ARTIST GRANT PROPOSAL WRITING HANDBOOK

FIRST PEOPLES'
CULTURAL COUNCIL

Arts Program

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Artist Grant Proposal Writing Handbook developed by the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC), Arts Program.

For many of us, writing a grant application or proposal can seem overwhelming. Simply figuring out which funding program to apply to can be confusing and explaining our ideas clearly on an application form isn't always easy.

The purpose of this handbook is to offer suggestions and clarify the process of writing an arts grant proposal. This handbook will explain the nature of arts funding and identify which organizations to apply to. You will be introduced to the common contents of an arts grant application form and provided with advice on how to create a clear and strong proposal for your project.

Please let us know if you have any suggestions on other resources that would be helpful to artists and arts administrators.

Here's how you can reach us:

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WHAT IS ARTS FUNDING?

Arts funding helps to sustain the practice of the arts across the country and beyond. If you are an individual artist, grants are an important resource to help you maintain your artistic practice. If you are a representative of an arts organization, grants can be a source of funding to help you continue to support the arts in your community.

Grants for artists, arts organizations and arts collectives in British Columbia are distributed through a variety of arts funding organizations including:

- First Peoples' Cultural Council (Aboriginal artists and organizations in BC only)
- British Columbia Arts Council (BC artists only)
- Vancouver Foundation, Visual Arts Development Awards (BC visual artists only)
- Canada Council for the Arts (Artists across Canada)

Arts Funding for Individual Artists

There are several grant opportunities available to individual artists related to projects such as:
- The creation and/or production of new works
- Professional development opportunities
- Artist in residency opportunities
- Travel relevant to your art practice

Arts Funding for Organizations

Many grant programs are designed to support arts organizations. First Nations/Band Administrative offices and Native Friendship Centres are also eligible to apply to some arts funding programs, provided that they can demonstrate a clearly articulated arts mandate. Funding for arts organizations can include support in the form of:
- Organizational operating funds
- Organizational development assistance
- Project assistance
- Presentation and dissemination assistance

Arts funding organizations offer many grant programs to support the work done by artists and arts organizations. Since there are so many funding possibilities, it is important to be sure that you are applying to the arts program that best suits your project and your needs.

It is important to note that arts funding programs do not fund business ventures. If you think that your idea may qualify as a business concept, rather than an arts project, there are business specific resources that may be a more appropriate source of support.

SELECTING AN ARTS FUNDING PROGRAM

FINDING THE BEST FIT FOR YOUR PROJECT

There are several factors to keep in mind as you select the arts funding program to which you will apply. Specifically, your choice of grant program will be influenced by your artistic discipline(s), the nature of the project you wish to undertake and your level of experience.

Artistic Discipline

Arts funding opportunities are often categorized related to seven main *artistic disciplines*. Generally, these disciplines are defined as follows:

1. Visual arts
2. Dance
3. Music/sound
4. Theatre/performing arts
5. Writing/storytelling
6. Media arts
7. Interdisciplinary arts

In order to avoid disappointment, it is important to make sure that the grant program you apply to is geared towards your specific artistic discipline. You should review the grant programs' description and guidelines for to find information about which artistic disciplines qualify for a funding opportunity.

Nature of Project Idea

You will find that most arts organizations offer a variety of grants that are dependant on the *nature of your project idea*. For example, within each artistic discipline, you are likely to find specific funding for projects related to:

- Travel,
- The creation of new works,
- Art production,
- New audience development,
- Touring,
- Capacity building, and others.

You can find information about the nature of the projects supported by a grant outlined in the grant program's description and guidelines. If you are still unsure if your idea fits the criteria, you can contact the grant program's Program Officer to discuss your ideas (for more information, see *How the Program Officer Can Help* section of this handbook).

Level of Experience

It is also important to select a funding program that fits you or your organization's level of experience in the arts.

Career Level as an Individual Artist

Your *career level* as an artist is determined by the training and apprenticeships you have undertaken, the length of time you have been practicing and whether or not you have produced a significant "body of artwork." Also considered is your history of public presentations (i.e. exhibitions or performances of your work) and the level of recognition you have received from your peers and community. Individual artists often fall into the following categories of experience:

- Emerging Artist *(new/learner to approximately 3 or more years)*
- Practicing/Establishing Artist *(approximately 3 years to 5 or more years)*
- Professional/Senior Artist *(approximately 5 years to 10 or more years)*
- Mentor/Master Artist *(approximately 10 years or more years)*

Level of Establishment as an Arts Organization

The level of experience of an arts organization is evaluated based on a variety of criteria, including how long an arts organization/group has been in existence, as well as the level of experience of the artists/arts administrators involved. Other factors include an organization or group's historical and ongoing activities related to the arts, their history of receiving arts funding and their successfully completion of past projects.

