



USArtists International®

Evaluation Report

Submitted to
Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation

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This report would not have been possible without the generous contributions of these individuals.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation's USArtists International® program (USAI) supports performances by U.S. artists at significant international festivals and performing arts marketplaces outside the United States and its territories. The program supports the engagements of exemplary solo artists and ensembles across all performing arts disciplines including dance, music, theater, multidisciplinary work, and folk/traditional arts.

The objective of USAI is to encourage and promote the vibrant diversity of U.S. artists and creative expression in the performing arts by expanding opportunity and exposure to international audiences, encouraging international cultural exchange, and enhancing creative and professional development of U.S. artists by providing connections with presenters, curators, and fellow artists. The program is committed to the presence of U.S. artists on world stages and aims to extend the reach and impact of professional artists dependent on touring for continued sustainability and career advancement.

Between 2006 and 2017, USArtists International

- received 2013 applications,
- approved 759 grants, and
- awarded \$5,346,036¹

to support

- 900 festival appearances
- by 454 artists and performance groups
- from 32 U.S. states
- at 604 festivals
- in 84 countries
- on 6 continents
- with grants averaging \$7,044.

Performances by USAI-funded artists have been seen by

- approximately 1.4 million people worldwide.

¹ 64 grants were either cancelled or withdrawn after being awarded, so the amount distributed during this period is lower than indicated above (\$4,895,353). Throughout the report, "grant" refers to applications that were approved for funding, regardless of whether the grant was successfully executed.

This evaluation was commissioned with three objectives in mind:

1. Assess the work USAI has done over the course of its twelve-year existence,
2. Determine the impact the program has had, both on international cultural exchange and on the careers of grantees; and,
3. Take stock of the current conditions of international touring and festival participation for U.S. artists.

As a result, this report focuses on the outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the program. Throughout, the equitable representation of the U.S.'s diverse pool of artists has been a particular focus. The efficiency of internal processes, administrative costs, staffing levels, etc., have not been assessed as part of this work.

Ultimately, MAAF hopes to determine whether USAI is optimally positioned to meet the current needs of U.S. artists performing abroad, and gain feedback on the current structure of the program to see what (if any) changes could improve both grantees' experiences and the program's outcomes.

Methodology

The evaluation is based on five separate strands of research, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Each strand of research resulted in a memorandum report that was delivered to MAAF:

1. "Analysis of USAI Grant Data, 2006-2017" (May, 2018)
2. "Survey of USAI Grantees" (April, 2018)
3. "Follow-Up Interviews with USAI Grantees" (May 2018)
4. "Interviews with Unsuccessful Applicants" (March 2018)
5. "Consultations with Experts in the Fields of International Touring and Intercultural Exchange" (June 2018)

This report summarizes and synthesizes the five strands of research, referencing specific findings from the subsidiary reports throughout.

To help take stock of the implications of the evaluation results, MAAF convened a Round Table discussion with three external subject experts in July 2018. Highlights from that discussion are summarized in the final section of this report.

Key Takeaways

USAI is a well-established, well-respected, and well-run program that plays a vital role in the in the arts ecosystem, and has significantly contributed to the creative development and professional careers of many U.S. artists over the years. The following takeaways are excerpted from the full report and are presented in the order in which they appear in the analysis.

Is USAI Needed?

USAI plays an important role in the funding ecosystem as the standard bearer for international performance. While there is a pastiche of more focused funding opportunities, USAI stands alone as the single, broad-based source of support for international performances by U.S. artists, and the sector has increasingly come to rely on USAI as other philanthropic support of international exchange has been cut.

Who gets supported by USAI?

USAI supports artists from a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds. The high volume of applications arriving from New York stands out, as does the fact that the vast majority of grantees already have international experience. While the pool of grant recipients is reasonably diverse given the historical pre-dominance of Euro-centric genres and organizations in the performing arts, there is room for improvement. A small number of organizations have received a high number of grants.

Where do USAI grantees go?

USAI grantees perform almost all over the world, but there is a clear concentration of grantees going to Western Europe, while there is a relative lack of artists going to Africa, Central Asia, and South America.

Is the program working well?

Overall, USAI is a well-run program. Most critical comments focused on issues that are endemic to all juried grant programs; however, research suggests that incremental improvements may be achieved with a few minor changes in outreach strategies, instructions for panelists, and follow-up communications with unsuccessful applicants. Program staff capacity is a concern, and even modest expansions of the program's outreach and support services will likely require additional human resources.

What is USAI's impact?

Grantees report a wide range of positive short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes that result from USAI's funding, including reducing the financial and artistic sacrifices that recipients have to make to attend

festivals and impacts on their careers and artistic development. It is more difficult to pin down how frequently applicants would be forced to cancel festival engagements entirely in the absence of a grant and for what proportion of grantees international festivals would otherwise be expected to have net-negative financial consequences.

Does awarding grants to established artists and major organizations reduce the program's impact?

While the percentage of USAI grants that go to large organizations and well-established solo performers is small, the potential for transformative outcomes would likely be increased if those grants were given to applicants who are not yet in the upper echelons of the international festival market. What's more, by funding major organizations USAI may discourage less established artists and organizations from applying. Short of changing the eligibility criteria or review criteria, emphasizing the exceptional nature of the grants that go to major organizations and artists in external communications might begin to address the latter concern.

Are the program's objectives clear?

USAI has multiple objectives. While the breadth of the program has been cited as an asset, the multiple objectives make it difficult to evaluate the program and optimize its design around specific outcomes. The fact that the program is open to such a wide range of applicants may also make it more challenging to target specific populations with recruitment efforts.

Are festivals the right focus?

In many cases, festivals provide impactful experiences for grantees, and the festival requirement provides a relatively clear demarcation of eligibility, which has benefits for the administration of the program. However, the requirement also significantly shapes USAI's outcomes in ways that may not always be intended or desirable. By adding a second layer to the selection process, the festival requirement also limits MAAF's ability to directly steer the program's outcomes (for instance, efforts to diversify the pool of applicants depend on festivals' willingness to invite more diverse artists).

Considering diversity, equity, and Inclusion

Our research surfaced a number of concrete suggestions to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion, focusing particularly on outreach/recruitment and the grant review process. While some gains may be made with relatively minor adjustments like increasing outreach to underrepresented communities, a more robust commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion would require examining the program strategy more holistically and considering structural changes to counter

inherent biases (such as the bias towards Western Europe that is inherent in the festival requirement).

Implications

On July 13, 2018, MAAF convened a Round Table discussion to collectively reflect on the results on the USAI evaluation and consider implications for the program. In addition to MAAF staff and consultants from WolfBrown, the perspectives of three external experts were welcomed into the conversation.

Based on the positive findings of the evaluation report, Round Table participants concluded that USAI is an important and generally well-functioning program. As a result, efforts to significantly increase the program's impact would likely require an overall expansion of the program or the addition of ancillary activities. If new components were to be added to the program, Round Table participants cautioned against task distraction that might detract from the success of the original program. There is currently one Program Officer working on the program, with 60% of time budgeted for USAI. Thus, even modest initiatives such as increasing communications and outreach would likely require additional human resources.

Nonetheless, several opportunities were identified to improve program outcomes in the short- or medium-term without major structural changes to the current program design, and a few further-reaching ideas were proposed for future consideration.

Short-Term Opportunities

- Dispel misperceptions about the pool of successful grantees
- Build partnerships with local and state arts agencies and arts service organizations to increase awareness about the program domestically
- Adjust presentation of funding priorities in panel guidelines

Medium-Term Opportunities

- Build closer relationships with festivals and increase international awareness
- Encourage and support subsequent proposals from strong, but initially unsuccessful applicants
- Continue to engage U.S. embassies abroad
- Consider revising funding allocation processes to encourage a distribution of grants that meets the program's objectives

Opportunities for Future Consideration

- Ancillary programs to build a more diverse pipeline of applications
- Adopt periodically rotating geographic focus to develop connections and opportunities in targeted regions
- Develop a Public Value Framework for international festival appearances by U.S. artists

Participants at the Round Table discussed whether USAI should be defined by and hold itself accountable for specific outcomes and impacts, or whether it is more appropriate to focus on the program's outputs (e.g., the number of grants that are awarded, the artists that receive those grants, the festivals at which they perform). While the discussants objected to distinguishing different application tracks based on expected outcomes, and felt that asking grantees to report on specific impact measures would be inappropriate, it does seem that greater clarity around the strategic goals of USAI (at least for provisional, internal use) might prove useful as a guiding star for program refinements. Since MAAF is poised to embark on a strategic planning exercise in the coming year, there may also be an opportunity to align USAI (and any potential ancillary programs that may be considered as a result of this evaluation) with the organization's larger program strategy.

Overview of USAI

Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation's USArtists International program (USAI) supports performances by U.S. artists at significant international festivals and performing arts marketplaces outside the United States and its territories. The program supports the engagements of exemplary solo artists and ensembles across all performing arts disciplines including dance, music, theater, multidisciplinary work, and folk/traditional arts.

The objective of USAI is to encourage and promote the vibrant diversity of U.S. artists and creative expression in the performing arts by expanding opportunity and exposure to international audiences, encouraging international cultural exchange, and enhancing creative and professional development of U.S. artists by providing connections with presenters, curators, and fellow artists. The program is committed to the presence of U.S. artists on world stages and aims to extend the reach and impact of professional artists dependent on touring for continued sustainability and career advancement.

USAI was launched by MAAF in 2006 as a replacement for the *Fund for U.S. Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions*. The Fund had been in existence since the 1980s, initially as a partnership between the U.S. Department of State and the National Endowment for the Arts. When The Pew Charitable Trusts and The Rockefeller Foundation added their support to the Fund, the administration of the program was entrusted to Arts International, a nonprofit based in New York City. Arts International dissolved in 2005. At the same time, MAAF was in the process of expanding its international programming, and USAI was created as a replacement for the Fund. Since then, the program has been funded by the NEA in partnership with a number of different private foundations, the most consistent partner being The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

In its initial years, USAI only supported U.S. music and dance ensembles performing at festivals in the European Union. In 2008, festivals in Russia and Ukraine also became eligible for funding, and in 2009 the program was expanded to include ensembles and individual artists in all performing arts disciplines performing at festivals all over the world. In addition to festivals, performances at performing arts markets became eligible for support in 2015.

By focusing its support on artists appearing at important industry nexus points like festivals and market places, USAI ensures that grant

recipients' exposure to other cultural influences, new audiences, and industry professionals (such as agents, presenters, and curators) is maximized.

Applications are scored and recommended for funding by review panels consisting of performing arts professionals from across the U.S. and knowledgeable laypersons.

There are two main review criteria:

1. *Artistic Excellence*, as demonstrated by the work samples submitted and the artist's record of professional activities including awards, grants, and other forms of special recognition; and,
2. *Artistic Merit*, as determined by the following:
 - Significance of the applicant's presence at the festival as it relates to their professional development,
 - Significance of the festival locally and internationally,
 - Quality of the proposed engagement including reasonable financial support from the festival given the context of the local economic situation.

Within the broad parameters of the program, applicants are able to identify their own objectives for the proposed festival engagements. Grant requests can range from \$1,000 to \$15,000, but due to the limited resources that are available, grants have historically rarely been funded at 100% of the request amount.

Once applications have been ranked according to the scores assigned by panelists, the panelists set a threshold below which applicants are not recommended for funding. They then set a second threshold, above which all applications are to receive some level of support. Program staff determine the grant awards as a percentage of the amount requested by the applicants, with higher scoring applications receiving a larger percentage of their request. Once funding levels have been set for all applicants above the upper threshold, program staff can opt to fund select applications from the so-called "grey area" (i.e., applications between the two thresholds) with an eye to the balance of art forms, diversity of geographic destinations, and diversity of artists' home states represented in the grantee pool, if sufficient funds are available.

Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation was commissioned with three objectives in mind:

1. Assess the work USAI has done over the course of its twelve-year existence,
2. Determine the impact the program has had, both on international cultural exchange and on the careers of grantees; and,
3. Take stock of the current conditions of international touring and festival participation for U.S. artists.

Throughout the evaluation, the equitable representation the U.S.'s diverse pool of artists has been a particular focus. Ultimately, MAAF hopes to determine whether USAI is optimally positioned to meet the current needs of U.S. artists performing abroad, and gain feedback on the current structure and administration of the program to see what (if any) changes could improve both grantees' experiences and the program's outcomes.

Methodology

To inform this program evaluation, WolfBrown researchers pursued five separate strands of research. Each strand of research resulted in a memorandum report that was delivered to MAAF.

This report summarizes and synthesizes the five strands of research, referencing specific findings from the subsidiary reports throughout. Citations take the form of an abbreviation for the specific report ("Grant Analysis," "Grantee Survey," "Grantee Interviews," "Applicant Interviews," or "Expert Consultations") and the page number. A brief summary of the methodologies associated with each of the five subsidiary reports follows.

1. "Analysis of USAI Grant Data, 2006-2017" (May, 2018)
(cited as "Grant Analysis")

WolfBrown researchers conducted a detailed analysis of all digitally available application and final report data from program years 2006 to 2017.

2. “Survey of USAI Grantees” (April, 2018)
(cited as “Grantee Survey”)

All past grant recipients for whom email addresses are available were invited to participate in an online survey. As an incentive, survey participants were given a chance to win either a \$100 Visa gift card or a one-year digital subscription to *International Arts Manager*. A total of 423 emails were sent, of which 363 were successfully delivered (i.e., did not bounce). 85 usable responses were received, for an overall response rate of 20%. Responses were received from a diverse cross-section of USAI grantees; however, due to the fact that the respondents opted into the study, rather than being randomly selected, there may be a self-selection bias.

3. “Follow-Up Interviews with USAI Grantees” (May 2018)
(cited as “Grantee Interviews”)

As part of the survey, grantees were asked whether they would be willing to participate in a follow-up phone interview. Of the 85 grantees who completed the survey, 46 agreed to participate in an interview. WolfBrown researchers conducted 16 interviews, each of which lasted approximately 30 minutes. After an initial pool of interviewees was chosen at random, additional participants were selected intentionally to achieve a balance between small organizations, midsize organizations, and individual artists. Interviewees were informed that their comments would not be attributed to them in reports to MAAF and were encouraged to speak openly. No additional financial incentive was offered.

4. “Interviews with Unsuccessful Applicants” (March 2018)
(cited as “Applicant Interviews”)

Nineteen unsuccessful USAI applicants were interviewed by phone. Since we anticipated a low response rate if unsuccessful applicants were asked to opt into our research, we recruited interview participants by cold calling them, and asking them to answer a few questions on the spot. In an effort to gather data that reflects the complete history of the program, applicants were approached based on the year of their first application to USAI, and within each program year, interviewees were selected at random. Each interview lasted approximately ten minutes. While the interviewees in the sample provide a diverse mix of

perspectives, we cannot assume their responses reflect the full range of experiences and opinions of all unsuccessful USAI applicants due to the small sample size. Interviewees were informed that their comments would not be attributed to them in reports to MAAF and were encouraged to speak openly. No financial incentive was offered to interview participants.

5. “Consultations with Experts in the Fields of International Touring and Intercultural Exchange” (June 2018)
(cited as “Expert Consultations”)

The expert consultations were conducted through a mix of online focus groups and one-on-one phone interviews. A total of 24 experts participated. MAAF staff developed an initial list of potential participants in each of six categories of experts, designed to incorporate a wide range of perspectives (festival directors, grant review panelists, USAI funders, arts service organizations, industry professionals, and other thought leaders). Based on this, a final roster of experts was selected with input from WolfBrown. Conversations ranged in length from 30 minutes to an hour.

A preliminary version of Parts 1 and 2 of this evaluation report were prepared in advance of a Round Table discussion that was convened on July 13, 2018. The discussion was attended by three external experts (Alicia Adams, VP of International Programming and Dance, The Kennedy Center; David Baile, CEO, International Society for the Performing Arts; and Kelly Barsdate, Chief Program and Planning Officer, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies) in addition to MAAF staff, and WolfBrown team members. The Round Table allowed for candid discussion of the evaluation results, and gave MAAF staff an opportunity to solicit additional perspectives on the findings and discuss potential implications for the program going forward. Key takeaways from that discussion are summarized in Part 3 of this report.

A note about qualitative data:

The research design includes qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups. In reading this report it is important to understand both the unique value and the limitations of qualitative data.

