

YouthReach

PREPARING FOR YOUR SITE VISIT

Introduction and Purpose

Site visits are a critical part of the application review process and involve a panelist visiting each applicant. The purpose of the site visit is for panelists to gain first-hand experience and direct contact with the proposed project's key players, young people, location, and community. The site visit will occur during a regular working session, not a culminating event, final showcase, or performance.

Who will Visit

Applicants seeking new and continued Serhacer funding will be visited by one of the review panelists and members of the Mass Cultural Council's Creative Youth Development staff.

Scheduling

Site visits are scheduled ahead of time to accommodate both the reviewers' and the applicants' schedules. Plan for site visits that last approximately two hours. Mass Cultural Council staff will be back in touch to confirm the date and time of your site visit and will ask for an agenda to be sent for the visit at two weeks prior to the visit.

What will happen?

Below is a list of required elements for the panelist during a site visit:

- Observe "the process" in action—class, rehearsal, work session, etc.—so that panelists can see the interaction between adults and young people, instructional approach and flow, space, etc.
- Talk to senior staff from the agency and key staff for proposed program
- Talk to someone in a caretaking/authority position with the participating (or intended) young people, outside of the program staff (parents, collaborators, case workers, or other key stakeholders as appropriate).

- Talk to participating (or intended) young people.
- See examples and/or documentation of completed student work.
- Review and discuss specific evaluation/documentation tools.

Even with this standard list of requirements, every site visit is unique. Applicants are expected to set up the visit to accommodate these requirements, but the timing and order of the agenda will be left up to each applicant. Mass Cultural Council staff is available to answer any questions and work with each applicant to help organize a successful site visit that provides value for all concerned.

Suggestions as You Prepare

All participants in the site visit—staff, community members, and young people—should be familiar with the S Review Criteria. This is the frame through which your application will be evaluated. Panelists will be looking for evidence (or lack of evidence) related to the criteria and their indicators.

Prior to the visit, spend time gathering examples or documentation of student work. (Performing arts programs are **STRONGLY ENCOURAGED** to have audio or visual clips available.) Panelists will be looking to see the range of the work produced in the program, the caliber of work, evidence of quality materials being used, etc. Again, look at the Review Criteria and indicators for tips on the kinds of evidence panelists are looking for.

Another important element of the site visit is the review of specific evaluation/documentation tools. These could include surveys, interview guides, observation rubrics, final reports, and other data, depending on your particular program evaluation. For established programs, staff and/or partners at the site visit should be able to speak knowledgeably about the source, purpose, use, and effectiveness of the tools on hand. For new programs, samples of tools being considered for use or adaptation should be available, and participants at the site visit should be able to speak knowledgeably about the source and purpose of these samples or prototypes as well as the plans in place to solidify the evaluation tools and methods should funding be awarded.

Tips on Preparing Young People for Site Visit

Conversations with young people might happen informally, during the course of a working session, or these conversations could also be set-up in a more formal structure. Either works, depending on nature of the program and design of the visit. The important thing to remember is that they WILL happen. Mass Cultural Council requires that the panelists interview young people.

The visitors' arrival should not be a surprise to the young people, nor should they be surprised that the visitors want to talk with them. The young people should expect to talk about themselves and their lives, their experience in the program and with the organization, their perceptions on what they and others are gaining through the experience, and their ambitions and dreams for the future—for the program, for themselves, and for their community.

How much preparation program participants will need will vary from program to program. Some young people are generally quite reticent, particularly around strangers, so those young people may need more preparation, background information, and even practice talking about the program. Other young people are naturally more open and curious among people they haven't met, so those young people may need much less preparation.

Many programs use preparing for funders and others to visit the program as an opportunity to teach the young people about the broader context of the program and organization. As one program manager explains to his young people, "This program is provided at no cost to you, but it isn't free. Someone's paying for it!"

The most important thing to remember is that the reviewers visiting you are experienced practitioners in the field. They will be able to tell the difference between authentic enthusiasm from your young people and coached or scripted boosterism. Encourage your young people to be comfortable and honest.

Further questions?

Contact Erik Holmgren, Program Manager at erik.holmgren@art.state.ma.us or 617-858-2731 who will assist you in planning for the most informative and useful site visit possible.