

## Minutes

COCA Grants Subcommittee

Tuesday, December 5, 2023

4:00 p.m.

Present: Amanda Clements, Ayne Markos, Beth Keating, Carol Hill, Neil Mooney, Rachelle McClure

Absent: Kim Harding

Staff: Kathleen Spehar, Summer Callahan

### I. CALL TO ORDER, WELCOME GUESTS, and PUBLIC INPUT

Amanda called the meeting to order at 4 p.m. All attendees of the meeting introduced themselves. Amanda asked if all attendees had the most recent version of the agenda; all attendees confirmed that they did.

Amanda asked for questions about the meeting minutes from December 14, 2022; there were none. Rachelle motioned to approve the meeting minutes. Beth seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

### II. OLD BUSINESS

#### A. FY23 COCA Grant Program Recap

Kathleen presented the FY23 COCA Grant Program recap, confirming the time period under discussion was October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023. Kathleen stated that COCA distributed 100 grants with the highest number of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) grantees in COCA's history. Kathleen stated that COCA also distributed:

- \$10,000 in Arts Education Grants.
- Approximately \$900,000 in Cultural Grants and Cultural Tourism Marketing Grants combined.
- Approximately \$289,000 in City-funded grants.

In total, COCA distributed approximately \$1,199,000 in grant funds in FY23.

Kathleen stated that FY23 included staff turnover, changes to the guidelines and a move to the online Submittable platform. Kathleen thanked Summer for her work on the grants program.

### III. NEW BUSINESS

#### A. FY24 Survey Results + Summary of FY25 Grant Program Changes

Summer delivered the FY24 survey results. Summer stated that a survey was sent directly to all FY24 applicants and included in newsletters. Summer stated that ten people filled out the survey, two of whom were not FY24 applicants. Summer stated that feedback from non-applicants was requested and that the pool of FY24 applicants was 35 people. Summer summarized the feedback from the survey:

- Respondents who did not apply stated that they did not need to apply, as they had received funds in January 2023.
- Some respondents stated that they struggled with the Submittable platform.
- Some respondents were unhappy with panelist questions and expectations, particularly about their operating revenue and operating expenses, during the panel review.
- All respondents stated that they were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the grant processes.
- One respondent stated that the grant applicant process was not easy to understand and/or that there was insufficient time to complete their application.
- One respondent stated that the panel review meeting was not conducted in an unbiased and transparent manner.

Summer stated that the grant application and grant processes have changed significantly in the past few years. Summer stated that COCA’s goal for FY25 is to stabilize and refine the grant programs in response to this feedback.

Summer delivered the summary of FY25 Grant Program changes. Summer stated that COCA continues to ask the Leon County Division of Tourism for a tourism eligibility checklist. Summer stated that a Bicentennial question was added to the FY24 application and that this question will remain for the FY25 application; as in FY24, applicants will not be penalized for a lack of Bicentennial programming. Summer stated that text from the Guidelines will be incorporated into the FY25 application. Summer stated that the name of the “Cultural Grant (City),” “Round 2” “City Funds” Grant Program will change to the “Local Community Grant Program” to avoid confusion. Summer stated that due to increasing TDT collections, COCA is exploring the possibility of developing an individual artist grant. Summer stated that changes made to the grant programs in FY23 will remain, including allowing applicants to request the only the Cultural Tourism Marketing Grant if desired (instead of requiring applicants to request the Cultural Grant and Cultural Tourism Marketing Grant together).

Amanda asked if it would be clear to the applicants that the Bicentennial question doesn’t impact their score; Summer answered that it is.

Amanda stated that she was interested to see the feedback from one respondent stating that the panel review meeting was not unbiased or transparent. Amanda stated that she chaired the panel review meeting and stated that, for the members of the Grants Subcommittee who did not attend the panel review, one panelist asked a number of questions and dominated the discussion of each application. Amanda stated that she mistakenly believed the panel needed to be finished by noon and attempted to limit the amount of discussion of each application. Amanda stated that the panelist stated that she was upset as a result. Amanda stated that the panelist’s scores were markedly different from her peers and stated that more panelist training may be necessary in the future. Summer and Kathleen agreed; Kathleen stated that because expectations differ so much from panel to panel, it may be helpful to ask panelists to review recordings of previous COCA panel(s). Kathleen stated that panelists can be trained on what feedback is appropriate to give verbally and what feedback is appropriate in the written comments.