Qualitative research provides an excellent means of capturing the experiences and perspectives of research participants. Since questions are answered in narrative form, researchers can understand the specific context for each respondent’s reply, and, what’s more, observe how respondents make sense of their experiences and what causal inferences they draw.

With qualitative research, one cannot assume that the results proportionately reflect the views of the population as a whole; that is, one never knows whether the comments offered by a single respondent (or even views shared by the majority of the respondents) reflect widely held sentiments in the population, or whether the perspectives are uncommon. However, the fact that an interviewee or focus group member holds that opinion means that it represents one point in the range of perspectives and experiences that exist in the field.

By intentionally inviting research participants from a wide range of backgrounds, we have tried to gain a sense of the variety of views that exist in the population, though we can't be certain that the selected respondents reflect the *full* spectrum. Nonetheless, the range of perspectives offered by the diverse group of research participants that contributed to this report can significantly enrich our understanding of the field.

When reading the participants' responses, it is important to remember that they reflect the respondents' opinions, which may or may not be factually correct. However, the fact that the respondents hold these views is often telling in itself, and can shed light on challenges and opportunities in the arts funding system.

Program Summary

Between 2006 and 2017, USArtists International ...

- received **2013** applications,
- approved **759** grants, and
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to support ...

- **900** festival appearances
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- from **32** U.S. states
- at **604** festivals
- in **84** countries
- on **6** continents
- with grants averaging **\$7,044**.

Performances by USAI-funded artists have been seen by

- approximately **1.4 million** people worldwide.

* 64 grants were either cancelled or withdrawn after being awarded, so the amount distributed during this period is lower than indicated above (\$4,895,353). Throughout the report, “grant” refers to applications that were approved for funding, regardless of whether the grant was successfully executed.

Part 1: PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Is USAI needed?

Based on the numbers alone, there is a strong argument to be made for the ongoing need for USAI. Since the program was expanded to all disciplines and regions of the world in 2009, USAI has consistently received between 170 and 240 applications per year—far more than it is able to fund (Fig. 1).

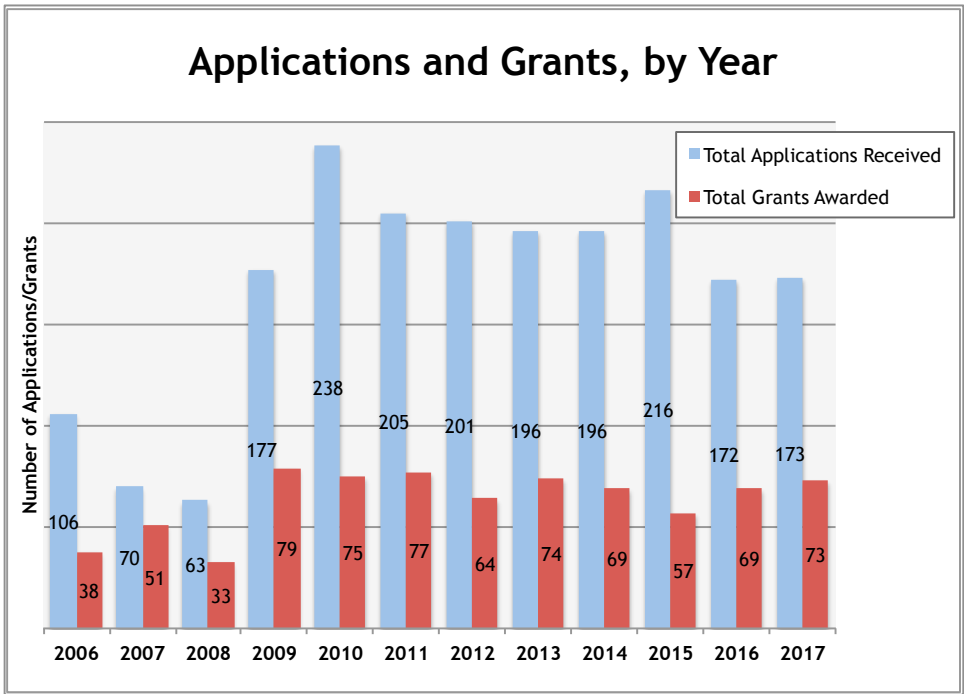


Figure 1: Applications and grants, by year (Grant Analysis 8).

Overall, USAI has been able to fund 38% of the applications it has received (Grant Analysis 9), but that number conceals the fact that many of the applicants who are supported receive a substantially lower

amount of funding than they request.² Between 2006 and 2017, the average request among funded applications was \$11,389, but the average grant was just \$7,044. In the first two years of the program, grantees, on average, received less than half of the amount they requested. Since then, the size of the grants has increased, but, in an effort to extend its resources to a greater number of applicants, requests are still rarely funded at the requested amount. In 2017, the average grant was 86% of the request (Grant Analysis 15).

Beyond the evident need demonstrated by the high number of applications received every year, the 24 experts we consulted about the current state of arts funding for performances abroad were unanimous in stating what an important role USAI plays in the arts funding landscape (Expert Consultations 4). While we did not conduct a comprehensive review of funding programs, the experts asserted that there is no other program like USAI, and that it is working in an area of arts funding that is increasingly neglected by other funders.³

In the survey, one past grantee wrote:

This is a really crucial program- it is the only travel grant available to U.S. artists like my ensemble. We would have missed out on many really important opportunities without the support of the USAI grant program.

Among the unsuccessful applicants we spoke to, several also referred to MAAF as the only stable funder for international performances (Applicant Interviews 5).

While one respondent pointed out that funding for international performances “has always been a tricky field” (Expert Consultation Notes), several experts who have been tracking the development of

² The request amount should not be confused with actual financial need of applicants: the amount of funding that can be requested is capped at \$15,000 (and has been since the program’s inception).

³ While expert opinions are not always accurate, they are valuable when two conditions are met: the experts work in environments that are sufficiently regular to be predictable, and the experts are able to learn these regularities through prolonged practice (Daniel Kahneman, “Expert Intuition: When Can We Trust It?” in *Thinking Fast and Slow*, 2011). Both of these conditions apply here. The high degree of agreement among experts on this point, further substantiates the finding’s reliability.

philanthropic support for international appearances by U.S. artists made it very clear that the support provided by USAI is more important now than ever (Expert Consultations 5).

When Arts International was running the *Fund for U.S. Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions* in the 1990s, a number of major U.S. foundations, including the Ford Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, and The Pew Charitable Trusts, were investing in the arts and international exchange. Of those, only The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation continues to support work in that area.

According to our interviewees, the priorities of other national funders shifted towards more domestic issues such as social justice and equity. Several experts cited the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation's exit from this area of funding as a decisive moment in the deterioration of philanthropic support for international exchange, referring to it variously as a "real red flag" and "the nail in the coffin" (Expert Consultations 6). The deterioration of other philanthropic programs for international touring and exchange among artists has increased the field's reliance on USAI as a standard bearer in this space. As one agent noted, "If the [USAI] funding was redirected, there would be a large negative impact on number of U.S. artists abroad" (Expert Consultations 6).

While the lack of philanthropic support is not the only factor (respondents also cited increased travel costs and reduced artists' fees), 37% of the grantees who took our survey say it's become harder to sustain international appearances financially (Grantee Survey 44-6).

USAI is widely seen as the "go-to" source of funding for international festival performances, but there are, of course, other programs and sources of support that help U.S. artists get abroad. The difference is that these tend to be discipline-specific (e.g., American Dance Abroad), focused on specific countries or regions (e.g., Korea Foundation, FACE Foundation), oriented towards presenters (e.g., NEA's Performing Arts Discovery, APAP's Cultural Exchange Fund), or otherwise more limited in scope than USAI. As a result, it can be more difficult for artists to find out about and access support from these sources (Expert Consultations 5).

In terms of widely accessible resources for U.S. performances abroad, the U.S. embassies were the most consistently cited source of support. Several of the festival directors we interviewed commented on the multiple ways in which U.S. embassies have supported U.S. artists appearing on their stages, including direct financial support, assistance in securing sponsorships from American companies, and marketing support (Expert Consultations 5).

Unfortunately, the artists themselves are often the ones who end up subsidizing their artistic engagements abroad. One festival director admitted, in addition to government and foundation support, he relies on “the generosity of the artists” (Expert Consultations 7). As an example, he cited a group of U.S. artists who appeared at his festival just for costs (i.e., without a fee), though he added, “I don’t love doing that.”

Another festival director suggested that the willingness to fundraise independently and compromise on fees in order to secure a festival engagement is unique to artists from the U.S. European artists who receive core support from their governments have a more fixed perception of their worth, he argued. For small and mid-sized companies from the U.S., he “realized that the fact that [he] didn’t have enough money didn’t really matter. They were willing to get resourceful on their end in a way that European companies wouldn’t” (Expert Consultations 8). U.S. artists thus often end up bearing the administrative burden of fundraising for their festival appearances, whether through grants or contributions from private donors, and ultimately shoulder the financial risk if funding for the engagement falls through.

Philanthropic support of some kind, and USAI grants in particular, are thus often a practical necessity, serving as the “cornerstone in making [a performance at an international festival] economically viable” (Expert Consultations 5). Among the grantees who took our survey, only 16% believe they would have been able to perform at the festival that invited them without USAI support (See page 40). One festival director explained,

Normally, we don’t bring artists without funds (but there are exceptions). ... For us it’s important to know that there’s some kind of support. That’s how we work with all countries.

(Expert Consultations 8)

In cases like that, the availability of a grant like USAI is almost a precondition for U.S. artists to appear at the festival.

Beyond the oftentimes very real financial need for USAI in allowing U.S. artists to perform at international festivals, there is a larger question about the significance of funding artists’ international engagements. Both grantees and outside experts commented on the role that such funding plays in leveling the playing field vis-à-vis artists from countries that provide more financial support for the arts (Grantee Survey 50). From the artists’/agents’ perspective, the grant is an important equalizing factor when “going in for gigs against artists from the

Netherlands or Norway, who get so much support” (Expert Consultations 5).

Other experts described USAI’s significance in terms of intercultural dialog and artistic growth. One commented,

What is so important about the grant is that it provides a way for Americans artists to live in an international and artistically interdependent world.

(Expert Consultations 5)

Still others highlighted the important work that USAI does to improve the economic basis for U.S. artists by supporting their career development. (Expert Consultations 5)

Takeaway: USAI plays an important role in the funding ecosystem as the standard bearer for international performance support. While there is a pastiche of more focused funding opportunities, USAI stands alone as the single, broad-based source of support for international performances by U.S. artists, and the sector has increasingly come to rely on USAI as other philanthropic support of international exchange has been cut.

Who gets supported by USAI?

Among the features that make USAI stand out in the arts funding ecosystem are its national scope and its ability to fund U.S. artists performing all over the world.

Geographic Distribution of Applicants

Over the years, applications have arrived from 42 states (Grant Analysis 39). While large numbers of applications arrive from major metropolitan areas, applications are submitted from locations across the country (Fig. 2).

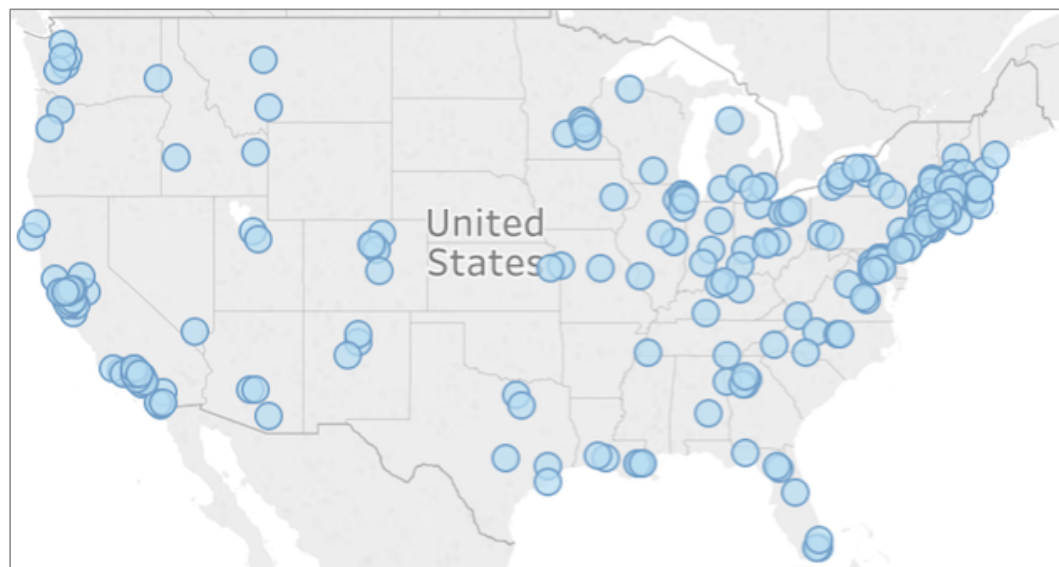


Figure 2: Locations from which applications have been submitted. *Note: Applications from Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico have been received but are not shown due to space considerations.*

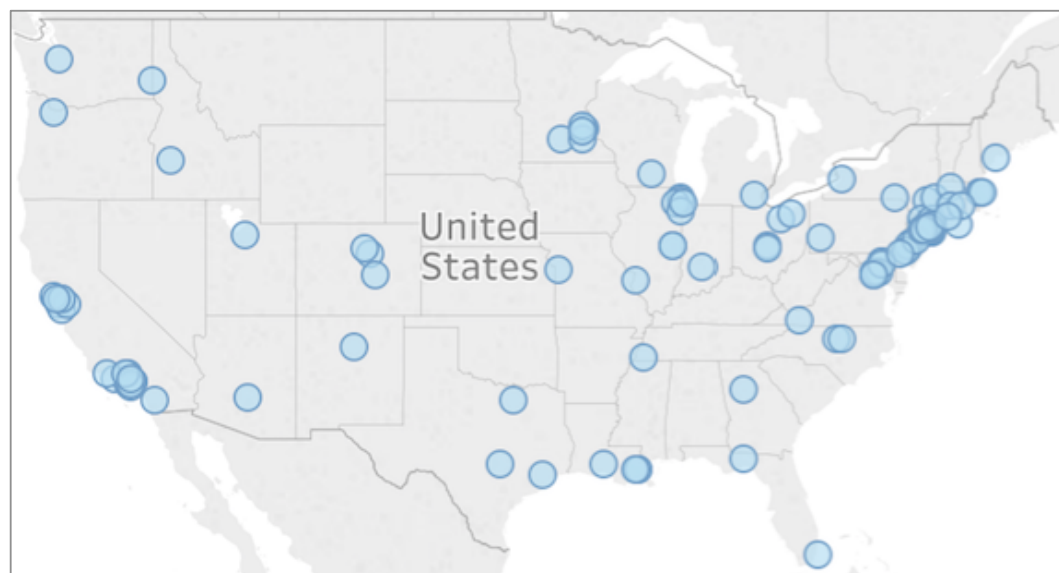


Figure 3: Locations in which USAI grants have been received. *Note: Grants have been awarded in Hawaii but are not shown due to space considerations.*

When compared to the map of applications, there are notably fewer grantees from locations outside of major cities (Grant Analysis 40-41).

New York is a clear outlier in terms of the numbers of applications submitted and grants received: Forty-six percent of all USAI applications come from New York, and over half of the grants go to artists and organizations in the Empire State (Grant Analysis 39). It is difficult to know to what extent New York is overrepresented in the USAI program,

since there is no national registry of artists. However, it seems unlikely (though perhaps not entirely impossible) that 50% of the country's internationally touring artists are based in New York.

Discipline

While the program is open to applications from all performing arts disciplines, music and dance stand out for their strong representation, both in the pool of applications and in the grants awarded. In both counts, over 40% are for music and 30% are for dance (Fig. 4). There are multiple possible explanations for this.

