

Annual Global Funding Evaluation

Reporting and Performance Criteria,
Impact Measurement, and Evaluation

Sask *Culture*

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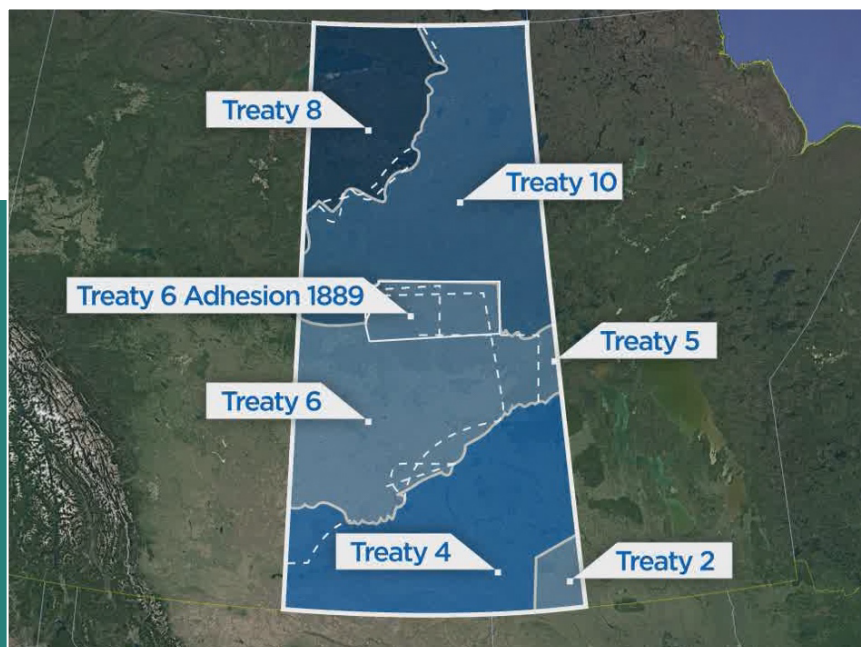
Land Acknowledgment

This work was conducted on Treaty 2, Treaty 4, Treaty 5, Treaty 6, Treaty 8, and Treaty 10 territories and within the homeland of the Métis Nation. We acknowledge the diverse Indigenous peoples who have lived on and cared for these lands since time immemorial, including the nehiyawak (Cree), Anihšīnāpēk (Saulteaux), Dakota, Lakota, Nakoda, Dene nations, and Metis.

Saskatchewan's cultural landscape has been shaped by Indigenous knowledge, artistic practices, languages, and traditions since time immemorial. The cultural organizations supported through the Annual Global Funding program operate on lands that continue to be home to vibrant Indigenous communities whose contributions to arts, heritage, and culture are fundamental to the province's identity.

We recognize that the work of cultural development in Saskatchewan must honor the original stewards of these lands and support the self-determination of Indigenous peoples in defining and sharing their own cultural narratives. This includes recognizing the ongoing impacts of colonization and committing to meaningful reconciliation through equitable access to resources, respect for Indigenous ways of knowing, and centering Indigenous voices in decisions that affect their communities.

Land acknowledgment is not merely a protocol but a commitment to ongoing relationship, accountability, and action in support of Indigenous cultural sovereignty.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Purpose

SaskCulture contracted this evaluation to review the Annual Global Funding (AGF) program as part of its broader program renewal initiative. The AGF program has provided operational funding to 30 Eligible Cultural Organizations (ECOs) since 1984, serving as a vital source of stability for Saskatchewan's cultural sector. The program operates on a three-year grant cycle with volunteer peer assessment. This evaluation examined three interconnected components: reporting and performance criteria, impact evaluation and measurement, and an assessment of AGF tools and supports.

Methodology

The evaluation drew on multiple sources including a survey of all 30 ECOs (72% response rate), four focus group sessions with more than 20 ECO organizations, review of feedback gathered from volunteer peer assessors, consultation with SaskCulture staff, document analysis, and exploratory research on practices used by comparable funders. Approximately 80% of ECOs participated in at least one component of the evaluation.

Key Findings

Reporting and Performance Criteria: The current annual submission and follow-up reports are valued as useful tools. However, there are concerns about duplication between annual submissions and triennial applications, and some ECOs are uncertain whether their submitted data is reviewed or how it informs decision-making. The existing performance criteria are valued for their flexibility and ability to accommodate diverse organizations. However, they lack clarity and specificity. Key terms (impact, meaningful progress, effectiveness) lack shared definitions. Criteria weighting is unclear, making it difficult for ECOs to understand priorities and for assessors to make consistent judgments. The criteria focus heavily on organizational capacity rather than outcomes, and comparing across the diversity of ECOs is extremely challenging.

Impact Evaluation and Measurement: Widespread confusion exists about the difference between outputs and outcomes, and between organizational performance and community impact. Data gathering is inconsistent, often based on estimates, and happens in bursts rather than year-round. ECOs receive no feedback on data submitted, creating uncertainty about whether and how it is used. There is no longitudinal tracking of change. Indigenous and culturally specific organizations need different evaluation approaches that align with their frameworks and values.

Evaluation Tools and Supports: ECOs lack consistent evaluation tools, training, and capacity. Smaller organizations face significant disadvantages compared to larger ECOs with dedicated staff. The cost of basic capacity-building (such as strategic planning at approximately \$10,000) creates equity challenges. There is no common framework, limiting sector-wide analysis.



Assessment Process: The assessment process lacks transparency. ECOs have questions about who assessors are, how they're selected, and how conflicts of interest are managed. Assessors struggle with information volume and comparing fundamentally different organizations. The triennial application feels disproportionately burdensome given that funding levels typically change minimally (approximately 10% annually).

A System Under Pressure: Financial pressures, increasing expectations without corresponding resources, and uncertainty about the program's future create strain across the system for ECOs, assessors, and SaskCulture.

Key Opportunities

The evaluation identified opportunities organized by the three evaluation components:

<p>Reporting and Performance Criteria</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop clear, shared definitions for key terms • Refocus criteria toward measurable outcomes • Use the annual submissions and follow-up reports as key components of the application process • Explicitly connect criteria to the Strategic Public Priorities • Explore differentiated assessment approaches for different organizational stages/scales • Clarify how criteria are weighted
<p>Impact Evaluation and Measurement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create consistent evaluation framework, training and practical tools • Implement year-round, updatable data system • Communicate clearly how data is used and provide feedback to ECOs • Explore external impact measures to supplement self-reporting • Enable culturally responsive evaluation approaches • Build capacity for provincial-level impact assessment
<p>Evaluation Tools and Supports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide structured evaluation capacity-building and training • Develop accessible, user-friendly tools and templates • Accept diverse formats for demonstrating impact (videos, stories, interviews) • Design supports and processes that address equity in organizational capacity
<p>Cross-Cutting Opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamline application and reporting processes, making better use of annual and follow-up reports and provide better year-over-year data gathering processes • Increase transparency about assessment processes and decision-making • Clarify and/or adjust SaskCulture's role in providing context to assessors • Compensate assessors in alignment with sector standards • Reduce complexity of multiple competing strategic priorities • Examine how SaskCulture's dual role as funder and capacity builder can work more effectively

Looking Forward

SaskCulture's commitment to program renewal and willingness to engage stakeholders in this evaluation demonstrates organizational maturity and sector leadership. ECOs demonstrated readiness for change through their extensive participation and constructive feedback. The strong relationships between SaskCulture and ECOs provide a solid foundation for program evolution. This evaluation identified substantial opportunities for improvement that are interconnected rather than discrete. Addressing them effectively will require thoughtful sequencing, collaborative stakeholder engagement, and piloting of approaches. Moving from identification of opportunities to implementation represents the next phase of this work.



"ECOs demonstrated readiness for change through their extensive participation and constructive feedback. The strong relationships between SaskCulture and ECOs provide a solid foundation for program evolution."

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

SaskCulture manages the Culture Section of the Saskatchewan Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation. Since 1984, the Annual Global Funding (AGF) program has provided operational grants to 30 Eligible Cultural Organizations (ECOs) across Saskatchewan, supporting organizations in the areas of arts, heritage, and multiculturalism.

The AGF program works on a three-year grant cycle. ECOs submit comprehensive applications that are assessed by volunteer peer assessors from the cultural community.

As part of developing its 2020-2026 Strategic Plan, SaskCulture's Board of Directors recognized the need for a program renewal project. This larger initiative aims to evaluate current practices, advance Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) work across cultural networks, and emphasize Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) principles throughout SaskCulture's programs and the broader cultural sector in Saskatchewan.

Feedback from ECOs, volunteer assessors, and SaskCulture staff pointed to opportunities to strengthen both the program reporting and funding processes and how impact is measured and evaluated.

1.2 Scope of the Contract

This project is one component of SaskCulture's larger program renewal initiative, designed to review and analyze how the AGF program currently functions and to identify opportunities for improvement. The work focused on assessing what exists, understanding how it works in practice, and highlighting where changes could improve effectiveness and better align with current needs and promising practices.

Three Areas of Focus

The evaluation examined three interconnected components:

Reporting and Performance Criteria: Examination of how current reports are working and how assessment criteria are used and understood by applicants and assessors, including strengths, limitations, and lessons from comparable funders.

Impact Evaluation and Measurement: Examination of how SaskCulture currently understands and assesses impact at organizational and community levels, with attention to long-term outcomes.

Evaluation Tools and Supports: Examination of tools, resources, and capacity-building supports needed for meaningful evaluation, with particular attention to accessibility and equity.

How the Work Was Done

The evaluation drew on multiple sources: analysis of existing AGF documents and processes, a survey with strong response from ECOs, focus group discussions with ECO representatives, a review of feedback gathered from volunteer peer assessors, consultation with SaskCulture staff, and research into practices used by other funders. The process was designed to respect confidentiality while gathering honest feedback.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Overview

The evaluation examined the AGF program's key components: the initial application, annual submissions, and follow-up reports. The work assessed performance criteria, impact measurement approaches, and the application, reporting, and adjudication processes. The review also included an exploration of promising practices used by similar funders within Canada.

2.2 Data Collection Methods

ECO Survey: A detailed survey was sent to all 30 ECOs, achieving a response rate of over 72%, providing quantitative and qualitative data on ECO experiences.

Focus Group Discussions: Four focused Zoom sessions were held with participation from more than 20 ECO organizations. These small group settings allowed for interaction, discussion, and deeper exploration of key topics.

Review of Previous Assessor Feedback: Feedback and insights previously gathered from volunteer peer assessors were reviewed and analyzed to understand the assessor perspective on the application review process.

Consultation with SaskCulture Staff: Discussions with SaskCulture staff provided context on program administration and organizational perspectives.

Best Practice Research: Research was conducted on other funders' practices through online review of publicly available program materials and guidelines, supplemented by a consultation call with a comparable funding organization. These included organizations working in similar contexts municipally, provincially and federally.

Document Review: Previous research conducted by SaskCulture was reviewed to build on existing knowledge and avoid duplication.

2.3 Participation and Reach

Approximately 80% of ECOs participated in at least one component of the evaluation. Many ECOs engaged in multiple ways, participating in both the survey and focus groups. This multi-layered participation allowed organizations to provide initial feedback through the survey and then discuss issues more deeply in group settings. ECOs were also given the opportunity to reach out individually by email or request a one-on-one conversation.

2.4 Validity and Confidentiality

Care was taken throughout the process to ensure confidentiality. This report presents findings as summaries and themes rather than attributing comments to specific individuals or organizations, encouraging honest, open feedback.

Based on the high level of participation, the range of consultation methods used, and the quality of feedback received, this evaluation provides a fair and representative picture of ECO experiences and perspectives. The multi-method approach strengthened validity. When similar themes emerged across the survey, focus groups, and other data sources, this provided confidence that the findings accurately reflect stakeholder experiences.

2.5 Limitations

Timing: The evaluation represents a snapshot of perspectives at a particular point in time. ECO experiences and needs may continue to evolve.

Best Practice Research: The exploration of other funders' practices was intentionally exploratory rather than exhaustive, focused on identifying promising approaches rather than conducting a comprehensive scan.

Assessor Input: The review drew on previously collected assessor feedback rather than conducting new interviews, which provided valuable historical perspective but may not reflect any recent changes in assessor experiences. These limitations provide context for how the results should be interpreted and applied.

3. STAKEHOLDER CONTEXT

Understanding the realities and perspectives of both SaskCulture and ECOs provides essential context for interpreting the findings that follow.

3.1 Organizational Context

SaskCulture's Position and Challenges: ECOs recognize that SaskCulture is unique and well-respected for the programs and services it provides. Participating ECOs expressed gratitude for AGF funding and appreciated being included in this evaluation. During consultations, ECOs also identified several factors that shape their experience with the program:

Challenge of Equity Across Diversity: ECOs understand the significant diversity within the ECO system as well as within the demographics of the communities they serve and broadly agree that funding should be based on performance outcomes and overall impact. They also recognize there is no simple solution to achieving equity given the vast differences in size, scope, and capacity among funded organizations.

Dual Role Complexity: SaskCulture serves as both funding administrator and capacity builder. This dual role creates complexity in how ECOs engage with the organization. Questions exist about when each role is most appropriate and how these functions interact.

Data and Feedback Loops: SaskCulture has gathered considerable information through previous assessments and ongoing discussions with ECOs. However, there is limited visibility into how this information is analyzed and applied. Some ECOs report providing input repeatedly without seeing clear changes or understanding how their feedback has influenced program evolution.

Transparency and Communication: Many ECOs lack clarity about fundamental program elements, including how ECO status is obtained or maintained, how assessment decisions are made, and how the data they provide is used to improve the sector or demonstrate province-wide cultural impact.

Funding Capacity: There is widespread recognition that lottery revenues allocated to culture are limited. Many ECOs believe that stronger evidence of performance and impact could support advocacy for a larger share of the Lotteries Trust Fund or help identify opportunities for additional revenue generation.

ECO Realities

ECOs shared their own organizational realities that frame their participation in the AGF program:

Financial Pressures: ECOs consistently noted that while AGF funding has remained relatively stagnant, operating costs continue to increase significantly. Salaries in the cultural sector are behind other fields, making recruitment and retention difficult. Many organizations struggle to maintain even basic operations and services, not just doing more with less.

Multiple Alignment Challenges: ECOs work to simultaneously align with SaskCulture's Strategic Plan, their own strategic plans, and the Saskatchewan Lotteries Strategic Public Priorities. There is confusion about what these priorities are and how they should be prioritized when they are very general and not outcome focused or appear to compete or overlap.

Increasing Expectations: ECOs expressed concern that SaskCulture continues to add new requirements, such as IDEA plans and enhanced reporting, without corresponding budget increases to support the additional work.

Varied Capacity to Adapt: ECOs acknowledged that the impact of funding changes would vary significantly. For some smaller organizations, a significant funding decrease would threaten their survival. For others with diverse funding sources, decreases could be managed with adequate advance notice and planning time.

Beyond Funding: ECOs emphasized that their relationship with SaskCulture extends beyond funding. They value the organizational support, capacity-building opportunities, networking, and sector leadership that SaskCulture provides.

3.2 Common Themes

The following themes emerged consistently across the survey, focus groups, and consultations:

1. Need for Clear Definitions

ECOs consistently requested clearer definitions for key terms used in the application and reporting processes, including meaningful progress, impact, organizational development, relevant programming, multicultural, unique contribution, newcomer, and diversity. The lack of shared understanding creates confusion and inconsistency.

2. Streamlining Application and Reporting

While the 2024 updates helped, further streamlining is needed. Specific concerns include repetitive questions, the volume of data requested, and the balance between qualitative and quantitative information. Many suggested alternative formats such as interviews, videos, stories, and testimonials.

3. Understanding Impact and Measurement

Progress indicators, results, and impact measures are important but not well understood. There is need for better and more consistent tools and training to forecast, measure, and evaluate outcomes. ECOs want to better understand how SaskCulture uses the data they provide and how it connects to broader impacts such as economic contributions, shifting attitudes, reduction of racism and bias, and increased diverse participation. Many noted that simple participation numbers are outdated and that quality matters as much as quantity.

4. Culturally Responsive Approaches

Indigenous organizations and some newcomer-serving organizations expressed that they need different approaches to reporting and evaluation. They use different terminology and have different perspectives on IDEA and Truth and Reconciliation. They feel they should be able to develop indicators and performance measures based on their own cultural frameworks and values. Notably, ECOs reported that attempting to meet current requirements is burdensome and is contributing to burnout among Indigenous elders and culture workers. The focus for these organizations should be on relationships, which take time to build and cannot easily be quantified.

