

How the Saipan's Arts Council NEA Grant
Ineligibility Affected Local Artists

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EN202 - 01

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GRANT INELIGIBILITY AND LOCAL ARTISTS

Process

The Grant Ineligibility and Local Artists research project began with the purpose of collecting the thoughts and feelings of local artists regarding recent developments concerning the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) reinstating the Saipan Art Council grant eligibility after changes were enforced in response to past misconduct that had the Art Council found ineligible for the first time in 2007, and for the second time in 2016. Data was triangulated and was collected from three different perspectives: Northern Marianas College (NMC) students that participate in the arts, NMC students that do not participate in the arts, and local experts, two of the Art Council's Art Coordinators.

Survey participation was required from two composition classes. The survey consisted of seven questions with the purpose of gauging the involvement that NMC students have with the local arts. The NMC survey was distributed electronically to approximately 35 students between October 2018 and March 2019. Eight students responded between the ages of 18 through 34. Two nationalities were represented: participants were four Asians, and three Pacific Islanders, and one left unanswered.

The student researcher contacted the Art Council board members through the email address provided on their website. One interview was scheduled and conducted with two Art Council Art Coordinators in October 2018. Interview questions were formed around answering how well the Art Council was fulfilling the mission statements listed on their website. The entire interview lasted between 30 minutes to an hour and was held in their own office at around 10:00 a.m. Concerning what was unable to be done for the research project, the student researcher was

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unable to contact actual local professional artists that had close enough ties to the Art Council to have been deeply affected by the NEA grant ineligibility. The student researcher had made plans to contact and meet with artists through the Art Council's recommendations acquired after the interview was conducted, but progress was interrupted by Typhoon Yutu. Contacting off-island experts was also interrupted by the same reasons.

Analysis and Findings

Based on the survey results, a majority of participants expressed a lack of awareness (*See Appendix A*) of what the Arts Council is and its role in the community, and they had a lack of interaction as consumers to local arts. Five of the eight participants were not involved in the arts, and at least two participants engaged in more than one. A highlight to note is the Flame Tree Festival: The Art Council plays a big role in organizing and maintaining one of the most popular cultural festivals on island, yet none of the eight participants, all of whom have expressed some form of participation to the festival, and some to the arts, demonstrated this knowledge and failed to even recall a connection between the Flame Tree Festival and the Art Council in the survey answers.

These results suggest how weak the Art Council's presence in the community may be despite the popularity and overall success of the Flame Tree Festival. Amongst both NMC students that were involved in the arts and those that were not, both groups portrayed the same lack of awareness to the Art Council's role in the community. It implied that the Art Council should be more proactive in establishing their presence; which may stir interest in the arts amongst locals, according to results from the NMC student survey.

The interview with the Art Council Art coordinators was brief. Something to highlight was the common thread between much of the answers concerning the Art Council's projects and programs, and the varying degrees of success or completion the Arts Council has reached as of October 2018. Much of the answers culminated to "due to a lack of funding, progress towards completing a particular mission goal is stunted." (*See Appendix B*) The questions asked regarding the artists they work with were also met with similar answers. According to the Art

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Coordinators, artists that could not find some financial success with their art often become discouraged and some even stop creating and selling their art altogether. In addition to this revelation however, based on the interview answers, other artists in similar situations found themselves creating art *alongside* working in more traditional workplaces--art is created recreationally more than it is created for the intent of dependable financial gain, but what these artists produce is often brought to sell in events that the Art Council manages, a prime example being the Flame Tree Festival. Regarding partnered artists' consumer base, much of their audience consists of tourists, locals who have lived off-island for some time and locals who will be leaving the island and living elsewhere.

Based on the answers gathered from the interview, it would seem that the Arts Council could do more to further integrate the artists they work with, to the general community. It can be inferred that normalizing the circulation of local arts and crafts amongst all members of the community can help stimulate the local arts, as well as further encourage artists into continuing their contributions to further cultivate local arts and culture. Normalizing art as a full-time profession on-island is an ideal that the Art Council can work towards, in addition to fulfilling their mission goals, now that they are eligible for the NEA grant.

Discussion

The island of Saipan's identity is defined by its rich culture and active community. Tradition and ensuring its longevity in Saipan's society is taken quite seriously; performances and art can be seen in every corner of the busiest, most tourist-centric areas on island. But behind all the efforts to ensure tradition keeps its place in the community, there are artists who create to contribute: dancers, musicians, painters, and so on. Much of these efforts to further integrate arts into the community is facilitated by the Saipan Art Council, the group of people responsible for beloved community events like the Flame Tree Festival. But when the Art Council was found ineligible for grants from the NEA, their work would suffer, and progress on much of their projects was slowed. In addition to the interview material (see Appendix B), the Literature reviewed for the research project all suggest that funding can be very influential towards the creative process.