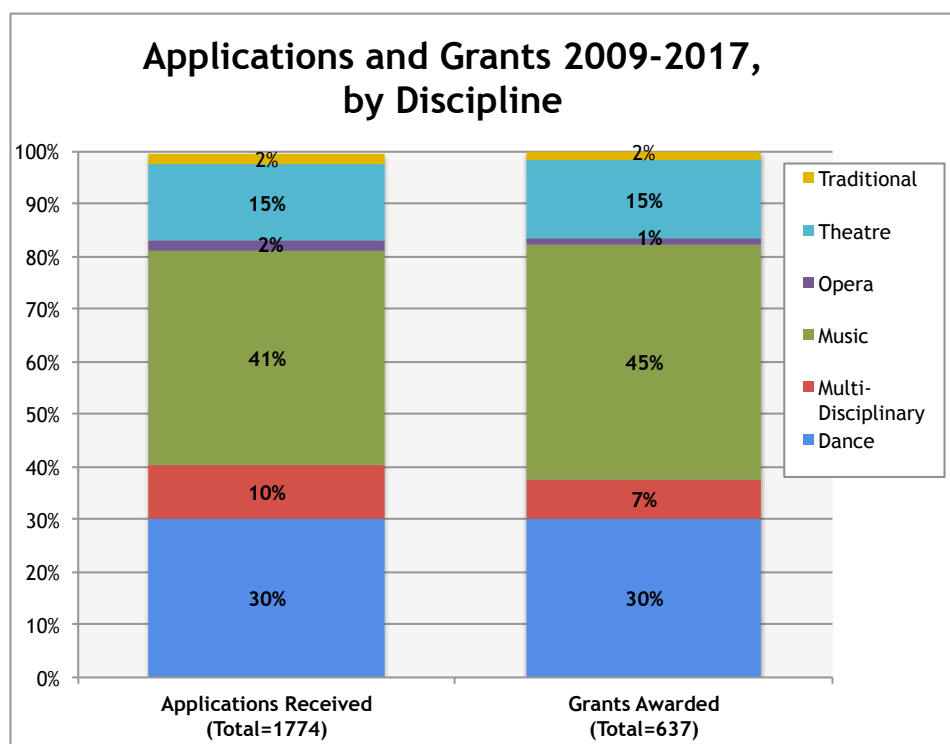


Figure 4: Applications and grants 2009-2017, by discipline (Grant Analysis 19). *Note: This chart only shows applications from 2009 on, since USAI only accepted dance and music applications prior to that.*

When USAI was launched in 2006, the program was initially only open to dance and music applicants (including traditional and multi-disciplinary), so the longer history of funding in those disciplines may contribute to their prevalence, or it may be that the grant is more widely known in those disciplines.

The focus group with representatives of arts service organizations as part of the Expert Consultations highlighted the different functions that international performances have in the careers of artists working in various art forms and genres. According to the focus group participants, musicians are, broadly speaking, more likely to see international touring

as their “bread and butter,” whereas for dance and theater artists, international performances are less frequent and primarily pursued to gain experience or as a matter of prestige. Within disciplines, there are differences by genre. For instance, touring in Europe is essential for many jazz musicians, whereas it’s generally less important for classical musicians. The respondents acknowledged that these are, of course, gross generalizations, and there are considerable discrepancies from one artist to the next; however, there are structural reasons for some of the differences. For instance, most theater productions are simply not designed to tour. Theater performances that go to international festivals are therefore often experimental works or devised theater pieces (Expert Consultations 6).

Organization Type

Another outstanding feature of USAI is that it supports both nonprofit organizations and (fiscally sponsored) individual artists and ensembles.

Overall, 46% of all applications submitted to USAI have used a fiscal sponsor, but those applicants only receive 40% of the grants.

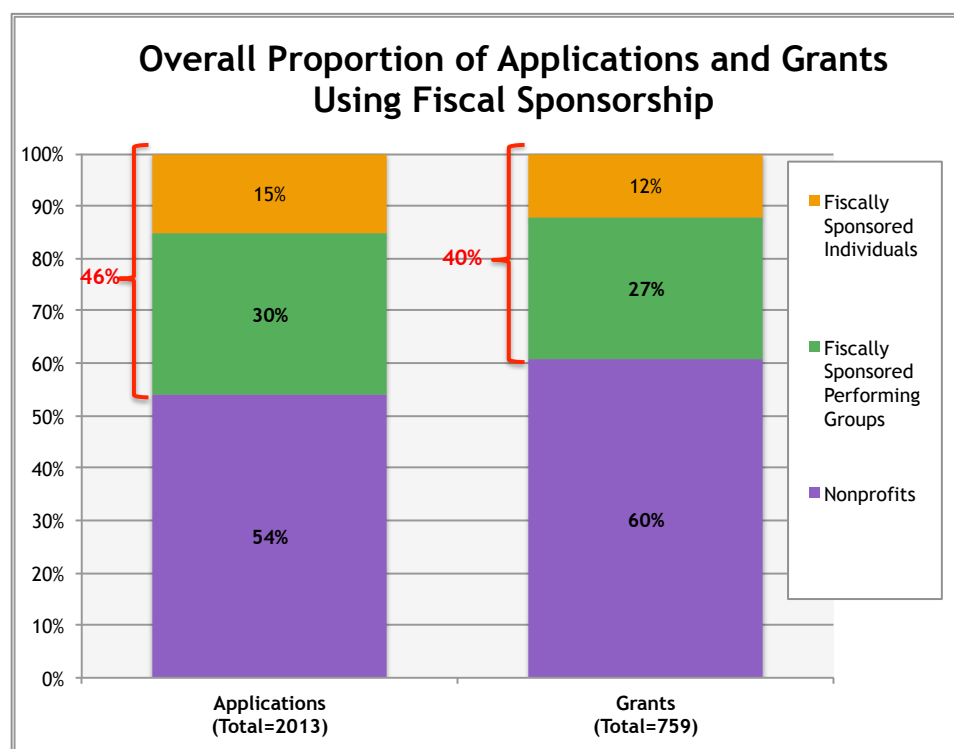


Figure 5: Overall proportion of applications and grants using fiscal sponsorship (Grant Analysis 25, 27).

While many unincorporated groups and individual artists applying through fiscal sponsors are able to secure USAI grants, the difference in success rate does suggest that nonprofits have an advantage. In the

survey of grantees, two thirds of the individual artists (66%) stated that they completed the application entirely on their own or with help from (unpaid) friends and colleagues. Twenty percent received assistance from their fiscal sponsors, 9% received some help from a paid professional, and 3% reported that their applications were submitted by a grant writer, agent, manager, or other paid professional on their behalf. While the majority of nonprofits responding to the survey (53%) also didn't have any dedicated development staff or contract with professional grant writers, 34% had a least part time staff member focused on development, and 6% hired external grant writers. While far from universal, the greater access to grant writing professionals among organizations may contribute to the greater success rate among organizations. Incorporated nonprofits may also be more likely to have an established track record of success than nascent groups, increasing their chances of success.

Prior Experience

While it is not a requirement for the grant, the vast majority (86%) of grantees who completed the survey had already performed abroad prior to applying for USAI (Fig. 6).

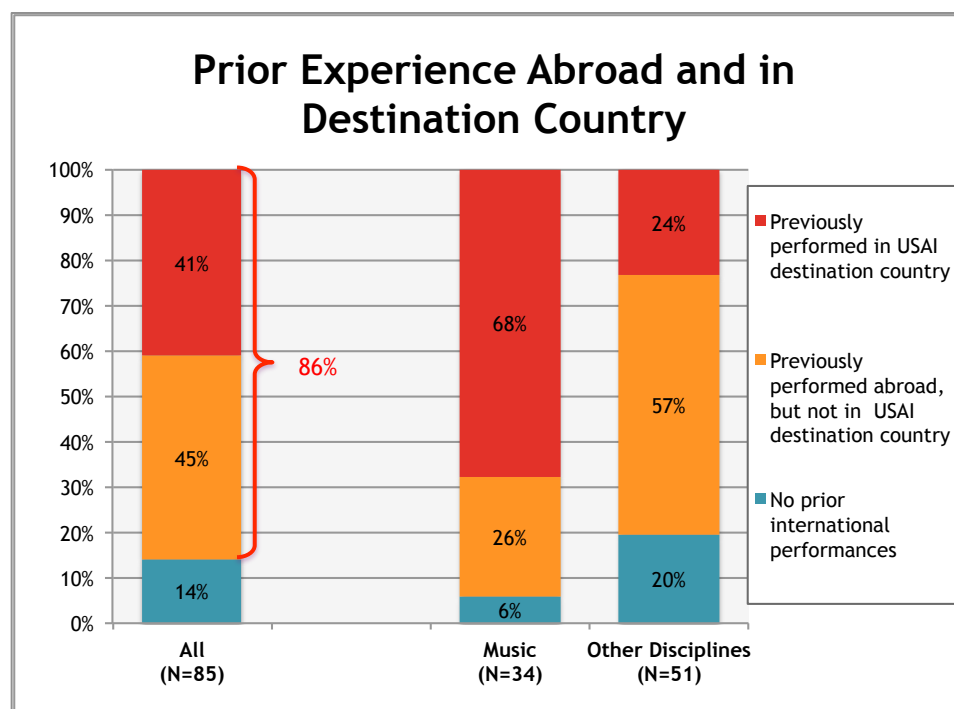


Figure 6: Prior experience abroad and in destination country (Grantee Survey 16).
Note: Throughout this report "N" designates the number of responses shown in a given column.

Consistent with the observations that musicians tend to rely more heavily on international touring as a source of income (noted above), the

musicians in the survey tended to have more prior experience abroad than grant recipients working in other disciplines.

While international experience may influence panelists' perceptions of applicants' artistic credentials, it is by no means sufficient to secure a grant. Several of the unsuccessful applicants we interviewed also had long histories of performing abroad (Applicant Interviews 5). It may also be that extensive widespread international experience among grantees comes about because artists with international exposure are more likely to be invited to festivals in the first place. Nonetheless, 56% of the survey respondents (and 75% of the non-musicians) had no prior experience in the country they performed in with their USAI grant.

Race and Ethnicity

The race and ethnicity data that is consistently collected from applicants is based on the National Standard for Arts Information Exchange adopted by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), which is of little analytical value.⁴ To gain a more nuanced understanding of the racial/ethnic makeup of the individual artists and organizations that receive funding from USAI, we requested more detailed information in the survey of grantees (Tables 1 and 2). While we cannot assume that the grantees who completed the survey are representative of all grant recipients, the survey data at least provides more reliable information on the respondents.

Overall, 33% of the staff members of responding organizations and 35% of the board members are identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, or Native American/Alaska Native (Table 1).⁵ The corresponding figures for non-Hispanic Whites, 65% and 57%, respectively. This is roughly inline with the composition of the U.S. population, which is 61% non-Hispanic White, according to the latest Census Bureau estimates.

⁴ Following the National Standard for Arts Information Exchange, applicants are asked to indicate which racial/ethnic category "best represents 50% or more of the racial make-up of [their] artist/ensemble's staff or board or membership." The resulting data is difficult to interpret since there is no indication of whether the entries refer to artist(s) or to an organization's staff or board members.

⁵ Since each individual could be associated with multiple racial/ethnic categories, the percentages don't sum to 100% (i.e., some people are double counted).

ORGANIZATIONS		
Staff Race/Ethnicity (40 organizations reporting)	% of Individuals	% of Orgs with 50% or more
Asian or Pacific Islander	8%	10%
Black or African American	13%	18%
Hispanic or Latino	8%	5%
Middle Eastern	2%	3%
Native American or Alaska Native	2%	0%
White, not Hispanic	65%	58%
Other race or ethnicity	3%	3%
Race/ethnicity unknown	1%	3%
Performer Race/Ethnicity (40 organizations reporting)		
Asian or Pacific Islander	8%	5%
Black or African American	15%	15%
Hispanic or Latino	11%	3%
Middle Eastern	4%	0%
Native American or Alaska Native	3%	3%
White, not Hispanic	37%	35%
Other race or ethnicity	8%	5%
Race/ethnicity unknown	20%	3%
Board Race/Ethnicity (36 organizations reporting)		
Asian or Pacific Islander	9%	6%
Black or African American	10%	6%
Hispanic or Latino	11%	6%
Middle Eastern	2%	0%
Native American or Alaska Native	3%	6%
White, not Hispanic	59%	64%
Other race or ethnicity	5%	3%
Race/ethnicity unknown	1%	3%

Table 1: Race and ethnicity within organizations responding to the grantee survey (Grantee Survey 11).

The performers appearing on stage in the past year were even slightly more diverse, with a total of 41% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, or Native American/Alaska Native. While only 37% of the performers are identified as non-Hispanic Whites, a few large organizations listed the race of all or most of their performers as “unknown.” Presumably, some of the 20% in the “unknown” category are also White, so that the true proportion of non-Hispanic White performers likely falls between 37% and 57%.

Since a small number of the large organizations responding to the survey could easily overshadow smaller nonprofits in the analysis of the

racial/ethnic composition of board members, staff, and performers, it may be more meaningful to look at the number of grantees who report that over 50% of their organization belongs to a specific ALAANA⁶ group. This may be interpreted as an indication that the organization is rooted in, or committed to serving, that particular population.

In many cases, nonprofits that report a majority belonging to a particular ALAANA group in one area of the organization (board, staff, or performers) are likely to show a similar distribution in other areas of the organization, so that, for instance, an organization whose board is predominantly Asian American, might also have over 50% Asian American performers. However, even when accounting for that type of duplication, the far-right column of Table 1 suggests that about a quarter of the responding organizations are rooted in ALAANA communities.

It should be noted that only 40 of the 50 organizations that completed the survey responded to the questions about staff and performer race and ethnicity (and only 36 reported on board members), so there may be some reporting bias: Organizations with a strong commitment to diversity may have this demographic data more readily available, or, on the flip-side, organizations that are predominantly White may have been less inclined to report their information (if they feel that that would make an negative impression on a funder).

The individual artists responding to the grantee survey were somewhat less diverse. Eighty percent identify as non-Hispanic, White. While the sample sizes are small and not necessarily representative of all of USAI's grantees, this observation raises the question of whether individual ALAANA artists might be less likely to know about, less inclined to apply, and/or less likely to receive USAI grants than either their White colleagues or ALAANA organizations.

⁶ African, Latino(a), Asian, Arab and Native American.

INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS, N=35	
Race/Ethnicity (multiple select; does not add to 100%)	
Asian or Pacific Islander	14%
Black or African American	3%
Hispanic or Latino	6%
Middle Eastern	3%
Native American or Alaska Native	0%
White, not Hispanic	80%
Two or more races	3%

Table 2: Race/ethnicity of individual artists responding to the survey of grantees (Grantee Survey 8).

To reduce biases in the grant selection process, MAAF strives to include a diverse mix of backgrounds on its selection panels. Table 3 demonstrates its success in this regard. A past panelist also noted, “Mid Atlantic has been doing a good job in addressing issues of diversity” (Expert Consultations 16).

PANELS	
Race/Ethnicity (multiple select; does not add to 100%)	% of Panel Participants
Asian or Pacific Islander	16%
Black or African American	21%
Hispanic or Latino	8%
Native American or Alaska Native	2%
White, not Hispanic	51%
N/A	3%
Gender	
Female	53%
Male	47%
Region	
Midwest	18%
Northeast (incl. New York)	34%
New York	17%
South	22%
West (incl. California)	25%
California	13%
Canada	1%

Table 3: Demographic composition of panels (MAAF Panel Records, 2006-2018). *Note: The table shows the composition of the panels, not the pool of panelists (i.e., panelists who served on multiple panels are counted multiple times). Regions are defined according to the U.S. Census Bureau (Midwest: IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI; Northwest: CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT; South: AL, AR, DE, DC, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV; West: AZ, AK, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY)*

Most Successful Applicants

A few applicants have been extremely successful in securing USAI grants over the years (Table 4). Some of them have been funded almost every year of the program's 12-year existence.⁷ 1125 different artists and organizations applied for USAI funding over the years, but the 15 grantees listed in Table 4 account for 15% of all USAI grants.

Rank	Name	Applications Submitted	Grants Received	Success Rate
1	Bang on a Can, Inc.	16	11	69%
2	Trisha Brown Company, Inc.	10	10	100%
3	Kronos Performing Arts Association	11	10	91%
4	Discalced, Inc.	8	8	100%
5	International Contemporary Ensemble Foundation,	10	8	80%
6	Ragamala Dance	8	7	88%
7	Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Inc.	9	7	78%
8	So Percussion, Inc.	11	7	64%
9	Hubbard Street Dance Chicago	6	6	100%
10	The Rose Ensemble	6	6	100%
11	Wooster Group, Inc.	6	6	100%
12	Jose Limón Dance Foundation	7	6	86%
13	Stephen Petronio Dance Company, Inc.	7	6	86%
14	Elevator Repair Service Theater, Inc.	8	6	75%
15	Shen Wei Dance Arts, Inc.	9	6	67%

Table 4: Most frequent recipients of USAI grants (Grant Analysis 48).

