

secrets of the grant

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Separate yourself from the grant. You are not the grant, you are not your video, you are not your resume. Your proposal will be approved or denied for a complex set of reasons, never because you are not a good artist. Depersonalize the task of grant writing. Be strategic. It makes your writing better and eases the (inevitable) heartbreak of rejection.

Try to inform, not seduce. A plainly spoken articulation of what you actually want to do is better than puffed-up, look-at-how-amazing-I-am bragging.

Lead with your most visionary, distinctive work. Don't imagine that you need to make yourself and your work look "normal" or traditional.

Funders are partners (not parents). When you read the guidelines (twice), imagine the strongest partnership: where do your interests overlap? How can you help them reach their goals while they help you reach yours? If there isn't a fit, applying is likely a waste of time.

Have someone read your proposal. HAVE SOMEONE READ YOUR PROPOSAL, preferably someone who writes grants successfully or sits on panels. This is essential.

If you ever have the opportunity to sit on a panel, do it. It is by far the best education in grant writing. Also, read grants that your friends and fellow artists write. You will learn a lot.

Grant panels are filled with master artists, presenters, funders, and critics. Putting your work in front of thought leaders in your field has huge career benefits, even if you don't get the grant.

how your work is seen

Knowing how your work is discussed by thought leaders in your field is power. This is gigantically gigantic: there is a conversation about your work. You can learn about that conversation, affect it, and address it in your writing. If you understand how your work is actually seen in your field, you will be much, much better at writing applications and getting resources. Get panel feedback whenever possible. It can hurt, but it's gold. It allows you to write to the concerns and questions that a panel has. Years ago, the NEA dance director told me the two worst arguments she'd ever witnessed on the NEA dance panel were about my company's work. The arguments were: is this really dance? Hearing that hurt a lot. But I got over it, and I wrote to that question in my applications, talking about movement invention and choreographic structure. And that question never came up on the panel again.

Have candid conversations about your work with presenters, funders, thinkers, and artists. Ask people who get what you are doing and have some perspective on the national

conversation. Again, this is intense, and maybe not for everyone. But knowing where your work actually lives, how it is received, will help you write better and get more resource.

Get thought leaders to see your work. It's hugely helpful if someone on the panel has seen an artist's work live. There is not a conspiracy in the art world, but there is a group of thought leaders who serve on a lot of panels. I strongly recommend making a gentle, ongoing plan to get prominent artists, curators, and leaders to see your work in person. In Headlong, the company I worked with for 20 years, there were five important curators/programmers/funders who advocated strongly for our work. More than half of our gigs and opportunities came from these five champions. This doesn't require cheesy, schmoozy careerism; just give people a chance to see your work. And if they connect with it, give them more chances to get close to it.

Invite people to your work. Ask people who are already supporters: who else might be interested? Make a special effort to connect with national leaders. Look for conventions and convenings. Make a short list of thought leaders to invite to your openings and premieres. When you hear someone is going to be in town, consider having a studio visit or showing. Sometimes a presenter or funder will help invite people or even buy a plane ticket if asked.

Today's emerging leaders will be running things in five years. Build relationships with younger folks, people starting out, and they will champion your work as they move up.

Yes votes mean more than No votes. Some people won't champion your work, or even like it. Doesn't matter too much. A champion or two, a few supporters, make a huge difference. I find that to be true in general and definitely on panels: champions outweigh detractors.

proposal

Make a "legal" argument, a case. Tie together the many threads of the application (resume, video, proposal, work sample description) into one coherent, irrefutable argument:

- 1) This is who I am and what I have done.
- 2) This is what I want to do next.
- 3) This is (precisely, specifically) how this project will get me there.

Number three is where the grant/award/fellowship/festival comes in.

Keep it short. Never use the entire space or word count. It shouldn't be that hard to describe. Start with a quick, pithy sentence (you need to be able to say it one sentence), and then fill in the details. A reader should be able to grasp your entire project by looking only at your first paragraph, your timetable, and your budget.

Specifics are key. Make a timetable, even if the grant doesn't require it. This communicates responsibility and planning.

Give ammunition to your allies and take it away from your detractors. Be transparent about questions and challenges. If a work is site-specific, discuss how you will secure and work in the site. It is good to have questions, good to have new challenges in the project. Let the panel know that you are thinking about these challenges and how you might address them. When you write to the challenges, rather than avoiding them, it communicates competence and is hugely reassuring to the panel.

documentation

Get good documentation of all your work. Build documentation into your budget and your schedule. Low-quality work samples don't convey the strength of your work and suggest carelessness and lack of follow-through, not things you want associated with your proposal.

Two questions. In my experience on panels, we are looking for two things: is something real and vivid happening? And then, does it develop? Choose a series of images or a cue in a time-based sample that (1) starts strong and then (2) shows development and change, rather than repetition/stasis.

Have someone look at your work samples. It is impossible to assess one's own work samples. Get together a trusted artist and someone on the decision side (presenter, funder, panelist), give them several options, and get honest feedback. It's not a question of whether the work is good. It's a question of what *reads well as a work sample*. Resubmit work samples that get grants.

In the "Work Sample Information Sheet," tell the panel exactly what to look for and how it ties into the story of your grant. Imagine that they will completely misunderstand your work and guide them explicitly to what you want them to see and how that connects to your proposal. This is a part of the application that many artists neglect, and it can completely change the panel's view of your work.

resume

Calibrate your resume. Make the smallest unit big. "Selected Performances" or "Selected Work." Let the reader wonder about what you left off. Never mention college work or college awards. One page is best. Two is the maximum, unless it's a C.V.

budget

Your budget must tell the same story as your proposal. Every item in your budget should be explained by your proposal, and everything in your proposal should be budgeted.

Pay yourself for your time. All of your time, including "creative time." Pay your collaborators. Real budgets that account for all expenses at professional level fees actually help your proposal. Underfunded or unthoughtful budgets make you less likely to be funded.

Use equations. Clarify artist fees with simple equations: *30 days @ \$X per day* or *300 hours at \$X per hour*. I have never seen an equation questioned, but unexplained artist fees can confuse a panel.

If the grant is \$10,000 proposal, don't propose an underfunded \$40,000 project. Panels, especially those that include artists, will immediately sense that. Limit your proposal to what you can do excellently and thoroughly. If necessary, break out a "phase" of the project that can be done for the grant amount.