Conclusion

The methods in which data was collected by the student researcher include a digitally distributed NMC student survey, which accumulated eight responses, and one interview with two on-island experts: two of the Saipan Art Council's Art Coordinators. A collection of all the data the student researcher collected is shared electronically via the Instructor's class website on the student researcher's personal student page on nmcstudentwork.weebly.com. As of right now, the student researcher has no plans to take the research any further outside of the EN202 class. Although, if there is anything that would be done differently, the student researcher would conduct more interviews with a larger array of professional local artists with close ties to the Art Council. Board members involved in other art councils on Tinian, Hawaii, Philippines and the United States mainland would also be contacted and interviewed through email. For any student researchers interested in the topic, advice to keep in mind is to always have a backup plan for when problems arise. Scheduling interviews with the Art Council members was quite challenging, so it would be best to contact the Art Council as early in the research project as possible to ensure schedule flexibility on the student researcher's end. Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that all artists have varying relationships with the Art Council; not all artists that work with the Art Council have the same levels of dependency on the success of the Art Council's projects and programs. When seeking out artists to interview, it would be best to contact the Art Council and find out through them, and then reach out to their closest artists.

Appendix A

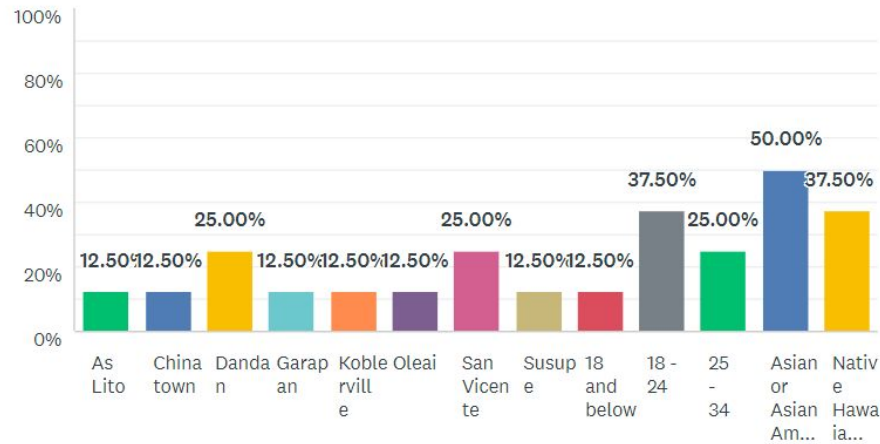
NMC Student Survey Results October 2018 - March 2019

Q1

Customize Save as ▾

Please check all that apply: Village, Age and Race.

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0



Q2

Save as ▾

Do you know what the Saipan Arts Council is?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0

RESPONSES (8) WORD CLOUD TAGS (0)

Apply to Selected ▾ Filter by tag ▾

Search responses

Showing 8 responses

Yes
3/2/2019 3:24 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)

Not really
10/23/2018 12:28 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)

I don't know
10/21/2018 10:49 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)

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RESPONSES (8) WORD CLOUD TAGS (0)

Apply to Selected ▾ Filter by tag ▾

Search responses

Showing 8 responses

<input type="checkbox"/> no	10/20/2018 11:01 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> not much.	10/20/2018 7:50 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> No I do not.	10/19/2018 12:56 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	10/18/2018 8:33 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▾

RESPONSES (8) WORD CLOUD TAGS (0)

Apply to Selected ▾ Filter by tag ▾

Search responses

Showing 8 responses

<input type="checkbox"/> no	10/20/2018 11:01 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> not much.	10/20/2018 7:50 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> No I do not.	10/19/2018 12:56 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	10/18/2018 8:33 AM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▾
<input type="checkbox"/> No I don't.	10/17/2018 3:02 PM	View respondent's answers	Add tags ▾

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Q3

 Save as ▾

When you hear the words “Saipan Arts Council,” are there any particular thoughts that come to mind? News you’ve heard about, etc?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0

RESPONSES (8) WORD CLOUD TAGS (0)

Apply to Selected ▾ Filter by tag ▾

Search responses  

Showing 8 responses

- Art and history
3/2/2019 3:24 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)
- Local arts and craft
10/23/2018 12:28 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)
- I don't know
10/01/2018 10:49 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)

Showing 8 responses

- no
10/20/2018 11:01 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)
- about Saipan Arts
10/20/2018 7:50 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)
- "What is Saipan Arts Council?" I have not heard about it whatsoever.
10/19/2018 12:56 PM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)
- Not particularly
10/18/2018 8:33 AM [View respondent's answers](#) [Add tags ▾](#)
- Nothing comes to mind.