The consultations with experts give the impression that there are at least two different tiers of artists that are supported by USAI. While all applicants are either non-profits or supported by fiscal sponsors, some artists clearly operate in a true “market,” bearing all of the attributes of a commercial marketplace. They have successful “products,” and they make a living selling those performances to international presenters and festivals that are willing to pay for them (Expert Consultations 7).

However, for many less established artists performing at international festivals, the best-case scenario is that they will break even, or at least not lose too much money on the engagement. While there may be hopes that the investment will lead to more profitable engagements in the long run, the festival is primarily pursued for the opportunity to perform, the experience, and/or the prestige (Expert Consultations 6). Unfortunately, artists who are not in high demand are frequently the ones who end up

⁷ Under USAI's guidelines, applicants are only able to receive one grant per calendar year.

taking a financial risk and/or underwriting the costs when they are invited to perform at festivals (as described above).

A number of the experts we consulted commented on the high frequency with which some grantees are funded (Expert Consultation Notes). As table 4 shows, only a small number of organizations fall into this category, but those cases seem to stand out to people who have been following the program over the years. Whether or not this small number of frequent grant recipients should be considered a cause for concern depends on the program's objectives. Some experts we spoke to suggested that the consistency with which some applicants are funded results from biases that allow them to benefit from the program

Takeaway: USAI supports artists from a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds. The high volume of applications arriving from New York stands out, as does the fact that the vast majority of grantees already have international experience. While the pool of grant recipients is reasonably diverse given the historical pre-dominance of Euro-centric genres and organizations in the performing arts, there is still room for improvement. A small number of organizations have received a high number of grants.

disproportionately, while shutting other applicants out. However, an expert at the Round Table discussion pointed out that one could also interpret this as an indicator of success: applicants who are funded by panel after panel (independently of each other) demonstrate that USAI is supporting truly outstanding artists, who are sustaining their international activities over the years. Ultimately, it is a question of whether the program's emphasis is on showcasing the "best" of U.S. artists abroad, or whether it's seeking to give a wide range of U.S. artists the opportunity to benefit from international exposure (or present the broadest possible range of U.S. arts abroad).

Where do USAI grantees go?

Viewed on a map, the USAI's global reach is clearly evident (Fig. 7). At the same time, the high concentration of grantees performing at festivals in Western Europe (in particular, to the UK, Germany, and France) stands out, and there are also some notable voids in the map, indicating regions where no USAI grantees have appeared, predominantly in Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and in Central Asia.

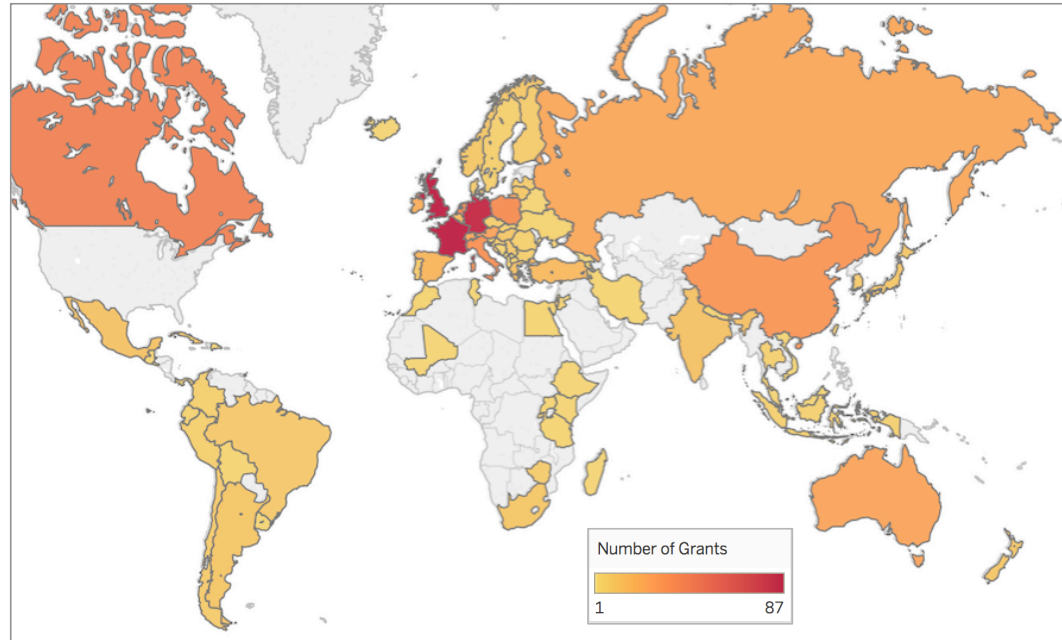


Figure 7: Map of Destination Countries for USAI Grant Recipients (Grant Analysis 34).

In part, this is due to the lack of applications seeking support for engagements in these parts of the world (perhaps even the absence of suitable performing arts festivals), but applicants seeking to perform in Western Europe or other culturally aligned regions (Canada, Australia) have also seen higher success rates than their peers traveling to other areas of the world. The success rates for applications for Canada, Australia, and Western Europe range between 43% and 48%. Meanwhile, only about a quarter of the applications for Africa, Mexico, and Central and Latin America are successful (Grant Analysis 35). Both the higher density of festivals in Western Europe and the higher success rate of USAI applications for that area likely result from the fact that the international performing arts festival, as a presenting format, originated in Europe, and Europe is home to many of the more established and better-funded festivals.

Since the purview of USAI expanded to all foreign countries in 2009, 39% of all applications seek support for festival performances in Western Europe, and 47% of all grants are awarded in support of performances in that region (Grant Analysis 31). Despite the uneven success rates that have continued to favor Western Europe in recent years, grants for travel to regions other than Western Europe, taken together, have outnumbered those for Western Europe since 2013 (Fig. 8). This is due to an almost 50% decrease in annual applications seeking support for festival engagements in Western Europe since 2010, while the application numbers for other geographies have remained more-or-less constant (Grant Analysis 32, 33).

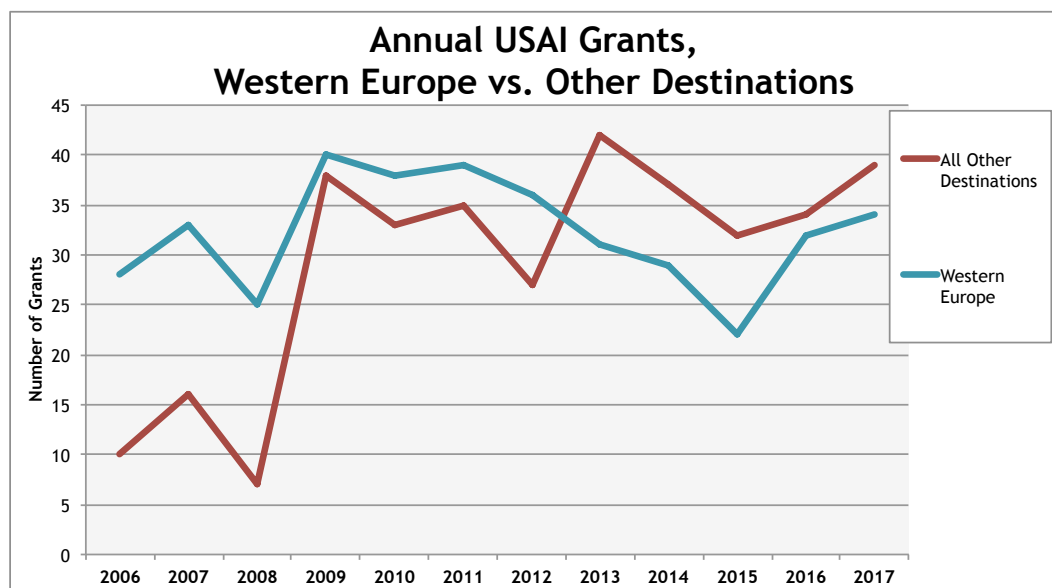


Figure 8: Annual USAI grants, Western Europe vs. other destinations (Grant Analysis 36).

Festivals

Over the years, USAI applicants have sought to perform at 1,354 different festivals worldwide, and USAI has supported artists at 604 (45%) of those festivals (Grant Analysis 50). 453 of those festivals have only presented one USAI grantee. These figures speak both to the breadth of the international festival market and to the range of opportunities supported through USAI.

Table 5 shows all of the festivals that have presented 5 or more USAI grantees over the years. Together, the 21 festivals shown in Table 5 account for only 128 (14%) of the 900 festival engagements USAI has supported. While some festivals thus feature USAI-funded artists on a fairly regular basis, it does not appear that any of them have captured a disproportionate share of USAI's support.

Festival	Country	Number of Grants
Edinburgh International Festival	United Kingdom	10
Lucerne Festival	Switzerland	8
BBC Promenade Concerts	United Kingdom	7
Harare International Festival of the Arts	Zimbabwe	7
International Summer Course for New Music Darmstadt	Germany	7
North Sea Jazz Festival	The Netherlands	7
Annual International Contemporary Dance Conference and Performance Festival	Poland	6
Beijing Modern Music Festival	China	6
Hong Kong Arts Festival	China	6
International Tanzmesse NRW	Germany	6
London International Festival of Theatre	United Kingdom	6
The Holland Festival	The Netherlands	6
Vancouver International Jazz Festival	Canada	6
Dublin Dance Festival	Ireland	5
Holland Dance Festival	The Netherlands	5
Montpellier Dance Festival	France	5
Music of the Streets	France	5
Noorderzon Performing Arts Festival	The Netherlands	5
Rheingau Music Festival	Germany	5
Santiago a Mil International Theatre Festival	Chile	5
Soorya Dance and Music Festival	India	5

Table 5: Festivals that have featured 5 or more USAI grantees (Grant Analysis 51).

Takeaway: USAI grantees perform almost all over the world, but there is a clear concentration of grantees going to Western Europe, while there is a relative lack of artists going to Africa, Central Asia, and South America.

Is the program working well?

In general, grantees we heard from and the experts we consulted agree that USAI is well run. In the survey of grantees, 95% percent of respondents indicated that USAI is well or extremely well designed and implemented (Grantee Survey 48). Grantees reported that the application process is clear and not too time consuming. Moreover, they have found their interactions with MAAF staff via email, phone, and/or webinars helpful (Grantee Interviews 10). The experts consulted for this evaluation, including agents, festival directors, and past reviewers for USAI grant selection panels, felt that, in general, the application process and administrative procedures for USAI were inline with those for other grant programs (Expert Consultations 10).

Communications/Outreach

When asked how they first heard about USAI, the grantees we interviewed cited a variety of channels, including friends and colleagues, email Listservs, other foundations, and online research (Grantee Interviews 3-4). The festivals also play a role in spreading the word about USAI, since several of the festival directors we spoke to routinely encourage artists to apply (although 78% of grantees indicated that they were aware of USAI before being invited to the festival (Grantee Survey 19).

The majority of responses from grantees emphasized the importance of having a strong network and being well connected within the field. The importance of networks also came up in interviewees' explanations of the circumstances that led to them being invited to perform at festivals in the first place (Grantee Interviews 3-4).

While the unsuccessful applicants and grantees we heard from were obviously all aware of USAI, there was a general concern that large numbers of artists might be missing from the applicant pool, either because they don't know about USAI, don't have the necessary skills or confidence to apply, or don't have the necessary connections to get invited to an international festival in the first place (Expert Consultations 15). In interviews, several grantees suggested there is a lack of awareness of the USAI grant, particularly among small, emerging, and culturally specific artists and organizations (Grantee Interviews 8). These concerns are thus of particular significance in light of diversity, equity, and inclusion considerations (see page 59). That said, additional outreach and support for applicants who are not well integrated into established networks is extremely labor intensive, and expanding USAI's efforts on these fronts would require increased staffing levels for the program.

Panel Process

The review panelists we spoke with were generally satisfied with the review process and felt that the grantees selected were all high-quality, deserving artists (even if there were other applicants they would have rather funded). However, comments from the respondents also make it clear that USAI shares all of the limitations that are inherent in peer-review grant processes. (Is the pool of applicants broad enough? Can the

artists be judged appropriately based on short excerpts of their work?⁸ Does the process reward good grant writing more than good art? Expert Consultations 11).

For a few of the panelists there was confusion about what attributes should be factored into the scoring and how much emphasis should be put on grant writing skills. Some panelists also struggled with the variety and range of the applications they were asked to weigh against each other. In reflecting on the pool of applications, one panelist recalled,

The quality was very strong. But it was very varied, and without a framework, I felt a little bit at sea in terms of evaluating ... From a curatorial standpoint, it was hard to know what we were trying to achieve.

(Expert Consultations 11)

Another panelist found it “hard to weigh the more established company with a solid history and resume and a relative new comer” who might show a lot of potential (Expert Consultations 12). With such a wide variety of artists applying, it seems that there are multiple ways of defining “artistic excellence” (e.g., past accomplishment, technical mastery, creativity, unique artistic voice), so some panelists might benefit from additional guidance.

Understanding USAI Funding Decisions

In our interviews, we asked both grantees who had seen one or more applications rejected and festival directors whether the reasons for the panel’s positive decisions in some cases and negative decisions in others were clear to them, and it turned out that the rationale often wasn’t obvious.

None of the grantees we consulted had a clear sense of why certain applications were funded and others weren’t. In fact, some interviewees said that the application that was not funded seemed stronger to them or was for a festival that was ultimately (or would have been) more impactful on their careers (Grantee Interviews 5). Similarly, festival directors who had experienced both successful and unsuccessful

⁸ Until USAI transitioned to holding its review panels online in 2016, there were no limitations on the length of the work samples. In order to help reduce the panelists’ workload, work samples are currently capped at 5 minutes each (10 minutes total per application). MAAF is considering extending the time limit to 10 minutes per sample for future application cycles.

applications to USAI reported that they didn't understand why the panels funded some artists but not others (Expert Consultations 9).

When speculating about why some of their applications were not funded, grantees surmised that

- MAAF may not value return engagements as much as initial engagements,
- the quality of the work sample may not have been high enough, or
- MAAF was looking for greater geographic distribution among applicants. (Grantee Interviews 5)

Since only the second of those options would explicitly influence panelists' scores under the existing review criteria, it appears that unsuccessful applicants conjecture fictitious selection criteria in the absence of concrete and accurate information about why their proposals were not funded.

Unsuccessful applicants are able to request feedback on the proposals, and some mentioned that they were able to use feedback from their first application to improve a second application that was then funded (Grantee Interviews 5). Even unsuccessful applicants expressed appreciation for the feedback and support that they received from MAAF, complimenting the grant program and in some cases mentioning that they refer colleagues to the program (Applicant Interviews 8).

MAAF has not systematically tracked how many applicants request feedback, but it is estimated that 25% or 30% take advantage of the opportunity. While program staff reports that the applicants requesting feedback represent a wide range of experience levels in terms of their grant writing, additional tracking of those receiving feedback, and potentially more widespread or targeted follow-up with unsuccessful applicants could help encourage future applications and dispel misperceptions about the grant program.

Takeaway: Overall, USAI is a well-run program. Most critical comments focused on issues that are endemic to all juried grant programs; however, research suggests that incremental improvements may be achieved with a few minor changes in outreach strategies, instructions for panelists, and follow-up communications with unsuccessful applicants. Program staff capacity is a concern, and even modest expansions of the program's outreach and support services will likely require additional human resources.

What is USAI's impact?

Impact on Festival Engagements

As noted above (page 22), the most direct outcome of USAI grants is, in many cases, simply that it allows grantees to perform at the festivals they've been invited to. Without support, the artists' ability to participate in the festivals would often be uncertain.

