect performing groups with rural audiences by providing a networking opportunities.
- Create a network among our rural community arts organizations. There is much that we of course learn from our urban partners, but some of their struggles are not applicable to our rural obstacles, and being able to reach out to another rural community leader or have discussion groups or meetups that are specifically rural would be helpful.
- Providing contacts of targeted areas/high schools and contacts would be of immense help to outreach efforts. Additionally the curriculum guides for grades 6-12 created for our digital exhibits could be shared with faculty of underserved communities.
- Create networks and sharing convening among awardees doing similar work or from similar areas.

Providing targeted funding for specific populations was requested by some and discouraged by others. Comments ranged from dedicating funding to organizations that embedded within the four priority populations, to supporting organizations outside to do outreach, to maintaining the status

quo. When interpreting this data, it is important to recall that a majority of respondents are located in the Chicago metropolitan region.

- Have more funding opportunities for BIPOC communities and programming.
- Targeted grant opportunities for BIPOC organizations
- To better serve these communities it would be wonderful if the IAC could partner us with organizations within these communities that would be interested in seeing the work we do as it aligns to their needs. Funding can be explicitly made to be used in these communities.
- If there is a specific grant project that targets underserved populations, that would be very helpful to plan and implement a project for them.
- Fund more Indigenous arts programming from Indigenous organizations and not Indigenous-adjacent organizations.
- We are intentionally reaching out to underserved populations. IAC can help with continuing grant support for our programs designed to reach these populations.
- Providing more funding targeted specifically for low-income students
- We have received project grants for emerging artists of color; making that a regular option instead of a specialized program would be helpful.
- Perhaps some sort of funding could acknowledge that the populations that need art funding the most have the least ability to pay for it.
- Money for programs which reach these underserved populations
- My hope is that the IAC will not shift funds or priorities away from gen ops in an effort to reach underserved populations.
- Create funding specifically for lower-income populations, regardless of race, location, or ability.
- Help us serve the general population and lobby politicians and social service organizations to help underserved communities.

Section 504 Self-Evaluation Workbook Support of Accessibility Efforts

Respondents were invited to write in responses to this statement:

Share some details about how the Section 504 Self-Evaluation workbook has supported your accessibility efforts.

There were 124 responses, which were categorized and have been summarized here.

Some comments (21 responses) provided examples of how the workbook prompted insights that **supported** accessibility efforts.

- We lease our facility and this gave us impetus to make sure improvements were made. Other grants care about this compliance.
- It has made us think about some areas of our venue that we haven't focused on before.

- The document gives the board things to consider for improvement.
- It helped us confirm that we are still in compliance with the law.
- We appreciated the clarity that the workbook provided concerning our weakness with accessibility and the challenges presented by the workbook to increase accessibility efforts in our organization.
- It proved to me that we were up to the standards we needed to be and excel in most areas.
- This is already a priority for our organization but it is helpful to regularly review best practices and standards in their entirety.
- I think the Section 504 Self Evaluation workbook has drawn awareness to all areas of accessibility and holds organizations accountable for providing accessibility to all.
- We rent our space, so we shared results of the workbook with our landlord. We also learned more about the facility where we rent, so we are able to better assist individuals with disabilities. And we added some practices to make our programming more accessible.
- It becomes a checklist to make sure that we are following all accessibility guidelines.
- It is a reminder to stay up to date on our review of these standards at our organization. Gives an opportunity to make sure various staff are on the same page.
- It clarified some of our accessibility issues.
- We had a very narrow concept of what accessibility entailed - thinking it was about having a ramp, elevator, toilet stalls, etc. Now we're more aware of sensory needs, for example, and offer visual aides, pre-arranged quiet or low light visiting times in the gallery.
- Assisted in making sure that events are fully ADA compliant. Provided the push to bring areas up to or redone to be up to ADA new standards.
- It made us more aware of things we should be looking for, especially when it came to entrances and bathrooms.
- The process of completing the workbook raised our level of awareness and encouraged a more complete and frequent consideration of participant and audience needs.
- We have included language on our website and on our printed programs demonstrating our sincere willingness to create accommodations whenever asked or requested. We have also begun involving this topic in our conversations with presenters.
- Our work is already centered in disability justice, but it's nice to get reminders.
- The facilities are kept up-to-date by the school district with current Section 504 requirements. Our facilities are accessible. Unfortunately, we do not have the staff or budget to maintain alternate documentation and media for the hearing impaired and blind citizens in the art gallery. The workbook definitely tells me where we ideally should be and to keep these residents in mind when designing our programs.
- As renters in the building we are housed in, it allowed us to bring specific examples of what we needed changed in order to be more accessible to our landlord, but as we cannot order those changes ourselves, things have not moved as quickly as we had hoped.
- It has sensitized us to the issues. We always inquire about accessibility of venues. We incorporated information learned into our hiring process.

Some comments cited **limitations of the workbook** that were, interestingly, very similar to positive examples mentioned by others. Many of these were related to the accessibility of rented spaces.

- Sadly, it only reinforces that our studio cannot afford to accommodate all disabilities such as providing desks, water fountains, doorways, etc. that meet the specific codes outlined in the workbook (although we wish we could!).
- We have no ability to do anything to make changes to the facility. For example, we cannot change any light bulb in the facility or apply masking tape to the walls of the facility to hold a sheet of paper with a list of something like props. Any and all changes to the facility are totally out of our hands.
- It's a little hard to do and/or relevant - we don't own our own space and we are hired to play at different spaces. We're usually tied to what the places that hire us have.
- The way the evaluation is set up, it seems to want information about where our organization is based more than the venue used for the activities/events produced - which is how we answer the questions.
- It really didn't help much. The facility in which we perform is not owned or leased by us and we're dependent on the organization that owns the facility to ensure accessibility requirements are met.
- We do not own our own performance space, so I have not completed Section 504. I have assumed that accessibility is the responsibility of the facility owners.