GRANT INELIGIBILITY AND LOCAL ARTISTS

Showing 8 responses

10/20/2018 11:01 PM

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▾

about Saipan Arts

10/20/2018 7:50 PM

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▾

"What is Saipan Arts Council?" I have not heard about it whatsoever.

10/19/2018 12:56 PM

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▾

Not particularly

10/18/2018 8:33 AM

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▾

Nothing comes to mind.

10/17/2018 3:02 PM

[View respondent's answers](#)

[Add tags](#) ▾

Q4

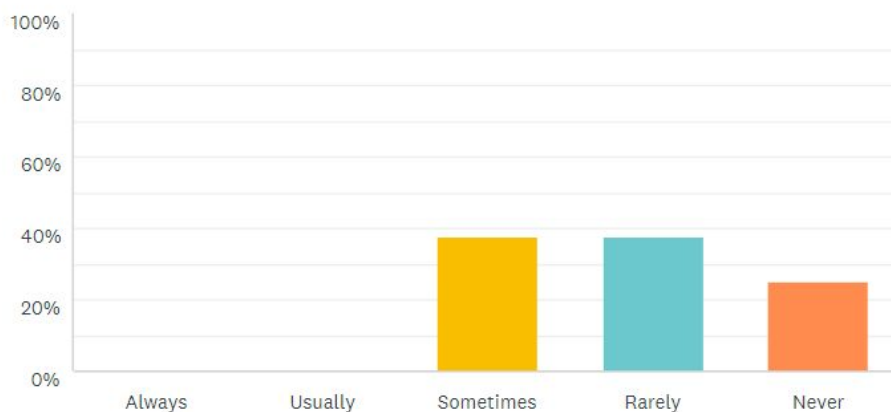


Customize

Save as ▾

How often do you interact with/view/purchase artwork created by local artists?



Answered: 8 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Always	0.00% 0
Usually	0.00% 0
Sometimes	37.50% 3
Rarely	37.50% 3
Never	25.00% 2
TOTAL	8

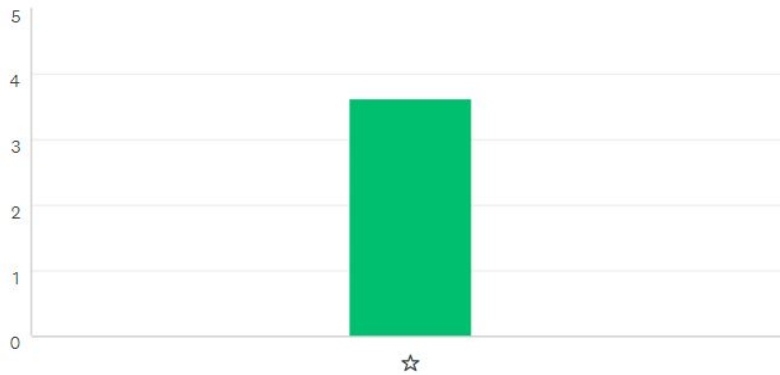
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Q5

 Customize  Save as



How much have you enjoyed the Flame Tree Festival/other community events involving art and culture.

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0



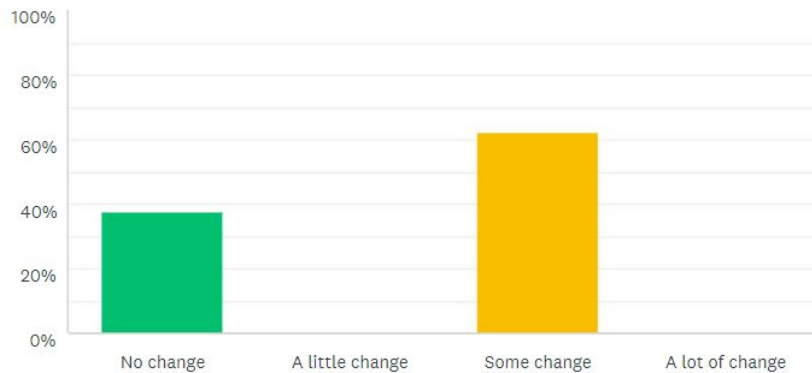
	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	12.50% 1	12.50% 1	0.00% 0	50.00% 4	25.00% 2	8	3.63