5. Assessment Process Transparency

The assessment process has positive aspects but lacks sufficient transparency. ECOs have significant questions about who assessors are, how they are selected, what "peer" means, and how conflicts of interest are managed. Many stated that writing reports and applications involves what they think assessors are looking for rather than focusing on honest self-assessment. ECOs are uncertain whether sharing organizational challenges might be viewed negatively.

Some ECOs suggested pre- and post-assessment interviews or having SaskCulture take a larger role in presenting ECO information to assessors. Several noted that most other funders compensate assessors for their time.

6. Capacity and Resource Challenges

There is concern about organizational capacity to do more with the same or less funding as costs continue to rise. Smaller organizations with limited staff noted the significant workload disadvantage they face compared to larger ECOs with dedicated grants and reporting staff. Ethno-cultural organizations particularly feel challenged competing with larger, more established ECOs. The cost of developing strategic plans, cited as approximately \$10,000, is significant for smaller organizations. ECOs expressed a strong need for more consistent evaluation tools and training.

7. Provincial Impact and Data Quality

Some ECOs have limited geographic scope while others work across the province, creating difficulty in assessing provincial-level impact consistently. ECOs noted that no longitudinal studies are conducted to track long-term change. Much of the demographic data they provide is based on estimates or guesswork, particularly when drawn from ticket sales or participation counts. They see a broader role for SaskCulture to provide consistent and more accurate provincial impact data.

8. Reporting and Application Process Burden

The combined application and reporting processes are very time-consuming. Given that funding levels change minimally for most ECOs (approximately 10% of budgets shift annually), many feel the application process should build more directly on annual and follow-up reports. The current system feels like applying and competing as new each cycle, rather than negotiating continued support based on demonstrated evidence of value already being shared. Several ECOs described AGF funding as unique

operational funding that serves as an investment enabling them to secure additional grants and contracts, thus multiplying cultural activity beyond what AGF alone could support.

4. FINDINGS

The following findings are organized according to the three components outlined in the project scope: Reporting and Performance Criteria, Impact Evaluation and Measurement, and Evaluation Tools and Supports. Where findings cut across multiple components, they are noted as such.

4.1 Performance Criteria

Performance criteria guide the renewal and application process and inform how ECOs frame their work and how assessors evaluate funding requests. Findings in this area address how the current criteria function in practice.

What Works Well

The tools for reporting were seen as important and useful and performance criteria were consistently described as having important strengths. ECOs appreciated the flexibility of the reporting process and performance criteria, noting they are broad enough to encompass a wide range of organizational mandates, sizes, and programming models. The framework avoids a rigid one-size-fits-all approach and remains relevant for both large established organizations and smaller volunteer-led groups. Many ECOs described strong alignment between the performance criteria and their organizational work. The criteria were seen as providing clear areas to focus on when completing reports and applications and have remained relatively stable over time, making it easier to frame organizational work. ECOs valued the emphasis on impact beyond numbers, noting that the narrative-based approach enables capturing relational, contextual, and longer-term outcomes that are not easily quantifiable. The criteria were described overall as balanced, fair, and covering the right areas, including cultural impact, accessibility, organizational effectiveness, governance, leadership, and sustainability.

Challenges and Gaps

Despite these strengths, significant challenges exist with how the reporting and performance criteria are understood and applied:

Lack of Clarity and Specificity: The most consistent feedback is that the criteria are too general and vague. While some ECOs appreciate flexibility, many struggle with unclear language and terminology. Terms such as impact, effectiveness, success, meaningful progress, relevant programming, unique contribution, and diversity lack clear definitions. This creates confusion about what is being assessed, reported on and how different activities are valued.

Unclear Priorities and Weighting: ECOs and assessors both expressed uncertainty about what SaskCulture prioritizes. There is limited visibility into how different criteria are weighted in the assessment process. Some assessors noted that sections 1 and 2 of the criteria appear more important than others, but this is not explicitly stated. ECOs are uncertain what level of merit is expected and how value is assigned to various activities.

Difficulty Comparing Across Diversity: Both ECOs and assessors noted it is nearly impossible to compare one ECO to another given the vast differences in organizational size, scope, mandate, and geographic reach. What constitutes a significant achievement for one organization may be routine for

another. The current criteria do not adequately account for these differences, making equitable assessment challenging.

Need for Outcomes Focus: There is strong consensus that the funding should be more directly linked to measurable outcomes. As currently structured, the criteria focus heavily on organizational capacity and activities rather than results and impact. ECOs expressed that the criteria should connect more explicitly to advancing cultural awareness, reducing barriers to participation, and demonstrating cultural, social, and economic impact.

Application Process Issues: The application process based on the performance criteria is time-consuming and cumbersome. Some ECOs reported that up to one-quarter of a staff position annually is dedicated to completing the AGF application. The frustration stems from the perception that ECOs are reapplying every three years as if new, despite being the same organizations doing similar work with incremental improvements. Given that funding levels change minimally for most ECOs (approximately 10% of budgets shift annually), the burden feels disproportionate.

4.2 Impact Evaluation and Measurement

This component addresses how SaskCulture and ECOs understand, measure, and demonstrate the impact of AGF funding at organizational and community levels.

Current State of Impact Measurement

Confusion About Impact vs. Performance: There is widespread confusion about the difference between organizational performance (what ECOs do) and impact (the change that results from what they do). Many ECOs are unclear how to differentiate between outputs (number of programs, participants) and outcomes (changes in awareness, behavior, community benefit). This confusion extends to understanding the relationship between organizational capacity building and program results.

Data Gathering Challenges: ECOs noted several significant challenges with current data gathering:

- Much demographic data (age, gender, ethnicity) is based on estimates or guesswork, particularly when drawn from ticket sales or participation counts rather than direct surveys
- There is no clear end use communicated for the data being requested, which affects quality and completeness
- No longitudinal studies are conducted to track long-term change over time
- Data gathering is not year-round or consistently updatable; it happens in bursts around reporting deadlines and there are no clear or consistent methods to measure year-over-year progress or results.
- ECOs are uncertain whether to report data as factual or as estimates, and there is no clear way to flag the difference

Limited Verification and Feedback: ECOs expressed that there appears to be no verification of what organizations report. They receive limited feedback on their data, creating uncertainty about whether anyone reviews it or how it is used. This contributes to a sense that data collection is an administrative burden rather than a meaningful tool for demonstrating value.

Provincial-Level Impact: Some ECOs have limited geographic scope while others work across the province, creating difficulty in assessing provincial-level impact consistently. There is an unfilled need to demonstrate impact economically, socially, and culturally across regions and the province. Some ECOs

noted that the unique nature of the Saskatchewan Lotteries funding could warrant demonstrating national impact as well.

Opportunities Identified

Clearer Outcomes and Indicators: ECOs want to better understand what success looks like. They need clear indicators and multiple ways to demonstrate impact. There is strong interest in moving beyond simple participation numbers to measures that capture quality, depth of engagement, and meaningful change. ECOs want to understand how their data connects to broader impacts such as economic contributions, shifting attitudes, reduction of racism and bias, and increased diverse participation.

Year-Round Data Systems: ECOs suggested implementing a year-round, updatable electronic system for data gathering so current information is always available. The system should clearly distinguish between factual data and estimates. Experience shows that when the purpose of data collection is made clear and seen as beneficial, people will self-declare and provide information.

Use of Existing Data: ECOs noted that annual submissions and follow-up reports already contain significant data that could be used more effectively. Rather than requesting the same information in multiple formats, SaskCulture could compile and analyze this data more systematically for assessment purposes.

External Impact Measures: Some ECOs suggested that impact measurement should not rely solely on self-reporting. External measures could include community surveys, interviews with program participants, tracking changes in human rights complaints, labor market engagement in the cultural sector, and economic impact studies.

Culturally Appropriate Measurement: Indigenous organizations and some newcomer-serving organizations emphasized that they need different approaches to impact measurement. For these organizations, the focus should be on relationships and community-defined outcomes that may not fit dominant evaluation frameworks. They should be able to develop indicators based on their own cultural frameworks and values, potentially aligning with United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) recommendations, and other Indigenous-led frameworks.

4.3 Evaluation Tools and Supports

This component examines what tools, resources, and capacity-building supports exist to help ECOs engage in effective evaluation and measurement.

Current State

Limited Tools and Training: ECOs expressed a strong need for more consistent evaluation tools and training on how to use them effectively. Many noted that they lack the capacity and knowledge to engage in meaningful evaluation beyond basic reporting. There is confusion about how to measure long-term outcomes and how to move from tracking outputs to assessing impact.

Capacity Disparities: Smaller organizations with limited staff noted significant disadvantages compared to larger ECOs with dedicated grants and reporting staff. Ethno-cultural organizations particularly feel challenged competing with larger, more established ECOs. The cost of developing strategic plans, is

significant for smaller organizations and creates an equity challenge even though strategic planning is an expected component of strong applications.

Lack of Consistent Framework: ECOs noted a lack of continuity in how data is gathered and used across the sector. Different ECOs use different methods, making sector-wide analysis difficult. There is no common framework or set of tools that all ECOs use, which limits the ability to aggregate data or compare progress across the sector.

Support Needs Identified

Evaluation Capacity Building: ECOs need more structured capacity-building focused on evaluation skills. This should include training on distinguishing outputs from outcomes, developing theories of change, selecting appropriate indicators, gathering both qualitative and quantitative data, and using evaluation results for organizational learning and sector improvement.

Consistent Tools and Templates: ECOs want access to consistent, user-friendly evaluation tools and templates. These should be designed to accommodate different organizational sizes and capacities while still enabling meaningful data collection. Tools should be practical and not require specialized evaluation expertise to use.

Clarity on Terminology: A glossary or guide with clear definitions of key evaluation terms would help address the widespread confusion about terms like impact, outcomes, meaningful progress, effectiveness, and success.

Alternative Formats for Demonstrating Impact: ECOs suggested that SaskCulture should accept alternative formats for demonstrating impact, including interviews, videos, stories, and testimonials. These formats may be more accessible for some organizations and more effective at capturing certain types of cultural impact that are difficult to convey through written reports alone.

4.4 Cross-Cutting Findings: The Assessment Process

Several findings relate specifically to how the assessment process functions, cutting across all three components.

Assessor-Related Findings

Lack of Transparency: The assessment process has positive aspects but lacks sufficient transparency for ECOs. ECOs have significant questions about who assessors are, how they are selected, what "peer" means in this context, and how conflicts of interest are managed. Many ECOs are uncertain about the assessor qualifications, backgrounds, and how assessor assignments are made.

Volume of Information: Assessors indicated that it is difficult or impossible to process all the information provided in the time they have. The volume and detail within applications make thorough assessment challenging. While the scorecard is helpful, assessors noted it does not always help when comparing one ECO against another, particularly when the task is making relative judgments rather than simply adjusting budgets.

Assessor Diversity and Bias: Assessors have become more diversified and have a wide range of backgrounds, so the assessment process is experienced differently by each assessor. However, some

noted that more diversity within the assessor group may still be needed, particularly as AGF expands and becomes more inclusive. Built-in biases exist, including how different assessors evaluate performance measurements, remain focused on objectives, and how they may be influenced by writing skill levels and their own grant adjudication experience.

Assessor Compensation: Both ECOs and assessors noted that most other funders compensate assessors for their time. This is seen as a sector standard, and SaskCulture should consider adopting this practice.

SaskCulture's Role in Assessment

Need for Expanded Information Provider Role: The current approach has SaskCulture managing the assessment process but limiting information sharing to avoid influencing assessors. Some ECOs and assessors suggested this may not be the best approach. A clearer role for SaskCulture as an information provider should be considered, potentially including summarizing existing documentation, flagging relevant changes or highlights, and providing context to help assessors understand organizational evolution over time.

Annual Submissions and Follow-Up Reports in Assessment: There is strong support for making better use of annual submissions and follow-up reports in the assessment process. These reports contain current, progressive information about organizational performance and could reduce the burden of the triennial application. Some suggested that a summary of three years of reports should be included in the assessment package.

ECO Understanding of Assessment

Limited ECO Knowledge of Process: The assessment process and the types of assessors being engaged are not clear to ECOs, and many feel the process is flawed. More information should be available about how assessment works. ECOs would like to see what organizations received funding each year and be able to track changes across the sector to better understand decision-making patterns.

Writing to Perceived Expectations: Many ECOs report writing applications to what they think assessors are looking for rather than focusing on honest self-assessment. They are uncertain whether sharing organizational challenges might be viewed negatively rather than as evidence of honest reflection and growth. While many feel comfortable discussing issues with SaskCulture staff, they hesitate to include this information in written applications for fear it could be misunderstood.

Process Suggestions: Some ECOs suggested pre- and post-assessment interviews or having SaskCulture take a larger role in presenting ECO information to assessors to provide context. Others suggested removing the comprehensive triennial application entirely and relying instead on enhanced annual submissions.

4.5 Application and Reporting Process Findings

Annual Submissions

ECOs indicated they like the annual submissions form and format but feel it should be used better as it contains valuable data. Some are unsure if anyone reads these reports as they receive no feedback. Some suggested SaskCulture could assess organizations based on what they receive annually and make adjustments as needed rather than waiting three years.

Follow-Up Reports

ECOs commented that improvements to the follow-up report have worked well. The report is now more consistent and smooth, with clarifications rarely needed. While budget formats vary by auditor, there is confidence in the fact that they support the proper use of funds. Some suggested the follow-up report, or a summary of three years of reports, should be included in the assessment package, if not being the key component of the assessment process.

Application Streamlining

Research indicated a clear need for streamlining the application process beyond what was achieved in the 2024 updates. The process remains both time-consuming and cumbersome. Concerns include repetitive questions, unclear how different sections connect, and the volume of data requested. The amount of effort required feels disproportionate when funding levels remain relatively stable.

Using Existing Information

It was suggested that annual submissions, follow-up reports, financial statements, and organizational websites already contain much of the information requested in applications. SaskCulture could compile this information consistently for all organizations and use it as the basis for assessment rather than requiring detailed applications every three years.

5. BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER FUNDERS

As part of this evaluation, exploratory research was conducted on practices used by comparable funders to identify approaches that might be relevant to the AGF program. Three organizations were reviewed through examination of publicly available program materials: Arts Nova Scotia (provincial), Manitoba Arts Council (provincial), and Canada Council for the Arts (federal). Additionally, one consultation call was held with Edmonton Arts Council (municipal).

Several practices emerged as potentially relevant to AGF's context. Arts Nova Scotia's differentiated funding pathways (Operate-Activate for emerging organizations vs. Operate-Sustain for established organizations) demonstrate how assessment can be tailored to organizational stage. Manitoba Arts Council's use of CADAC (Canadian Arts Data/Données sur les arts au Canada) shows how standardized data collection can serve both accountability and sector-wide analysis. All three organizations use clearly defined peer assessment processes with documented roles and transparent decision-making. Equity is embedded as a policy priority rather than an add-on criterion, and multi-year funding is structured with interim accountability rather than comprehensive reapplication.

While important contextual differences exist, these practices represent approaches successfully implemented by comparable public funders that may warrant further exploration. AGF serves a broader definition of culture, operates within Saskatchewan's unique Lotteries system, and works with a smaller pool of organizations. Adaptation would be required to fit AGF's specific context.

More detailed findings, including program descriptions and source documentation, are provided in Appendix A.

6. OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The following opportunities emerged from the evaluation findings and are organized according to the three project components.

6.1 Reporting and Performance Criteria

Clarify Definitions and Terminology: Provide clear, shared definitions for key terms including impact, effectiveness, meaningful progress, and relevant programming. A glossary could address widespread confusion and improve consistency.

Strengthen Outcomes Orientation: Refocus reporting and performance criteria to emphasize measurable outcomes rather than primarily assessing activities and organizational capacity. Connect criteria more explicitly to advancing cultural awareness, reducing barriers to participation, and demonstrating impact.

Align more closely with the Strategic Public Priorities: More explicitly connect performance criteria to Saskatchewan Lotteries Strategic Public Priorities. If these are central to Trust Fund accountability, they should be clearer in reporting, application structure and assessment.

Consider Differentiated Assessment: Explore whether different assessment approaches might be appropriate for organizations at different stages of development or with significantly different scales. Examples from other funders show how criteria weighting or funding pathways can be tailored while maintaining fairness.

Clarify Criteria Weighting: Make explicit how different sections of performance criteria are weighted. If certain criteria are more important, communicate this clearly to ECOs and assessors.

6.2 Impact Evaluation and Measurement

Develop Consistent Framework and Tools: Create practical tools for measuring and reporting impact, including guidance on distinguishing outputs from outcomes and selecting appropriate indicators. Design for different organizational capacities while enabling sector-wide analysis.