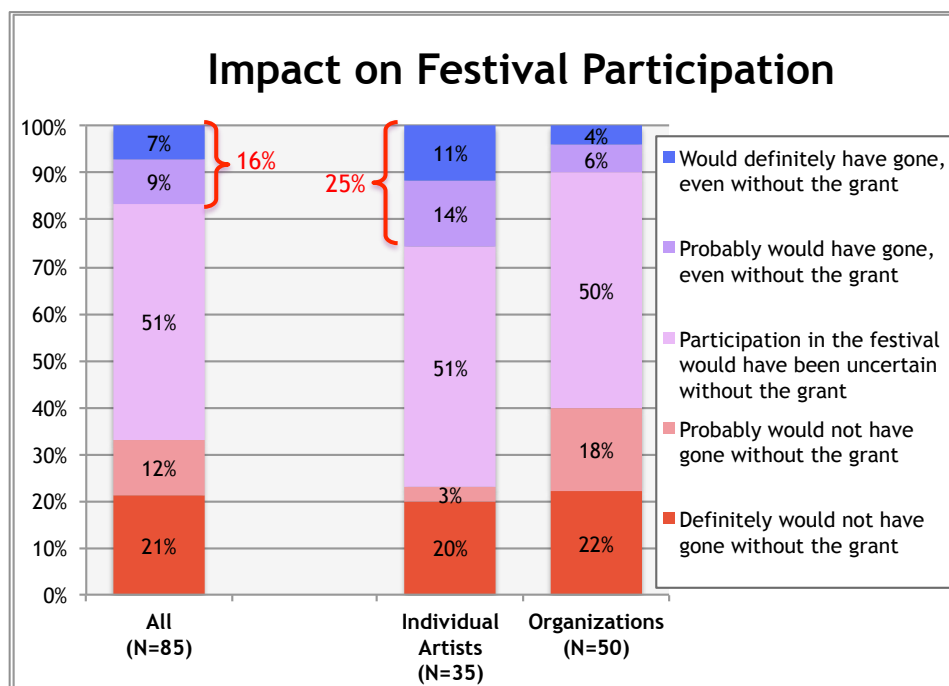


Figure 9: Impact on festival participation (Grant Analysis 23).

In the grantee survey, only 16% of respondents indicated that they would probably or definitely have performed at the festival even without the grant (Fig. 9). Individual artists show greater flexibility (or perhaps a greater willingness to self-finance the festival engagement) than organizations, with 25% stating that they would likely or definitely have participated in the festival even without the USAI grant.

Grantees who were invited to festivals outside of Western Europe tended to depend on the USAI grant more heavily. Thirty-nine percent of the grantees going to destinations elsewhere in the world felt they would probably or definitely not have gone to the festival without the USAI support versus 25% of those going to Western Europe (Grant Analysis 24).

Somewhat contradictory to the survey results, we found that many - though certainly not all—of the unsuccessful applicants we spoke to ended up performing at the festival anyway. Though we can't generalize

based on the small sample, slightly over half of the unsuccessful applicants found their way to the festival one way or another, and, consistent with the survey results, this was more common among the individual artists (Grantee Interviews 5; Applicant Interviews 4).

As indicated above (page 22), U.S. artists are often very resourceful in finding ways to make their festival engagements work out, and many are willing to use their personal resources or even go into debt in order to take advantage of the opportunity to perform at an international festival (which speaks to how highly artists value these opportunities). In addition to seeking funding from other foundations (The Korea Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, and a small regional foundation were mentioned), applicants who didn't receive USAI grants raised funds from individual donors, launched crowdfunding campaigns, cut costs by reducing the number of artists traveling to the festival, or booked additional engagements abroad to offset the expenses (Grantee Interviews 5; Applicant Interviews 4). Half of the interviewees who performed at the festival without USAI support were not able to secure any philanthropic support for their engagement, and even some of those who did raise funds from alternative sources found the funding insufficient so that they had to partially self-fund the engagement (Applicant Interviews 4).

The early- and late-career artists we spoke to were less likely to perform without receiving the USAI grant, because they were either unable or unwilling to self-finance. Several late career artists explained that they have self-financed or taken lower fees for years and are no longer willing to do so. As a consequence, some had stopped performing internationally (Applicant Interviews 4-5).

While there are certainly many instances in which an unsuccessful USAI application immediately puts an end to a potential festival engagement, our research suggests that there are also many cases in which the USAI grant has less of an impact on whether or not the engagement happens, but instead affects the financial risk that the artist must shoulder, the level of artistic sacrifice required, the resources the artist must put into additional fundraising, and the degree of hardship the artist must endure for the sake of performing at the festival.

As Figure 10 shows, the vast majority grantees who took our survey (89%) indicated that participating in the festival without a USAI grant would have created financial hardship (e.g. forced them to take on personal debt or accessing financial reserves). This figure was even higher for individual artists (97%), and slightly lower (84%) for organizations.

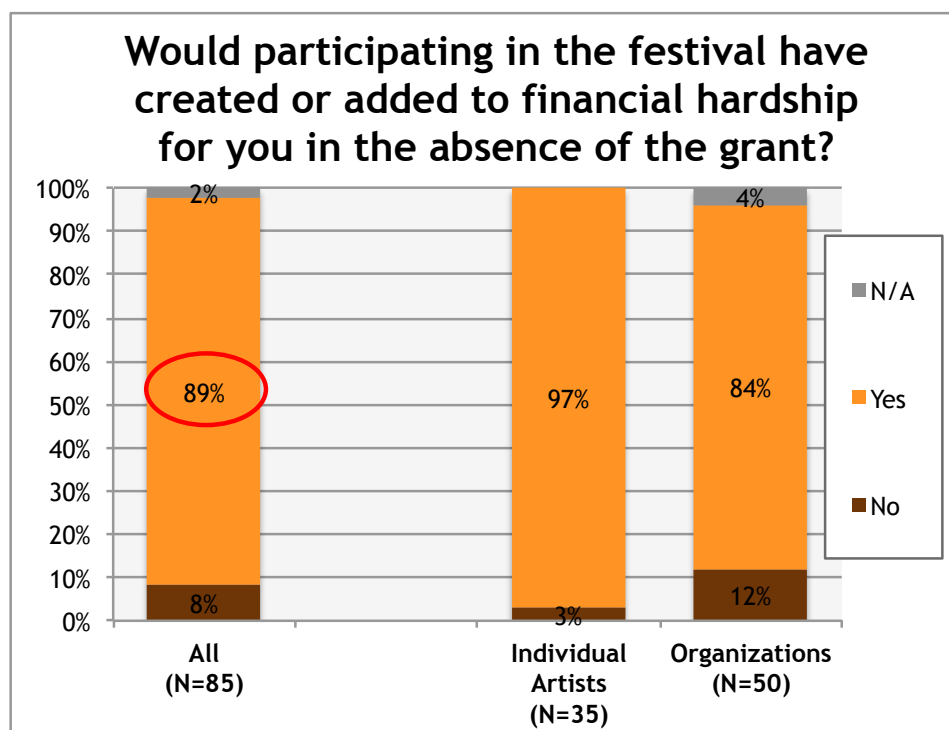


Figure 10: Would participating in the festival have created or added to financial hardship for you in the absence of the grant? (Grantee Survey 25). *Note: Throughout this report, cases in which respondents were unable to answer to a question because they either had no records or recollection, or because the question was not applicable to their situation are reported as “N/A.”*

The lack of grant support can also affect the artistic quality of the work that is presented at festivals: a number of interviewees reported that they were forced to scale back their performances, sometimes performing with a smaller ensemble than initially intended for the work, in order to reduce the costs when a USAI application was unsuccessful (Grantee Interviews 5; Applicant Interviews 4).

In light of the financial hardships that many artists take on to perform at festivals abroad, it is worth noting that some USAI applicants face a very different financial calculation when considering engagements at international festivals. Artists who are in high demand don't need to take financial risks to perform at festivals, in hopes that they will boost their careers. In fact, the festival performances can be quite lucrative. One agent reported:

For the artists with whom I work ... 75% of the work I do is probably within festivals, and those are festivals that have budgets that allow for ... a significant or respectable fee. Often times their international work is quite profitable.
(Expert Consultations 6)

Reaching that level of financial sustainability is, of course, an aspiration for many USAI applicants, and it is one of the outcomes that the program explicitly seeks to promote.

Impact on Grantees

In many instances, it is difficult to isolate the impact of USAI grants from the impact of performing at the festival that the grant funded. As noted in the previous section, it is not always clear whether the festival engagement would have happened anyway, even without a grant; however, one grantee we interviewed explicitly reaches out to festivals using the possibility of a USAI grant and the organization's track record of receiving the grant as leverage to get booked at festivals (Grantee Interviews 4).

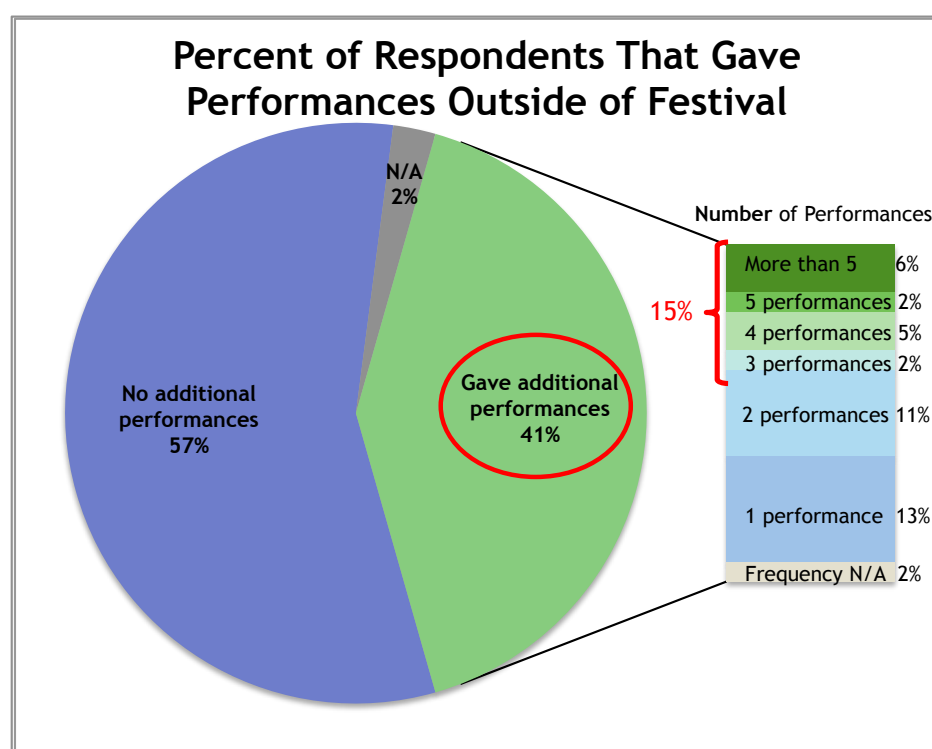


Figure 11: Percent of survey respondents that gave performances outside of the festival while abroad (Grantee Survey 28).

Once artists have one engagement abroad and the major costs of international airfare and shipping have been covered, they are often able to book additional performances. While these performances are not specifically supported by USAI grants, the ability to book such follow-on engagements is clearly an additional benefit of the grant that recipients can take advantage of. As Figure 11 shows, 41% of the grantees who took our survey gave additional performances outside of the festival at which they were funded to perform. Fifteen percent gave three or more additional performances.

Roughly half of the respondents who gave additional performances stayed in the country of the festival, while the others travelled on to other destinations (Grantee Survey 29, 30)

Almost everyone who responded to the grantee survey (91%) reported making industry connections at the festival they attended through USAI (Fig. 12). For a third of the respondents, those contacts have already resulted in follow-on engagements, and an additional 4% have made plans for future performances.

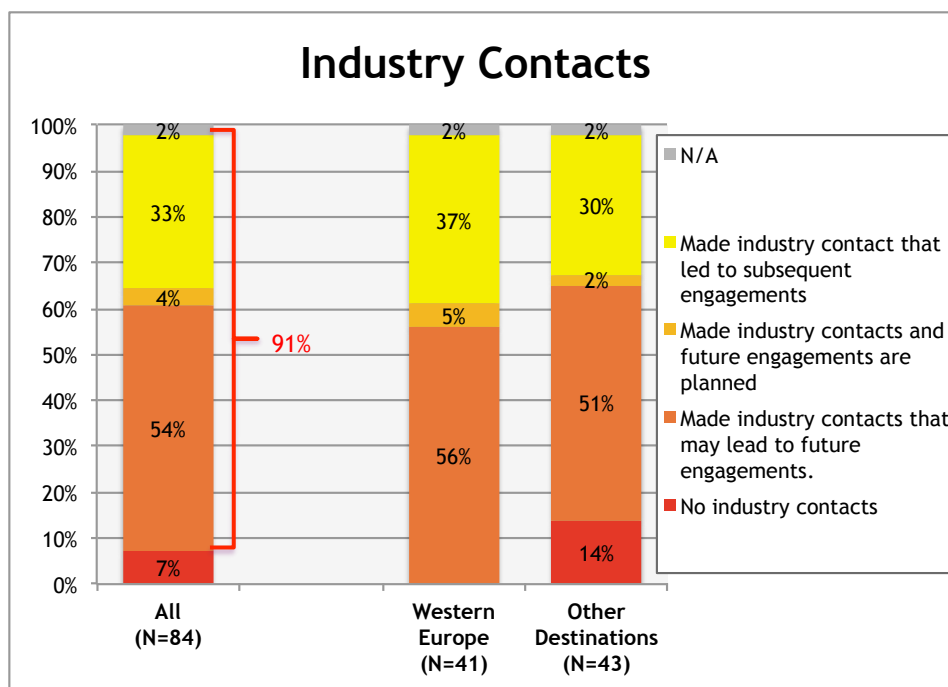


Figure 12: Industry contacts (Grantee Survey 38).

Eighty-four percent of the grantees we surveyed reported participating in networking activities and business meetings at the festival, 87% attended performances by other artists at the festival, and 59% gave workshops or lectures as part of their engagement (Not shown here. See Grant Analysis 27). This indicates that funded artists make the most of the opportunities that are available to them through the festival.

Overall, 68% of the surveyed grantees made new connections at the festival that either have already or may still lead to creative partnerships or the creation of collaborative works—an indication of the festivals' impact on the creative work of grantees (Fig. 13). In write-in responses, several grantees described the impact the experience had on their artistic work in terms of artistic inspiration, exposure to international trends in the field, and cultural exchange (Grantee Survey 40).

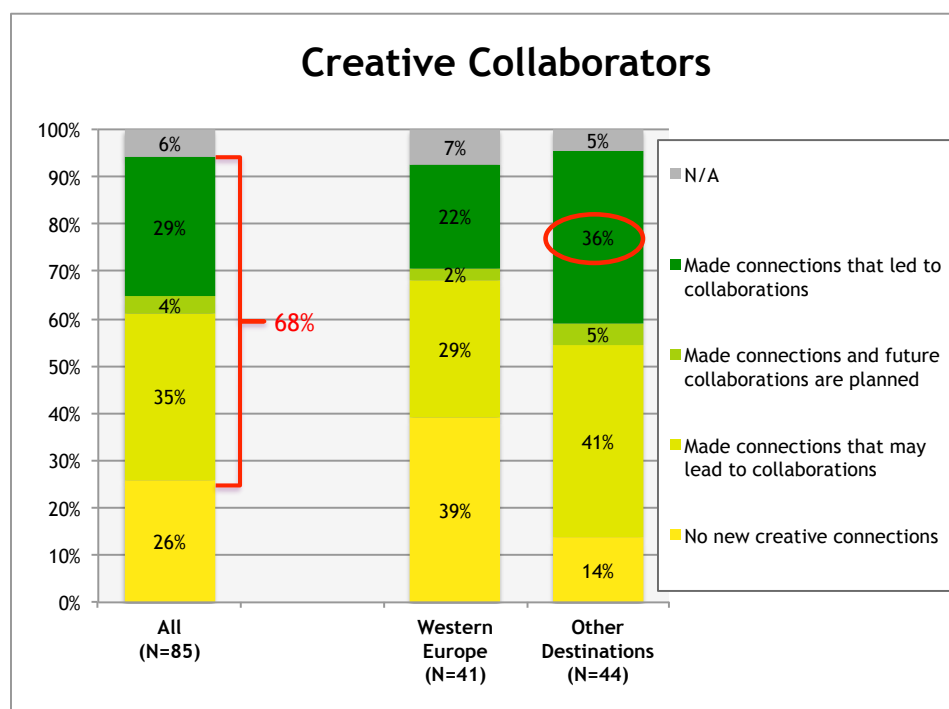


Figure 13: Creative collaborators (Grantee Survey 39).