Once you have explored various funding sources and have determined the program(s) you qualify for based on the above criteria, it can be helpful to contact the Program Officer(s) in charge of your grant program(s) of interest in order to confirm the suitability of your choice.

HOW THE PROGRAM OFFICER CAN HELP

Program Officers are employed by funding organizations to oversee the administration of arts funding programs. They do not usually have the authority to decide who receives a grant, though it is their job is to determine your eligibility to apply and to oversee the peer assessment process (discussed later in the handbook). Program Officers are helpful resource people for potential applicants, as they can provide some guidance regarding how your project fits within a given funding program and provide tips to strengthen your application. The name and contact information for the Program Officer can usually be found in the program guidelines of a grant program. Contacting the Program Officer well ahead of the grant deadline will ensure they have time to respond to your inquiries effectively.

APPLYING TO MULTIPLE SOURCES FOR FUNDING

If your proposed project involves several stages and/or is a large-scale production, you may consider applying to more than one funding source. Specifically, for large-scale projects, it is not unusual for applicants to secure some of their funding through one grant program and then use this first amount of funding to "leverage" more financial support from a second or third funding agency.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN WRITING

PREPARING

Now that you have decided on the right grant program for your project, there are several important steps before you begin writing. These steps include familiarizing yourself with the program's description and guidelines, and creating a plan to get your proposal in on time.

Get Familiar with Program Descriptions and Guidelines

Before you start writing, you will want to spend some quality time studying the *program description and guidelines* specific to the grant program you are applying to. Though this may not sound like the most exciting way to spend your time, it is the best way to avoid wasting your resources and emotional energy on a grant program that does not fit your project idea.

Within a grant program's *program guidelines*, you will find the *program description*. The program description outlines the types of projects considered eligible for funding, as well as the types of projects that are considered ineligible for this specific funding opportunity. In this section, you will also find information regarding the funding organization's priorities and vision. This can be helpful information when writing about the how the outcomes of your proposed project are in line with the goals of the funding organization.

Timing is of the Essence

Stress can kill the excitement and creative process that lies at the heart of planning a successful project. As a result, it is important to look ahead as much as possible and make sure that you are not going to be surprised or pressured by the unexpected.

Check Application Deadlines

One of the first things to do when considering applying to a grant program is to find out the due date when you will need to have your application submitted. Each funding opportunity has its own unique submission deadline(s). Many grant programs have one annual deadline, while others have several deadlines per year or accept applications on an on-going basis. You will also want to clarify ahead of time whether your completed application needs to be received (at the funding agency) on or before the deadline or if your application will be accepted if it is postmarked (at the post office) on or before the deadline.

Leave Yourself Enough Time

Once you know the deadline for the submission of your application, you can plan the steps you will need to take in order to complete your application on time. Grant writing takes time and it is best to start work on your application as soon as you know you will be applying. In fact, it can often take between one to two months to organize your ideas, write your proposal, seek out letters of support, create high-quality samples of your work and make your final edits. You may find it helpful to create your own "grant-writing calendar" that includes the deadlines you have set for yourself to complete various stages of your proposal.

WRITING YOUR PROPOSAL

GETTING STARTED

When first sitting down to begin writing a grant application, it is not unusual to feel overwhelmed by the process of putting your ideas into words. The important thing is to simply getting *something* down on paper (or on your computer), remembering that you can always make changes at a later time if you are not happy with what you have written.

Beginning to "Put Pen to Paper"

You may already have a well-developed idea of your project in your head, but you will likely need time to translate your vision into words on a page. Beginning to write requires that you allow yourself to get your ideas out, without the pressure of having your thoughts come out perfectly on the first go. It is often useful to allow your mind to wander freely and write down all the thoughts that come to you, without judging your ideas or your writing.

Since you likely think about your project idea at various points in your day, you may also find it useful to carry around a little notebook to record ideas as they come to you. You can then be sure that your moments of inspiration will not be forgotten, as your notebook will be with you when you sit down to complete the grant application form.

Clarifying Your Project Idea

When clarifying your project idea, it is helpful to breakdown the elements involved in your project. In order to help you with this process, we have provided the following questions to will help you create a clearer picture of your project idea. You will also find space to write your responses to these questions on the next page of this handbook.