Implement Year-Round Data System: Consider a year-round electronic system that ECOs can update regularly rather than reporting in bursts. Allow organizations to flag whether data is factual or estimated.

Clarify Data Use and Provide Feedback: Communicate more clearly how ECO data is analyzed and used. Providing feedback would signal that reporting is valued and inform organizational learning.

Explore External Impact Measures: Consider supplementing self-reported data with external measures where feasible, such as community surveys, participant interviews, or sector-wide studies.

Support Culturally Responsive Evaluation: Enable Indigenous and culturally specific organizations to develop evaluation approaches based on their own frameworks and values, including alignment with UNDRIP and MMIWG recommendations where relevant.

Build Provincial-Level Impact Capacity: Develop capacity to assess and communicate provincial-level cultural impact through consistent data collection and potentially longitudinal studies.

6.3 Evaluation Tools and Supports

Provide Evaluation Capacity Building: Offer structured training on evaluation skills including developing logic models, selecting indicators, and gathering qualitative and quantitative data.

Create Accessible Resources: Develop user-friendly evaluation tools and templates that don't require specialized expertise, with examples relevant to cultural work.

Diversify Demonstration Methods: Allow ECOs to demonstrate impact through diverse formats including interviews, videos, stories, and testimonials alongside written reports.

Address Equity in Capacity: Recognize that smaller organizations face significant disadvantages. Design supports and processes to reduce burden while maintaining accountability.

6.4 Cross-Cutting Opportunities

Streamline Application and Reporting: Further reduce repetition, better use data from annual and follow-up reports, and reconsider whether comprehensive triennial applications are necessary for established organizations.

Increase Transparency: Provide more information about how assessment works, including assessor selection, training, conflict management, and decision-making.

Clarify SaskCulture's Role: Explore whether staff could provide more context and analysis to support assessment, such as summarizing reports or highlighting organizational evolution.

Compensate Assessors: Align with sector standards by compensating volunteer assessors for their time.

Align Strategic Priorities: Reduce complexity of multiple competing priorities by identifying clear, shared priorities for both SaskCulture and ECO planning.

Address Dual Role Clarity: Examine how SaskCulture's roles as funder and capacity builder can work together more effectively.

7. CONSULTANT'S OBSERVATIONS

Having conducted this evaluation and engaged with ECOs, assessors, and SaskCulture staff, several observations emerge that may be useful as SaskCulture considers next steps.

The Flexibility Paradox

One of the program's most appreciated features is also one of its most challenging. The broad, flexible performance criteria allow the program to support a remarkably diverse range of organizations. This breadth reflects the expansive definition of culture within Saskatchewan's Lotteries system. However, this same flexibility creates confusion about priorities for ECOs and contributes to challenges for assessors in making equitable comparisons across organizations, particularly in the absence of clearly articulated priorities and shared indicators of success. Addressing this paradox—maintaining

appropriate flexibility while providing greater clarity, is central to many of the opportunities identified in this report.

A System Under Pressure

The evaluation revealed a system experiencing significant strain. ECOs face rising costs with static funding. Assessors struggle with information volume and comparing fundamentally different organizations. SaskCulture navigates a complex dual role while managing limited resources. These pressures have accumulated over time and contribute to challenges across all three evaluation components.

Readiness for Change

Despite these pressures, there is notable readiness for change. ECOs participated extensively (80% participation rate) and provided candid, constructive feedback. This willingness to engage and the consistency of themes across stakeholder groups suggests that meaningful improvement is possible. The evaluation process itself demonstrated that when asked, ECOs engage thoughtfully.

Interconnected Opportunities

The opportunities identified are not discrete items that can be addressed in isolation. Clarifying definitions supports better assessment. Improved data systems enable better impact measurement. Streamlining processes creates capacity for meaningful evaluation. Some opportunities are foundational while others are enabling. Thoughtful sequencing will be important.

The Unique Context

The Saskatchewan Lotteries system and the AGF program's broad cultural mandate create a distinct context. Practices from other funders provide useful reference points, though implementation will need to account for AGF's specific structure, scale, and stakeholder relationships.

Looking Forward

This evaluation provides a snapshot at a particular moment in time. Moving from identification of opportunities to implementation will require prioritizing, engaging stakeholders in co-design, and piloting approaches. These opportunities are interconnected and will require careful sequencing, stakeholder engagement, and piloting to implement effectively. The next phase of this work would benefit from collaborative design processes that build on the trust and participation achieved in this evaluation.

8. CONCLUSION

This evaluation examined the AGF program's reporting processes, performance criteria, impact measurement approaches, and evaluation supports through extensive stakeholder consultation. With approximately 80% involvement in a range of methodologies, the findings reflect broad and honest input.

The evaluation identified significant strengths in the AGF program, including its flexibility and operational funding model, alongside clear opportunities for improvement across all three components. Reporting and performance criteria would benefit from greater clarity, streamlining and alignment. Impact measurement needs consistent tools and frameworks. Evaluation capacity-building supports are needed, particularly for smaller organizations.

A central finding is that these three components are deeply interconnected. Clearer criteria support better measurement. Improved data systems enable meaningful evaluation. Streamlined processes

create capacity for organizations to engage effectively. Addressing these opportunities requires recognizing these interconnections rather than treating them as separate issues.

Stakeholders demonstrated readiness for change through their extensive participation and constructive feedback. This readiness, combined with strong relationships between SaskCulture and ECOs, provides a solid basis for program evolution. The opportunities identified are substantial but achievable with strategic attention to timing, sequencing, stakeholder engagement, two-way communication and appropriate resourcing.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to SaskCulture for the opportunity to undertake this evaluation and for their commitment to continuous improvement and program excellence. SaskCulture's willingness to seek honest feedback, engage stakeholders meaningfully, and invest in thoughtful program renewal demonstrates organizational maturity and sector leadership. This kind of reflective, collaborative work is essential to ensuring that public funding systems remain responsive, equitable, and effective in supporting Saskatchewan's diverse cultural communities.

We also acknowledge the volunteer peer assessors whose previous feedback informed this work, and SaskCulture staff who provided context, support, and access to documentation throughout the evaluation process. We extend our appreciation to our team including Israel LeJour for research and administrative support, and to Ley Ward for technical support throughout this project.

We thank the Eligible Cultural Organizations who participated in this evaluation through surveys, focus groups, and individual consultations. Approximately 80% of ECOs engaged in at least one component of this work, providing candid insights that shaped these findings. While we cannot name individual participants, we deeply appreciate their willingness to share experiences and contribute to program improvement.

The complete list of Eligible Cultural Organizations funded through the Annual Global Funding program includes:

Association of Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan Canadian Artists Representation/Le front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC) SASK Conseil culturel fransaskois Dance Saskatchewan Incorporated Mackenzie Art Gallery Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan Museums Association of Saskatchewan Nature Saskatchewan Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Councils Remai / Mendel Art Gallery Saskatchewan Archaeological Society	Saskatchewan Band Association Saskatchewan Choral Federation Saskatchewan Council for Archives and Archivists Saskatchewan Cultural Exchange Society Saskatchewan Drama Association Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association Saskatchewan Express Saskatchewan Genealogical Society Inc. Saskatchewan German Council Saskatchewan History & Folklore Society	Saskatchewan Library Association Saskatchewan Music Educators Association Saskatchewan Music Festival Association Saskatchewan Orchestra Association Saskatchewan Organization for Heritage Languages Saskatchewan Writers Guild Theatre Saskatchewan Inc. Ukrainian Canadian Congress – Saskatchewan Provincial Council Wanuskewin Heritage Park
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Appendix A

Best Practice

Comparator Funding Models

Comparator Funding Models

Purpose and scope (for appendix use): This is a light-touch scan of comparable public arts funding models to support SaskCulture’s AGF renewal discussion. It is not an evaluation, ranking, or recommendation. It is included to show what was reviewed and to offer a few transferable practices for future exploration.

Jurisdictions reviewed: Provincial (Arts Nova Scotia; Manitoba Arts Council), Federal (Canada Council for the Arts).

Arts Nova Scotia (Provincial)

Funding context

- Arts Nova Scotia operates as a provincial arts council providing multi-year funding using an organizational operating support model delivered through multi-year programs. Operate–Activate offers support on a two-year basis, while Operate–Sustain supports established organizations on a four-year basis both are subject to annual provincial budget availability. (1)
- According to both programs, policy priority will be given to equity deserving collectives, as outlined in their Equity Framework. (2)

Why this model is relevant to AGF

- Arts Nova Scotia is a strong comparator because it operates at the provincial level and manages long-term operating relationships while explicitly distinguishing between organizational stages.
- Its use of differentiated operating pathways offers concrete examples of how AGF could acknowledge maturity, risk, and readiness without relying on a single funding category.
- According to Arts Nova Scotia websites, the descriptions indicate that Operate-Activate targets newer or smaller organizations, whereas Operate-Sustain assists existing organizations, functionally distinguishing funding by organizational stage. (3)

Core operating and multi-year support

- Operate-Sustain provides multi-year operating funding for established organizations.
- Operate-Activate supports organizations earlier in their development with a shorter cycle and a built-in reset.

Assessment and allocation model

- Applications are reviewed by Peer Assessment Committees (PACs) that are made up of three assessors.
- Program officers facilitate the process and ensure fairness and diversity; however, they do not participate in scoring or ranking.
- PACs evaluate applications using an assessment tool with three main criteria:
 - Artistic Impact (Activate: 50%, Sustain: 40%)
 - Relevance and Community Impact (30%)
 - Organizational Effectiveness (Activate: 20%, Sustain: 30%)
- For both programs, the program officer presents PAC recommendations to the Arts NS Board of Directors for final approval. (4)

Reporting, accountability, and data practices

- Arts Nova Scotia supports accountability through interim reporting and requires organizations to keep financial records. (5)
- Applications are kept anonymous, and the identities of peer assessors are disclosed annually to ensure transparency.
- Operate-Sustain also employs CADAC to gather financial and statistical data and report on the health of Nova Scotian arts groups.

IDEA and Indigenous considerations

- Programs reference provincial-level equity and accessibility expectations and encourage alignment with sector standards.
- Arts Nova Scotia employs the Equity Framework to center marginalized and Indigenous groups, ensuring that IDEA principles are included when considering eligibility, assessment, and funding. (6)

Notable practices to consider for AGF

- This program provides multi-year, peer-reviewed operating funding with equity and accessibility identified as policy priorities. Accountability is supported through required reporting and, for Operate-Sustain, CADAC data collection to monitor organizational health and sector trends... (7)

Key sources

1. <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-activate> / <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-sustain> - Found under *How often is funding awarded?* – for both programs
2. <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-activate> - Found under *'The purpose of this program is to:'*
3. <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-sustain> / <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-activate> - Found in the first sentences of the program.
4. <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-activate> - Found under *How will our application be assessed?*
5. <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-sustain> / <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-activate> - Found under *How often is this funding awarded? /What are the financial and statistical reporting requirements?*
6. <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-sustain> / <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-activate> – Found under *Strategic Priorities* (Both)
7. <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-sustain> / <https://artsns.ca/programs/operate-activate> - Found before *Strategic Priorities* and in *How will our application be assessed? /How often is funding awarded?*

Manitoba Arts Council (Provincial)

Funding context

- This program invests in community arts and cultural organizations, supporting Manitoba's art sector. The funding structure includes support for the ongoing activities and operations of these organizations. (8)

Why this model is relevant to AGF

- MAC provides a provincial comparison that maintains a clear distinction between operating support and project funding.
- Its Support–Operate program treats operating funding as confirmation of organizational viability and sector stability, rather than as a competitive mechanism requiring year-over-year improvement.
- Assessment focuses on mandate alignment, financial health, and operational capacity, with CADAC data used for sector monitoring rather than individual performance ranking. This model demonstrates how operating funding can prioritize sustainability and continuity without collapsing into project-style evaluation.

Core operating and multi-year support

- Organizations must plan at least three years ahead, prioritizing long-term operational stability and ongoing creative programming. (9)

Assessment and allocation model

- Funding decisions are made through a peer review process, examining each organization's effect, inclusivity, and operational strength. Support is then allocated based on how applications rank relative to available funds. (10)

Reporting, accountability, and data practices

- The Manitoba Arts Council's Support-Operate program requires the submission of financial and statistical reports through the Canadian Arts Statistics (CADAC) system. (11)
- This ensures transparency, accountability, and consistent sector data. This reporting allows MAC to assess organizational health, measure program impact, and support evidence-based decision-making, while also matching reporting expectations with the nature of basic operational funding (12)

IDEA and Indigenous considerations

- The Manitoba Arts Council's activities are guided by Indigenous perspectives and the ideals of equality, diversity, and inclusion. Through projects such as Indigenous 360 and its cultural integrity policies, MAC promotes culturally sensitive programming and Indigenous artistic expression while also supporting practices that enhance equity and inclusiveness in the arts.(13)

Notable practices to consider for AGF

- Manitoba Arts Council relies on peer assessment committees made up of arts professionals and Indigenous knowledge keepers to guide decisions on operating support, ensuring sector-based expertise informs funding recommendations. (14)

Key sources

8. <https://artscouncil.mb.ca/grants/operate/> - Found under Heading
9. <https://artscouncil.mb.ca/grants/operate/> - Found in *Who can apply?*
10. https://artscouncil.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/V2023B.1_Support_Operate_Guidelines_EN.pdf?utm - Found on pg. 2 / <https://artscouncil.mb.ca/grants/how-to-apply/> - Found in *Tips for your application*
11. <https://artscouncil.mb.ca/grants/operate/> - Found under *Eligibility/How to Apply*

12. <https://artscouncil.mb.ca/grants/operate/cadac-frequently-asked-questions/> - Found under *What is CADAC? /Why does MAC need us to use CADAC?*
13. <https://artscouncil.mb.ca/about-us/>

Canada Council for the Arts (Federal)

Funding context

- Federal arts funder with national reach and peer assessment as a core decision-making practice. (15)

Why this model is relevant to AGF

- Demonstrates how public funder structures long-term operating support using clearly differentiated program pathways, criteria, and assessment frameworks. While not comparable in scale, it demonstrates how operating funding can be organized without relying on a single application or assessment model.
- Its publicly documented separation between peer assessment, staff analysis, and final decision-making provides an example of how roles and processes can be articulated transparently within a stable operating funding system. This offers contextual insight into how clarity and accountability can be maintained over long-term funding relationships. (16)

Core operating and multi-year support

- Provides multi-year support through organization-focused programs, including longer-term funding pathways for eligible organizations. (17)

Assessment and allocation model (18)

- Peer assessment is central, with assessors providing evaluations and recommendations.
- Peer panels examine projects, and the Canada Council makes final funding decisions to ensure transparency and accountability.

Reporting, accountability, and data practices (19)

- Uses structured outcome frameworks and reporting expectations aligned to organizational role and scale.

IDEA and Indigenous considerations (20)

- Equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and Indigenous reconciliation are embedded within program design and assessment expectations.

Notable practices to consider for AGF

- Use differentiated organizational funding pathways with distinct assessment frameworks, so operating support reflects organizational role and maturity without relying on a single, uniform funding category.
- Clearly document and publish how peer assessment input, staff analysis, and final funding decisions relate to one another, to support transparency and trust in long-term operating funding relationships.

Key sources

14. <https://artscouncil.mb.ca/resources/assessment/>

15. <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/funding-decisions/decision-making-process> - Found under *Decision making: Awarding grants and prizes*.
16. <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/funding-decisions/decision-making-process>
17. <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants/core-grants-for-organizations> - Found in *What you should know before applying for a core grant*
18. <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/funding-decisions/decision-making-process> - Found under *Peer Assessment*
19. <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/funding-decisions/principles>
20. <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/funding-decisions/decision-making-process> - Found in *Composition of peer committees/* <https://canadacouncil.ca/priorities/ongoing-priorities/equity> and in their policy

Edmonton Arts Council (Call with Alex. January 20, 2026)

Edmonton Arts Council

- Went through major organizational change, including a new Executive Director (2024), significant staff growth, and increased independence from municipal government policy structures.
- They are nearing the end of a 10-year cultural plan that began in 2019 and are preparing to go to the City in the fall for a four year funding allotment.
- They released their first independent investment strategy in fall 2024, reflecting the shift away from being directly tied to City policy frameworks.

Funding structure and scale

- EAC's total budget is around \$28 million, which includes grants, public art, civic programming, and other operating branches.
- Grants funding is just over \$14 million, with around \$10.2 million supporting annual funding allocations.
- Funding has largely stayed static since 2018 and noted this has reduced accountability in the system over time.
- Proposing gradual reductions over multiple years as the solution to those overfunded

Multi year funding pilot

- Multiyear agreements began in 2022 as three-year pilots: 22 organizations (2022), 6 (2023), 2 (2024).
- Multiyear renewals are currently paused since EAC is entering a municipal funding cycle and does not want to lock in commitments without knowing future funding levels.
- Multiyear funding amounts stayed consistent across the agreement period, with no inflation adjustments.

