



Maryland Heritage Areas Program

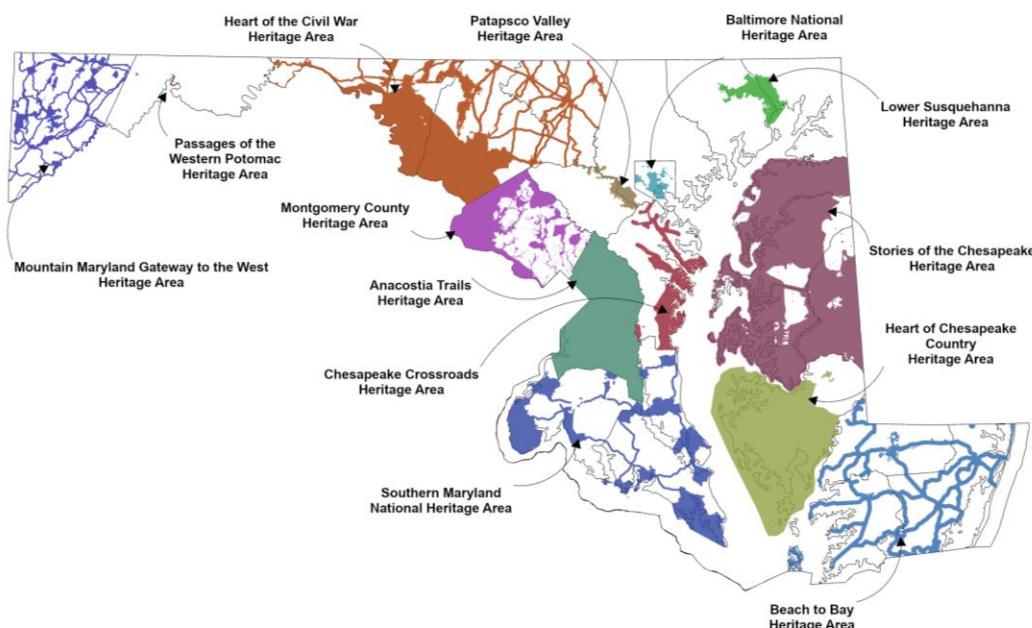
Grants Review Panel

Procedures and Guidelines

The Grants Review Panel of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program plays a critical role in the review and recommendation of project grant applications each year. The work of the Grants Review Panel focuses on ensuring that the grants that are ultimately approved by the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHA), the program's governing body, are distributed fairly and equitably across the State of Maryland.

About the Maryland Heritage Areas Program

The Maryland Heritage Areas Program provides capital and non-capital grants for projects that take place in one or more of Maryland's 13 certified heritage areas. The program supports nonprofit organizations, local jurisdictions, and state/federal agencies within the heritage area boundaries in creating or enhancing place-based experiences for the public that preserve and promote Maryland's diverse heritage and contribute to the well-being of local economies. Additional information about the program can be found here: <https://mht.maryland.gov/Pages/MHAA/heritage-areas.aspx>.



Panel Process Overview

The Maryland Heritage Areas Program awards approximately \$5 million in grants each year through a competitive process. Applications are reviewed and ranked first by a review panel at the local level in the heritage area in which the project will take place.

Once the local review process is complete, the applications are reviewed by the state Grants Review Panel, the group for which this procedures and guidelines document is intended. The Grants Review Panel is comprised of a diverse group of individuals from across the state, representing a wide range of areas of expertise and knowledge, from natural resources and historic preservation to tourism/economic development and anthropology and public programming. Panel scores and discussions are used to rank the applications and make funding recommendations to MHAA. The Authority makes the final grant award decisions each year at their July meeting.

Panelist Application / Nomination and Selection

Grants Review Panelists are community members with a commitment to the natural, cultural, and historical heritage of the state of Maryland, with knowledge and experience in areas relating to a broad range of related fields. The Maryland Heritage Areas Program strives to create a fair and impartial panel environment that is representative of the diversity of the state of Maryland and therefore seeks to create a diverse panel (see **Diversity**, below).

