



Grant Writing for Artists

Basic Principles

A grant proposal is a compelling case for why a particular funder should support your project. There are three core factors that contribute to success in the realm of grant writing: aligning priorities, clear and compelling writing, and establishing a track-record of success.

Aligning Priorities

The first step in the grant writing process is to gain clarity on the impact you want to make through your project. What is the overarching goal of your project? What need or problem is it addressing? Once you have clearly established your project's goals, you can seek funders that share your goals and are looking to support projects that will advance their mission. Think of foundations as investors who want their money to influence change and make an impact in their areas of focus. For example, if you want to create an after-school music program that utilizes music and as agent for social change, you will direct your research to funders that have this mission articulated clearly in their funding priorities and also have a history of making grants to similar projects. No matter how well articulated your proposal is, or how innovative your programmatic approach may be, if you are applying for a grant from a funder that does not share your priorities, you will most likely not succeed.

Clear and Compelling Writing

Most grant proposals require extreme clarity and brevity. You may be asked to summarize your project's history in 250 words or less, or synthesize your project's goals into two bullet points. It's crucial to use language that is precise and that clearly communicates the scope of your project to a reader who will likely be encountering your work for the first time. Using terminology that is overly specialized, making broad sweeping statements about the rationale of your project, or making assumptions about the reader's knowledge of your discipline can greatly hurt your chances of securing a grant, even if your priorities are well aligned. While building a clear body of language about your project can be slow and challenging, it will serve you well for future grant proposals and other deliverables, such as content on your website, presentations, promotional materials, etc. When you are starting out, don't go it at it alone. Enlist the help of a friend, family member or colleague whose writing and skill as an editor you appreciate. Ideally, you should enlist the help of someone who knows very little about your discipline or project and can give you an honest appraisal of whether someone who is reading about your work for the first time will walk away with a clear picture of your project's activities and goals.

Building a Track Record

Simply put, funding begets funding. It can be hard to secure your first grant, but once a funder has invested in your project, it becomes exponentially easier to secure additional funding. Funders like to see that your project has received other 'votes of confidence' and that the success of your project doesn't rise and fall with one source of funding. You can begin to build this track record while you are a student, by applying for university-based grants, or summer fellowships. These small-level grants early in your career can go a long way in convincing a funder that you are driven, accountable, and quickly building a track-record of success.

Who Gives Grants: The Landscape

Before you begin researching grants for your project, it's important to understand the basic landscape of grant-based fundraising—most importantly, which bodies give grants, and what basic eligibility requirements you will need to be aware of. Below you will find information about two primary grant-giving bodies: foundations and government agencies. You will also find crucial information about eligibility requirements and some helpful organizations and resources that help artists navigate the process of applying for grants and soliciting tax-deductible donations from individuals.

Foundations. A foundation is a nonprofit corporation or a charitable trust, with the principal purpose of making grants to unrelated organizations, institutions, or individuals for scientific, educational, cultural, religious, or other charitable purposes. There are two primary types of foundations: private foundations and grant making public charities. A private foundation derives its money from a family, an individual, or a corporation. Examples of private foundations include: the Ford Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and The Righteous Persons Foundation (Spielberg). Public charities generally derive their funding or support primarily from the general public, receiving funding from individuals, government, and private foundations. Examples of grant making public charities include: The United Way, Ms. Foundation for Women, and The Mayo Foundation. In addition, many non-profit organizations, such as universities, arts presenters and agencies, have small grant-making programs, even if their primary mission is programmatic or educational.

Government. There are many grant programs that are administered by government agencies at the municipal, state and federal level. Examples include National Endowment for the Arts (Federal), Mass Cultural Council (State) or Boston Cultural Council (Municipal).

Who Gets Grants: Basic Eligibility Requirements. While some foundations and government agencies have grants that are tailored for/open to individual artists, the vast majority of grants require non-profit 501(c)(3) status. This eligibility requirement used to be a considerable barrier that cut artists off from a large pool of funding. Today, through organizations such as Fractured Atlas (www.fracturedatlas.org), artists can apply for **fiscal sponsorship**, enabling them to qualify for grants and solicit tax-deductible donations from individual donors.

Fiscal Sponsorship. Fiscal Sponsorship is a financial and legal system by which a legally recognized 501(c)(3) public charity (such as Fractured Atlas) provides limited financial and legal oversight for a project initiated independently by an artist. That "project" might be a one-time project or an independent artist or even an arts organization that does not have its own 501(c)(3) status. Once sponsored in this way, the project is eligible to solicit and receive grants and tax-deductible contributions that are normally available only to 501(c)(3) organizations. Many non-profit organizations may be willing to provide fiscal sponsorship to an artist or project that aligns with their mission, but working in tandem with Fractured Atlas provides many benefits. In addition to fiscal sponsorship, Fractured Atlas provides fundraising tools and resources and has a knowledgeable staff to help you navigate the ins and outs of operating as a fiscally sponsored artist, project or organization. You can learn more, by visiting: www.fracturedatlas.org/site/fiscal.

Research Funding Opportunities

General Literacy

Students often ask how they can begin building skills in the area of grant-based fundraising before they are actually ready to execute an independent project. Below are a few easy steps you can take to increase your grant literacy so that when you are ready to begin your research, you are starting with a solid foundation.