Data collection changes and why they were introduced

- Recent application changes were largely driven by the city requiring stronger reporting on economic impact and geographic reach.
- Examples include collecting postal codes for mapping and requiring more consistent financial reporting.
- EAC emphasized that they are still building the internal systems and capacity needed to track and interpret this data.

Internal review process

- EAC is strengthening its internal review process by using a structured staff checklist that breaks eligibility requirements into clear yes or no questions.
- The internal review captures factual issues such as missing documentation, unclear financial statements, or submissions that do not meet basic requirements.
- A key point was that record keeping issues show up across all sizes of organizations. This includes small volunteer run groups and large institutions.

Examples of what they are seeing:

- Submissions that include bank balance sheets instead of proper financial statements.
- Organizations unable to clearly identify key expense categories, even at large budget levels.
- Variation that seems tied more to internal capacity and governance than to organizational age or size.

Application and Assessment Structure

- All organizations, regardless of size or funding request, currently complete same application form.
- This creates inefficiencies for both applicants and assessors, especially when very small organizations are required to provide the same level of detail as large institutions.
- Raises questions about proportionality, assessor fatigue, and if the process meaningfully reflects organizational scale or risk.

IDEA and TRC considerations

- Using a single application across all organizations raises equity and accessibility concerns, particularly for smaller, volunteer led, Indigenous, and equity serving organizations.
- There was recognition that IDEA and Indigenous accountability cannot be meaningfully assessed through uniform processes alone.
- Edmonton Arts Council noted that formal IDEA and Indigenous frameworks are still in development and expectations are not yet fully defined.

External assessment and allocation decisions

- EAC uses peer assessors, but assessors do not determine final funding amounts. They provide advice and recommendations.
- Allocation decisions rest with EAC leadership, informed by peer assessment plus internal review and financial context.
- They described this split as intentional but noted it increases the need to clearly document the reasons behind allocation decisions.

Context sharing and feedback to applicants

- EAC exploring how to provide assessors with limited factual context when relevant (for example leadership turnover) without speculation or private information.
- They operate under a principle of assuming positive intent during assessment.
- They do not share assessor notes verbatim. They provide structured feedback
- They have developed an assessment feedback report that:
 - Uses a four-point scale and category outcomes rather than numeric scores.
 - Summarizes how assessors landed across criteria. Not a test score report.
 - May be attached to next year's application in future to help assessors see trajectory, but that process is still being refined.

Organizing review by funding request size

- To better manage scale differences, EAC is moving toward grouping applications by funding request amount rather than program stream.
- Current working groupings are under \$20k, \$20k to \$100k and over \$100k
- They noted that a single application process is not efficient when it is applied equally to very small groups and major institutions.

Funding percentage bands and phased adjustments

- EAC is developing proportional funding approaches tied to organization size, including caps that scale based on operating budget.

- They gave an example of an organization being funded at more than half of its operating costs and flagged that as a major issue.
- They discussed phased reductions over several years as a more realistic approach than sudden cuts.

Exploring priority-based incentives, including:

- Fair pay for artists and arts workers
- Facility operations (where relevant)
- Strategic work related to equity and Indigenous communities

Heritage and community foundation roles

- EAC funds some legacy festival and cultural events, including the Heritage Festival, even though it is not strictly “arts.”
- Edmonton Heritage Council provides operational funding at a smaller scale.
- Edmonton Community Foundation has major role in funding community-based work, including through fiscal agents. EAC cannot do because it administers City dollars.
- They identified overlap risk across funders and described situations where organizations received operational funding from more than one source, requiring correction.

Invent and Adapt program

- Invent and Adapt is a capacity building program focused on internal strengthening rather than program delivery.
- It supports work such as strategic planning, restructuring, training, administrative capacity, shared staffing models, and organizational consolidation.
- They noted examples like theatre companies sharing administration and financial roles under one roof as a practical model.

Takeaways for AGF

- Separating peer assessment from allocation can reduce assessor burden and improve consistency but requires strong internal documentation and transparency about allocation logic.
- Internal review tools that translate eligibility into concrete checks can strengthen consistency and reduce ambiguity.
- Funding bands and staged adjustments can be a way to correct overfunding without destabilizing organizations.
- Capacity building funds that support “getting internal operations right” can encourage long term stability and reduce repeated crises in the system.

Appendix B

Survey Summary

AGF Survey Summary

Annual Global Funding Survey (AGF) – Question-Based Summary (21 respondents)

Note on confidentiality: This summary is written to avoid identifying any individual organization or respondent. Where the survey included organization names, those names are not reproduced here.

Acronyms

ECO – Eligible Cultural Organizations

IDEA – Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access

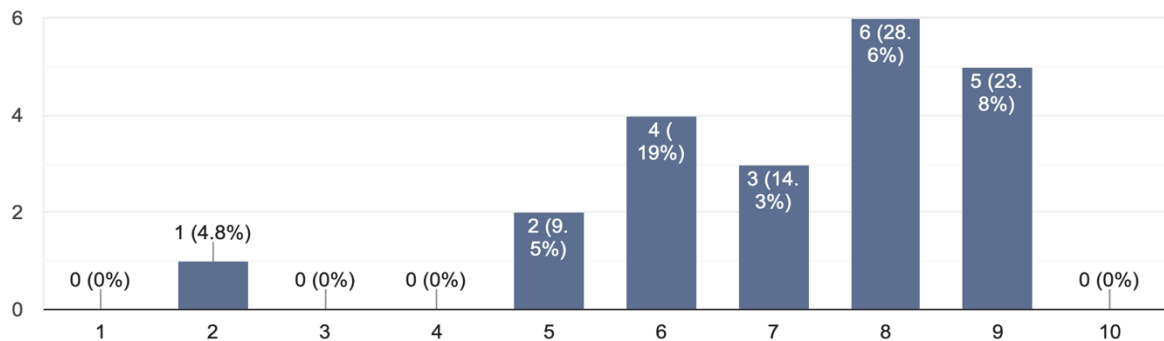
TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission

UNDRIP – United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

MMIWG – Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

1. How would you rate your understanding of the performance criteria? (20 responses)

Responses clustered in the **mid-to-high range**.



2. What aspects of the performance criteria work well? (20 responses)

Participants identified several strengths in the current performance criteria, particularly related to flexibility, relevance, and alignment with organizational and policy contexts.

Clarity and ease of use

- Several noted that there is **sufficient writing space** to share what is needed and that the application is generally well laid out.
- The criteria were described as providing a **clear sense of areas to focus on** when completing the AGF application.
- Some indicated that the criteria have **remained stable** over time, making it easier to frame organizational work.

Flexibility across organizations

- Responses consistently noted that the criteria are broad enough to encompass a wide range of organizational mandates, sizes, and programming models.
- Participants appreciated that the framework **avoids a rigid one-size-fits-all approach** and remains relevant for both large, established organizations and smaller, volunteer-led groups

- Several highlighted that the openness of the criteria allows organizations to be **responsive to community needs and interests**.
- One organization noted that the eligibility framework supports cultural infrastructure and community, rather than narrowly defined activities.

Alignment with organizational work and priorities

- Many described **strong alignment** between the performance criteria and their organizational mandates and operations.
- Some noted alignment with SaskCulture’s strategic plan and broader cultural policy.
- One participant appreciated the **inclusion of definitions** and the space provided for capacity building.

Focus on impact beyond numbers

- Several respondents valued the emphasis on impact rather than relying solely on statistics.
- Participants noted that focusing on impact allows organizations to communicate value beyond numerical measures, particularly where **numbers alone do not reflect meaningful outcomes**.
- Some highlighted the opportunity to present cultural impacts, including impacts related to human interaction with natural environments.
- The **narrative-based approach** was seen as enabling the capture of relational, contextual, and longer-term outcomes that are not always easily quantifiable.

Recognition of cultural diversity and relevance

- Recognition of Diversity was identified as a strength of the criteria by some organizations.
- The criteria were described as allowing organizations to **reflect on cultural relevance** and how programming benefits the communities they serve in broader ways.

A Balanced framework

- Taken as a whole, the criteria were described as covering the right areas and providing a well-rounded representation of organizations acknowledging that the ECOs cover a wide range of activities, mandates, experiences and types of programs or member-based work.
- Participants characterized the framework as **clear, fair, and flexible**, supporting assessment of cultural impact, accessibility, organizational effectiveness, governance, leadership, and sustainability.
- One organization noted that the criteria clearly lay out the expectations of the Trust.

Overall impressions

- Many indicated that most aspects of **the criteria work well** and that nothing felt glaringly missing, although some indicated a lack of clarity about specific desired outcomes.
- Overall, the framework was described as open, balanced, and applicable to a wide range of cultural organizations across Saskatchewan with comments made about their value and collective impact.

3. What challenges or barriers do you experience with the performance criteria? (21 responses)

Participants described several recurring challenges with the performance criteria and how they are applied in the AGF process.

Volume and repetition in the application

- Some said the application includes **too many questions** and that many feel repetitive, creating an overly large and **time-consuming process**.
- One organization noted that the number of criteria is difficult to address in practice and suggested that the criteria could be **condensed without losing important content**, or that some information could be **addressed through other processes**.
- Specifically mentioned was **making better use of the annual reports and follow up reports** to help reduce the burden of the application process and to have current progressive information.

Unclear language and assessment expectations

- The criteria, terminology use and language were **frequently described as subjective**, including terms such as impact, effectiveness, success, and engagement.
- Several expressed uncertainty about what level of merit is expected (and **how value is assigned to various activities**) and noted limited visibility into how assessment works, including not having seen a scoring matrix.
- **Clearer definitions, benchmarks, and performance indicators** were identified as potential ways to reduce misinterpretation.
- Clarity about **what SaskCulture is reporting on** to the Trust would help to establish clearer guidelines or help focus the "bigger picture" objectives for the funding.
- Some said that while vagueness/open ended expectations have flexibility and merit, it makes things too difficult to assess or plan for when funding becomes more competitive.
- Some indicated they were unsure overall what information was required and suggested that **examples would be helpful**.
- One participant stated that the criteria as written do not always reflect SaskCulture's expectations in practice.

Relevance and fit across different organizations

- While questions were generally seen as broadly relevant, some noted that certain criteria do not align well with all organizational or operational realities.
- One organization highlighted difficulty answering when meaningful opportunities or **experiences do not clearly align with expected results**, and felt the criteria do not always account for "who we really are" as an organization.
- Concerns were raised about the Arts section being too brief, creating uncertainty about whether **assessors distinguish between Arts and Cultural sectors**.
- Challenges related to Participation, Access and Service were noted, particularly around increasing diversity and inclusion in membership.

- **Recognition of Diversity was described as challenging** for some small multicultural organizations, particularly in representing Saskatchewan's diversity when their mandate is very focused.
- **Several noted that clearer definitions and expectations** would be beneficial, including concern that interpretations may differ between assessors and ECO perspectives.
- One participant suggested that the definition of multiculturalism could be strengthened to focus more explicitly on equity, with clearer reference to racism and barriers to full integration.

Challenges showing impact and evidence

- Some organizations said it can be difficult to provide the information needed to answer questions, particularly when participation feedback is incomplete or hard to gather.
- Member-based organizations stated that their **members do not gather data in a particular or similar format**. Many are simply guessing or making assumptions. Data/ evidence and impact tools should be more consistent, training provided, with places to indicate where data is firm and when it is not (a guesstimate).
- Concerns were raised about **overreliance on narrative reporting** and said writing ability may be rewarded over demonstrated impact, suggesting a better balance is needed in how information is shared/presented but all of it with concrete measures.
- Some mentioned the **lack of provincial impact data** (either it is not collected or not shared with the ECOs) which should include impact beyond the culture sector (economic, labour market, social determinants, reduction in racism, increased knowledge, awareness and education)

Duplication and timing pressures

- One or two organizations stated that annual submissions and follow-up reports already provide budgets, financial statements, activity summaries, and evidence tied to performance criteria, and that **completing a separate full application every three years feels redundant**.
- The same respondents described the burden as especially unfair for one-person organizations, particularly when the full **application falls during a busy programming period** and noted that the cycle does not offer alternate timing or additional lead time.

Criteria that do not fit all operating models

- Difficulty meeting criteria related to volunteerism and membership was noted where organizational models do not align with assumed structures.
- Concerns were raised that this can negatively affect scoring even where organizations create significant paid employment impacts or operate within unionized environments.
- Broad and complex definitions, including the term *unique contribution*, were cited as challenging, particularly given limited capacity for documentation and evaluation.
- **Indigenous organizations described challenges working within colonial structures**, including impacts on staffing stability and turnover.
- Newcomer/multicultural organizations expressed similar concerns and the inability to capture the significance of different types of progress/impact (what is small to some is huge to others).
- Some organizations found it **difficult to communicate impacts not tied to individual activities**, particularly where cultural work challenges the status quo at a systemic level.

4. What changes would help the performance criteria better reflect your organization's work? (19 responses)

Respondents identified a range of changes that would improve how the performance criteria reflect the realities, impacts, and capacities of different organizations.

Reducing repetition and administrative workload

- Participants called for **reduced repetition** across questions, particularly where accessibility, diversity, and related topics must be addressed multiple times.
- Many suggested **shifting focus away from past activity** and toward present and future work.
- Some proposed allowing annual submissions and follow-up reports to replace the separate multi-year application, noting that much of the same information is already provided.
- The workload placed on small and one-person organizations was described as disproportionate.
- Greater **flexibility in application timing** was also recommended.

Clearer guidance and expectations

- Clearer definitions and examples explaining **how questions are evaluated** were widely requested.
- Participants suggested providing an overview explaining how submitted data is used in assessment and funding decisions.
- Requests were made for **greater transparency** regarding assessor guidance, scoring processes, and expectations.
- Some recommended checklists of required evidence and clearer digital guidance.

More meaningful ways to demonstrate impact

- There was strong interest in **more opportunities to share impact** through testimonials, informal feedback, and qualitative evidence.
- Many emphasized the value of **storytelling**, particularly for impacts not tied strictly to programs or activities.
- Suggestions included interviews, short videos, or in-person conversations with organizational leadership to complement written reporting.
- One participant proposed allowing organizations to describe programs **in their own words** and then identify which criteria are met, reducing repetition.

Recognition of differences across organizations

- Participants emphasized the need for **adjudicators to better understand organizational size, mandate, and scope**, and to avoid comparisons that disadvantage smaller organizations.
- **Indigenous organizations** noted that their work often operates at **broader, indirect scales** that are difficult to compare to narrowly focused mandates.
- Concerns were raised about volunteerism and membership criteria not reflecting all operational models, particularly for organizations offering free, low-barrier public programming.

Clearer guidance for the Arts sector

- Clearer and **more fulsome Arts-specific guidance** and understanding was requested, with participants noting benefits for both applicants and assessors.

TRC, IDEA, and equity considerations

- Participants asked for **clearer articulation of expectations and outcomes related to TRC and IDEA**.
- Indigenous perspectives emphasized the need for definitions that reflect **Indigenous worldviews**, including cultural revitalization, land-based learning, reconciliation, and the role of elders and community partners.
- **Clarifying uniqueness in ways that recognize Indigenous organizations** as distinct ecosystems was also recommended.
- A broader view of possibilities **beyond TRC** (as one tool for use) to include national and international agendas and actions related to broader-based inclusion and reduction in oppression/exclusion.

Tools, systems, and reporting frameworks

- Suggestions included breaking **multi-part questions into smaller sections**, offering video tutorials, mandatory training, and improved digital guidance.
- Some proposed greater attention to **digital engagement** and clearer focus on board strength and sustainability.
- Logic models and tiered performance indicators differentiated by organizational type and capacity were also suggested. Several mentioned developing indicators of progress, results and impact.

Relationship-building and feedback

- Interest was expressed in both **pre-and post-assessment conversations** with assessors to better understand strengths and areas for improvement.
- Participants noted that without feedback, extensive application effort often results in minimal funding change, limiting perceived value for the process.
- Suggestions were framed in **a spirit of partnership** aimed at strengthening the cultural sector.
- Several stated that their organization's reputation and work were well known and the process of re-applying each time reduced the opportunity to work toward open feedback and relationship building **with an eye to the future and systemic changes** needed province-wide within the ECO ecosystem.

5. Do you feel able to report challenges or difficulties without fear of consequences? (21 responses)

Responses reflected a wide range of experiences, with many respondents expressing conditional or mixed comfort in reporting challenges.