Applications/nominations of prospective panelists at the state level are primarily collected December–January for the next grant cycle but are accepted year-round via an online form at <https://forms.gle/C88i4tb5pzVV9eSs5>. The application/nomination form includes information about the individual’s related employment history and background in the form of a brief statement about their knowledge and experience in particular fields and areas of interest as they relate to this opportunity.

Panelists should be comfortable using computers and have access to the internet, as all grant applications are submitted and reviewed through an online reviewer portal and Microsoft Teams.

Panelists are interviewed and selected by MHAA program staff based on the skillset needed to review grants; specific educational and experience credentials that other panelists might not have; and geographic and human diversity. The panel also includes representatives from six state agencies – the departments of Natural Resources, Housing and Community Development, Commerce, Transportation, and Education, as well as the Maryland Historical Trust. The state’s ethnic and cultural commissions are also invited to nominate potential panelists.

Because of the need to form a well-balanced panel, MHAA program staff may not be able to consider all of the qualified people who apply/are nominated in a given year. Qualified candidates will, however, be retained in a pool for future years.

Note: Members of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, employees of local heritage area management entities, as well as local heritage area management entity board members and grants review panelists, are not eligible to serve on the state Grants Review Panel.

Diversity

The Maryland Heritage Areas Program seeks to be inclusive and accessible to all applicants and to make diversity, equity, and inclusion central considerations in each step of our grants review process. The program believes that varied perspectives and experience — among panelists, staff, and applicants — generate better grant projects to steward and share the heritage of our diverse communities. As part of this commitment, we seek to convene a Grants Review Panel that reflects the human and geographic diversity of Maryland.

Panelist Terms

Each non-state panelist may serve for 2 consecutive 3-year terms and panelists can re-apply to the panel after a 2-year absence. Whenever possible, the terms of the Grants Review Panelists will be staggered to ensure that there isn't a complete turnover of membership in any given year. Panelists will be reviewed by program staff at the end of each three-year term to ensure that they are meeting expectations and requirements.

Panelists Expectations, Requirements and Time Commitment

All panelists are required to:

- Participate in an initial orientation training process when first joining the panel.
- Participate in annual training sessions to include sessions on bias awareness.
- Review all applications assigned to them prior to the panel review meetings and complete a preliminary evaluation of the applications.
- Participate in one 2-hour small group meeting with fellow grant reviewers
- Submit all their scores by the assigned deadline.
- Attend two deliberation meetings (approximately 2-5 hours on the selected dates).
- Participate in an after-action interview at the end of each grant cycle to provide feedback about the process.

Each panelist will be assigned between 20-25 applications to review starting in April. Each panelist should allow approximately 30 minutes-1 hour to evaluate each of those applications, depending on their length. In addition to the time spent reading and scoring applications, each panelist will be expected to attend one small group meeting in May and two review meetings in June. Panelists should also expect some additional hours for training and initial review of background materials.

In total panelists should expect to spend between 30 and 50 hours on grants review activities over the course of several months, mainly focused in May and June (see chart below). This is a significant time commitment but serving as a panelist also yields substantial benefits. Panelists gain a better understanding of Maryland's cultural resources, become better grant reviewers and writers, gain increased understanding of the grants review process, and serve their communities by playing important roles in the distribution of funds to grantees across the state. Non-state panelists are also eligible to receive an honorarium (see below).