Whereas grantees performing in Western Europe were more likely to establish contacts that led to subsequent engagements (Fig. 12), those that performed elsewhere were more likely to find creative collaborators (Fig. 13). Over a third of the respondents who went places other than Western Europe made connections that have resulted in creative collaborations, with an additional 5% planning such collaborations in the future.

Almost all of the survey respondents (96%) have continued to perform abroad since receiving their first USAI grant (Fig. 14), and 44% have returned to the country of their first USAI grant to give additional performances, indicating that the funded engagement was not a one-off occurrence (Grantee Survey 35).

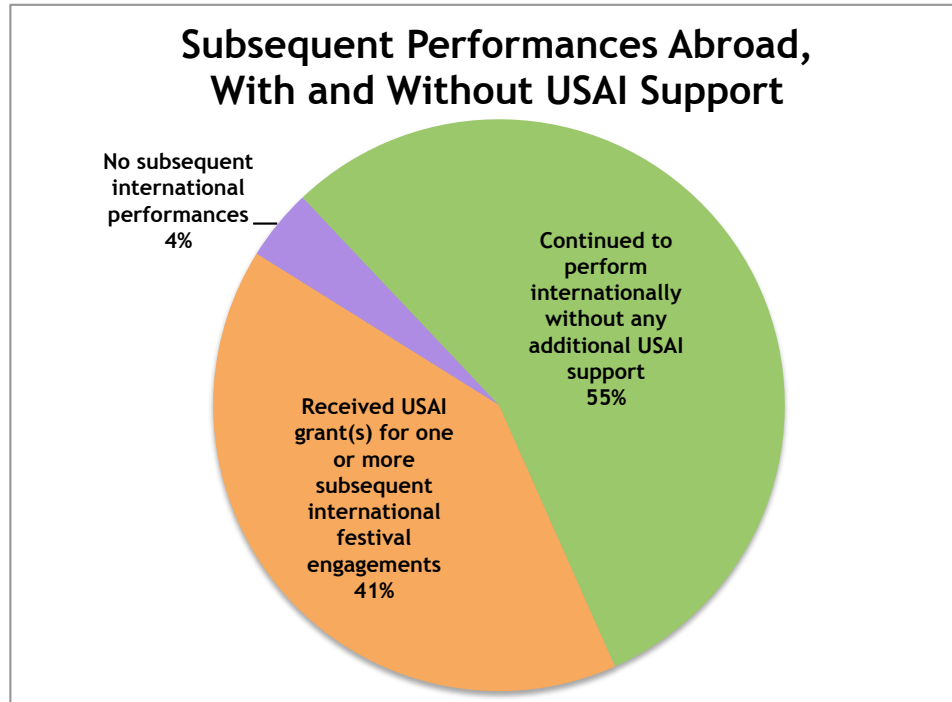


Figure 14: Subsequent performances abroad, with or without USAI support (Grantee Survey 34). *Note: Respondents who received their first USAI grant in 2017 have been excluded, since they may not have had time for additional international engagements yet.*

While this can't be directly attributed to the USAI grant (since many respondents had already performed in their destination country or in other international venues prior to receiving the grant), it suggests that the performance that was supported by USAI is part of a larger trajectory of international engagement. What's more, over half (55%) of the respondents continued to perform abroad without any additional support from USAI (Fig. 14), and 100% of the survey respondents who received multiple USAI grants have also performed abroad without the program's support (Grantee Survey 34). This demonstrates that the grantees don't become dependent on USAI funding and are able to pursue international engagements on their own.

Agents and festival directors we spoke to as part of our Expert Consultations provided anecdotal evidence of several other types of spill over benefits associated with the USAI grants (Expert Consultations 9-10). One agent noted that performances at international festivals and grant awards can be helpful in general fundraising efforts:

It becomes doubly effective in their development efforts if they're trying to court a community that wants to support an ensemble that goes places ... Many people like to be a part of the 'winning team.'

(Expert Consultations 9)

In some cases, being perceived as affiliated with MAAF added value to grant recipients. An agent recalled an instance in which a festival failed to pay an artist for an engagement. The agent was able to use the threat of reporting the festival to MAAF for not keeping its word, which might lead to that funding source drying up in the future, as additional leverage.

One final impact of the USAI grant was mentioned by a festival director in his closing comments at the end of his interview. He said he was grateful that the grant “prompts more thought on our side about different sorts of artists engagement—community engagement kinds of things—in order to be able to make the case for why that particular artist is a good fit” (Expert Consultations 10). He added, “It’s also nice that the artists are motivated to think creatively about their engagement.” By spurring deeper thinking about the artist’s engagement in advance, the application process itself may help both the artist and the festival make the most of the opportunity.

Overall Assessment

In their final reports, most grantees have expressed that their funded projects “significantly” met their internal goals, expanded their artistic process, and advanced their career/professional standing (Fig. 15). While grantees consider the impact of the USAI grant to be more moderate in helping them leverage additional resources, over the years grantees have increasingly been able to leverage their USAI funding to gain access to additional resources.⁹

⁹ The time between grant notification and travel activity is sometimes as little as two weeks, which may limit the opportunists to leverage the USAI grant for additional funding.

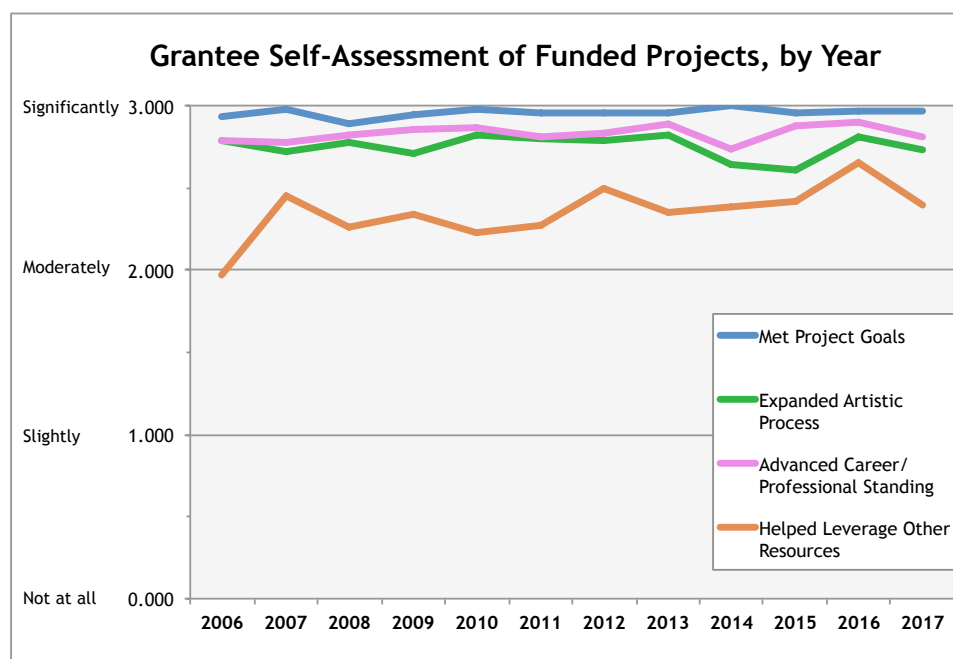


Figure 15: Grantee self-assessment of funded projects, by year (Grant Analysis 54).

Forty-six percent of the grantees who completed our survey described the effect that the USAI-funded festival performance had on their creative work, career, or the development of their organization as “transformative,” and an additional 45% described the impact as an “incremental improvement” (Fig. 16). Musicians were more likely to consider the impact an “incremental improvement” than “transformative,” which likely results from the fact that about two thirds of the musicians responding to the survey had already performed in their destination country prior to receiving USAI funding (a much higher percentage than for other disciplines. Grantee Survey 41, 16).

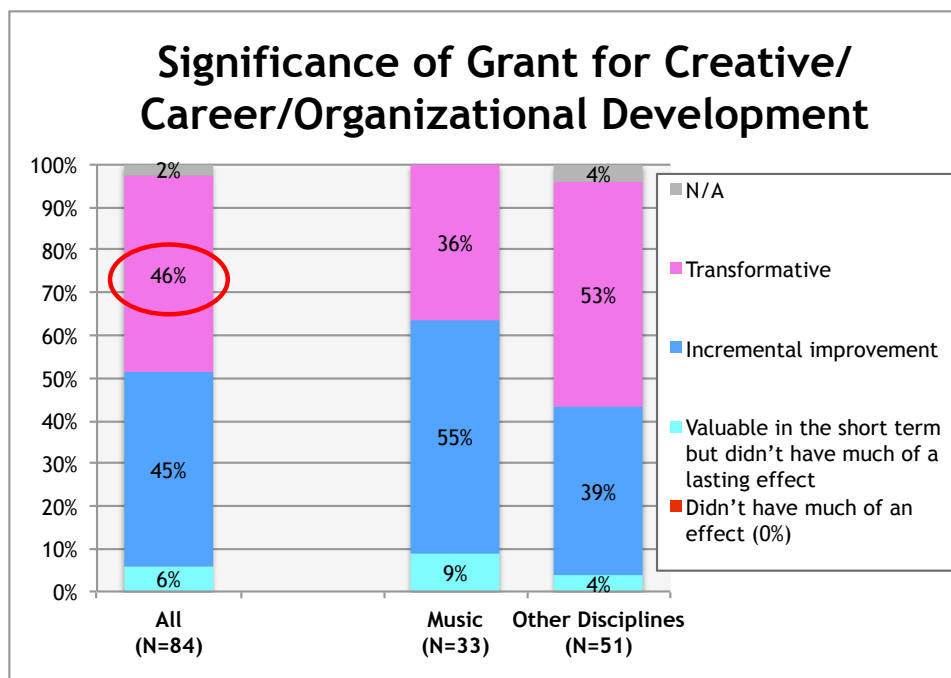


Figure 16: Significance of the grant for creative/career/organizational development (Grantee Survey 41).

While grantees' assessments of the overall impact of the program are likely tainted by the desire to flatter their funder, one might still expect to see grantees voice their discontent if the program were seen as severely flawed. The overwhelmingly positive assessment of the grant's impact garnered from grantees' final reports is corroborated by the grantee survey we conducted, and qualitative follow-up interviews with a small sample of grantees further highlighted the profound impact that festival participation supported by the USAI program has had on the recipients' careers.

Takeaway: Grantees report a wide range of positive short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes that result from USAI's funding, including reducing the financial and artistic sacrifices that recipients have to make to attend festivals and impacts on their careers and artistic development. It is more difficult to pin down how frequently applicants would be forced to cancel festival engagements entirely in the absence of a grant and for what proportion of grantees international festivals would otherwise be expected to have net-negative financial consequences.

PART 2: CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE PLANNING

Does awarding grants to established artists and major organizations reduce the program's impact?

One of the most common concerns about USAI raised in the Expert Consultations was whether it makes sense, given the objectives of the program, to support organizations that already have an established reputation and a widespread international presence. A few of the interviewees also noted that some applicants seem to get funded over and over again. If the program seeks to be a catalyst for change—that is, leave grantees in a substantially different, hopefully better and more sustainable state than they were in when they submitted their applications—there are limits to what can be achieved by funding artists and organizations who are already operating in the upper echelons of the international performing arts or who have already received numerous USAI grants in the past (Expert Consultations 14-15).

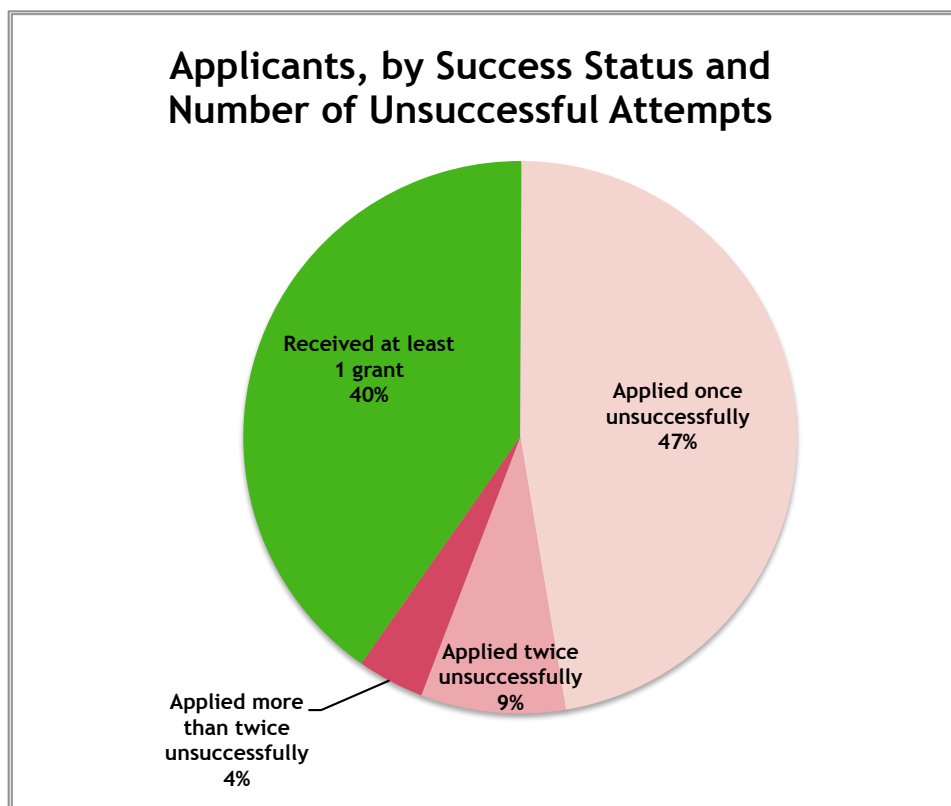


Figure 17: Applicants, by success status and number of unsuccessful attempts (Grant Analysis 45).

The issue is compounded by the fact that past funding decisions clearly influence who applies in the future. As Figure 17 shows, almost half of all USAI applicants (47%) applied once, and have not applied again after their first application was declined.

It is easy to understand how that happens. As one unsuccessful applicant explained:

If people have success when they apply, they will apply again, and people who know their work will apply. ... But if you don't see that and you get turned down, after a while you stop applying and aren't even in the pool.

(Applicant Interview Notes)

In interviews with grantees, unsuccessful applicants, and other experts in the field, it was also very clear that people make assumptions about the program based on the names they recognize on the list of past grant recipients. One unsuccessful applicant noted, “I looked at who they gave it to, and it is a lot of huge companies. We are a small nonprofit, so we aren’t going [to be able to compete]” (Applicant Interview Notes).

While Table 4 (page 32) certainly supports the observation that some major companies get funded over and over again, the larger problem may be one of perception. While the big names stand out to people in the list of past grantees, they are not representative of the pool of funded projects. One grantee recalled, “When I saw who won, there were big companies like Kronos or Taylor Mac, who would clearly find support without the grant” (Grantee Interview Notes), but Figure 18 paints a different picture.

Among the completed grants, project budgets range from approximately \$1,000 to \$1.75 million, but budgets over \$250,000 are the exception. Fifty percent of all completed grants have project budgets under \$30,000, and 85% have budgets under \$100,000.