Ability to report challenges

- Several participants said they feel able to report challenges, either fully or mostly.
- Some answered simply yes, while others said yes with qualifications depending on context, experience, or the nature of the challenge.
- A few indicated they were unsure.

Conditional comfort and hesitation

- Many described feeling only somewhat comfortable reporting challenges.
- Several noted that while organizations are encouraged to report difficulties, there is uncertainty about how that information is interpreted during assessment.
- Some questioned whether **challenges are viewed as contextual realities or interpreted as shortcomings.**
- Comfort was also said to vary depending on the type of issue being reported.

Concerns about assessor understanding and interpretation

- Several expressed concern that assessors may not fully understand their organization, its work, or the specific challenges it faces. Some stated that **SaskCulture could play a greater role** in this.
- Some felt that difficulties are often left for organizations to resolve on their own, without meaningful acknowledgement or support.
- Participants with long experience in the program noted that comfort reporting challenges has increased over time for them personally, but concern about assessor interpretation remains.
- A distinction was frequently made between **confidence in SaskCulture staff** understanding challenges (which they do) and uncertainty about whether assessors do.
- Comments were made about not knowing the assessors' backgrounds and their ability to understand organizational challenges; and ECOs not receiving feedback about identified or resolved issues .

Impact of competition and funding pressure

- Several noted that **the competitive nature of the AGF program affects willingness to report** openly, linked to concern about stats/ data not being totally verifiable nor is it (data) gathered consistently from one organization to another.
- Funding was described as coming from a fixed pool, where increases for one organization may reduce funding available to others.
- This environment was said to discourage transparency and create pressure to **focus on meeting requirements** rather than openly discussing either possibilities/innovation or difficulties.
- Some expressed concern about maintaining eligibility and good standing in a program that is not accessible to very many organizations.

Equity, value, and lived experience

- Some described **feeling less valued** in broader engagement spaces, including ECO meetings.
- One participant noted that racism and unequal valuation of organizations influence how safe they feel reporting challenges.
- Indigenous and equity-seeking perspectives were reflected in concerns about whether reporting challenges related to **systemic barriers** is received fairly.

Perceived lack of response or follow-up

- Some said they feel able to report challenges but **do not believe anything meaningful is done with that information.**

- Feedback or suggestions offered in response were sometimes described as unrealistic given limited time and resources.
- Participants noted that conceiving improvements is often easier than executing them, and that **operational realities are not always acknowledged**.

Impact of experience

- Several noted that comfort reporting challenges increased with experience in the program.
- One participant explicitly stated that earlier in their career they did not feel able to report challenges, but now feel somewhat more comfortable.
- Even among experienced organizations, **uncertainty remained about how assessors perceive reported difficulties**.

Overall pattern

- While some feel able to report challenges without fear of consequences, many described conditional comfort, ongoing uncertainty, or reluctance.
- Trust appears to be influenced by assessor transparency, competitive funding dynamics, perceived understanding of organizational context, and whether reporting challenges leads to meaningful acknowledgement or action.

6. Is it clear how the information you submit is used in assessment and funding decisions? (21 responses)

Responses reflected mixed understanding and ongoing uncertainty about how submitted information is assessed and translated into funding decisions.

Mixed levels of clarity

- Some said it is clear, or mostly clear, how submitted information is used in assessment.
- Several organizations said clarity exists to some extent, but not consistently.
- Many said it is not clear or not very clear.
- Some organizations expressed ambivalence, noting that while they want to say yes, they also feel uncertainty remains.

Guidelines versus lived experience

- Some noted that the Guidelines do outline how information is used by assessors.
- However, several respondents said that despite the written guidance, the practical experience of assessment and feedback does not always align with those explanations.
- One participant referenced specific guideline pages that describe the process, while still expressing concern about how it operates in practice.

Feedback quality and usefulness

- Post-decision **feedback was frequently described as vague**, brief, or general.
- Receiving a score without detailed explanation was said to make it difficult to understand how submissions were assessed or how to improve.
- Some felt feedback suggested that **assessors had not fully engaged with application materials**.
- Requests for additional evidence were described as frustrating when organizations were not permitted to submit supporting documentation.

Assessment process transparency

- Many expressed a desire for **clearer information about adjudication**, including scoring grids, weighting of criteria, and decision-making processes.
- Some were aware that point systems exist but said little is known about how decisions are actually made.
- Uncertainty was also expressed about how organizational diversity is addressed in assessment.
- Some expressed difficulty in finding information about **what organizations were funded** (reduced or increased budgets) and information **what level of expertise Assessor's possess**.

Desire for dialogue and learning

- Several organizations said it would be valuable to **meet with adjudicators** after funding decisions to receive clearer feedback. (One said either before, during or after has value).
- Direct conversations were seen as supporting learning, mentorship, and capacity building, benefiting both individual organizations and the broader sector.

Assessor capacity and compensation

- One participant raised concerns that **SaskCulture does not pay assessors**, unlike other funders.
- This raised questions about assessment quality, accountability, and whether professional development alone is adequate compensation and/or incentive to be involved.

Funding realities and expectations

- Some indicated understanding that **AGF operates within a fixed funding envelope**, with limited flexibility. Many, stated that costs have continued to increase and the gap is increasing.
- While stable funding was appreciated, limited movement year over year made it unclear how assessment scores translate into **meaningful funding change and long-term impact**.

Overall pattern

- While some feel the process is broadly understandable, many expressed partial clarity, uncertainty, or lack of transparency.
- Clearer feedback, greater transparency, and opportunities for dialogue were widely seen as ways to strengthen understanding and trust.

Annual Submission and Follow-Up Report

1. Do the application, Annual Submission, and Follow-Up Report function as an aligned, coherent system? What changes would you recommend? (20 responses)

Responses reflected mixed views on whether the application, Annual Submission, and Follow-Up Report function as a coherent system. While some respondents felt the system generally works, many identified gaps in alignment, efficiency, and clarity exist.

Overall alignment

- Several felt the three components function together reasonably well, or for the most part.
- Some said yes outright, while others said the system as improved compared to earlier cycles.

- A number of participants stated that the system works unevenly, or that components relate to each other but do not feel fully coherent.

Differences in purpose and audience

- Some noted that different components appear designed for different audiences, such as staff versus boards.
- The Follow-Up Report was often described as more statistical, while the application allows for greater narrative.

Volume, repetition, and administrative burden

- The overall process was frequently **described as exhaustive relative to funding levels**.
- **Repetition across components** was a common concern, with suggestions to reduce duplication and simplify requirements.

How the three components work together

- Some felt the application does not clearly relate to annual reporting.
- **Stronger integration** was suggested, though concern was expressed about shifting burden either to organizations or SaskCulture staff.

Improvements over time

- Participants acknowledged that **the application has improved** significantly since earlier cycles, particularly compared to the 2019–2022 cycle, which was described as dense and repetitive.
- Respondents noted that revisions prior to the 2024 application reduced overlap and improved concision.
- Some said the system is much better than it was previously but **could be improved further**.

Support materials, templates, and communication

- Several organizations described confusion related to support documents, unclear distinctions between documents such as **“organizational summary” and “organizational profile.”**
- Some stated that it would be helpful if all templates and required support materials were available in the grant portal, rather than distributed through multiple channels.
- It was noted that important instructions were shared through ECO meetings, which they understood to be informal, and suggested that **critical information should instead be housed centrally in the portal**.
- Respondents described challenges caused by late distribution of required documents, such as the “membership trends” spreadsheet, which necessitated last-minute revisions to applications already in progress.

Timing and deadline challenges

- Reporting timelines were said **not to align well with fiscal years or programming cycles**.
- Suggestions included **shifting deadlines** to better reflect organizational realities.
- Other options suggested were to have **staggered intakes** and options for timelines.

Data systems and reporting efficiency

- Organizations questioned why information cannot be entered continuously throughout the year into a single, cohesive system.

- It was suggested that a **unified digital system** could allow data to flow into Annual Submissions and applications, reducing duplication.
- Some noted that complex reporting systems are particularly challenging for Executive Directors with limited administrative or technical support.
- There was emphasis that **simplifying the overall process** should be a central goal.

External pressures and changes

- One respondent noted that recent changes to reporting requirements, including additional budget information, were **confusing and not reflective of operational reality**, and were perceived as driven by external requirements.
- Respondents acknowledged that reporting has evolved and is more closely aligned with SaskCulture's strategic plan, but that changes have sometimes created additional burden.

Overall pattern

- While improvements were acknowledged, there was strong interest in further simplification, clearer integration, and reduced administrative burden.

2. How do you connect reporting back to the performance criteria to show progress? (20 responses)

Responses showed a wide range of approaches to connecting Annual Submissions and Follow-Up Reports back to the performance criteria, with varying degrees of consistency and effectiveness.

Use of strategic planning

- Many participants said **they integrate the performance criteria into their strategic planning**, which then informs reporting.
- Progress is monitored against strategic plans and used to shape follow-up reporting. Some noted that because their organizations are culturally based, many **performance criteria are already embedded in their mission**, mandate, and strategic goals, including IDEA and accessibility.
- At the same time, some questioned **how “progress” is defined**, emphasizing that progress can look very different across organizations and that sustainability may be as meaningful as growth.
- Comments were made that their own organizational strategic plans (and those of their members) may not align specifically with SaskCulture's strategic plans and that more clarity is required about **which plans should take priority** or how to better align language and intent.

Referencing the original AGF application

- Some organizations said they connect reporting back to the performance criteria by returning to their original AGF application.
- This often involves reviewing the application alongside the most recent Follow-Up Report when preparing new submissions.
- Several noted that they refer back to what was proposed in the application and report on what was delivered based on the funding actually received.
- Comments were made that **SaskCulture is in a better position to gather, manage and share multi-year data** and summarize reports for assessors, ECOs and Trust needs.

Year-to-year reporting as the primary focus

- Several participants said they rely more heavily on Annual Submissions and Follow-Up Reports than on the AGF application, particularly because the application is submitted far in advance.
- Funding allocations were noted as **often being lower than requested**, and shifting funding levels and **changing contexts** require organizations to adapt in ways that were not foreseeable at the time of application.
- Some indicated that the performance criteria become more relevant during the AGF application cycle than during annual reporting, and that **they think about the criteria most explicitly every three years**.

Loose connection between reporting and criteria

- Several said that the Annual Submission and Follow-Up Report function mainly as statistical or programmatic references and are only **loosely connected to the performance criteria**.
- One participant noted that there is not a strong connection beyond using the reports as quick references for programs and statistics.
- Several indicated that **they do not feel explicitly asked to connect reporting back to the performance criteria** during the reporting process, and some said they struggle to make this connection or feel they do not do it well.

Methods used to demonstrate progress

- **A variety of methods were described** to demonstrate progress, including tracking program participation and service engagement, comparing year-to-year data, and illustrating growth in programming and organizational health.
- Some organizations use narrative, photos, videos, and other qualitative materials to demonstrate progress, particularly when they act as funders to their own members.
- Others emphasized focusing reporting on the **performance criteria that is most relevant to their community** and strategic vision, rather than areas they see as less impactful.

Challenges related to time and change

- Several noted that there can be a three-year gap between writing the application and reporting on later years, during which organizational circumstances, funding levels, and community **needs may change significantly**.
- **Difficulty demonstrating progress** was also described when funding has been reduced, as fewer resources can limit the ability to meet originally proposed criteria.
- Some indicated that **changes to reporting formats over time make it harder** to maintain consistent connections between reports and criteria.

System limitations

- Several participants said it would be easier to connect reporting to performance criteria if reporting systems could recall data from previous Annual Submissions and Follow-Up Reports.
- **Better system memory or integration** was seen as a way to help organizations track and demonstrate progress more clearly and accurately over time.

Overall pattern

- While some organizations have developed internal systems that align reporting with performance criteria, many described partial, inconsistent, or informal connections.
- Overall, responses suggest that clearer expectations, better system integration, and greater recognition of changing contexts would support more consistent demonstration of progress over time.

3. Does reporting (Annual Submission and Follow-Up Report) allow you to clearly communicate your progress, outcomes, and results/change? (20 responses)

Responses reflected a generally mixed experience, with many organizations indicating that reporting allows them to communicate progress to some extent, but with notable limitations in capturing outcomes, qualitative change, and longer-term impact.

Ability to communicate progress

- Many respondents answered **“yes,” “mostly yes,” or “for the majority, yes,”** indicating that reporting does provide a basic mechanism to describe progress and results.
- Several respondents noted that reporting allows them to explain what actually occurred during the year, rather than what was anticipated at the time of the AGF application.
- Narrative sections were frequently identified as the primary place where progress and outcomes can be communicated.

Limits of quantitative reporting

- Multiple organizations emphasized that membership, participation numbers, and statistics **do not reliably reflect meaningful progress or change.**
- Membership was described as remaining stable or fluctuating in ways that are not necessarily linked to organizational health or impact.
- There was concern that reporting can become **overly focused on outputs and numbers,** rather than outcomes or change.

Challenges communicating qualitative and long-term impact

- Several participants stated that **qualitative, relational, and long-term impacts**—such as cultural learning, relationship building, mentorship, personal growth, and land-based experiences—**are difficult to represent within current reporting formats.**
- Examples were shared of significant outcomes, including long-term career pathways, skill development, returning volunteers, and intergenerational impact, that are meaningful but not easily quantifiable.
- Some noted that **change often occurs over many years or decades,** making it difficult to demonstrate within annual reporting cycles.

Constraints of reporting structure

- The limited length of the **Annual Submission Letter was identified as a constraint,** requiring organizations to prioritize certain programs or activities while leaving other work undocumented.

- Some said that while financial reporting is clear, **statistical reporting is challenging** and does not always align with how impact is experienced.
- **Repetition across questions** and restrictions on **reusing examples** were also noted as limiting clear communication.

Demonstrating change over time

- Several respondents said that while reporting allows them to demonstrate successful programs, there is **limited space to show change over time or progress across multiple years**.
- Leadership transitions, organizational rebuilding, and overlapping past and future work were described as difficult to capture clearly within the reporting framework.

Reporting organizational strain and capacity

- Some participants expressed **discomfort reporting challenges related to capacity**, workload, or organizational stress, noting concern about being judged negatively.
- Limited space to communicate when organizations are struggling, rebuilding, or lacking capacity was seen as a barrier to accurately contextualizing progress.

Context and assessor understanding

- A few organizations noted uncertainty about how much background knowledge assessors have, creating tension around how much organizational context/history must be included in reports.
- **Language limitations and ambiguity about expectations** were cited as factors affecting how clearly outcomes and change can be communicated.

Overall pattern

- While reporting generally allows organizations to communicate progress at a basic level, responses indicate persistent challenges in representing qualitative outcomes, long-term change, and organizational realities.
- Responses consistently identified a gap between what can be measured easily and what is most meaningful in terms of cultural impact and change.

4. Are you able to report operational realities (needs and gaps) accurately and easily? (20 responses)

Responses showed a mixed experience, with some organizations indicating they are able to report operational realities to a degree, while many described limitations, discomfort, or uncertainty about the usefulness of reporting needs and gaps.

General ability to report operational realities

- Several respondents answered **“yes,” “mostly yes,” or “for the majority, yes,”** suggesting that some operational realities can be reported through existing mechanisms.
- Some respondents noted that financial realities, such as insufficient funding or limited staffing, can be communicated with relative clarity.

Limits to reporting needs and gaps

- Multiple respondents indicated that while financial information can be reported, **operational gaps, unmet needs, or capacity constraints** are more difficult to communicate.

- Some respondents explicitly said they cannot report needs and gaps easily or are unsure whether they are doing so effectively.

Emphasis on successes over challenges

- Several noted that reporting tends to focus on **successes rather than challenges**, which can discourage full and accurate disclosure of operational difficulties.
- Some expressed discomfort reporting issues when actively experiencing challenges, despite the inclusion of questions related to challenges in recent reporting formats.

Concerns about usefulness and response

- Participants questioned whether reported operational realities are **being addressed or acted upon** by those reviewing the reports.
- One organization asked whether reporting needs and gaps is meaningful if those realities cannot be managed or responded to within the system.

Role of informal communication

- Several organizations noted that discussions about operational needs and **gaps often occur outside formal reporting**, through direct conversations with SaskCulture staff, outreach, or informal channels.
- These conversations were described as more effective for conveying context, though they tend to focus on individual organizations rather than capturing sector-wide patterns.

Limits of current reporting tools

- The Follow-Up Report was described as having **very limited space to report challenges** and adjustments, often restricted to a single example of each.
- Some noted that budget notes help provide context, but do not fully capture broader operational realities.