1. What artistic medium is the main focus of my project?
2. What is my level of experience working in this artistic medium?
3. What would I like to have completed at the end of this project?
4. What is the main focus of this project?
5. Does my project idea fit into any categories such as; the exchange of knowledge, the production of new work, the development of new skills, the exhibition or production of previously completed work, etc.?
6. Is travel a central cost in this project?
7. Does my project involve other artists such as a mentor, collaborator, etc.?
8. What makes this project important to me, my community and/or my culture?

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RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS ON AN APPLICATION FORM

Questions asked on grant application forms vary between funding organizations, as well as between funding opportunities within each organization. As a result, no matter how many grant applications you have written in the past, it is always important to respond directly to the specific questions found on every application form you complete.

There are a few key types of questions that can be found in most applications for arts funding. These can include, but are not limited to questions about:

- Your history and philosophy as an artist,
- The proposed project (including a time line and budget), and
- The expected outcome(s) and benefits of the project.

When formulating your responses to questions, it can be helpful begin your response by first paraphrasing the question on the application form. For example, if an application form asks: "*What are the community benefits of this project*?" You can begin your response as follows: *"The community benefits of this project are*…" This paraphrasing approach can help you start writing and can ensure that you are responding directly to the questions asked. (For detailed examples of answers to common questions on art grant application forms, please see *http://www.fphlcc.ca/arts/arts-toolkit/grant-writing-handbook/sample-questions-and-responses* or contact our office to request hard copies).

Your History and/or Philosophy as an Artist

On application forms for arts funding, there are almost always questions in that seek information about you as an artist or as an arts organization. For individual artists, these questions often ask about your background, art practice, any training you have received in the arts, information about your creative process as an artist (the steps you go through to create your work) and a few highlights of your successes. For arts organizations, these questions often ask about your organization's philosophies and values, the expertise of artists or arts administrators involved and highlights of past projects.

If you have already written documents for your artist's or arts organization's portfolio (for more information, please see the *Arts Portfolio Handbook*), you can pull information from your portfolio (biography and statement) when writing your responses to these types of questions. At the same time, it is very important to adapt your artist's bio and statement to relate them directly to the requirements of each grant program.

Many grant programs will also offer you the opportunity to attach your artist's bio, artist's statement, and arts resume/CV (or the equivalent for an organization). If you do include these documents, be sure that they are *in addition to answering the question*s on the application form and do not simply write, "see attached," in the space provided.

Writing a Description of Your Project

Now that you have take some time to ask yourself questions about your project and have allowed yourself some freedom to dream, you are probably ready to streamline your project idea into a project description. Some grant application forms will ask specific questions about the nature of your project, while other applications will ask you to include a concise "project description." At this point, it is good to make sure that you have the 'who, what, where, when, how and why' of your project clarified. Specifically:

- Who will be involved in the project?
- What form will the project take? What will be involved?
- Where will the project take place?
- When will the project take place?
- How will the project proceed?
- Why are you doing this project and why is it important?

In addition to the questions listed above, art funding opportunities that are specifically designed for Indigenous art practitioners may require that you explain how you will address the necessary cultural protocols in the planning and execution of your proposed project.

Including a Project Timeline

As part of your project description, many funding agencies will ask you to provide a timeline that indicates how your proposed project will proceed. This timeline allows the assessment committee to understand the progression of your project and demonstrates that you have thought through the steps necessary for its successful completion.

When constructing your timeline, you will want to imagine how long it will take you to carry out your project. You will then create a simple chart that breaks down your project plan by either weeks or months, depending on the length of your proposed project. It is best to keep your timeline simple and concise, yet complete. (For a detailed example of a project timeline, please visit *http://www.fphlcc.ca/arts/arts-toolkit/grant-writing-handbook/sample-workplan-template* or contact our office to request a hard copy.)

Developing a Clear Budget

Your budget plays a critical role in your application for funding and will often make or break the success of a proposal for art funding. Most grant application forms will provide you with a budget template where you outline all the costs (project expenses) involved in your project, as well as the source of the funds you will use to pay for your project (project revenues). If a budget template is provided in the application form, we highly recommend that you use the format provided by the funding organization. If there is no budget template provided in the application form, you will need to choose one that is clear and easy to understand. (For a detailed example of a budget, please visit *http://www.fphlcc.ca/arts/arts-toolkit/grant-writing-handbook/sample-budget-template* or contact our office to request a hard copy.)

