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Arts Advisory Unit Stresses Flexibility Of Its Support Plan

The Advisory Council for the Cultural Arts emphasized the experimental nature and flexibility of its new plan for support of the arts in Rhode Island at a meeting last night with groups that may apply for money under the program.

About 60 persons representing cultural organizations throughout the state gathered in the Journal Auditorium to pick up applications and hear Barnett Fain, chairman of the seven-member advisory group, elaborate on the council's proposal for a \$117,000 state and federal program for the next fiscal year.

Last week, the council announced a four-point plan that will depend on General Assembly approval of a request for \$67,000 and qualification for \$50,000 in federal matching funds under the National Endowment for the Arts.

'Purposely Vague'

Responding to criticism that appeared in an Evening Bulletin editorial on Monday, which said the council's plan was "dismayingly vague," Mr. Fain told the potential applicants that the proposal was "purposely vague" because the council "feels very strongly that the specifics of a state program should come from sponsors indicating what they want and the organizations who know best what services they can provide."

"It would be presumptuous of us to force-feed the audiences," Mr. Fain said. "The programs should come from the organizations themselves."

At the same time, organization spokesmen indicated last night that they were dismayed at the short time they have been given to fill out the applications, which must be submitted before April 7.

Richard Godfrey, a director of the Rhode Island Fine Arts Festival, was one of those who objected to the short notice.

"It's awfully hard to start lining up sponsors now," he said.

When Miss Madeline Newburger asked why the council did not make the applications available sooner, Mr. Fain explained that his group "did not get this from the federal government until February, and we have been working frantically since that time to put these proposals together."

Changes Possible

In reply to another question, however, he said applicants may make changes in their plans later if they believe such changes are necessary.

The council chairman also was asked whether the General Assembly would decide on the \$67,000 request in time for the group to submit its application for matching federal funds. The deadline for the federal application is May 1.

Mr. Fain said he could not predict when the legislature would vote on the issue, but he said the council hopes it can go ahead with the application to Washington even if state action is not taken before the May deadline, with the understanding that federal approval would depend upon a state appropriation.

Mr. Fain listed three criteria that the council would use in judging an application:

The quality of the program proposed by an organization.

The substantive need for the specific request, in terms of the amount requested, the extent of support by the sponsor and the effect on overall distribution among different areas of the arts.

The council's assessment of the applicants in terms of their ability to complete the program, their financial responsibility and past experience.

Won't 'Give Money Away'

The chairman emphasized that the council doesn't "intend to give money away."

"We hope that this will not become a public grab-bag," he said. At the same time, he said, the council will not establish a specific rule that applicants should provide, say, 50 per cent of a program's cost.

"Everything depends on the particular situation," he said.

"We would hope that over a period of time, the communities would be able to assume more and more of the responsibility," he added. "We hope this money will be leverage to increase the local money that flows into the arts."

Under the proposed four-point program, the council would provide \$30,000 to support local groups sponsoring professional performances and exhibits; \$35,000 to support free or low-cost performances by local organizations themselves; \$25,000 for "the support of research and development projects designed to solve problems common to the entire cultural community," and \$10,000 to provide technical assistance to local amateur organizations. The remaining \$17,000 of the allocation would be used for administrative purposes.

Breakdown Is Flexible

Mr. Fain said the breakdown in the allocation is a flexible one. If applications for research and development programs, for instance, do not require a \$25,000 expenditure, the money left over could be applied to another area.

"The figure of \$25,000 is a guess, frankly," he said. The research and development projects might provide the participating groups with "ways of reducing the deficit by helping yourselves," and might try to establish "unified fund-raising" procedures in a community, or community mailing lists to be shared by local cultural groups.