Activity	Estimated Time for New Reviewer	Estimated Time for Experienced Reviewer
Grant Reading/Reviewing	30 hours	15 hours
One Small Group Meeting	2 hours	2 hours

Additional Review of Local Heritage Area Priorities and Goals	3 hours	1 hours
Two Large Grant Review Meetings	10 hours	10 hours
TOTAL	50 hours	31 hours

Honoraria and Travel Costs

Non-state employees who serve on the Grants Review Panel are eligible to receive an honorarium, in recognition of the time and effort that panelists put into the grants review process. The honorarium is optional, and is calculated using the following model:

Activity	Payment Amount	Description of Activity
Attend or watch recordings of training(s)	\$50	Flat payment for completing training required in a given year
Attend small group meeting in May	\$75	Meeting with fellow reviewers to discuss applications and ask questions of heritage area directors
Review applications and submit scores	\$200	Flat payment for review of grant applications assigned in a given year and submittal of scores
Attend grant final review meeting(s) in June	\$125	Flat payment for participation in final review meeting(s) to – may be in-person or virtual, no more than 2 annually
Travel (to in-person meetings)	Reimbursable	Reimbursements for mileage, accommodations, and meals for round trip travel to grant review meetings, based on the travel rates and policies for Maryland State employees. Reimbursement for travel expenses is also available to state-agency-appointed panelists.

MHAA program staff will provide the necessary forms to request an honorarium at the end of the year's grants review process. Panelists will be required to submit I-9 and/or W-9 forms and provide copies of identification documents in order to be added to the state's payment system and receive an honorarium payment.

All panelists (both state and non-state) are eligible to receive reimbursement for mileage and other travel costs at prevailing state rates for attendance at in-person meetings and trainings. Travel regulations established by the State of Maryland apply to all panelists. Program staff will provide the necessary forms for reimbursement.

Orientation and Training

It is critical that all panelists are properly trained and provided sufficient background about the goals and objectives of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program, as well as details about the goals and objectives of each of the certified heritage area for which they will be reviewing grant applications. All panelists must participate in an orientation and training process led by program staff. They are also provided with access to all relevant heritage area planning documents.

Review of Grant Applications

1. Before reviews of applications begin, all panelists receive the full list of applicant names and are asked to recuse themselves from any for which they have a conflict of interest. This is done via a form that is provided by MHAA program staff
2. Program staff will create approx. 8 small groups comprised of 4-5 panelists who will be assigned to review the same set of applications. MHAA staff will ensure that the assigned reviewers for each group have the expertise and diverse backgrounds necessary to evaluate the applications
3. Reviewers must score all applications that they are assigned to read, this allows program staff to generate average scores that are comparable for all applications.
4. Information is shared through Microsoft Teams and email and the assigned panelists provide scores for each application through the online reviewer portal, which is accessible at <https://mht.goreviewers.com>. Instructions on use of the online portal are available here: <https://mht.maryland.gov/Documents/MHAA/reviewerportalguide.pdf>.
5. Program staff create a ranking list based on the scores from the assigned reviewers, which will then be combined in an algorithm with the local heritage area ranking. The combined ranking list is circulated to the Grants Review Panel before the first Grants Review Panel meeting and will be the basis of the grant review discussion at the final panel meetings.
6. The Grants Review Panel holds no more than two 2-5 hour deliberation meetings in June on selected dates where discussions about the rankings take place. The Grants Review Panel may choose to rearrange the ranking based on the group discussion until a final list of funding recommendation is achieved. The panel also puts forward a proposed reserve list consisting of projects for which they recommend awarding grants if additional grant funds become available. The panel will also identify any projects they are not recommended for funding or reserve list consideration and will provide clear justifications as to why.
7. The Grants Review Panel will take time to meet with program staff after the second meeting to reflect on the grants review process, share their experiences, and make recommendations for improvement.