Capacity and workload pressures

- Participants highlighted the **strain of limited staff capacity**, noting that time spent seeking additional funding reduces the ability to expand programs or services.
- Some indicated uncertainty or difficulty articulating needs and gaps clearly, even when those challenges are present.

Overall pattern

- While some organizations feel able to report certain operational realities, responses suggest that needs and gaps are not consistently or easily captured through formal reporting tools.
- Many rely on informal communication to convey operational challenges, and uncertainty remains about how reported needs and gaps are used or addressed within the assessment process.

5. What reporting information feels redundant or not useful? (19 responses)

Responses identified several areas of reporting that are seen as repetitive, difficult to complete accurately, or of unclear value, particularly related to financial documentation, statistics, and demographic data.

Financial reporting duplication

- Many organizations identified **repetition in financial reporting** as a significant burden. This included repeatedly submitting budgets, cashflows, and similar financial documents across the AGF application, Annual Submission, and Follow-Up Reports.
- Several **questioned the value of resubmitting largely unchanged financial information** year after year, particularly when audited financial statements and actuals are already provided.
- Some suggested the development of a **single, master financial record** that could be updated as needed rather than submitted multiple times.

Statistics and data collection challenges

- A recurring concern was the **usefulness and accuracy of statistical reporting**, particularly when figures are based on estimates rather than verifiable data.
- Organizations cited **difficulty collecting accurate information** on age groups, audience demographics, Indigenous participation, volunteers, and other attendance characteristics, especially for those with province-wide reach.
- Several noted that statistics are often approximations and may not meaningfully represent reach or impact.
- Uncertainty was expressed about **how these statistics are used beyond reporting** to the Ministry and their value within the assessment process.

Membership and volunteer reporting

- Membership numbers were frequently described as **limited indicators that do not reflect the full scope or depth of organizational impact**.
- Some organizations noted that volunteer and membership reporting does not align well with their operational models or how communities engage with their work.
- Participants suggested that integrating volunteerism and membership information into narrative sections could allow for greater nuance and contextual accuracy.

Demographics and identity-related reporting

- Several organizations identified **demographic reporting as problematic**, particularly where it risks **tokenizing staff, board, or participants**.
- Concerns were raised about **making assumptions** when individuals have not self-identified, and about the ethical implications of assigning identity categories.
- Responses emphasized that numerical representation alone does not capture whether an organization is inclusive, equitable, or culturally safe.

Application and reporting structure

- While some acknowledged that the AGF process has become more streamlined over time, others felt that the **full AGF application is redundant** given the depth of information already provided through annual follow-up reports.
- Several suggested that assessments could rely more heavily on annual reports, potentially supplemented by interviews or conversations with peer assessors.
- Confusion around changing reporting requirements and expectations, particularly for outcomes and inputs, was also noted.

Technology and system suggestions

- Participants expressed interest in **centralized or shared digital systems** that would allow information to be entered once and reused across reporting processes.
- Systems that improve accuracy, reduce duplication, and better support narrative storytelling were seen as preferable to repeated manual data entry.

Overall pattern

- Responses indicate that redundancy is most strongly felt in financial and statistical reporting, particularly where data is repeated, estimated, or of unclear use.
- Many expressed a desire for reporting that prioritizes meaningful narrative, context, and impact over repeated numerical inputs that may not accurately reflect organizational realities.

Impact and Measurement

1. When you think of “impact,” what does that mean for your organization? (20 responses)

Responses reflected a broad and nuanced understanding of impact, emphasizing qualitative change, long-term outcomes, and alignment with organizational mission rather than only short-term or easily quantifiable results.

Impact as meaningful change

- Many participants described **impact as meaningful change** experienced by individuals, communities, or the sector.
- Impact was framed as making a difference for people, helping someone learn something, connect with others, or benefit from participation, with recognition that not all impact is dramatic or life-changing.
- Several respondents emphasized that **status quo does not necessarily indicate success**, and that impact often involves shifts in policy, governance, programming, or systems.

Community value and relevance

- Impact was frequently described in terms of **how organizations are valued by their communities** and whether their **work remains relevant**.
- Participants linked impact to **reaching new audiences**, serving people who may not have been reached previously, and responding to community needs.
- Some emphasized impact related to **reconciliation, bridging Indigenous and non-Indigenous** communities, and contributing to **long-term systemic change**.

Qualitative and long-term outcomes

- Many participants emphasized that impact often occurs over long periods of time and is **not always immediately measurable**.
- Examples included changing perspectives, cultural learning, relationship building, mentorship, personal growth, and land-based experiences.
- These outcomes were described as deeply meaningful but difficult to capture through numerical measures alone.

Mission, vision, and strategic alignment

- Several organizations linked impact directly to their mission, vision, and values.

- Impact was described as the degree to which these guiding principles are realized over time.
- Some organizations referenced strategic plans, key performance indicators, logic models, or outcome frameworks as ways to define and track impact, while noting that current reporting tools do not always align well with these approaches.

Participation, engagement, and capacity building

- Impact was also defined through participation and engagement, including attendance, involvement, and relevance of programming.
- Participants described **impact in terms of building skills, capacity, confidence, and leadership** among participants, members, and communities.
- Several emphasized the importance of supporting people to take knowledge and skills back to their home communities and **fostering a sense of belonging**.

Sector and systems-level impact

- Some organizations described impact at **broader organizational, provincial, or sector-wide levels**.
- Examples included influencing policy, strengthening sustainability, supporting cultural infrastructure, and contributing to healthier cultural ecosystems.

Overall pattern

- Responses indicate that impact is understood as multi-dimensional, combining qualitative and quantitative elements.
- Overall, impact was described as relational, contextual, and often long-term, closely tied to mission, community value, and meaningful change rather than short-term outputs alone.

2. What evidence is realistic to gather to demonstrate the impact of AGF funding on your organization? (20 responses)

Responses highlighted a mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence, with strong emphasis on organizational sustainability, participation data, and contextual storytelling, alongside clear limitations related to capacity, timing, and data collection.

Organizational stability and sustainability

- Many organizations identified **organizational stability as a key indicator** of AGF impact. This included the ability to pay staff living wages, maintain facilities, manage debt, and sustain core operations over time.
- Several emphasized that AGF funding enables continued program and service delivery and, in some cases, **is essential to organizational survival**.

Strategic planning and performance tracking

- Some participants described using progress against strategic plans, goals, and key performance indicators as realistic evidence of impact.
- Annual or quarterly tracking and reporting to boards were identified as common practices that inform external reporting.
- **Logic models and outcome-based frameworks** were mentioned as useful tools, though not always well supported by current reporting formats.

Quantitative participation data

- Participation figures such as attendance, registrations, ticket sales, and the number of communities reached were widely cited as accessible evidence.
- Some organizations also track returning participants, geographic reach, program frequency, partnerships formed, and professional development opportunities delivered.

Qualitative evidence and storytelling

- Testimonials, participant feedback, interviews, and anecdotal stories were consistently identified as important forms of evidence.
- Many noted that stories provide essential context and insight into impact that numbers alone cannot capture.
- **Qualitative evidence was seen as particularly useful for demonstrating changes in perspectives**, skills, confidence, and relationships.

Evaluation tools and surveys

- Some organizations collect evaluations or feedback forms for programs, capturing both qualitative and quantitative information.
- While these tools support impact reporting, **capacity limitations and the timing of new reporting requirements** were noted as challenges.

Limitations and capacity constraints

- Small organizations described **limited capacity to conduct formal evaluations** or large-scale data collection.
- Participants emphasized the need to balance numerical data with narrative evidence and cautioned against over-reliance on either approach.
- Realistic evidence was consistently described as needing to align with available systems, staff capacity, and time.
- **Additional tools, consistent training and better understanding of evaluation** are needed to increase sector capacity.

Community-level and member impact

- Some organizations highlighted evidence related to community partnerships, mentorship outcomes, and capacity building among members.
- Reduced program size paired with deeper engagement was cited as an example of meaningful impact that is difficult to demonstrate numerically.
- Two stated that the **general community is not often included** in evaluation or impact.

Overall pattern

- Responses indicate that realistic evidence of AGF impact is multi-faceted, combining organizational indicators, participation data, and qualitative narratives.
- While quantitative measures are widely used, organizations consistently emphasized that stories, feedback, and contextual explanation are essential to demonstrating meaningful impact.
- Consistency and additional capacity (know how) is important to gathering useful evidence.

3. Does reporting allow you to clearly communicate your progress, outcomes and results/change?" (20 responses)

Responses reflected a generally mixed experience, with many respondents saying reporting allows communication of progress to some extent, but with notable limitations.

Overall ability to communicate progress

- Many organizations answered **“yes” or “mostly yes,”** indicating that reporting does provide space to describe progress, outcomes, and results.
- Several noted that narrative sections allow them to explain what actually occurred during the year, rather than what was projected at the time of the AGF application.

Emphasis on outputs over outcomes

- Multiple participants noted that **reporting tends to emphasize numbers,** statistics, and outputs rather than outcomes or change.
- Membership numbers, attendance figures, and participation data were described as remaining stable or fluctuating in ways that do not necessarily reflect meaningful impact.

Limits of statistics and quantitative measures

- Participants consistently emphasized that **statistics do not capture relational or long-term change** such as cultural learning, relationship building, land-based experiences, mentorship, or personal growth.
- Several shared examples of long-term outcomes, such as former participants pursuing related careers or staff developing into leadership roles, that are difficult to represent numerically.

Space for narrative and storytelling

- Narrative sections were identified as the primary place where outcomes and impact can be communicated effectively.
- Organizations valued the ability to describe programs and **impacts in their own words,** whether the work was new or longstanding.
- At the same time, some felt there is **limited space to demonstrate change over time,** particularly when progress is incremental or spans multiple years.

Constraints related to reporting structure

- The limited length of the Annual Submission Letter was noted as restricting fuller communication of outcomes and change.
- Repetition across questions and restrictions on reusing examples were also described as limiting clarity.
- Some participants expressed **uncertainty about how much organizational context assessors already know,** making it difficult to judge how much background to include.

Discomfort reporting challenges

- Some organizations said there is **limited space to communicate struggle,** capacity limitations, or being overwhelmed, without fear of negative judgment.
- Participants expressed concern about how such information might be interpreted alongside reported outcomes.

Impact of organizational change

- Reporting during periods of leadership transition or organizational rebuilding was described as challenging, particularly when work is focused on internal capacity rather than visible program delivery.
- Several noted difficulty separating **past outcomes from future direction** when work is evolving.

Overall pattern

- While reporting enables organizations to describe progress and outcomes to some extent, it remains limited in capturing qualitative, long-term, and relational forms of change.
- Responses point to a mismatch between what is easiest to measure and what organizations consider most meaningful in terms of cultural impact and change.

TRC and IDEA

1. Is it clear what SaskCulture sees as meaningful progress related to TRC and IDEA? (20 responses)

Responses indicate significant uncertainty and concern about how “meaningful progress” related to Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) and Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) is defined, interpreted, and assessed.

Lack of clear definitions and benchmarks

- Many organizations answered “**no**” or “**not really**,” indicating that meaningful progress related to TRC and IDEA is not clearly defined in SaskCulture materials.
- Several noted they **have not seen clear definitions, rubrics, or benchmarks** outlining what constitutes progress.
- Participants **questioned what “progress” means** in practice, emphasizing that definitions vary widely depending on organizational mandate, size, and context.

Use of internal frameworks in the absence of clarity

- Some organizations described relying on internal tools such as action plans, SMART goals, or quarterly reviews to define and track progress.
- These organizations reported summarizing progress based on what they consider meaningful within their mandate, rather than responding to a clearly articulated external framework.
- Participants noted that this approach **involves interpretation and guesswork** due to a **lack of transparent assessment criteria**.

Misalignment with Indigenous and equity focused organizations

- Indigenous organizations in particular noted that **their work does not fit neatly within** existing categories or expectations.
- Participants described current framing as **insufficiently reflective** of Indigenous realities, worldviews, and the scope of their work.
- Some called for broader **recognition of frameworks such as UNDRIP, MMIWG Calls for Justice**, decolonization, and anti-racism, rather than limiting expectations to TRC Calls to Action alone.

Time required for meaningful change

- Many emphasized that authentic TRC and IDEA work is long-term and **relationship-based**.
- Annual reporting cycles were described as misaligned with the time required to build trust, partnerships, and structural change.
- Several expressed concern that year-to-year assessment can create the **impression of limited progress when foundational work is underway**.

Capacity and resource constraints

- Participants highlighted that **expectations related to TRC and IDEA may exceed organizational capacity**, particularly for small organizations with limited staff and flat funding.
- Several expressed distress about being assessed poorly despite actively working toward deeper cultural shifts.
- **Limited resources were described as constraining** the ability to pursue TRC and IDEA work alongside core operations.

Concerns about risk, pressure, and unintended harm

- Some participants expressed fear that **insufficient progress, as interpreted by assessors, could put funding at risk**.
- Concerns were raised about **burnout and over-reliance on the same elders, knowledge keepers**, and community leaders across organizations.
- Several noted that **current expectations can feel tokenistic** and may unintentionally reinforce power imbalances.

Challenges demonstrating behind the scenes work

- Participants said that foundational work such as **relationship building, internal learning, and preparatory conversations is difficult to demonstrate in reporting**.
- This work was described as essential to long-term change but not easily visible or measurable within existing reporting structures.

Overall pattern

- Responses indicate that while SaskCulture’s commitment to TRC and IDEA is understood, expectations for demonstrating meaningful progress are not consistently clear, realistic, or transparent.
- Participants emphasized the need for clearer guidance, broader frameworks, and assessment approaches that recognize time, capacity, and the relational nature of this work.

2. Do the current questions allow you to demonstrate substantive TRC and IDEA work beyond listing activities? (20 responses)

Responses showed a split view, with some respondents feeling the questions allow for substantive discussion, while many others identified limitations, particularly related to time, context, and assessment expectations.

General ability to demonstrate substantive work

- Several organizations answered **“yes” or “yes and no,”** indicating that the questions allow some discussion of TRC and IDEA work beyond activity listings.

- Participants noted that narrative-style questions can support discussion of training, relationship building, internal change, and governance-level work where space allows.

Value of narrative and qualitative description

- **Open-ended questions were appreciated** for allowing nuance and context.
- Some noted that compared to other funders, SaskCulture’s approach places less emphasis on counting activities and more space on describing the nature of the work.
- Relationship-based work, internal learning, and cultural change were described as particularly well suited to narrative reporting.

Limitations for Indigenous and equity focused organizations

- Several participants noted that the **questions could be better adjusted for Indigenous organizations.**

Substantive work related to UNDRIP, reconciliation, and equity was described as producing fewer immediate outputs that fit standard reporting expectations.

Some expressed concern that organizations focused on groundwork may appear underperforming if assessment emphasizes visible activities or numerical outputs.

Difficulty demonstrating work that does not result in immediate outcomes

- Outreach efforts, relationship building, and preparatory work that do not yet result in partnerships or programs were described as **difficult to report meaningfully.**
- Participants emphasized that future-oriented work can be substantial even when short-term outputs are limited.

Concerns about focus on activities rather than impact

- Some participants said **the questions still tend to encourage listing activities rather than demonstrating depth, outcomes, or learning.**
- Clearer prompts related to impact, challenges, and reflection were suggested as ways to capture substantive work more effectively.

Variation across reporting tools

- **Differences were noted between the Application, Annual Submission, and Follow-Up Report.**

Some felt the application allows for deeper discussion, while annual reporting tools are more limiting.

- One participant noted the significant word count required in recent reporting, reflecting both the importance and complexity of this work.

Overall pattern

- While the questions allow some demonstration of substantive TRC and IDEA work, many participants felt they do not consistently capture depth, long-term progress, or relationship-based change.
- Clearer expectations and more tailored prompts were seen as ways to better reflect the realities of this work.

3. What would improve the application to help capture real change related to TRC and IDEA? (20 responses)

Responses highlighted a strong desire for **clearer expectations, greater flexibility**, and reporting approaches that better reflect long-term, relational, and culturally grounded change.

Need for clearer definitions of meaningful progress

- Many participants said it is **unclear what SaskCulture considers “meaningful progress”** related to TRC and IDEA.
- Several expressed **uncertainty about how their work is assessed**, particularly when progress is incremental or embedded in long-standing practice.
- Some questioned whether **established TRC and IDEA work should require repeated demonstration of change**.

Recognition that change is long-term and non-linear

- Participants emphasized that **real change is slow and difficult to capture** in short reporting cycles.
- Progress was described as involving learning, relationship building, and at times setbacks, rather than linear advancement.
- Respondents stressed that **trust, healing, and structural change take time**.

