

HOW TO FIND AND PURSUE **ARTS GRANTS**

Barbara Gothard



› **Search your soul:** Why do you want a grant or residency? What do you, as an artist, bring to a grant? What skills do you possess that can be an asset? What's your tolerance for taking direction and meeting deadlines? What will the financial impact be on your current endeavors? This is the most important factor in deciding whether to apply for grants or residencies. Before you start your research, define what kind of grant will work for you – your schedule and how much time you're willing to commit to the grant.

› **Be realistic:** Apply for only the grants or residencies in your wheelhouse. Read the fine print and be honest with yourself when you seek to match your skills with grant or residency criteria. This is where your research skills come into play. Take geographical considerations into account.

› **Call or email to ask questions:** There are no wrong questions. The more information you receive about the grant, the better decision you'll make about whether to apply. In addition, if you prepare your questions properly, this is an opportunity to subtly and informally sell yourself to the grantor and establish a rapport prior to submitting an application. Grants are about relationships.

› **Sharpen your writing:** The first impression you give grantors will be your documents so your application must be well written. Review grant writing for artists websites for samples. Ask friends and family to read and assist with editing to make sure you use good grammar, proper spelling, and the correct format.

› **Answer their questions:** Avoid tangents. Follow the application format and respond concisely and succinctly. Less is more.

› **Be accountable:** You set the expectations for what you propose to accomplish so it's crucial to deliver on or exceed your promises. Be prepared to provide written reports or

assessments of what you accomplished; grantors want to know how you spend their money. Each grant-making organization has its own reporting criteria; it's best to ask about this in advance of submitting your proposal because if, for example, you dread accounting, you may need assistance to provide accurate reports to the grantor. The manner in which you conclude the grant can often lead to extensions and increase future consideration by the grantor.

Brittany Delany



› **Prepare a development calendar:** Include deadlines for grant outreach, research, deadlines and reports.

› **Research funding as you would a job opportunity:** Understand what they're looking for, who they want to partner with, where they invest their money. Read up on their past grants. Read their Annual Report. Reach out, if appropriate, to one of the staff members.

› **Do your homework to find the right match:** Read the guidelines and directions. Then re-read them.

› **Submit your request prior to the deadline:** You never know when your computer/the Internet/their grant portal/the post office will be unavailable when you need it most.

› **Treat the process as an opportunity to learn more about you, your art, your capacity, your organization, and potential for attracting funding:** While much of the process can be left-brain oriented (fill out this form in this way, follow this budget format, enter data here), much of it requires critical thinking, complex solutions, and best of all your storytelling of why you matter.

› **Bonus tip:** Watch Shark Tank. Learn how passionate people can persuade people with money to write a check on the spot.

MORE >>>>

Leigh Wiemann

› **You are ready to write your grant proposal. How should you begin?** Before writing even one paragraph or looking for a grant award opportunity, finalize your budget, line item by line item. Identifying and costing out each line item will force you to “detail launch” your project/program in your imagination, which may lead to two discoveries: items not in your budget that need be there to make your project/program work, and/or issues related to project/program design. Completing your budget will also confirm the grant amount you think you need is truly the amount you need.

› **What organizations make grants to artists like me?** Foundations, corporations, state agencies, and the federal government all make grants to artists like you. They typically have a maximum grant award, so use your budget to focus your search.

- Most foundations have a website providing comprehensive information about their grants, including eligibility criteria as well as guidelines and deadlines for proposal submissions. The Foundation Center, an excellent source of information, lists current grants available at philanthropynewsdigest.org.
- Many corporations support arts and culture through event sponsorships and grants that support projects/programs, including artist projects.
 - (a) Identify large corporations in your area;
 - (b) research the corporation’s website to find community support information related to grants (often found under About Us or Community Involvement, etc.); and (c) develop a relationship with a management-level employee if possible. (Corporate grant applications often ask for a local employee to support your grant request.)
- State agencies, such as California Arts Council (arts.ca.gov), often make grants and announce current opportunities offered by other organizations. From the homepage, go to the Opportunities tab and select Grants.
- Federal grants from National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for The Humanities, etc. The future of these federal agencies remains unclear. Your efforts may be better invested elsewhere, at least for now.

› **Should you hire a grant writer if the application becomes too difficult or must be submitted online (both terrifying to contemplate)?** Ask yourself if writing in general is difficult, or whether writing this specific grant proposal is difficult. Do you have all the information you need, including a clear, concise goal and detailed objectives? If you are submitting an online application, have you gone to the grantor’s website and reviewed the application questions? If possible, print the application. Then write your response to each question, and cut and paste your answers into the grant application. If you employ a grant writer: (a) negotiate a project (not hourly) fee; and (b) retain the grant writer to produce a grant proposal template that you can use as a guide to apply for other grants.

› **Grant stewardship:** You have won a grant! The award letter says you must submit a report. Is that really important? Yes! The information you provide to the grantor detailing the accomplishments and outcomes of your project/program is one of the most effective tools to assure another grant from this organization. Set yourself apart from the competition!

› **What if my grant proposal is not approved?** The real question is, “Does it mean that my project or program is not worthwhile? Does it mean they don’t like my work?” They may actually love your program and admire your work. You probably received a letter that said something like, “Your proposal was excellent, but we receive so many applications, and do not have enough funds to make grants to everyone.” That is true! Foundations must use a specific percent of endowment earnings each year for grants, but that amount is limited; the availability of corporate grants depends on the company’s profit in any given year; the availability of state grants depends on the state’s budget; and the availability of federal grants, as we know from recent experience, depends on political priorities in Washington, D.C.

Securing a grant is a competitive endeavor; you must do your best work, submit your proposal or application by the deadline, learn from experience, and take the decision you receive professionally—whether that means using the grant well and producing an outstanding stewardship report, or accepting the decline to fund letter as one informative event on a steady path to success.