

Applicants sought for state arts grants

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A New York State grant program for small arts organizations that has been in disarray for the past several years is getting back on track with help from a newly formed local arts agency.

The New York State Council on the Arts' decentralization grant program, which hands out small grants to individual artists, educational groups and community arts projects in urban and rural communities, is being administered this year by the Arts Services Initiative. That group, formed last year to spearhead efforts to promote and fund cultural organizations across the region, is now seeking applicants for grants ranging from \$500 to \$5,000 for events and projects large and small.

The deadline for applications (available on the ASI website, www.asiwny.org) is Oct. 10. Arts Services Initiative Executive Director Tod A. Kniazuk noted that organizations who get their applications in before Oct. 3 will receive help to make sure they have included all the necessary material.

"What's great about these grants is that it's a pot of state money," Kniazuk said. "It's given as a pot of money to local communities to distribute. Rather than having to try to get the attention of [the New York State Council on the Arts] and Albany and say, 'We're worth funding,' it's decided upon by a panel of local leaders in the field, administered locally and meant for smaller cultural organizations - ones who wouldn't be applying directly to NYSCA."

In past years, applications for the DEC grants, as they are known, have encountered a number of hurdles. The trouble with the grants came to a head in 2009, during the last days of the Arts Council in Buffalo and Erie County, whose executive director defrauded New York State taxpayers and left most promised grants unpaid. About half that money was later recovered by the state attorney general's office and distributed to local arts groups, all of whom had mounted programming based on the promised grants.

In subsequent years, the Carnegie Art Center in North Tonawanda took over administration of the grants from the defunct Arts Council, but disarray within the State Council produced continued confusion and delays in the grant process.

Kniazuk, who praised the Carnegie center for doing the best in the face of difficult circumstances, promised a much smoother process.

"We're going to announce by early December, so folks will know that they've got this money and they can go ahead with their programming," Kniazuk said.

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