Q6

 Customize  Save as

For Flame Tree Festivals/other community events involving art and culture, have you noticed a change in the amount of independent artists over the years?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ No change	37.50%	3
▼ A little change	0.00%	0
▼ Some change	62.50%	5
▼ A lot of change	0.00%	0
TOTAL		8

Appendix B

Art Council Art Coordinators Interview October 2018

Interview with the NMI Arts Council/CCAC

The interview occurred on the 19th of October in the afternoon in their office at Capitol Hill. The student researcher managed to get in contact with two art coordinators, who chose to have their names omitted and opted to be referred simply as “Art Coordinator 1” and “Art Coordinator 2” in the document. The student researcher’s goal was to evaluate how closely they were committing to accomplishing their mission statements as indicated on their website. Underlying topics included the specific ways in which a lack of funding inhibited their abilities to move forward with their mission statements, their artists and how they fare with an underwhelming art consumer base, other sources of funding besides the NEA and the Arts Council’s involvement with the community’s most popular cultural events, such as the Flame Tree Festival or the Thursday Street Market. This transcript will present the interview in sections by each of the Art Council’s subsequent mission statements.

I. Increase support for CNMI artists of all mediums

Both art coordinators agreed that funding play a huge part in just how much the Art Council can do regarding the promotion of local artists. “We work with what we got.” Art Coordinator 2 says, “If we’re well funded, we can do a lot.”[1]

II. Improve exhibit program and facilities with the long term goal of the creation of a Cultural Center

According to both Art Coordinators, although there was a temporary gallery set up in the first floor of the DFS shopping center in Garapan which spanned the length of a month, no

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permanent Cultural Center is currently in the works. They mention a building similar in function to a real Cultural Center that they used to maintain, but the Art Coordinators stated that because of Typhoon Soudelor, they needed the space and repurposed the building. Early into the interview, they make it clear that they are funneling an especially large amount of attention and funding towards one of their projects: variations of the name of the project include: the Canoe and Seafaring Program, the Canoe and Navigation Program or the Canoe Project. It can be inferred that it will be a while before a dedicated Cultural Center will be organized.

III. Support and Improve Arts in Education in all public schools K-12

They used to have an Arts Education Coordinator... Schools would often reach out to them about artists that they would like to bring over to their campuses. Events span from class demonstration or even school wide cultural events. The most requested artists are artists that work with sculpture, particularly wood carving. Following this Marmar makers, weavers and generally artists that work with traditional crafts.

The Art Coordinators stated that these events are planned and scheduled on a yearly basis. The months where they find they are most often reached out to are September (for Cultural Month) and from April to May.

IV. Ensure that the Folk Arts of the CNMI is preserved

The Folk Arts Coordinator was not present at the time—she was out on the day of the interview. I couldn't get much on this.

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V. Ensure that the arts play an important role in the life of the entire community

According to the Art Coordinators, many of the artists they work with make a living by selling their art, although there isn't a huge market for local art. The Art Council's position in the process is planning and managing art exhibitions, collaborations with other government agencies or private sectors (Red Cross, NMC (chaturdays), the Marianas March for Cancer); artists participate for the chance to sell their art. Much of their consumer base consists of tourists, and people who go off-island who have a pre-existing relationship with the island, be it professional or otherwise.

According to the Art Coordinators' experiences, keeping artists motivated is challenging due to those circumstances.

VI. Create New Art Programs for People with Disabilities

The Art Coordinators worked with NMPASI for a little bit, connecting students under the program with professional artist in an event similar to job-shadowing for a short time. NMPASI students would learn how an artist's workday looks like.

VII. Collaborate with the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (Rehabilitation Program) to Create Art Therapy Programs for the Community

According to the Art Coordinators, they do not have an active program with hospitals. In 2018 however, a new center for community members struggling with substance abuse and rehabilitation called the HOPE Center has utilized the Art Council's Canoes from their *Canoe and Navigating Project* in activities facilitated by the HOPE Center, according to the two Art Coordinators.

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VIII. Creation of the CCAC Canoe and Navigating Program

According to the Art Coordinators, this is one of the few projects that were finally realized, the project is located across the Naked Fish Restaurant, in Susupe. Maintained by two men if the Canoe and Navigator Program. Schools often ask for demonstrations to be held at the site.

IX. Preserving the Indigenous Language through Performing Arts

Most of the events they manage--the Flame Tree Festival, Thursday Street Market, the Ukelele Festival, the Kantan Isla Festival and so on--would very often feature various performances featuring local dance and songs. These events are quite popular, gaining substantial traction much of the time.