

PREPARING A GRANT APPLICATION



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada



THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS IS A NATIONAL ARTS FUNDING AGENCY PROVIDING GRANTS AND SERVICES TO PROFESSIONAL CANADIAN ARTISTS AND ARTS ORGANIZATIONS, IN A WIDE VARIETY OF ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES.

DANCE • INTEGRATED ARTS • MEDIA ARTS • MUSIC • THEATRE • VISUAL ARTS • WRITING AND PUBLISHING

THE CONTEXT

Each year, we receive thousands of grant applications from across the country. Most of these applications are evaluated by changing, ad hoc, peer assessment committees. These committees make their funding decisions according to the criteria specific to each grant program (as described in the program guidelines available on the Canada Council website).

The most important aspect of the committee's decision is assessing the **artistic merit of your project** and whether it is competitive within:

- a national context
- the relative context of the stage of your career, and
- the overall context of your discipline.

Your grant application plays a critical role in demonstrating the artistic merit of your project to the committee. This brochure responds to some frequently asked questions and provides tips to help you prepare a grant application.

This information is aimed specifically at *individual* professional artists, but the basic principles of grant writing also apply to applications from *arts organizations*.

THE ABCs OF A GRANT APPLICATION

When and why should I apply for a grant?

The best time to apply for a grant is when a planned project or activity is well developed. Moreover, you must be able to assure the peer assessment committee that recommending a grant at that particular moment will have a significant impact on your artistic career.

TIP: If you don't think your project or activity plans will be ready by the time a grant competition deadline is approaching, it may be wise to wait until the next competition. That way, you'll have time to better prepare your application and apply once everything is ready.

Paysage approximatif (detail),
Catherine Bodmer, 2008

Escadron volant / A Flock of Flyers, Corpus, performed
around the world from 1999-2009. Photo: Gary Mulacahey

Singers of the Nathaniel Dett Chorale, at the Presence
Forum, organized by the Canada Council in 2007.
Photo: Stephanie Lake/CP Images

Creek Tangle #2, Gordon Smith, 2008.
Courtesy: Equinox Gallery

What is a grant application?

All grant applications consist of two distinct and equally important parts:

- *Application form*: Informs the peer assessment committee of your proposed project or activity.
- *Support material*: Provides examples of your previous and/or current work, and artistic development.

How do I get an application form?

Get the most recent application form from the Canada Council website about two months before a competition deadline. This will give you time to become familiar with the contents of the guidelines, prepare the application and gather the required support material.

You must use the most recent application form because program guidelines and forms change on a yearly basis.

Can I apply online?

You can apply online for many Canada Council grants. Visit the website and click on the GO! icon, beside the program description.

PREP MAKES PERFECT!

Reading the fine print of program guidelines and multiple instructions can be discouraging, but don't give up! Once you've read the guidelines and form thoroughly, the task ahead will be easier. Before beginning to complete the application form, make sure that you:

- meet the minimum professional requirements of the program's *eligibility criteria*
- understand the *assessment criteria* of the program, since they form the basis for the peer assessment committee's decisions
- propose a project that meets the *requirements of the program* as outlined in the program guidelines

- have the required *support material* on hand and up to date
- gather all the information necessary to submit a *realistic budget page*

First-time applicants might find it helpful to contact the program officer to clarify eligibility, assessment criteria or other details.

WRITING THE APPLICATION

What should I write in the application?

Explain what you have done in the past, what you are doing now and what you want to accomplish with the grant. Peer assessment committees tend to prefer an application that is clear, concise and personal. However, there is no formula or recipe for writing effective grant applications.

The purpose of the written grant application is to get the peer assessment committee excited about your proposed project or activity so that they want to support it. They will want to know what your intended project is about, how it fits into the context of your practice and its anticipated impact on your artistic development.

Dos

- Respond to every assessment criterion of the program you are applying to.
- Back up your claims with hard facts. Avoid broad statements like: “This touring grant will allow me to reach millions of people.”
- Be sure your application is legible – handwriting is not recommended. Remember that the presentation of the application reflects your professionalism.
- Provide relevant background information. You shouldn’t presume that the peer assessment committee is familiar with your work or the specific terminology and peculiarities of your field of specialization.
- Show that your project is well thought out and can be carried out as planned.
- Be concise and get to the point.

What support material should I select for my application?

Support material complements and strengthens the written grant application. Even the most skillfully written application will ultimately not be successful if the submitted support material – on which committees base their rating of artistic merit – is weak or has little relevance to the planned project or activity.

Choose material that reflects the path of your artistic development and achievements, and shows promise and confidence.

TIP: Your resumé, or CV, is a very important part of the support material. It provides the peer assessment committee with proof of your professional development as an artist. Include pertinent information on your education and training, public presentations of your

Don'ts

- Don't claim financial need, ill health or other personal misfortunes as reasons for requesting financial support.
- Don't write lengthy, vague, general statements about your proposed project.
- Don't assume that the peer assessment committee will “read between the lines” or guess at what you're trying to say.

You can include some earlier work – to show the committee where you have come from artistically – but should include primarily current work that bears a relationship that has relevance to the grant application.

Once the support material is ready to be submitted, make sure that it is of the best possible quality. Provide detailed information about it in the application form's support material section.

work, employment related to your art practice only, awards, publications, etc. Many application forms specify a maximum number of pages for the resumé, but if not, two or three pages are usually sufficient.

What are the last steps in preparing my application?

Once you have written your grant application, selected support material and fully completed the form, review the whole package.

Make sure your text is free of spelling mistakes and your budget is realistic. Ensure that your application is complete – incomplete applications are automatically ineligible.

TIP: Ask someone who has not read your application to read it and give you constructive criticism.

SENDING THE PACKAGE

How strict are the grant deadlines?

Your grant application package *must* be postmarked on or before the deadline. Your application will be ineligible if it is postmarked after the competition deadline. A postmark is the Canada Post or courier company's date stamp.

POST-APPLICATION

Keep in mind that it is a competitive process and budgets are limited. However, every competition is different with

- a new group of applicants.
- a new peer assessment committee comprised of different peer assessors.
- a potentially different amount of funding available.

If your application isn't funded, it doesn't mean that your work lacks merit. Reassess your application and apply at another time or for a different grant.

GOOD LUCK!

CONTACT INFORMATION

Information Officer
Arts Services Unit

Canada Council for the Arts

350 Albert Street
Post Office Box 1047
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5V8

Telephone: 1-800-263-5588 (toll-free)

or (613) 566-4414 ext. 5060

TTY (TDD) machine (for hearing-impaired callers):

1-866-585-5559 (toll free)

Fax: (613) 566-4390

info@canadacouncil.ca

WWW.CANADACOUNCIL.CA

Canada
February 2009