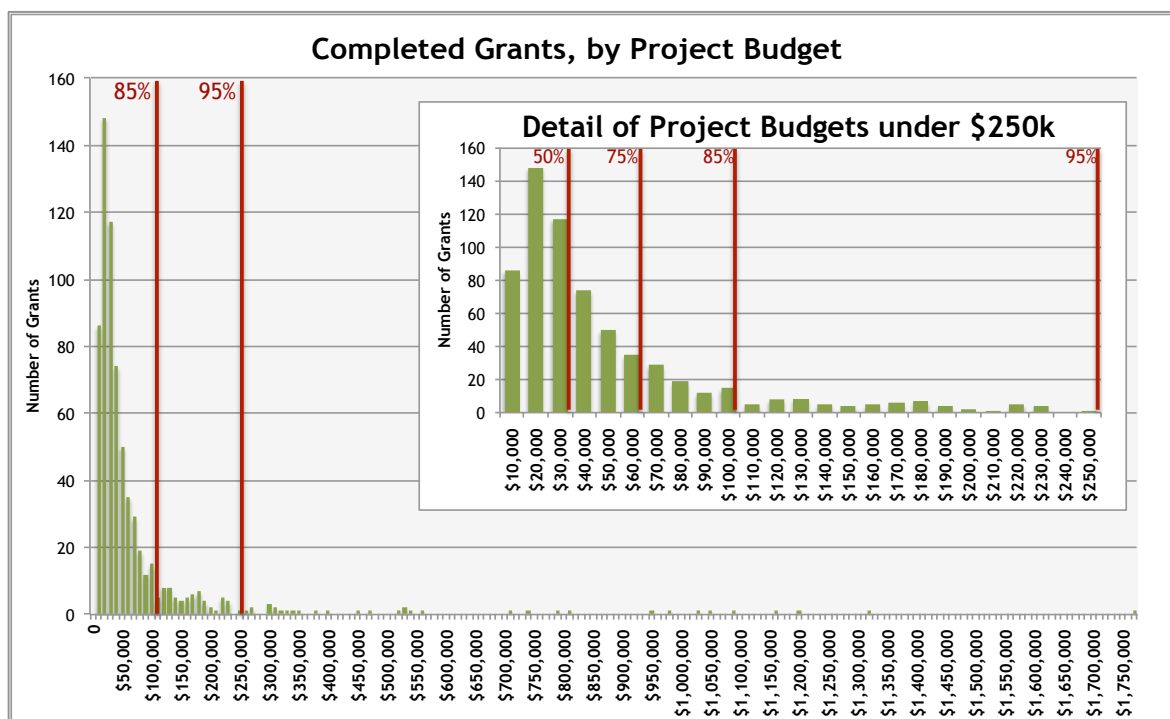


Figure 18: Completed grants, by budget size (Grant Analysis 12).

While name recognition is not the same thing as budget size (in fact, some of the most successful and well-known grantees have applied with project budgets under \$100,000), the perception that USAI *primarily* supports artists and organizations that don't really need the money—a widely held view among the interviewees—is contradicted by this data. With an average grant amount of just over \$7,000, USAI generally only provides one piece of the funding for the festival engagement (27%, on average), but for most grantees it's a significant drop in the bucket. Emphasizing the true distribution of grants in external communications (e.g., as contextual information for the list grant recipients, where the biggest names otherwise receive most attention) could help dispel these misperceptions.

It is understandable that respondents, including outside experts, panelists, unsuccessful applicants, and grantees, question whether awarding a \$15,000 grant to a well-established international performer or major performing arts organization is as likely to result in transformative outcomes as funding an emerging artist or smaller organization that has greater growth potential. Two arguments were voiced in favor of funding applicants with large budgets and international brand recognition: first, even if the grant is small, it's one piece of the funding puzzle that helps recipients sustain their international practice, and second, the smaller grantees may enjoy reputational benefits by being associated with a program that also funds

top-tier international performing arts acts. It is worth noting that neither of these arguments contradicts the assertion that the potential for transformational outcomes on the recipient's practice is reduced. The grant is expected to help them maintain their position at the top of the international festival circuit, which may in itself be a worthwhile cause, but isn't likely to result in materially different outcomes in the future. As we have seen, this only affects a relatively small percentage of USAI grantees, but it's reasonable to wonder whether the program's impact could be increased by investing that money elsewhere.

There are multiple possible approaches to addressing this concern, ranging from improved communications, to revised panel procedures (potentially splitting applicants into separate pools by budget size, as discussed on page 62), or limiting the number of times grantees can be funded.

Takeaway: While the percentage of USAI grants that go to large organizations and well-established solo performers may be small, the potential for transformative outcomes would likely be increased if those grants were given to applicants who are not yet in the upper echelons of the international festival market. What's more, by funding major organizations USAI may discourage less established artists and organizations from applying. Short of changing the eligibility criteria or review criteria, emphasizing the exceptional nature of the grants that go to major organizations and artists in external communications might begin to address the latter concern.

Are the program's objectives clear?

USAI's objectives are stated succinctly in two sentences in the program guidelines:

USArtists International is designed to encourage and promote the vibrant diversity of U.S. artists and creative expression in the performing arts by expanding opportunity and exposure to international audiences, encouraging international cultural exchange, and enhancing creative and professional development of U.S. artists by providing connections with presenters, curators, and fellow artists. The program is committed to the presence of U.S. artists on world stages and aims to extend the reach and impact of professional artists dependent on touring for continued sustainability and career advancement.

If one breaks that statement down into its component pieces it becomes clear that there are at least two different types of outcome that are desired:

- Economic/career development outcomes (e.g., “connections with presenters and curators,” “continued sustainability and career advancement”)
- Cultural/artistic outcomes (e.g., “diversity of creative expression,” “international cultural exchange,” “connections with artists”)

The program is also clearly targeted at a range of artists and performing groups, including those “dependent on touring for continued sustainability” and those “dependent on touring ... for career advancement,” and there is a commitment to the “vibrant diversity of U.S. artists.” Applicants are able to articulate the specific outcomes they hope to achieve through the festival engagement in their grant proposals.

Perhaps as a result of the broad program objectives that give applicants leeway to identify their own anticipated outcomes, a number of grantees used the “additional comments” section of the grantee survey to address what they see as a lack of clarity, perhaps even contradictions, in USAI’s objectives. For example, one grantee remarked, “The grant is more geared towards ‘artistic excellence’ than it is towards ‘advancing the career of an artist/group.’” Another commented, “It needs to clarify ... is this for artists that are high status ... or is this to help artists with significant invitations but not the financial resources to tour effectively” (Grantee Survey 50). Similar concerns were voiced by unsuccessful applicants (Applicant Interviews 8).

Among the experts we interviewed, some see USAI’s breadth and the resulting diversity of artists, art forms, and festivals that are supported as a core strength of the program. In part, it is the breadth of the program that solidifies its position as the “go-to” source of support for international festival engagements and sets it apart from other funding sources that have more narrow disciplinary or regional foci (see page 21). Other experts, however, noted a lack of clarity around the program’s outcomes (Expert Consultations 12), and some review panelists mentioned that this made it difficult to adjudicate proposals (Expert Consultations 11).

More than one of the experts we consulted pointed out that the term “exchange” is used rather loosely in USAI’s communications. As one respondent put it, “The fact of the matter is that USAI is not an

exchange program. It allows U.S. artists to perform and develop professionally abroad.” Another interviewee commented, “We are using the term ‘cultural exchange’ and I don’t feel that that is what USAI does, ... Cultural exchange is a different thing, a great thing, which is also not funded by too many people.” A third succinctly stated: “Exchange is not the same as presenting art” (Expert Consultations 12).

Some experts pointed out that the two main objectives of the program are not always divorced from each other: meaningful cultural exchanges can indeed support artists’ career development. In some cases, one festival engagement may contribute to both objectives, but they are not the same thing. One interviewee said that they are both worthy causes, and where both overlap, so much the better; however, she felt that expecting each grantee to advance towards both goals would be asking too much:

If you have to meet both criteria, I think that’s a false structure. You may not be able to do both. Depending on who you are, you may not be able to meet new people. Interacting with established artists may be great and worthwhile for emerging artists, but it may not get you more bookings.

(Expert Consultations 13)

Thus, some questions around USAI’s ability to maximize its contribution towards multiple objectives and possible tradeoffs between the specificity of program outcomes and its range of impact remain.

Takeaway: USAI has multiple objectives. While the breadth of the program has been cited as an asset, the multiple objectives make it difficult to evaluate the program and optimize its design around specific outcomes. The fact that the program is open to such a wide range of applicants may also make it more challenging to target specific populations with recruitment efforts.

Are festivals the right focus?

Besides its international orientation, the one program feature that brings clear definition to USAI is its focus on festivals. While many people we consulted recognize the necessity of placing parameters on the types of engagement that would be supported, quite a few—including grantees, experts, and unsuccessful applicants—take issue with USAI’s festival requirement.

Festival Outcomes

The basic premise of the festival requirement—that festivals provide good exposure for artists, create networking opportunities that increase the odds of additional engagements, and offer opportunities for exchange— seem to hold true.

In addition to the strong survey results on industry contacts and creative collaborators cited above (pages 44-45), the idea that festivals provide opportunities for exposure to presenters and the possibility of follow-up engagements was strongly supported by the grantees we spoke with (Grantee Interviews 5). One grantee recounted,

In France last year, we were at the Avignon OFF Festival, which is kind of like an industry convening for French presenters, and we’ve already booked a five-week French tour solely based on presenters that saw us there. ... The only way to get more gigs is to get work in front presenters. Getting work in front of presenters is a main reason we go to festivals. It’s how we make a living.

(Grantee Interview Notes)

Some grantees also described ongoing artistic partnerships that have resulted from their performances abroad, including multi-year collaborative projects and bringing artists they met abroad to the U.S. for performances. Several also mentioned cultural exchange and exposure to new ideas as an important impact of performing at festivals (Grantee Interviews 5-6).

The many testimonies about positive outcomes of festival engagements support the festival requirement; however, our research also highlighted how diverse the festivals are that artists attend through USAI. While the grantees we spoke to generally agreed that performing at festivals had impacted their careers, they were quick to make distinctions between their experiences at different festivals, clarifying that while festivals can result in networking, exposure, and collaboration, not all festivals produce these outcomes (Grantee Interviews 6).

The agents we consulted said it was easy for them to identify festivals that were likely to lead to future engagements based on indicators such as the roster of artists performing at the festival, and, not surprisingly, they were most interested in festivals that have structured arts market places (Expert Consultations 7). Other experts noted that there simply is no “market” for the performing arts where some of the festivals take place. In some locations, the festival may be the only context in which formal performing arts presentations are available to the public. As one interviewee remarked,

If someone applies to go to a festival in Bali, I can guarantee they're not going to make money. And 85 or 90 percent of the time, there aren't going to be any following gigs in Jakarta or Malaysia. ... But that doesn't diminish the importance or impact of what's going on.

(Expert Consultations 8-9)

While festivals have varying degrees—and varying types—of impact, there are also concerns that the requirement arbitrarily limits the scope of work that can be supported. Both grantees and outside experts argued that many other types of engagement, such as touring, educational activities, and residencies could be just as, or even more, effective in achieving the program’s goals (Grantee Survey 50; Expert Consultations 14). Based on the current data, we have no way of determining whether festivals are, on average, *more* impactful than other types of international engagement.

How do people get invited to festivals?

One concern about the festival requirement is that artists can only receive funding to perform where structured festivals that are appropriate for their disciplines exist. One expert shared,

I always felt the festival requirement was a little antiquated. It always seemed rooted in a very music-centric, perhaps euro-centric model, that most work doesn't fit neatly into.

(Expert Consultations 13)

One of the past review panelists added that the emphasis on festivals “clearly puts some of those—I’ll even just say continents—at a disadvantage.” She explained:

I remember one in an African country that we ended up scoring low because the festival was so poorly organized. Likewise in South America, there were a couple of flakey things going on there, too, in the sense of festival organization and reputation.

So yes, length of time and tradition of presenting -European and Western countries have been doing it for years.

(Expert Consultations 13)

Even where there are appropriate festival opportunities, there are concerns that the processes through which people get invited to festivals create substantial barriers for some artists.

The grantees that we interviewed emphasized the importance of networks in explaining how they got invited to perform at festivals. The nature of those connections, however, varied. In some cases, interviewees knew an artist performing at a festival and that artist recommended them to the presenter or festival director. In other cases, interviewees had established relationships with presenters or festival directors before receiving an invitation. Many of these relationships were formed through past performances at international festivals (Grantee Interviews 4).

For the more established artists we spoke to and interviewees affiliated with larger organizations, agents also play an important role in booking festival engagements. Additionally, these interviewees explained that after years of performing, they are now known in their fields and receive invitations to perform at festivals where they do not have personal connections (Grantee Interviews 4).

Speaking to grantees, one gains the impression that securing invitations to perform at international festivals is not a major hurdle, but it also seems clear that it is a very challenging circuit to enter for artists who do not have international contacts or agents who represent them abroad (Grantee Interviews 4, 9). The survey findings also support this impression. As noted above (page 27), 86% of the grantees we surveyed had performed abroad prior to receiving their first USAI grant, making international experience almost a de facto pre-requisite for the grant. Moreover, 41% had already appeared in the country of the festival to which they were invited. Some unsuccessful applicants argued that emerging artists and small organizations are not often invited to international festivals and that opening up the grant to opportunities outside of festivals would allow a greater range of artists to apply (Applicant Interviews 8).

A final challenge of the festival requirement mentioned by one of the experts we interviewed is that it may hamper efforts to increase the program's diversity, equity, and inclusion, since the pool of applicants is filtered through the festival selection process: "that puts the onus on the festivals to invite diverse artists" (Expert Consultations 14).

Despite these concerns, several of the experts we spoke with consider the festival requirement a reasonable way to set parameters for the program. However, a number of statements made clear that the requirement was merely supported as a means to an end: it's not that festival performances are inherently more worthy of support, they just provide a convenient and relatively clear place to draw the boundary. Whether this is the right place to draw the boundary, however, depends on the objectives of the program.

Takeaway: In many cases, festivals provide impactful experiences for grantees, and the festival requirement provides a relatively clear demarcation of eligibility, which has benefits for the administration of the program. However, the requirement also significantly shapes USAI's outcomes in ways that may not always be intended or desirable. By adding a second layer to the selection process, the festival requirement also limits MAAF's ability to directly steer the program's outcomes (for instance, efforts to diversify the pool of applicants depend on festivals' willingness to invite more diverse artists).

Considering diversity, equity, and inclusion

In our conversations with experts, grantees, and unsuccessful applicants, we were particularly interested in gathering perspectives and suggestions on what USAI could do to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. In order to generate a wide range of suggestions, respondents were invited to interpret the terms “diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusion” as they saw fit, and their comments reveal the broad spectrum of considerations that may fall under those headings, including the representation of artists from across the U.S., career stage and organizational size, art forms and genres outside of Western European/academic norms, disability communities, and the geographic location of the festivals, in addition to race and ethnicity. While a few suggestions sought to target specific underrepresented groups, many aimed at increasing the program's inclusivity by reducing potential barriers more generally. The comments that were collected tended to focus on three areas: outreach and communications, the grant review process, and MAAF's engagement with artists.

Outreach & Communications

When asked what MAAF could do to increase the range of artists touring abroad, grantees most frequently focused on ramping up efforts to spread the word about USAI, with a focus on communities that are currently underrepresented. Several of the grantees don't think USAI is widely known among small, emerging, and culturally specific artists and organizations, and suggested that MAAF increase its investment in marketing and work to specifically target groups that are underrepresented among artists touring abroad (Grantee Interviews 8).

In terms of basic communications, some of the experts we spoke to suggested partnering more closely with state and local arts agencies as well as with other service organizations that work with populations of interest, such as the National Council for the Traditional Arts and the International Association of Blacks in Dance (Expert Consultations 15). One grantee commented on the success that New Music USA has had using social media to spread the word about its programs, and suggested that grantees would be willing to promote funders in their social media streams (Grantee Interview Notes).

An additional resource that may be underutilized lies in the festivals themselves. As we have seen, the festivals often have a vested interest in securing grants for the artists they present, but many of the festival directors we spoke to said they had little or no direct contact with MAAF, and while some routinely encourage artists to apply they know little about the application process.

Several respondents felt that simply "getting the word out" may not be enough. One review panelist maintained, "It's not just about putting out a press release. It's about evangelizing about the benefits of the program and finding artists who might be a good fit" (Expert Consultations 15). Some grantees and unsuccessful applicants argued it may be necessary to go one step further and help potential grantees through the application process (Grantee Interviews 8, Applicant Interviews 7).

One of the service organizations we consulted has had considerable success "contacting individual artists or collectives that have access to artists to encourage them to apply and walk them through the application process." For many artists, finding out about grant opportunities and submitting applications is a foreign concept and is simply not how they have thought about funding their work in the past. Though the staff member we spoke to admitted that it took a lot of work, the efforts led to the desired effect: "We felt that if we could

diversify the applicant pool, the excellence among the [applicants] would rise to the top, and that has happened now two years in a row” (Expert Consultations 15).

A number of interviewees proposed some form of intentional recruitment to enrich the pool of applicants, which might involve a committee or some process of nominating potential applicants who have not applied in the past (Expert Consultations 15). Nominations and intentional recruitment is complicated under the program design, since those approaches would require knowing who has been invited to perform at festivals. An alternative would be to identify artists *before* they have been invited to a festival and support both the booking and applications process, which would have the additional advantage of addressing the barrier of the festival engagement (Applicant Interviews 8; Grantee Interviews 9).