Ability to report challenges alongside successes

- There was **strong interest in reporting** both successes and challenges.
- Participants emphasized the **importance of acknowledging effort, learning, and attempts** that did not lead to immediate success as part of meaningful progress.

Greater flexibility and narrative space

- Many called for more **flexible reporting** that allows organizations to explain change in ways that reflect their realities.
- Suggestions included expanded narrative space, storytelling, testimonials, and qualitative evidence.
- Participants emphasized that change looks different across organizations and **should not be constrained by a single reporting approach**.

Indigenous-specific considerations and ways of knowing

- Several **recommended indicators aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing**, such as language revitalization, land-based learning, elders’ involvement, healing, and relationship building.
- Some expressed a desire to **define culturally relevant indicators themselves** rather than fitting their work into externally defined measures.

Tools and frameworks to support impact reporting

- Suggestions included multi-year comparisons to show progress over time, the use of logic models, and identification of short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes.
- Participants noted the **need for additional support and guidance** to measure and demonstrate impact effectively.

Concerns about guessing expectations

- Several participants said they feel they are **guessing what SaskCulture wants** to see related to TRC and IDEA.
- Clearer guidance and shared definitions were seen as ways to **reduce this uncertainty**.

Equity and expertise in defining progress

- One participant suggested building relationships with, and compensating, individuals from equity-seeking groups to help define meaningful progress.
- Participants emphasized that **defining progress should not rest solely with applicant organizations**.

Balancing TRC and IDEA with organizational sustainability

- Participants noted that **TRC and IDEA work cannot be the sole focus for most organizations**.
The need to integrate this work across governance, budgets, strategy, and programming was emphasized.
- Several cautioned that **without attention to funding and sustainability, organizations may struggle to advance TRC and IDEA commitments effectively**.

Overall pattern

- Responses indicate a strong desire for an application framework that recognizes long-term, relational change, values learning and effort, and provides clearer expectations.
- Participants emphasized that capturing real change related to TRC and IDEA requires flexibility, cultural relevance, and assessment approaches grounded in lived realities rather than short-term outputs.

Appendix C

Focus Group Notes

AGF Focus Group One – Notes

Themes

- **Clarity & assessment:** ECOs write directly to criteria but are unclear who assessors are, how “peer” is defined, and how familiarity/conflict is handled.
- **Application burden:** Process seen as long, repetitive, and time-intensive; capacity strain noted for smaller and ethno-cultural orgs.
- **Long-term impact:** Strategic plans used, but uncertainty about what “year-over-year improvement” means and how far back to measure; need for guidance/tools.
- **Processes & support:** Repeated request to streamline application/FUR; desire for more structured capacity-building (focused sessions), recalling earlier SaskCulture models.
- **Impact & outcomes:** Strong confusion about outcomes vs outputs; lack of clarity on what counts as impact; concern that reach/scale disadvantages smaller organizations.
- **Feedback loop:** Frustration that similar input is requested from ECO’s over years without clear response or visible change.
- **Funding context:** Broader concern about stagnant AGF pot and reduced lottery revenues; advocacy role raised and the need for more revenue generation.

Outliers

- Economic impact modelling (hiring an economist).
- Reintroducing interviews/presentations to assessors.
- Multi-lens/pre-jury adjudication model.
- Resource-sharing across ECOs (shared ED, communication, accounting, programs).
- One or two organizations noted that SaskCulture is clearer than many funders.

Part 1 – Meeting funding requirements (Q1)

- Common approach: write directly to the form sections and mirror SaskCulture language; use bullets to map to criteria (some orgs said this is easier when SaskCulture is the primary funder vs one of many).
 - AGF described as unique because it is operational/core funding; some orgs frame it as an “investment” that enables additional grants/contracts and multiplies program/cultural activity.
 - Application described as very large/cumbersome; several organizations said it can take weeks/months and feels repetitive across sections/years.
 - Repeated question: who is the adjudication audience? Confusion about “peer” assessment and interest in how assessors are selected, what they know going in, and conflict-of-interest handling.
 - Concern that assessors may not retain/understand ECOs given the volume of submissions; some felt feedback indicated assessors didn’t fully understand them even when info was included.
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- Equity/capacity: smaller ECOs (limited staff) said workload is challenging when compared to larger ones with dedicated staff for funding/reporting; one ECO noted ethno-cultural/small organizations feel challenged competing with bigger ECOs.
- Different view: one org said SaskCulture is stronger than other funders at communicating expectations; emphasized importance of relationship with consultants as liaison; supported anonymous juries for fairness.

Part 2 – Long-term, year-over-year change (Q2)

- Strategic plans cited as a main tool for long-term tracking; challenge noted: operationalizing and tracking the plan over time (spreadsheets/roadmaps used).
- Strategic planning costs raised as significant (example: \$10,000); noted expectation that some strategic planning is built into budgets.
- Several ECOs questioned what “long-term improvement” means (improvement in what—governance, program delivery, fundraising, HR, etc.).
- Some said they plan in shorter cycles (3-year plans) and are unsure how to show 5–10 year change; requested guidance/tools for long-term evaluation approaches.
- Evaluation capacity/training referenced (example: having had a session on evaluation); interest in practical guidance for setting up long-term outcome tracking.
- Compensation/sustainability raised as a major long-term issue (board expectations vary widely); references to past salary survey and interest in updated benchmarking or access to compensation, salary and benefits data.

Part 3 – SaskCulture processes (Application / Annual Submission / FUR) (Q3)

- Direct request repeated: simplify/streamline application; reduce repetition across different parts or the total process. Use existing data more effectively (annual reports and FUR).
- Idea raised: if challenges are reported, a follow-up mechanism could exist (consultant check-in later) to support orgs in addressing/working through challenges (not framed as “solve my problems,” more like a mechanism/support).
- Theme: shift from earlier community-building/capacity-building approach to a more “hands-off funder” approach; desire for more structured and possibly separate capacity-building support.
- Past model referenced: regular in-person ED meetings with focused topics and subject-matter experts; participants said this supported governance/operations learning and peer connection.
- Current online meetings described as hard to attend and less valuable due to lack of direction/agenda/outcomes; request for focused agendas even if meetings remain online.

- Tension noted: some ECOs want SaskCulture to play a capacity-building role; others noted expectations can be unrealistic (orgs should handle basic operations), but acknowledged SaskCulture previously filled gaps.

Part 4 – Community impact & Public Priorities (Q4)

- Theme: outcomes vs outputs; difficulty quantifying “soft” outcomes and translating impact beyond counts/activities.
- Repeated uncertainty: lack of clarity on what qualifies as “impact/outcomes” and what should be reported; desire for clearer definitions and examples.
- Equity/capacity concern returns: focus on reach/large numbers can disadvantage smaller orgs; question of how impact expectations account for ECO size/capacity.
- Example approach: partnering to conduct an economic impact study (hiring an economist) to translate value into economic terms; interest in models/tools that different org types could use.
- Suggestion: allow additional modes of demonstrating impact (interviews, video testimony/storytelling) rather than only written paragraphs.
- Suggestion: consider bringing back a presentation/interview opportunity with assessors to help communicate impact and clarify what is difficult to capture in writing.

Open discussion / additional themes raised

- Suggestion to adopt practices used by other funders: webinars/info sessions for calls, definitions guidebook, applicant Q&A period, and sharing responses to all applicants (example referenced: IRCC and Ministry of Immigration and Career Training).
- Request for higher-level profile of adjudicators (general makeup/knowledge base) to help ECOs know how much background to include in applications (while maintaining anonymity).
- Idea: multiple-lens review process (example referenced: SaskArts uses an initial area-informed review/pre-jury and then a wider jury).
- Funding environment/pot size: suggestion that a key question is why the AGF pot isn’t growing; discussion of external pressures on lottery revenues (online gambling/sports betting, casino/community initiative funds, hospital lotteries).
- Advocacy theme: perception that SaskCulture has stepped back from advocacy; mention of SK Arts Alliance stepping into advocacy work; suggestion that sector coalitions and shared advocacy efforts are needed (arts + cultural heritage).
- Consolidation/resource-sharing ideas: sharing communications staff, sharing executive leadership across ECOs sharing space/resources; request that the system be flexible/open to these approaches (not necessarily mandated or causing a reduction in grant amounts).

- Feedback loop issue: frustration that SaskCulture asks similar questions over years (what do you want to see?) but orgs don't see results/changes or a clear response explaining why requests can't be implemented.
- Clarification made in the discussion: some comments about "follow-through" were about SaskCulture gatherings/professional development requests (not the AGF application itself).
- General tone: participants expressed appreciation for funding and for the session, while still naming improvement areas; noted value of having this discussion in a small-group exchange format.

AGF Focus Group Two – Notes

Themes

- **Human element in adjudication:** Strong interest in bringing back interviews and presentations (or video submissions) so organizations can speak to their work and storytelling can be heard beyond written narratives and numbers.
- **Consultant role & relationship:** Participants emphasized the importance of a neutral, supportive consultant role (answering questions and understanding organizations) without favouritism.
- **Clarity on SaskCulture's role:** Repeated discussion about whether AGF is strictly a funding application or also a relationship/capacity-building mechanism; participants asked for clearer separation if both roles exist.
- **Reporting challenges & perceived risk:** Mixed comfort levels when reporting their challenges; some felt safe naming challenges, while others feared honesty would be used against them in a competitive environment (and that the record is permanent).
- **Demonstrating impact & alignment:** Desire for clearer alignment to provincial strategic public priorities and better ways to evidence community impact (including community voices), rather than relying on writing skill or “improvement” framing.
- **Capacity constraints:** Participants raised concerns about expectations placed on small or one-person organizations, timing of the process and the lack of flexible/one-off funding options to seize opportunities (accessibility initiatives).

Outliers

- Suggestion that adjudicators should not review financial statements, based on past questions indicating they may not be examined or well understood.
- Suggestion to pay peer jurors (including retired sector professionals) to support fair and consistent adjudication.
- Suggestion that the AGF funding pool should increase predictably over time (indexed to inflation).
- If big funding changes are to be made, let ECOs know soon so they can plan and adjust (one larger org. said they could handle cuts better than smaller or newer ECOs).
- Concern that SaskCulture has expanded into direct programming that can compete with member organizations' work (comparison drawn to other 'globals').
- Anecdotes illustrating that government/ministers may not understand how the lottery funding system operates or how funds flow through the system and/or the impact of them linked to policy direction "beyond culture/arts etc" and /or the strategic public priorities and long-term impact being realized.

Part 1 – Meeting funding requirements (Q1)

- Past practice described: organizations provided a short presentation (who they are and what they do), followed by questions from assessors/jury to clarify the application.
- Participants said this format was nerve-wracking but satisfying, because speaking to the application can communicate meaning that does not come through on paper.

- Request to “put a human back into this” for an arts and culture context; acknowledgement that government/lottery systems favour hard numbers but that storytelling is central to many organizations’ mandates.
- Suggested options if in-person is not possible: video submissions, or other formats that reintroduce voice/story while maintaining fair process.
- Importance of anonymous juries acknowledged (to reduce risk related to relationships/conflicts), but participants still wanted more human connection and information sharing within safe boundaries.
- Consultant role raised as “hugely important”: consultants can remain neutral while still being accessible, answering questions, and supporting all organizations under their portfolio.
- Point raised that organizations are not all the same and do not do the same work; adjudicating across different organization types was described as “apples and oranges,” requiring assessors to understand context and differences.
- One participant raised a concern about financial statements review, based on a past consultant question that suggested financials may not have been examined.

Part 2 – SaskCulture processes (Application / Annual Submission / Follow-up) (Q2)

- Question discussed: how to better support organizations in communicating both progress and challenges through the application and reporting processes.
- Some participants said they feel comfortable naming challenges and see the challenge question as healthy and useful—especially to explain why outcomes may not have been achieved as planned.
- Others said they do not feel safe being fully candid about challenges due to a perceived competitive environment and fear that identified struggles could justify funding decreases.
- Concern raised that reporting forms create a permanent record; participants said this can discourage honesty if they believe it could be held against them later.
- Discussion suggested the “challenge” question becomes loaded if there is no clear pathway from reporting challenges to receiving support (mentorship, practical help, or follow-up).
- Participants questioned whether SaskCulture’s role is funder-only or also a support network; if funder-only, some suggested removing relationship-type questions from the AGF forms.
- Repeated request for clarity and transparency about SaskCulture’s role and how application information is used (funding decision only vs broader organizational support).

Part 3 – Community impact & alignment with public priorities (Q3)

- Suggestion to allow organizations to bring forward community voices (a short interview/testimony from someone impacted) to demonstrate impact, rather than relying primarily on written articulation.
- Suggestion to structure application questions around provincial strategic public priorities so reporting can roll up cleanly to government requirements; participants noted they currently feel pressure to answer two sets of priorities (SaskCulture and government).
- Discussion about SaskCulture’s strategic plan: participants questioned whether alignment should primarily be to public priorities, with SaskCulture’s strategic plan acting as the conduit (and therefore automatically served if priorities align).
- Concern expressed about being assessed on whether the organization itself is ‘of value’ rather than whether programs/initiatives advance policy priorities; participants said organizations exist because communities value and use them.
- Concern raised about expectations placed on small or one-person organizations; participants described the burden of delivering complex expectations (including IDEA/TRC-related progress) without staff or dedicated resources.
- Point raised that progress in small/rural contexts can be significant even when not easily captured through numbers; participants said relationship-building and culture-shift work may not translate well into the current assessment format.

Open discussion / additional themes raised

- Separation of functions: Participants suggested keeping AGF as a clean funding application, while re-establishing separate capacity-building or special initiative funding streams where relationship-building questions (history, challenges, development needs) fit better.
- Need for human support: Participants described being directed to websites/resources when seeking help and expressed a desire to speak with someone for guidance (not only read materials).
- Recognition/appreciation: One participant noted the absence of explicit thanks or acknowledgement for the work organizations do and suggested this affects the relationship dynamic.
- Several mentioned that Saskculture does not promote its own results very well and this is not about being 'humble' but possibly missing opportunities to advance the sector.
- Special initiatives / one-off opportunities: Request to reintroduce a pool similar to past special initiatives or capacity building grants to fund short-term, high-value projects that cannot be absorbed into tight operating budgets.
- Example provided: an accessibility initiative quoted at approximately \$12,000 was described as valuable but not feasible within existing budget flexibility; participants noted this becomes a ‘catch-22’ if organizations are later assessed as having made insufficient progress without funding to implement the work.

- Comments about organizational landscape: Participants discussed perceived shifts where SaskCulture (and, by comparison, other ‘globals’) have taken on more direct programming over time, and the potential for competition with funded organizations.
- Process consistency and juror compensation: Participants noted that application processes have changed repeatedly over time and raised the idea of paying jurors to support consistency and effectiveness.

AGF Focus Group Three –Notes

Themes

- **Difficulty demonstrating outcomes** when impact is qualitative, long-term, or affects small groups within communities.
- **Rural/remote participation constraints:** travel time, cost, logistics, and uneven uptake between urban vs rural communities.
- **Desire for clearer guidance from SaskCulture** on what constitutes “success/impact,” including examples, checklists, and plain-language supports.
- **Challenge aligning organizational plans** and reporting with SaskCulture’s accountability to Lotteries/public priorities.
- **Stats and data collection limits:** estimating attendance, demographics, and volunteer hours can require guesswork.

Outliers

- Strong interest in province-wide research (e.g. periodic public opinion/impact studies) that individual organizations cannot carry alone.
- Concern that being transparent/specific (logic models, outcomes) could feel risky if other organizations report more generally.
- Some organizations experience “fit” issues in forms (e.g. membership questions not applying to non-member-based orgs).

Part 1 – Meeting funding requirements (Q1)

- Reporting is often narrative-heavy with limited concrete metrics; broad questions can unintentionally encourage “prose” over measurable outcomes.
- Some organizations worry small-number impacts (e.g. serving a single person or small group) may look “unflattering” even when meaningful.
- Success depends on context: a workshop with 15 people may be highly successful for rural/volunteer-run communities even if the number looks small.
- Year-to-year reporting can miss outcomes because work spills across fiscal years; achievements don’t always fit neatly into one reporting period.
- Rural delivery realities shape what’s feasible: distance, early travel (e.g. 4–6 a.m. departures), insurance/liability questions, and limited teacher capacity.
- Virtual options help (larger participation in online tournaments), but are not equivalent to in-person engagement for relationship-building and program quality.

Part 2 – Long-term, year-over-year change (Q2)

- Long-term impact is hard to quantify when evaluation is primarily qualitative; interviews and exit interviews were cited as useful but capacity-limited.
- A suggested support: SaskCulture-led province-wide, robust studies (public opinion or sector impact research) done periodically (e.g. every 10 years).

