

Double-the-funds boost for arts, heritage groups

By HUANG LIJIE
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

MORE than 100 arts and heritage organisations here could find themselves doubling the amount of cash donations they receive each year with the Government's \$200 million Cultural Matching Fund.

The launch of the dollar-for-dollar matching fund was announced yesterday by Acting Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Lawrence Wong at the opening of the Singapore Writers Festival. He first announced the fund to encourage private-sector giving to the arts and culture in Parliament in March.

It is open to arts and heritage charities and institutes of public character, which are required to have a system of accountability such as boards of governance. More than 100 such arts and heritage groups qualify.

Speaking on the sidelines of the opening at the Singapore Management University, Mr Wong said the reach of the fund is "very broad" given the many factors considered in its design to ensure flexible, sustainable and accountable use of grants. These features of the fund were identified after six months of consulting cultural groups and donors.

He said: "There is no perfect solution but I think developing this

framework now where we provide it to charities gives us some assurance that governance will be taken into consideration."

All cash donations from private sources such as corporations and individuals will be matched with no minimum requirement. There is, however, a \$10 million cap per cultural group for this tranche of funds to ensure all groups stand a fair chance of benefiting from it.

Recipients are free to use the first \$300,000 of the matching grant received in a year as they deem fit. Matching grants above that amount will have to be put towards initiatives that build up the organisation's sustainability. This includes providing staff with

skills training and refurbishing performance venues.

The guideline on the usage of funds ensures that smaller groups, which typically receive modest donations, will be able to channel the grant towards pressing day-to-day needs like rentals, while established groups ready to grow their capabilities can use the funds in a sustainable way.

The ministry will monitor the fund's performance and review it in one to two years' time.

Ms Emily Hoe, 40, general manager of contemporary arts centre The Substation, said she does not think donors will reduce contributions. "I think our donors' motivation is to give what they can af-

ford to a worthy organisation, not to see how they can cut costs."

Similarly, Dr Reshma Merchant, 42, a senior consultant of geriatric medicine at National University Hospital and an avid arts donor, said: "Knowing that my contributions will be matched and make twice the impact, I will have greater motivation to give."

Mr Wong said it is hard to predict when the fund will be depleted but when it is, "then we'll have to look at topping it up in the future". "The sooner it is depleted, the better... because the whole purpose of this is to catalyse private giving."

✉ lijie@sph.com.sg