Grant Review Process

Another set of comments aimed at modifying the grant review process. Suggestions ranged from making rather minor adjustments in the instructions that panelists are given, to updating review criteria, to substantially restructuring the review process.

A number of suggestions aimed at modifying the evaluation guidelines for panelists to include factors such as financial need and inclusivity as separate criteria.¹⁰ A participant in the focus group for service organizations noted that several grantmakers are in fact reconsidering their use of “artistic excellence” as a criterion in light of diversity, equity, and inclusion considerations: “There are a lot of grantmakers who have been really looking at that particular criteria and maybe changing it or redefining it” (Expert Consultations 16). An alternative approach to increasing diversity would be to state upfront that underrepresented groups of applicants or festival destinations will receive preferential treatment, or even setting up quotas to ensure adequate representation of targeted groups (Applicant Interviews 6, Expert Consultation Notes). One former review panelist suggested that the reviewers could simply be instructed to take the diversity of the cohort they are nominating into account in making their final selection of grantees (Expert Consultations 16).

¹⁰ As USAI is in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Arts, there are parameters surrounding program criteria, panel processes, and funding procedures. Several of the suggestions articulated by respondents—in particular those aimed at awarding grants based on financial need or demographic quotas—are not viable.

Two past panelists we spoke to as part of our Expert Consultations proposed a two-stage process, the first of which would assess the artistic excellence of applicants, while the second would take a more curatorial approach to assembling an interesting and diverse cohort of grantees. Others suggested that there might be distinct pools of applicants with different review criteria (potentially based on project budget), so that established artists and large organizations would not be competing with newcomers and might be subject to more stringent criteria in terms of the merit of their proposed engagement. The idea of segmenting the applicant pool was also proposed by grantees, who noted that smaller companies and less established artists would be more likely to apply if they know that they're not going to have to compete with the renowned artists that appear on the list of past grantees (Grantee Interviews 9).

Following the logic that the list of the program's past recipients affects who applies in the future discussed above (page 51), several interviewees emphasized the importance of diversifying the pool of grantees. One unsuccessful applicant argued that it is vital to diversify grant making to encourage a more diverse pool of applicants, explaining that, "if you see someone of your ilk getting something you say, 'oh that would be available to me'" (Applicant Interviews 8). A representative of one of the service organizations we consulted also pointed out that the first step in any diversity, equity, and inclusions initiative "is to include those diverse groups in revising the program" (Expert Consultations 16).

Engagement with Artists

Both grantees and unsuccessful applicants expressed an interest in developing a more sustained relationship with USAI, which might also promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (Grantee Interviews 8; Applicant Interviews 6). Some interviewees advocated for multi-year support, arguing that particularly less established artists needed a longer time horizon to develop their international practice and build the relationships that are necessary to support an international career (Grantee Interviews 8; Applicant Interviews 7). Others saw untapped potential in the USAI alumni and in the knowledge that MAAF has gained about international festivals over the years (Grantee Interviews 8).¹¹ Given what we have learned about the importance of relationships and networking in securing international engagements, having access to an alumni network could be highly beneficial.

¹¹ MAAF is planning to develop an alumni network for USAI and roll it out next year.

A couple of past grantees expressed an interest in working with MAAF to share their experience when they got back to the U.S., through blog posts, video clips, or the likes. This would create additional publicity for the funded artists and would also help dispel the impression that USAI primarily supports established artists going to major European festivals (Grantee Interviews 10).

Takeaway: Our research surfaced a number of concrete suggestions to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion, focusing particularly on outreach/recruitment and the grant review process. While some gains may be made with relatively minor adjustments like increasing outreach to underrepresented communities, a more robust commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion would require examining the program strategy more holistically and considering structural changes to counter inherent biases (such as the bias towards Western Europe that is inherent in the festival requirement).

PART 3: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On July 13, 2018, MAAF convened a Round Table discussion to collectively reflect on the results on the USAI evaluation and consider implications for the program. In addition to MAAF staff and consultants from WolfBrown, three external experts participated in the conversation:

- Alicia Adams, Vice President of International Programming and Dance, The Kennedy Center
- David Baile, CEO, International Society for the Performing Arts; and,
- Kelly Barsdate, Chief Program and Planning Officer, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies.

The implications that were discussed in the wide-ranging conversation largely fell into two areas: outreach and communications initiatives, and active support for the development of a more diverse pipeline of applications. Some changes in the area of outreach and communications could be implemented in a relatively short time period (i.e., in the upcoming application year), though it should be noted that program staff capacity is a concern. The program has continued to grow over the years, with administration demands increasing. In an effort to maximize granting efforts and minimize administration expenses, there is currently only one Program Officer working on the program, with 60% of time budgeted for USAI. Under these circumstances, and given the opportunities for continued growth, even modest additional outreach will likely require additional human resources.

Short-Term Opportunities

Possible short-term improvements in the area of outreach and communications that were discussed at the Round Table include:

- **Dispel misperceptions about the pool of successful grantees:** While a relatively small percentage of grants go to large organizations, well-established artists/ensembles, and frequent grant recipients, those recipients seem to stick in people's minds when reviewing the list of grantees, which leads them to underappreciate the diversity of the artists supported by the

program. This is particularly concerning, since it appears that the small number of highly recognizable names on the list of grantees may discourage less well-established artists from applying for the grant. Changing the order and/or format in which grantees are listed on MAAF's website (i.e., listing the grantees by state, by discipline, or some other criteria other than alphabetically by name) may counteract reader's tendency to fixate on recognizable names.

- **Build partnerships with local and state arts agencies and arts service organizations to increase awareness about the program domestically:** While Round Table participants agreed that MAAF could encourage strong applications from across the U.S. and its territories, they were not overly concerned with the high proportion of grants that go to applicants based in New York, feeling that the strong representations of New York artists results from the national infrastructure for the performing arts rather than bias in USAI's evaluation process. As a result, they advocated for increasing efforts to solicit competitive applications from other parts of the country, rather than changing the eligibility or review criteria to reduce the number of grants flowing to New York.

While MAAF disseminates its grant announcements to arts agencies and service organizations, more targeted outreach and communications with specific organizations (such as arts agencies in underrepresented states, or organizations that serve specific communities of interest) could both help MAAF increase awareness of USAI overall and increase the program's diversity.

- **Adjust presentation of funding priorities in panel guidelines:** By and large, Round Table participants did not feel that major structural changes or revisions to USAI's funding criteria were necessary; however, some minor changes in the way the criteria are communicated to the panelists may shift the focus of their review process in ways that are desirable. For instance, a change as small as listing the merit of the festival opportunity above the artistic excellence of the artist's work in the panel guidelines may prevent panelists from overemphasizing the quality of the work samples in their assessments.

A slightly bigger change in the panel instructions would be to remove the language that asks panelists to consider the level of support that is provided by the festival (which is already assessed as a precondition for eligibility and is often difficult for panelists to judge in light of regional economic variations) as a component

of artistic merit. Without changing the evaluation criteria, per se, this alteration may reduce panelists' inclination to prioritize well-funded festivals, which are disproportionately located in Western Europe.

Medium-Term Opportunities

Round Table participants identified a number of medium-term opportunities for USAI. Beyond mere communications, several of the suggestions aim at expanding the pipeline of applicants, either by helping more artists get invited to international festivals or by supporting applicants in submitting competitive grant proposals. While these would not require major structural changes to the current program design, they would have considerable budgetary implications and would need to be carefully assessed in terms of their feasibility and desirability with respect to policy goals. Suggestions include:

- **Build closer relationships with festivals and increase international awareness:** To date, MAAF has had relatively little direct contact with festival directors abroad, which makes sense, given that USAI grants are awarded to the artist rather than the festivals. However, the evaluation research has shown that the festivals play two important roles in the function of the USAI program: For one, festivals can help spread the word about USAI and encourage artists to apply, but even more importantly, they decide who to invite to their festivals and thus determine which artists are eligible for USAI support. Communicating more clearly with festival directors about the opportunities offered by USAI and the program's objectives may encourage them to invite more U.S. artists and bring attention to the range of U.S. artists who are eligible for the grant.

MAAF staff members promote USAI at a small number of regional conferences around the U.S. every year, but the current travel budget does not allow MAAF to attend international conferences, festivals, or performing arts market places to establish more direct, personal relationships with festivals. While it would be desirable for MAAF to build its international presence over time, as an interim solution it may be possible for MAAF to recruit "ambassadors" among USAI's past grant recipients, past panelists, and other organizations that support the arts internationally to represent the program abroad. To support and incentivize ambassadors, MAAF might provide stipends, distribute informational material, and facilitate periodic group check-ins (either by phone or at convenings such as the annual APAP conference). An alternative approach to increasing international

visibility would be to include international presenters and/or festival directors on the grant review panels.

- **Encourage and support subsequent proposals from strong, but initially unsuccessful applicants:** An important question was raised at the Round Table in reference to the finding that 47% of USAI applicants don't reapply if their initial proposal was unsuccessful: Why don't people come back? While no definitive answer to this question was offered at the Round Table, it is possible to articulate some preliminary thoughts.

Given the number of applications that USAI receives and the limited funds that are available, many of the unfunded applications —particularly those in the “grey area” — are in fact very strong. Nonetheless, many artists (particularly those without much experience with grant writing) are likely to see the initial rejection of their application as an indication that either their artistic work isn't good enough to be competitive in the pool of USAI applications, or that USAI isn't interested in work like theirs. It takes a lot of experience and self-confidence to believe that simply reapplying (perhaps with a slightly revised proposal) may result in a more favorable outcome.

Meanwhile, unsuccessful applicants from underrepresented backgrounds are high value targets in diversifying the pipeline of applications, since they have already overcome several hurdles that keep people from applying to USAI: they know how to secure invitations to international festivals, they know about USAI, and they know how to apply. Supporting and encouraging strong, but initially unsuccessful applicants from underrepresented states, art forms, or backgrounds may therefore be one of the most efficient ways of increasing the diversity of the grant program.

In pursuing this strategy, it is imperative that applicants are in fact supported and/or compensated in the process of reapplying (potentially through professional development, networking opportunities, etc.) and that their chances of eventually receiving a grant are high, so that their efforts are worthwhile. MAAF already invests a considerable amount of staff time in providing feedback by telephone to all unsuccessful applicants who request it, and any further efforts to encourage and support subsequent applications will require additional resources.

- **Continue to engage U.S. embassies abroad:** While there are a number of challenges in working with U.S. embassies (lack of resources for cultural programming, frequent personnel changes)

the global network of embassies could play a greater role in disseminating information about USAI and maintaining relationships with performing arts festivals. Information about USAI's grantees is already shared with cultural affairs officers at embassies around the world, and MAAF sends quarterly updates on funded activities to the Department of State. Moreover, the award letters that grantees receive include contact information for a state department official who can connect grantees and embassies in the destination country.

While MAAF hasn't systematically tracked how many artists contact the embassies and whether that leads to any additional engagements or support, final reports occasionally include success stories, particularly when grantees appear in countries outside of Western Europe. It may be possible to build upon those successes with additional initiatives to engage embassies. For instance, MAAF might share information about the types of resources and support that embassies can provide and more actively encourage grantees and festivals to contact embassies.

- **Revise funding allocation processes:** In addition to reversing the order of the review criteria (artistic merit and artistic excellence) in the guidelines for review panelists, MAAF is planning to ask panelists to assign separate scores for each of the two criteria starting in 2018. In the past, panelists have been asked to consider both criteria but assign a single score, and there are concerns that this may lead panelists to overemphasize recognizable names among the applicants and festivals. While MAAF currently plans to assign equal weight to both of these scores, it would be possible to adjust the weighting at some point in the future to encourage a distribution of grants that meets the program's objectives. One Round Table participant also pointed out that "bonus points" for underrepresented geographic regions or populations could also be factored into the scoring, though this has the disadvantage that it reduces the authority of the panelists. An alternative strategy would be to set aside one or more pools of money that are earmarked for specific types of applications, such as artists performing at their first international festival or ones traveling to underrepresented regions of the world.

In the current process, MAAF staff have some discretion in funding applications that fall into the grey area to balance out and diversify the funded cohort (see page 13). If funding procedures were revised to expand the "grey area" (for instance, by determining that only the first 10 or 15 grantees are selected

purely based on panel score), the foundation could maintain greater flexibility in addressing diversity concerns and distributional outcomes, while still respecting the panels' ranking of applications.

Opportunities for Future Consideration

Based on the positive findings of the evaluation report, Round Table participants concluded that USAI is an important and generally well-designed and well-managed program. As a result, efforts to significantly increase the program's impact would likely require an overall expansion of the program or the addition of ancillary activities. If new components were to be added to the program, Round Table participants cautioned against task distraction that might detract from the success of the original program. Nonetheless, several ideas were proposed for future exploration:

- **Ancillary programs to build a more diverse pipeline of applications:** While Round Table participants felt that the core USAI program should remain intact, several ideas for smaller, more focused programs were proposed that might complement USAI. So as not to interfere with the current program, it was suggested that MAAF flesh out a small number of ideas and gauge the feasibility of attracting funding from new sources to implement them. Ancillary programs might also be administered by other service organizations, while feeding into USAI.

Two main strategies were proposed to develop a pipeline for applications from the middle of the U.S., applications in non-Western art forms, applications from underrepresented populations, and applications for artists going to festivals outside of Western Europe. One approach would be to entice festival directors to book a more diverse range of U.S. artists by showcasing artists from outside of the main U.S. cultural hubs and/or increasing the representation of U.S. artists at industry convenings and market places abroad. The other would seek to identify promising U.S. artists who have not yet entered the international festival market, and support them over two or three years in securing their initial engagements abroad.

- **Adopt periodically rotating geographic focus to develop connections and opportunities in targeted regions:** Since the overrepresentation of Western Europe at least in part results from the well-developed festival infrastructure in that part of the world, focusing on a specific country that has less developed infrastructure and identifying in advance a number of

opportunities for artists, including but not strictly limited to festivals (e.g., reputable presenters and other partners) might help U.S. artists enter less developed regions of the world. In order to sustain the relationships that are established in the focus countries, it may be necessary to add presenters and partners who showcase U.S. artists over the course of the year to the list of “approved engagements” for future rounds of USAI, which would expand the range of performance opportunities that are eligible for USAI funding over time.

- **Develop a Public Value Framework for international festival appearances by U.S. artists:** Both experts consulted as part of the evaluation research and Round Table participants commented on the diminished support for international cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy from private and public funders. To combat this, one Round Table participant proposed assessing and articulating the value that programs like USAI create for the U.S. public. Such a broad analysis of the value of international artistic engagement exceeds the scope of the current program evaluation, but was recommended for future consideration.

Strategic Focus

The Round Table conversation began with a discussion about whether USAI should be defined by and hold itself accountable for specific outcomes and impacts, or whether it is more appropriate to focus on the program’s outputs (e.g., the number of grants that are awarded, the artists that receive those grants, the festivals at which they perform). The latter approach is more in line with the current framing of the program, and indeed the breadth of the program helps cement its position as the “go-to” source of funding for international festival performances. This framing allows USAI to be less restrictive (artists are largely able to define their own outcomes, whether they’re primarily interested in booking more gigs or growing artistically), and it increases the program’s ability to adapt to changes in the ecosystem.

The Round Table participants were loath to narrow the program’s focus or reduce the potential impact of the grants to a predefined set of impacts. Moreover, they noted that many of the anticipated impacts are long term, and would be difficult to capture in final reports. Given the relatively small grant amounts awarded through USAI, there were also concerns about adding to the reporting requirements for grantees.

When discussing possible modifications to USAI, however, Round Table participants frequently stated that the specifics (e.g., which aspects of diversity to prioritize, which organizations to partner with) would need

to be determined by the program's strategic priorities. While the discussants objected to distinguishing different application tracks based on expected outcomes, and felt that asking grantees to report on specific impact measures would be inappropriate, it does seem greater clarity around the strategic goals of USAI (at least for provisional, internal use) might prove useful as a guiding star for program refinements. Since MAAF is poised to embark on a strategic planning exercise in the coming year, there may also be an opportunity to align USAI (and any potential ancillary programs that may be considered as a result of this evaluation) with the organization's larger program strategy.