Elements that are critical to address in your project budget include:

- A breakdown of how much the proposed project cost (Project Expenses)
- Any additional sources of funding that are already confirmed and available for the proposed project (Confirmed Revenues)
- Any additional sources of funding are you pursuing to support the proposed project (Unconfirmed Revenues)
- How much funding you are requesting from this particular grant program (Amount Requested)

When determining your costs and revenues, it is also important to honour the resources that are available for your project that do not require the payment of money. In applications for arts funding, these donated resources are called "in-kind" contributions. Some examples of in-kind contributions include, but are not limited to:

- The use of studio, office, rehearsal and/or workshop space
- Access to administrative resources (office equipment, phone, fax and postage, etc)
- Time volunteered by professionals or other support people
- Donated transportation services

If you have confirmed access to resources that will be donated to your project (i.e. meeting space at a Friendship Centre), be sure to include an appropriate monetary amount (i.e. $200 per month) in the *confirmed revenues* section of your budget template.

Writing About Potential Outcomes and Benefits of the Project

Many grant application forms will include a question about the outcomes of the proposed project and this is your opportunity to let the Proposal Assessment Committee know why your project is important. When writing this section, it is often helpful to think about what benefits will come out of this project on various levels. These can include benefits for the:
- Artist(s) involved (this could be just you)
- Arts organization(s) involved (if applicable)
- Community or communities, both directly or indirectly involved
- Art form(s) as a whole
- Maintenance of cultural/traditional knowledge

Organizing Samples of Your Artwork

Now that you have spent time and energy on the written components of your proposal, it is important to submit high-quality samples of your artwork. Submitting samples of past work is equally important for arts organizations as it is for individual artists.

The nature of the samples included with your application will depend on the nature of the artwork you produce or the nature of the arts programs or artists supported by your organization. For example, a musician will send a high-quality demo CD, while a visual artist will send a CD of high-quality digital images. A dance collective will usually submit a demo DVD, while a Friendship Centre may submit a CD of images from past community arts programs. (For more information regarding creating samples of your artwork, please see our

Arts Portfolio Handbook at http://www.fphlcc.ca/arts/arts-toolkit/arts-portfolio-handbook or contact our office to request a hard copy.)

For visual artists (carvers, painters, photographers, bead workers, etc.), it is highly recommended that you send a CD of your images, rather than hard copies of photographs. Sending a CD of digital photographs provides the option for members of the Proposal Assessment Committee to view your work on a large projection screen and this carries a much greater impact. This also makes it easier for the committee to view and discuss your work as a team.

Be sure to double check that the files on the CD or DVD match the file format requested by the funding organization and that you have labeled everything with your full name (i.e. both the CD <u>and</u> CD case).

The List of Works

To ensure the samples of your artwork are viewed properly, you will also need to provide a "list of works" that explains your work to the Proposal Assessment Committee. Though funding organizations often indicate what they would like you to including on this list, generally a "list of works" will outline information about each piece, including:
- Title
- Medium (e.g. cedar carving, acrylic on canvas, etc.)
- Date
- Dimensions or length of the art work and
- A brief description of your intention behind each piece

The Application Checklist

Many grant application forms include a "checklist" near the end of the application form. Before sealing the envelope, review this checklist to be sure that you have included all of the items required. In fact, a completed checklist is often a required component of your proposal.

FINAL TIPS: WHAT <u>NOT</u> TO DO IN A GRANT PROPOSAL

At this point, you have read about many factors that contribute to a strong arts funding proposal. In addition to knowing what to do when writing your proposal, it can also be helpful to know what <u>not to do</u>. As a result, things to avoid when writing a proposal are:
- <u>Do not</u> leave blank spaces on your application.
- <u>Do not</u> squeeze more information into the application form by using a small font or decreasing the margin spaces. Standard font sizes can be 10, 11 or 12 point and most applications forms are designed with a 1" margin.
- <u>Do not</u> simply write, "*see attached*" all over the application form and then attach your own proposal in your own format (unless the funding agency says this is acceptable). Use the space provided on the application form and, if you need more space, indicate that there is additional information attached.
- <u>Avoid</u> lengthy and/or vague statements, as this can make it difficult for the Proposal Review Committee to understand your proposal. Be concise and remain focused on your proposed project.

- <u>Do not</u> leave out critical details and assume that the Proposal Review Committee will read between the lines. Though it is important to be concise, it is also important to provide a full, detailed explanation of what you will accomplish with the funding.

EDITING YOUR PROPOSAL

When you feel ready to send in your application, go over your *project description* once more and compare it with the *program description* of the funding program you are applying to. Make sure that you have not left out any key details and be sure to double-check your spelling and grammar. It may be helpful to have some else edit your writing, as a person who is not familiar with your project can often noticed gaps in your proposal that you had not identified.

Once you are sure that the proposal meets all the requirements and describes your project idea clearly, you are ready to send it in to the funding organization for assessment.

Congratulations! You got your proposal done!

HOW AN APPLICATION IS ASSESSED

WHEN WILL YOU RECEIVE NEWS?