- For some organizations, indicators of sector health are influenced by external systems (post-pandemic school club participation dropping 50%).
- Examples of “impact stories” that don’t fit simple metrics: provincial competitive success in speech/debate, alumni influence, newcomer participation rates.
- Common internal tools: post-event evaluations, member surveys, and strategic plan reviews tied to multi-year cycles.
- Working definition offered: “long-term” may align to a strategic plan cycle (example given: four years), especially where boards rotate frequently.

Part 3 – SaskCulture processes (Application / Annual Submission / FUR) (Q3)

- Add clearer upfront guidance: overview of what data is used for, evidence expectations, and a simple checklist of what to gather.
- Provide plain-language supports for new applicants: short explainer videos/tutorials and examples/models of strong responses.
- Break down multi-part questions to reduce rambling responses and increase accuracy and relevance.
- Make “success/impact/effectiveness” descriptors clearer from SaskCulture’s perspective (keep broad categories, but clarify what’s being assessed). Look at desired results and let the orgs determine how to best meet them.
- Form-fit issues: some sections don’t apply to all org types (membership organization questions are not applicable to all).
- Statistics challenges: attendance and demographic data can be unavailable; volunteer and board hours are difficult to estimate consistently and particularly when members are gathering the data in different formats and ways.
- Participants described needing to estimate in some cases despite aiming to be as accurate as possible.

Part 4 – Community impact & Public Priorities (Q4)

- Some participants were unclear on the public priorities; several noted they focus on them mainly during AGF reporting time.
- A key gap identified: organizations align to their own strategic plans, but the connection to SaskCulture/ lotteries public priorities isn’t always made explicit.
- Suggestion: increase engagement with ECOs in developing/refreshing public priorities so alignment feels shared and understood. Use specific outcomes from the priorities.
- Call for shared language and consistency in planning/reporting (logic models/program theory) to distinguish outputs vs outcomes. Allow for long-term impacts (public opinions and values - change in human rights complaints, reduction in hate based comments).
- Need for access to expertise/support to build stronger strategic, diversity, and inclusion plans, especially for smaller orgs with limited capacity.

- Concern raised: organizations may struggle to express ‘we are already diverse/inclusive’ in ways that meet application expectations, creating fear of weaker assessment.

Open discussion / additional themes raised

- Rural participation supports: interest in funding mechanisms that enable in-person engagement (rural capacity funds, travel/hotel supports, special initiative-style grants).
- Clarifying what reporting influences: questions about how reporting effort meaningfully affects SaskCulture’s Lotteries-level discussions and decisions.
- Equity of assessment: desire for tiered expectations that reflect organizational size/capacity so smaller orgs aren’t compared directly to large, staffed orgs. - or cluster based on mandates or types of programs/services offered.
- Ongoing tension: accountability and diligence requirements vs the reality that some data is inherently hard to capture (attendance counts, demographics, volunteer time, gender, ability, ethnicity, social barriers etc).

AGF Focus Group Four – Notes

Themes

- **Funding requirements are “retrofitted” during application/reporting (not driving planning):** Participants shared that strategic planning is driven by organizational objectives; funder language is mainly applied when completing the AGF application and reporting.
- **Member-based reporting creates inconsistency in statistics:** Organizations relying on reporting from dispersed community groups described wide variation in volunteer counts/hours and how “volunteer” is interpreted, making year-over-year consistency difficult.
- **Reporting workload strains capacity (and peaks during busy periods):** Participants described reporting and application process as time-consuming (a significant portion of a staff role; heavy reporting months) and challenging to complete alongside service delivery.
- **Data quality and value are questioned:** Some participants questioned how accurate the reported statistics are and whether the aggregated information is meaningfully used (by the Trust/government) given variability and human error.
- **Need for better tools, automation, and interoperability:** Participants requested shared systems/tools to reduce manual re-entry (booking/software tools, automated data capture) and flagged system limitations (inability to import external calendars/program feeds).
- **Clarity needed on data governance, privacy, storage, and use:** Participants asked where submitted data goes, how it is stored, what it is used for, whether it is returned, and how vulnerable populations are protected, especially for Indigenous and racialized communities.
- **Demographic terms/categories need review:** Participants flagged concerns with current labels (“newcomers”) and encouraged stronger alignment with how racialization, barriers, access, and leadership are actually experienced.
- **Different relationships to SaskCulture shape reporting expectations:** One participant described a unique “peer/associate/advocate” relationship with SaskCulture (including context of provincial funding dynamics), and noted AGF as a very small portion of overall revenue shifting emphasis toward impact rather than counts.
- **“Bigger isn’t always better” for success and sustainability:** Participants highlighted that large events can look successful on paper while creating staff stress and capacity strain; smaller, intensive programs can produce deeper outcomes.
- **SaskCulture’s advocacy role was raised:** Participants suggested SaskCulture can help other funders understand that impact is not only “bums in seats,” and can elevate approaches that recognize depth, relationships, and sustainability.

Outliers

- **Pay assessors/jurors:** Participants stated compensation should be standard practice (consistent with other funders) given workload and accountability.
- **Shared province-wide booking software;** A “pie in the sky” idea to reduce manual work and support shared infrastructure.
- **Calendar/program feed integration:** SaskCulture systems should accept ECO feeds rather than requiring manual re-entry.

- **Leverage existing annual reports:** Reduce duplication by using organizational annual reports and existing documentation as primary reporting sources.
- **Sector-wide research support for impact measurement:** SaskCulture could coordinate research partnerships to measure broader community outcomes that individual ECOs cannot evaluate alone.

Part 1 – Meeting funding requirements (Q1)

- Participants described aligning to requirements primarily at the application/reporting stage (rather than during program planning).
- Orgs described adapting internal/member reporting processes to produce required stats, with challenges in consistency (especially volunteer-related data).
- Some participants reported using the ECO reporting spreadsheet/template and repurposing it across multiple grants due to its usefulness while noting it is labour-intensive.
- Participants questioned the accuracy/utility of aggregated stats and requested alternatives that reduce duplication and improve credibility.
- Clearer transparency was requested about data storage, use, and protection, particularly for sensitive community data.
- Suggestions included shared tools (booking systems) and interoperability (importing calendars) to reduce manual reporting burden.

Part 2 – Long-term, year-over-year change (Q2)

- Many described organizational change as easier to measure internally (governance processes, decision-making, financial accountability, program management) than community long-term change based on programs offered.
- Orgs cited internal tools such as member/staff surveys, annual reporting, and documentation of structural changes to track year-over-year improvements.
- Participants emphasized that “growth” is not the only marker of success; sustainability, staff well-being, and operating within capacity may reflect responsible improvement. There was a stated sense that “bigger is better” within the SaskCulture processes.
- Institutional memory was identified as a challenge (gaps where “nobody knows what happened”), with reliance on long-serving staff, Elders/Knowledge Keepers, and informal/alumni networks.
- Participants suggested SaskCulture's consultants/officers should be able to track progress across years by reviewing prior submissions and context (good management practice).

Part 3 – SaskCulture processes (Application / Annual Submission / FUR) (Q3)

- Participants acknowledged improvements in recent iterations (reduced repetition; word guidance instead of hard cut-offs).
- Participants described additional “Trust-driven” submission requests (budgets/forecasts/cash flows) as unclear, burdensome, and sometimes misaligned with board approval timelines.

- Participants requested clearer rationale for extra reporting requirements and fewer “make-work” tasks.
- Participants suggested SaskCulture should leverage materials already produced (annual reports, existing success stories) rather than requiring duplicate uploads.
- Some participants described having to re-prove eligibility or jump through additional hoops after already being approved as an ECO; concerns raised about unnecessary intermediaries and potential manipulation of funds.
- Participants noted discomfort/constraint in application language around anti-racism and anti-oppression; requested explicit space and permission to use accurate terms.
- Participants raised interest in cross-sector comparisons (whether sport-related reporting is less onerous) and stronger alignment across lottery-funded systems.

Part 4 – Community impact & Public Priorities (Q4)

- Participants emphasized that measuring community-level outcomes is difficult within existing capacity; deep outcome measurement (shifts in racism attitudes) requires expertise and resourcing beyond most organizations. More awareness and training are required and/or funding to hire specialized expertise.
- Suggested role for SaskCulture: coordinate shared outcome tools/frameworks and/or support research partnerships to answer sector-wide questions.
- Caution raised about OCAP/data sovereignty and trust in external research institutions; any research partnership would need strong governance and community control.
- Participants described qualitative approaches to impact (story-based outcomes, long-term relationship impacts, youth leadership trajectories) and the tension of “tracking” success without surveillance.
- Public priorities were not front-of-mind for some organizations in day-to-day planning; participants said they can focus on them in applications, but do not find the framing especially useful for internal evaluation.
- Additional alignment references emerged (provincial growth plan and UNESCO-related framing), with concern about having to “fit” complex work into narrow frames. Several ECOs have national and international experience that could be valuable connection to best practice.

Open discussion / additional themes raised

- Stable, multi-year operational funding is a strength: Participants described AGF’s stability as valuable and something they advocate for with other funders.
- Administrative burden varies across funders: Participants noted that some funders require less reporting even for larger amounts, and questioned why AGF reporting can be comparatively onerous.
- Advocacy beyond “celebration” framing: Concerns raised that government framing can emphasize celebration/diversity without resourcing anti-racism and deeper relationship-building; participants suggested SaskCulture can elevate ECO work and advocate for a fuller policy impact and understanding.

- **Alternative granting models and experimentation:** Participants referenced experimentation in other programs (participatory approaches; alternative formats) and raised interest in trust-based grantmaking as a direction to reduce burden while maintaining accountability.
- **Other funder mechanics:** Canadian Heritage and other funder's processes were described as difficult in different ways (slow timelines, clunky forms), reinforcing the need for simpler, more modernized application/reporting systems where possible.

Appendix D

Assessor Feedback

Assessor Feedback 2019–2024

Source Materials Reviewed

This synthesis draws from the following assessor-related materials:

- Assessor Feedback Notes from 2019–20 AGF Adjudication
- 2024 AGF Assessor Consultation Transcript (Tara)
- 2024 Observer AGF Comments for SaskCulture

These sources include assessor reflections, process notes, observer commentary, and facilitated consultation discussion. In addition, information was received from those who have been assessors, ECO comments made within this current evaluation and input from SaskCulture staff experience.

Common Themes Across Assessment Cycles (2019–2024)

1. Application Volume and Cognitive Load

- Assessors consistently noted that the amount of information provided in applications is overwhelming, making it difficult to assess quality, relevance, and progress.
- In 2019–20, assessors requested condensed notes, clearer summaries, and improved analysis documents.
- In 2024, observers again noted that the volume of material made it easier for applicants to generalize or obscure substance.
- Across years, assessors flagged the challenge of meaningfully reviewing large applications within limited timeframes.
- What persisted: Application length and density continue to strain assessor capacity and affect assessment quality.

2. Lack of Proportionality by Organizational Size and Mandate Scope

Assessors repeatedly raised concerns about right-sizing expectations.

- 2019–20 assessors questioned whether organizations of vastly different sizes and scope should be assessed using the same criteria and application structure.
- Capacity, staffing, and infrastructure differences were repeatedly flagged as limiting smaller organizations' ability to meet expectations designed for larger ones.
- In 2024, similar concerns were raised about legacy organizations versus smaller or newer groups, particularly in relation to accountability and scale.

What persisted: Assessors consistently questioned whether current processes meaningfully account for organizational scale, risk, scope and capacity.

3. Difficulty Assessing Progress Over Time

Across cycles, assessors expressed frustration with the lack of clear organizational trajectory.

- In 2019–20, assessors recommended including summaries of previous adjudication comments and clearer histories of funding changes.
- In 2024, assessors emphasized the need to see whether organizations addressed feedback from prior rounds.
- Assessors noted that applications often present snapshots rather than longitudinal progress.

What persisted: Limited mechanisms to track, present, or assess year-over-year change weaken accountability and assessment confidence.

4. Statistics and Impact Measurement Limitations

Assessors consistently raised concerns about data quality and usefulness.

- 2019–20 feedback called for statistics to be presented in more meaningful, consistent and interpretable ways.
- Assessors questioned the accuracy of demographic data and participation statistics, especially for province-wide impact, sector improvement or for use by volunteer-led organizations.
- In 2024, similar concerns surfaced regarding what AGF funding is actually “buying” in terms of impact.

What persisted: Quantitative data is often difficult to verify, inconsistently applied, and insufficient on its own to demonstrate impact.

5. TRC and IDEA: Superficial Responses and Assessment Challenges

Concerns related to Truth and Reconciliation and IDEA intensified over time but were present across cycles.

- 2019–20 assessors already flagged challenges around board diversity and meaningful engagement.
- In 2024, observer comments highlighted widespread superficial engagement, including reliance on open-door policies “everyone is welcome”, token references to Calls to Action, and program-based rather than relationship-based approaches.
- Assessors noted discomfort and inequity in asking a small number of Indigenous or BIPOC assessors to evaluate TRC and IDEA across the panel.

What persisted: Assessors struggle to assess TRC and IDEA meaningfully within current structures, and many organizations demonstrate limited structural change.

6. Role of SaskCulture Staff and Process Transparency

Assessors consistently emphasized the importance of staff context and clarity.

- In 2019–20, assessors requested clearer guidance, better preparation materials, and clearer conflict-of-interest policies.
- In 2024, assessors noted a disconnect between staff knowledge of organizations and what assessors see in applications.
- Staff were described as critical to maintaining continuity, fairness, and institutional memory.

What persisted: The assessment process relies heavily on staff mediation, but this role is not always transparent or structurally integrated.

Outliers and Distinct Observations

Paid Assessors

- A 2024 comment explicitly questioned why SaskCulture does not compensate assessors when comparable funders do.

Colonial Structures and Eligibility Questions

- 2024 observer commentary raised explicit concerns about whether some legacy or Eurocentric organizations are structurally incompatible with TRC and IDEA priorities.
- This level of critique does not appear in earlier assessor notes.

Treated as: Outlier and perspective-based observation, not a cross-cycle theme.

Cross-Cycle Observations (2019–2024)

Across assessment cycles, assessors consistently raised concerns about:

- Administrative burden and information overload
- Misalignment between organizational scale and assessment expectations
- Limited tools to assess progress over time
- Challenges measuring impact using current data requirements
- Structural and process limitations in assessing TRC and IDEA work

While the language and urgency evolved, the core issues remained remarkably consistent, suggesting that many challenges identified in 2019–20 remain unresolved in later cycles.

Research Feedback (2026)

Feedback from those directly involved with the most recent assessment process and ECOs themselves highlighted the following points that validate past research and consultations outlined above.

- The current format is too much work for volunteer assessors (many other organizations pay their adjudicators), although it was acknowledged that improvements have been made.
- Some assessors and applicants say it is too much work for very small funding changes.
- Confidence is limited about equitable performance measurement given differences in ECO size, mandates, locations, people served, year over year success, and membership priorities.
- There are no clear indicators or desired impacts against which all applications can be measured (several recommended using the Public Interest Priorities or key objectives such as reducing racism, increasing cultural awareness and inclusion, education, partnerships)
- There is difficulty assessing what each organization focuses on and how that links to SC strategic planning, their own plans and priorities, government direction, community needs etc.
- Balancing organizational capacity building and community or program impacts is problematic and several suggested that the funding be split into two distinct and focused funding streams.
- Several suggested that the FUR and the annual reports should be used as the application process.
- It takes some organizations months to gather data for the application to demonstrate impact (and often it is guesswork), therefore assessors do not work with hard data.
- Both quantitative and qualitative data are important and could be designed to allow for some form of consistency in gathering and different, more personal ways of sharing it with assessors.
- SC's role is not clear and not utilized well enough to serve the assessment process in the most meaningful way. Perhaps consider expanding their role and reducing assessor burden.

- Time is often limited at the end of the assessment process, resulting in funding being allocated too quickly, albeit that changes made are often very small and insignificant.
- A better formula for reducing funding should be considered with the impact on the organization as the major consideration. Larger ECOs can absorb change easier than smaller ones.
- ECOs and some assessors would like to see additional processes/methods for presentation applications (not just written) including videos, stories, testimonials and in-person interviews/presentations and post-assessment interviews.
- It is not clear what SC wants to fund (or how an organization is able to demonstrate that they are moving the needle (sometimes no movement/maintaining or streamlining is positive)).
- Ethnocultural and Indigenous organizations have a unique relationship with IDEA and TRC which, they say, should be viewed separately from “mainstream organizations.”
- ECOs stated that they would like more information about the assessors (general backgrounds and expertise), the assessment process and results as well as the final changes in funding for all ECOs.