



# Secrets of the Grant

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## Three Things That Aren't True About Grants

- 1) If another artist gets the grant, it means the world thinks s/he is a better artist than me.
- 2) If I propose a huge, under funded project and don't pay myself, I'm more likely to get the grant.
- 3) There is a conspiracy in the art world an on panels against my type of art. My work is too strange/raw/honest/political for panels to handle.

## Big Thoughts

**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.

**Don't try to second-guess a panel by pandering to funding priorities.** Going on about how your work could have community impact and solve poverty and cure AIDS only helps if it's at the center of your project. If it's about making art, just say so.

**Have someone read your proposal.** HAVE SOMEONE READ YOUR PROPOSAL, preferably someone who writes grants successfully or who has sat 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 the grants that your friends and fellow artists write, especially people whose work you do not know. You will learn a lot.

**Always try to get panel feedback** (if you're accepted or rejected). Look at the artists and projects that were funded. Some have formal mechanisms; others can be contacted informally. Take notes on the feedback. Take a deep breath (cause it's gonna hurt). Take it seriously. This is the most useful information you can get.

**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.

## **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.

**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. Give ammunition to your allies and take it away from your detractors.

## **Work Samples**

**Get good documentation of all your work.** It's a hassle, but it is crucial. There was a time when getting good work samples was extremely expensive and difficult. That time has passed. Budget the money and time for documentation when you plan a project.

**Have someone look at your work samples.** Get together a trusted artist and someone on the decision side (presenter, funder, panelist), give them several options, get their honest feedback. It's not a question of whether the work is good. It's a question of what reads well in a photo/video, which is totally different. TAKE THIS ADVICE! It is impossible to assess clearly one's own work samples. 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 your current work and your proposed project.** Imagine that they will completely misunderstand your work and guide them explicitly to what you want them to see. 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. People who actually think they are unimportant brag. Create an air of importance and clarity. "Selected Performance." "Selected Choreography." "Partial Listing." Let the reader wonder about what you left off. Never mention college work or college awards. One page is nice. Two is the maximum, unless it's a C.V.

## **Budget**

**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 will actually help your proposal. Underfunded or unthoughtful budgets will make you less likely to be funded. If there is in-kind donation of time and services, put it in the budget as both expense and income. Donated time should be valued. And your budget should reflect the actual size of the project, even if it's not all paid for in cash.

**If you are making a \$10,000 proposal, don't propose a \$40,000 project and underfund it.** 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.