Now that you have sent your application off to be assessed, you are likely to receive a letter or email within approximately a month confirming that your application has been received. After this initial confirmation letter, it will take a significant amount of time before you hear back from the funding organization regarding a decision about your application. Generally, it takes 12 to 14 weeks (about 3.5 months) after the deadline before a decision is made and you are informed whether or not you received funding. If you change your contact information during this time, be sure to contact the Program Officer as soon as possible.

WHO WILL BE MAKING THE DECISION?

Applications for funding are often assessed by a "Proposal Review Committee," which is usually comprised of three to five respected artists and/or arts administrators who hold specialized knowledge in the artistic disciplines represented in the applications. You may also hear the Proposal Review Committee called a "Peer Assessment Committee," "Peer Review Committee," "Grant Review Committee" or "Jury." Generally, all of these titles refer to the group of people who review applications and collectively decide which projects will be recommended to receive financial support.

Proposal Review Committee members will often begin the assessment process by first individually reviewing all applications prior to meeting with the committee as a whole. During this first stage, individual committee members may be asked to assign points to each grant application based on the proposed project's fulfillment of the program's criteria, as outlined in the program description and guidelines. Following this first stage, the Proposal Review Committee will come together as a group to discuss the applications in greater detail. Often

over several days of intense discussion, the group will reach a collective decision regarding which applications will be recommended for funding.

Once the Proposal Review Committee has met and the grants are awarded, the Program Officer keeps notes regarding each application and the reason for the committee's discussion to fund or not fund a given project. If you would like to know why your project was or was not recommended for funding, you can often contact the Program Officer for this valuable feedback. Integrating this feedback into your proposal writing practice will strengthen your future grant applications.

If you are interested in serving on a Peer Review Committee, check with the grant agency to see how they select members. Most will request that you send your resume, along with a cover letter describing your work in the arts and why you would like to participate.

ONCE THE DECISION IS MADE

YOU GOT THE GRANT: WHAT NOW?

Celebrate Your Success and Start Realizing Your Vision!

It can be incredible exciting to receive a grant to support your artwork. For many artists, the thought of someone believing in our vision and offering the support to bring this vision to reality is very affirming. Now it is time to get down to work on the project itself.

Though your proposal has already served its main purpose of securing funding for your project, it can also be a tool to help keep you on track. Refer to your project timeline often and use your project budget to be sure your resources are being used efficiently. Upon completion of the project, your proposal can also be a helpful reference when you are writing your final report for the funding organization.

What if you need to change part of your project?

Despite one's best efforts, sometimes project timelines can change and project outcomes can take on new and exciting, yet unexpected, directions. If this happens during the execution of your project, be sure to contact the Program Officer and keep them up to date.

Making yourself eligible for future funding

Almost all arts funding programs will require that you submit a final report once you have completed your project. You will usually need to submit this final report before a funding organization will consider you or your organization eligible to receive financial support for any new projects. Funding organizations usually have their own specific final report form that you will need to complete. As part of this final report, you may be required to submit samples of work demonstrating the outcomes of the completed project and/or receipts indicating how the funds were spent.

YOU DIDN'T GET THE GRANT: WHAT NOW?

Rejection is difficult but it is a part of being an artist

Though it is always hard to stomach the disappointment of not having your proposal accepted, rejection is a common occurance for even the most experinced artists. Allow yourself to feel the disappointment, while also being sure to keep faith in your vision and your art practice. There will be times that you get the grant and other times when you don't get the grant. It is very important to keep creating and contributing to the arts in your community.

Seek Constructive Feedback and Try Again

Even if you did not get the grant this time, submitting a proposal and receiving feedback from a group of experienced artists/arts administrators can be worth its weight in gold. Be sure to call or email the Program Officer to find out what feedback the Proposal Review Committee gave as they reviewed your project proposal. Receiving and integrating this feedback into your future proposals could lead to success in your future project proposals. (Please see the *List of Funding Sources for Arts Grants* at the end of this handbook to see where you could submit your next arts funding proposal).

FINAL THOUGHTS

Whether you are an individual artist and/or the representative of an arts organization, group, or collective, it is our hope that this handbook has provided useful information to get you started towards submitting applications for arts funding.

We encourage you to explore other sources of information regarding grant proposal writing for artists and arts organizations, as well as research the funding opportunities available for your specific artistic discipline.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about our services. Our contact information can be found on page four of this handbook.

We wish you all the best in your arts career!

With good Spirit,

First Peoples' Cultural Council, Arts Program

Committed to the revitalization of B.C.'s First Nations languages, arts, cultures and heritage.