## B. FY25 COCA Grant Program Guidelines

Summer presented the changes to the FY25 Guidelines:

- The name of the “City Grant Program” will be updated to “Local Community Grant Program.”
- The timeline on page 6 will be updated to match the FY25 calendar, without substantial structural changes.
- The list of application questions will be updated, pending County feedback.

Amanda asked for clarification on the three grant programs; Summer answered that the Local Community Grant Program would ideally be funded by the City of Tallahassee and serve local arts programs, whereas the Cultural Grant would be funded by the Tourist Development Tax and serve programs that attract tourists.

### C. FY25 COCA Grant Program Application

Summer presented the changes to the FY25 COCA Grant Programs application:

- A “How to Fill Out this Application” section will be placed at the beginning of the application, linking applicants to Submittable’s help desk and including links to useful pages on Submittable’s website.
- A “COCA Grant Programs” section will be added, summarizing each grant program and linking to the Guidelines.
- Applicants will be asked which grant programs they want to apply to, instead of asking if they want to apply for “tourism” and/or “community” funds.
- A “Basic Eligibility” section will be added, explaining what is required to apply for a COCA grant; questions that address basic eligibility are grouped together and ordered to make staff review easier.
- More information about determining applicants’ last, current and next fiscal year will be added to the Operating Revenue and Operating Expenses section.
- The Operating Revenue and Operating Expenses sections will automatically determine whether in-kind is at allowable levels and maximum requests for the Cultural Grant, depending on organization type.
- Applicants will fill out one spreadsheet to request all three grants, as opposed to filling out different spreadsheets for different grants.
- A list of non-allowable expenses will be added.
- Text will be added to the Bicentennial question, clarifying that Bicentennial programming is not required and that this question will not be scored.
- A “What Happens Now?” section will be added to the end of the application, advising applicants of next steps and relevant dates.

Amanda asked if it would be easier to provide a number of days in the “What Happens Now?” section; Summer answered that the date format matches the Guidelines.

Ayne asked how many pages were in the application; Summer answered that printed, the application is 25 pages but that it is one page on a computer screen. Summer added that applicants are able to save their work. Summer stated that the application is longer than in FY24 because more clarifying text was added, but the questions remain the same.

Amanda stated that all text reading “Tallahassee Community College” needs to be updated to “Tallahassee State College.”

Amanda asked if, for the question “Please indicate the out of county geographic markets you

will be targeting,” would applicants be prompted to explain what “other” markets mean? Summer answered that applicants were prompted to explain “other” markets in 2024 and this feature will remain in 2025.

Amanda thanked Summer for her work. Amanda stated that she thought the Guidelines text was helpful for applicants attempting to submit after business hours. Amanda stated that if multiple pages were used, staff should find out if applicants can skip a section and if so, will they be prompted to return to skipped sections before submitting? Summer stated that she would look into that.

Ayne motioned for staff to forward the FY25 Guidelines and application to the Leon County Division of Tourism for review. Rachelle seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Kathleen asked Summer for an update on the FY24 City Grants. Summer stated that in the previous year, the City of Tallahassee provided \$300,000 to COCA for a two-year period, but that those funds were distributed in the first year due need in the community. Summer stated that the City did not award additional funds to the City Grant in FY24. Summer stated that COCA proposed a solution where a portion of those grants could be paid by COCA’s general operating fund, but that solution is under legal review indefinitely as of the Grants subcommittee meeting. Summer stated that COCA has \$25,000 from the NEA for regrating purposes and that staff hopes to use these funds to pay the three FY24 grantees who only requested the City Grant. Summer stated that the three City Grant awards will be reduced by 10% to match the NEA award. Kathleen stated that the conversations with the City and County are ongoing and that the 10% cut may be restored in the future. Kathleen stated that the Executive Committee will vote on this at their upcoming meeting.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Amanda asked for questions. There was none, so Amanda wished the staff and Grants Subcommittee a fantastic holiday season.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:48 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Summer Callahan*