Step #1: Increase your general literacy by taking notice of which foundations and government organizations fund artists in your discipline. When you are on an artist's website, click on the 'supporters' tab and copy and paste the list into a running document.

Step #2: Sign-up for free e-newsletters that include information about art-based funding or grant opportunities in your discipline. When you receive the emails, skim them quickly and mine information that may be relevant to your discipline.

Step #3: When you are at concerts, flip to the back of the program and look at the logos of funders who have supported the artist, ensemble or particular concert series. Circle relevant names and file the program, or keep a running Google doc with the names and links.

Free Resources for Grant Research

Below are several excellent and free resources that will connect you with information about potential grant opportunities:

- **Foundation Directory Online**, foundationcenter.org: one of the most comprehensive funding research tools that includes foundation profiles, application guidelines, 990 filings, and more. FDO is an expensive subscription service, but it can be accessed online for free at the central branch of the Boston Public Library in the Social Sciences Department (700 Boylston St., Boston MA). All you need is a valid library card to use the electronic service.
- **NOZA**, www.nozasearch.com: Free database of foundation grants. NOZA also includes information on private donors and corporate grant programs, but this information is only accessible to paid subscribers.
- **Grants.gov** is the official government site for information on federal grants and funding. Managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The site offers a database of more than 1,000 grant programs administered by 26 federal grant making agencies, searchable by agency, category, eligibility or CFDA number. Users can also browse listings of grant opportunities by agency or category.
- **New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA)**, www.nyfa.org: NYFA lists a wide range of artist grants, residencies, fellowships, and student scholarships across the US.
- **NEA Listing of State and Regional Arts Agencies**, www.nea.gov/partner/state: The National Endowment for the Arts has a comprehensive list of state and regional arts agencies (with links and contact information) that have grant making programs.
- **Bridge: Worldwide Music Connection**, www.necmusic.edu/bridge: A free service for NEC students and alumni (and students at institutions that license the service - check with your library or career service center to see if you can gain free access), includes over 3000 listings of opportunities of music. There is an entire section dedicated to grants and fellowships. You can also sign up for a bi-monthly newsletter that will include grant opportunities relevant to your discipline.
- **Michigan State University**, staff.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/3subject.htm: MSU Libraries has a fantastic compilation of grants for individuals, broken down by discipline area. This information is free and accessible to non MSU students and is a great jumping off point for individual artists looking for funding that does not require fiscal sponsorship for 501(c)(3) status.
- **American Composers Forum**, <http://composersforum.org>: specifically tailored to composers, this website includes an excellent listing of upcoming opportunities, including grants, commissions and fellowships.
- **Guidestar**, www.guidestar.org: provides free access to tax filings and other basic information about foundations around the country. This is a helpful resource when trying to decide your ask amount—you can get a sense of the capacity and the range of grants that a foundation generally awards. You can clearly see which other artists, projects and organizations have received funding in the previous year.

Close Attention to Guidelines, Deadlines and Other Published Information

As you are reviewing possible grant opportunities, it is important to closely review the published guidelines and check for your eligibility. Below is a basic list of eligibility requirements to be aware of:

- Tax exempt status (organizations and projects)
- Nationality (individuals)
- Geographic location or focus
- Funding priorities
- Stage of project, organization or career
- Size of organization or project (annual budget, size of staff, etc.)
- Affiliations or memberships

As you identify potential grant opportunities, slot all of the relevant information into a table like the one shown below:

Funder	Priorities	Application Process	Deadlines	Grant Range	Notes
Meyer Foundation for the Arts	Arts Education, promotion of classical music in public schools	Letter of inquiry required, visit meyerartsfun.org for guidelines	Letter of inquiry due on January 15. Full proposal request by March 15.	\$5000-\$10,000	Have funded ClassicKids and Strings for All projects in Boston, MA.

Basic Grant Architecture: Mapping Your Project

Most grant makers will either provide an organization specific application form, or ask that you complete the Associated Grant Makers common proposal, which can be downloaded here: www.agmconnect.org/cpf. Below you will find the basic sections that you will most often find in applications, along with prompts to give you a sense of what information should be provided:

Project Overview:

- Description of the project you plan to undertake
- Succinct rationale for your project: what conditions, ideas, challenges and research have informed the shape of your project?
- Clear articulation of your target audience or community services: who will be involved with and/or impacted by your project?
- Information about your collaborators and partners. Include details of your collaborators' backgrounds and credentials (short bios can work well) and explain the nature and level of their participation.

Goals and Outcomes:

- Goals, which should be few in number, capture the overarching vision for the impact of your work.
- Outcomes are the finite, quantifiable results of your project (e.g. a recording, new curricula, etc.)

Evaluation and Sustainability:

- What criteria will you use to measure the success and impact of your project?
- How will you continue to grow/sustain the project after the course of the grant?

Budget/Additional Funding Sources:

- A detailed budget that includes all of the expenses associated with your project. Do your homework and build a realistic a budget (e.g. investigate how much it will cost to rent equipment or the cost of a specific venue).
- How will you use the funding you are requesting? Give a clear picture of how the funding will be allocated and what impact it will make on the health of the project.
- Who else has supported you? Many funders will want to see a track record of success, or at the very least, an indication that you are pursuing multiple sources of funding.

Appendices:

- Evidence of tax-exempt status, supporting documents, letters of recommendation, reviews, full length bios, etc. Keep this sparse but high quality.

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