Responsibilities

Panel Chair	Panelists	MHAA Program Staff	Local Heritage Area Directors
<p>Nominated and elected by the members of the Grants Review Panel</p> <p>Preside over the Panel meetings, facilitating discussion by all Panel members.</p> <p>Review and evaluate submitted grant proposals assigned to them.</p> <p>Present applications as assigned at the grants review meeting.</p> <p>Participate in discussion.</p> <p>Represent the Panel at MHAA meetings, presenting Panel recommendations for MHAA consideration.</p> <p>Participate in orientation activities and review background materials on the program.</p>	<p>Participate in orientation activities and review background materials on the program.</p> <p>Review and evaluate submitted grant proposals.</p> <p>Participate in discussion.</p> <p>Attend small group meeting in May with fellow reviewers and heritage area directors.</p> <p>Attend up to two larger group decisions meetings in June to make final funding recommendations to MHAA.</p>	<p>Coordinate meeting schedules and application processing.</p> <p>Inform the Panel in matters of MHAA policy.</p> <p>Provide clarification on pertinent facts regarding an applicant to the Panel.</p> <p>Provide information related to match, management capability, past performance, and any other pertinent information.</p> <p>Record Panel comments and summarize recommendations for MHAA.</p> <p>Generate the ranking chart and keep up to date.</p> <p>Lead orientation and small group sessions and provide background materials to reviewers.</p>	<p>Conduct review of applications at the local level and provide scores.</p> <p>Provide a prioritized list of funding recommendations detailing the local heritage area scores, rankings and reasoning, as well as an overview of how the projects align with the goals, priorities and/or strategies of the local heritage area.</p> <p>Attend and present prioritized list to Panelists at small group meetings in May</p> <p>Attend June review meetings, if desired.</p> <p>If asked, provide clarification on pertinent facts regarding an applicant to the Panel.</p> <p>Ensure that local review panelists are receiving orientation and training at the local level.</p>

Evaluation Criteria and Scoring

MHAA publishes guidelines (<https://mht.maryland.gov/Pages/MHAA/heritage-areas-resources.aspx>) for the grant program, outlining the purpose, review criteria, and accompanying point assignments for scoring and evaluation.

All applications are reviewed and scored according to the published review criteria, following a standard scoring rubric provided to all panelists.

All panelists should express their professional judgement of each proposal through their scores, written comments, and group discussion and are expected to do so with as much of an objective and unbiased perspective as possible.

Conflict of Interest

For panelists, a conflict of interest exists if an individual panelist or a member of their immediate family during the past or upcoming 12 months:

- a. Was/is actively involved in the governance of an applicant organization (as a member of a board of directors or steering committee),
- b. Was/is a paid or unpaid staff member, or
- c. Gained/stands to gain financially from the funding of an application under review.

Each panelist is required annually to identify all organizations with which he or she, or an immediate family member, is currently associated as a member, employee or board member. This information is kept on file at the program office.

Disclosure of affiliation with an applicant is required in order to protect MHAA, the panelists and applicants from actual, as well as the appearance of, conflict of interest. Affiliation with an applicant is to be declared before review assignments are made, and to be reiterated at the start of discussion of that application. **Panelists who have an affiliation may not join in the discussion of that application.**

Panelists shall not solicit, accept or agree to accept any gift of money, goods, loans or services, or engage in any other arrangements for personal benefit, which would improperly influence them in their panel-related duties and responsibilities.

Panelists shall not attempt to influence the vote of fellow panel members or MHAA members on applications or any other matter involving applicants with which they are affiliated.

Panelists who have reviewed an application should never represent the applicant in dealings with MHAA or other State agencies with regard to the grant application or award.

Violations of the Conflict of Interest policy may be investigated by MHAA and/or program staff. Action resulting from said investigations is at the discretion of MHAA and may include removal from the Grants Review Panel and forfeit of the honorarium.

Confidentiality

Panelists may have access to confidential, proprietary, sensitive or non-public information of either the grant applicants, including applications and financial data, or of the Grants Review Panel, including documents, recommendations, opinions and/or conclusions. Panelists should treat all such information as confidential, whether or not it is identified as confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions, project activities or other information contained in the applications. Contact program staff if you have any questions concerning an application – do not contact an applicant directly.

Panelists must keep all Grants Review Panel deliberations and discussions, as well as all final recommendations for award, confidential. Grant award decisions are not final until the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority votes to approve them and are not to be made public until an official press release is issued (usually in July).

Violations of the confidentiality policy may be investigated by MHAA and/or program staff. Action resulting from said investigations is at the discretion of MHAA and may include removal from the Grants Review Panel and forfeit of the honorarium.