

Grant Writing Guide

What Are Grants?

A grant is a relationship where an organization agrees to give you a certain amount of money in order to fund a specific project. Generally, when you are designing a project, you send applications to grant making organizations. If your project looks promising and fits the mission of a particular organization, they may select your proposal and offer you the grant. If they do, you then have to complete your project within a specific timeframe and budget, following which you will probably need to submit a report to the organization that funded you.

Grants are awarded by a variety of sources. Organizations awarding grants can include cities, foundations, arts organizations, artist services, charities and private donors. Broadly speaking, grant makers fall into three categories:

- **Private non-profit foundations.** These are usually funded by families (like the Zellerbach Foundation) or businesses.
- **Corporate giving.** Many businesses also give some amount of money to the arts directly, either in addition to or instead of sponsoring a non-profit foundation.
- **Public charities.** Community arts councils and education or cultural charities.

Grants can fund a variety of needs and types of support. Grant money can fund any combination of new work, collaboration, community, equipment, performances of pre-existing work, recording, engagement or education. *Most grants are created for a specific need and will list things they do not fund, so it is important to read their guidelines carefully.*

Before You Apply

Plan Ahead. In order to apply for a grant, you will need a compelling project that can be achieved with the grant money.

Get resume, bio, press clips, and list of performances together now! Don't do this at the last minute, when you need to focus on other aspects of the grant. Consider putting together your work sample when you're fresh and excited (see p. 5 for details).

If a letter of support is needed, ask for it early and give the person as much information as possible. Let them know what they can say about you that you can't say yourself in your statement: things about your reliability, integrity, etc.

Finding, Remembering, and Getting Started on Grants

Get on email lists. Examples include Fractured Atlas Blog, Art Deadlines List, New Music USA.

Look for a Foundation Center or an arts council near where you live. Examples: SF Foundation Center, NY Foundation for the Arts, Chamber Music America (may have membership fees), Composer's Forum (may have membership fees), New Music USA

Put all possible grants into calendar, including reminders for yourself to check deadlines if they haven't been announced yet. There often isn't much time between when deadlines are announced and the due date.

Doing Your Research

Get a sense for the foundation and what they want. Watch their webinars, go to their meetings, etc. Don't be afraid to call and ask about the process—there is usually a person who is paid to talk to you! Ask questions like: who is on the board, where are they from, are they artists, etc. Knowing who the readers are should change how you frame the project in proposal. Do your research before you call, and prepare specific questions. You should have called at least once by the time you submit the grant proposal.

Are you eligible for the grant? Consider the following as you verify your eligibility:

- Are you working with anyone else (e.g. a chamber group or other organization)?
- Is the grant composer or ensemble-specific?
- Can you apply as a collaborative team?
- Do you have to be affiliated with a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization?
- Is the grant for you or an organization helping you / working on your project?
- What types of support does the grant offer? Many grants are specific to certain types of expenses, such as travel, recording, equipment, or marketing.

Know your potential funders.

- Where is the money for the grant coming from and what are their values? Many organizations that give grants to individual artists and ensembles are themselves funded by grants from larger organizations. This informs their decisions on which artists to support. Therefore, there are three sets of values that your proposal should embody: yours, those of the organization you are applying to, and those of the people ultimately paying for the grant.
- Is the grant-giving organization legitimate? If there an application fee over \$25-30, a red flag should go up. Do your research on the organization to make sure they are responsible, and that they are not scammers.
- If you have a partner organization, is your partner organization writing the grant for you, or are they having you write it? If the latter, is that reasonable given the size of partner organization? *If they're capable, but not investing many of their resources in you, make sure they're worth the effort. Don't necessarily share this sort of unofficial division of labor information with the grant giving organization.*

Writing the Grant Proposal

The application instructions will either give you an explicit form, or leave it up to you. If you're not given a structure, create one anyway. Start your proposal by explaining what your project is and what specifically you are applying to the grant for.

Writing Tips

- **Keep your proposal simple, clear, and concise.** They will be slammed with applications; make the nuts and bolts very easy to grasp, and when talking about essence of your work, connect with your reader.
- **Every proposal you write should fit the organization's mission**—give funders exactly what they are looking for.
- **From beginning to end, your proposal must be compelling.** Your goal is to get potential funders to be as excited about your project as you are, and to stand out from other applicants.
- **Revise.** Read your proposal out loud to make sure it flows. As you revise, consider how panelists may not grasp your project the way you do.

- **Write for short attention spans.** While your entire narrative should be compelling, consider that your readers may not get past the first couple of paragraphs. Your proposal should be written in the “upside-down pyramid” style; offer content in the order of most important to least important.
- **Don’t be scared by things you think you can’t answer**, whether or not you have the necessary information. The known details can and will change, and you can say things like, “I will hire these [ideal] people to play on the recording, funding and availability pending, of course...” When in doubt, call and ask!

Key Messages

- It’s a Great Artistic Idea
- You Can Pull it Off
- It Will Positively Impact Your Career
- The Time for it Is Now
- It Will Reach People
- Not so different from your past work that they can’t picture it or don’t think you can pull it off.

Content

- **Who is involved?** Who you are, who’s involved. Use well-known names if possible. If your project is on a smaller scale, you might have to make a convincing case for it. Consider explaining that you want to work with lesser-known venues or artists for a legitimate reason, whether it be a desire to perform in smaller venues for a more intimate feel, wanting it to be accessible to certain kinds of people, providing a service to certain communities; etc.
- **What is the project?** Show your readers what your project is and help them visualize it. Choose a title even if you don’t have one yet. This makes you and them visualize the project, and you can always change it later.
- **Timeline:** The date of the event, including a timeline for planning, developing, marketing, etc. Make sure to note how this fits into the grant period, which may specify a period of time when certain things need to happen. Don’t allow listing dates to overwhelm the flow of your proposal.
- **Where it will happen:** Where will it be—what are your potential venues? For performing arts grants, funders want to see a clear idea not just of where you will stage your project, but how you will fill seats.
- **How will it happen—Will it be successful?** In addition to a clear vision of what you are trying to accomplish, they want to see that you have thought through the nuts and bolts of your project. Be clear on what specific parts of your project the grant will support, and how you will accomplish the parts that it doesn’t. How will you evaluate whether your project was successful? What counts as success for your project? You should have concrete goals with specific time frames.
- **Why must you accomplish this project?** Why must this be the very next thing you do for your career? Show funders that they will be making a difference in your career, and convince them that this is the ideal next step to make it happen. What are your values as an artist? If you can clearly and concisely articulate them, you can influence readers to see your project through the lens of why you think it is important. Who are the beneficiaries of your project? For example: a specific community or group of artists or scholars. Since your project values must align with the grant-givers’ values, consider who they aim to benefit and if your project benefits them also. Your artistic project does not need to solve world hunger or rescue stray puppies, but you should have a clear idea of who it will benefit, beyond “the world in general.”

Budgets

Be Realistic: Hit the line between padding budget and being frugal

Golden Rule: *Income & Expense must be EQUAL*

Income examples:

- Ticket revenue
- Donations projected from online campaigns and individual donors
- “In kind” income: things you would normally pay for, but are receiving for free or barter. Examples: doing your own video editing, staying in a friend’s apartment, being driven around by a friend, etc. Do research on how much it would cost if you were to purchase a service that you are getting for free or through barter. List that as an expense, and then list the same amount appropriately under Income, marked as “in kind.” In this way, you are not actually asking for grant money for these items, but you are showing that they are part of your planning.

Expense examples / things you should be trying to pay for ideally:

- Your own fee—*pay yourself fairly!* Determine how many hours everything will take (composing, rehearsals, etc.) and figure out what a reasonable hourly wage for this stage in your career would be. Don’t undercut the going rate for your labor—you are a highly skilled professional, and funders want to see that you know that.
- Artistic fees (composer, rehearsal pay, concert fee). It’s okay to tell them where you got your projections from—performer request, union standards, etc.
- Room rental (rehearsal, recording)
- Staff for the space
- Gear
- Lighting
- Ask the venue for ideas: there are probably budget items you haven’t thought of.
- High-quality documentation (audio/video fees and editing)! It will help you market yourself and apply for more grants in the future
- Travel fees
- Marketing: flyer printing cost, mailing (postage, printing), online and print advertising (they cost different amounts and reach different groups of people, show them that you know that). Don’t skimp on marketing! (If they don’t give you the funding for it, you know you can market on a shoestring.)

Shoot for a little beyond what you know will work. A project that’s somewhat bigger than you’ve done before, or what you would try to do with more money. Start with what you have done and what is in reach, then let them provide that little push over the edge into a 7 manageable, but meaningful, next step forward.

Always ask them for the maximum amount of money for your project. Go ahead and up your project’s sights if you’re not using all of the money they give yet. If your project is bigger than their funding, go ahead and ask for the full amount they’ll give—it shouldn’t hurt your chances of getting the grant. They will like to hear that they’re one part of a big project for you, and they want to know you’re applying to other grants to fund the whole thing. Under income, you can list “other pending requests” in order to let them know what part of the full budget you’re asking them to support.

Make sure the part you’re asking them to fund works well with the organization’s mission.

Ask about budgetary requirements! Often, grants will have some constraints on how you structure your budget, but they will not publish them with the other guidelines. Call and find out!

Work Sample

Maximum impact with minimum audio quality. While you should try to submit the best quality possible, panels don't always listen to audio on good speakers, so make it punchy despite this. Don't start with a quiet, contemplative section or a slow build-up. Make volume good in the beginning, as the panel may be chatting as it begins to play. Consider submitting a video recording, as it has a greater impact than audio alone.

Excerpt your work. Don't make them listen to the development, even if you think it's the coolest thing. Sometimes they like to hear you clearly in the recording, if possible.

Include work sample description. This gives you a chance to help them listen to your work through the lens you want them to use. If they don't ask for description, include it anyway, but keep it succinct.

Finishing and Follow-up

Be on Time. In fact, be a few days ahead of time. Things will go wrong at the last minute! Consider setting yourself a fake deadline in order to finish things in advance. Write all mail by dates in calendar, not in hand dates.

Learn for the Future. Ask for panel notes and go to open processes (where they let you watch the board decide) if offered. If asked to be on a panel (they'll often ask old participants), DO IT.

Receiving a Grant

Keep your funder in the loop and let them know if something about your project changes. Keep track of your spending, and if you're required to file a final report, make sure to do it on time.

Fiscal Sponsorship

For legal reasons, many organizations can only give grants to 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations. **Fiscal sponsorship is an arrangement under which a non-profit organization lends you their nonprofit status, in order to apply for grants that require it.**

Fiscal sponsorship is not something you should apply for as part of a specific grant application. Apply for fiscal sponsorship in advance of any particular grant. Once an organization agrees to sponsor you, you are affiliated with them in general, and they are your fiscal sponsor for whatever grants you apply for.

Many organizations have institutionalized fiscal sponsorship programs. Apply for sponsorship from organizations that are set up for it already. *Local organizations with fiscal sponsorship programs, also sometimes called "incubator" programs, include: Switchboard Music, SF Friends of Chamber Music, and Fractured Atlas.*

Be aware that working relationships between artists and fiscal sponsors may vary in terms of how much the sponsor is willing to do for you. Technically, fiscal sponsors are applying for grants on your behalf, but you need to do the work. It is best not to share those kinds of details with grant-giving organizations.