

TIPS for grant applicants from the East Central Regional Arts Council

ECRAC Criteria for organizations are:

Merit and Quality – Is it art? Does the project have artistic merit? What is the quality of the artists involved? Is the project well designed? How will the project advance the organization? What will this project mean to the region?

Ability – Are the personnel qualified? What are examples of previous efforts? Are their organizational goals met with the project? Repeat projects have a heightened consideration of artistic merit.

Need/Demand – Is there community support? How many people will benefit? Is it a good use of tax money? Will an underserved constituency be met? How did the group assess need and how will they evaluate the project?

ECRAC Criteria for individual artists are:

Quality of the artist's work. Does the artist have artistic merit? What is the quality of the artist involved? If an emerging artist, does the artist exhibit artistic potential?

Quality of the proposed project. Is the project well designed? Do the proposal narrative and the budget tell the same story? Are there any red flags or questions that arise from the narrative or is it a solid explanation of an arts project that will enhance the artistic career of the applicant?

The résumé. Does the artist's résumé match with the project proposed? Will the project proposed advance this artist's résumé?

General suggestions and background info for grant proposals

The grant review is a peer review. Grant reviewers are instructed to judge the applications based on how they fit the criteria not pit them against each other. Until the final round applications are not compared to one another.

Make the application interesting, because reviewers are looking at many proposals at once (include anecdotes, snippets from past experiences; in short, bring in the human element but don't make it too lengthy so that you exceed the grant guidelines). Brainstorm ahead of time on your project, a project team is often useful at this stage.

Make it substantive, because reviewers are looking at many proposals at once (provide the facts, answer questions with real answers, not fluff). Well, you get the idea... reviewers are going to compare your grant (ultimately) to many others, and you need to stand apart from the rest. Review your application with a friend, read and reread your application, then have your friend read through it to ensure you've answered all the questions.

Grant project narratives should be tailored to each granting agency's needs. Although most ask you to describe your project, as well as something about the experience of your organization in carrying out projects of this nature, there are a host of other questions which may or may not be asked in project narratives. Here they are in a nutshell, you should use them as appropriate:

- **Project Description:** The what, who, when, where, why questions are essential ingredients to this recipe, which must inspire reviewers and introduce them to your spectacular ideas. Project descriptions are vital. My tips are as follows: Allow plenty of time to write the grant. Those written at the last minute give a hurried impression. Write the application based on the key points i.e. the grant review criteria. The proposal does not stand alone it must be part of a process of planning and research, building on past arts experience.
- **Project Goals:** Here's where you use visualization and brainstorming and reflect on why you are doing this project or event. How does this project fit in with the mission of your organization? Why is this project important? What is the need for this project? How will this project enhance your artistic skills and take you to the next level as an artist. Why are you ready for this project? Why have you chosen this particular workshop or this particular artistic mentor?
- **Audience:** Who will be involved in this project? Who will attend the event? Understanding your audience is an important key to success-have you developed a program that meets your audience's needs? How many people do you anticipate will attend? Does the space you have chosen accommodate this number of people? What are these attendance figures based upon?
- **Timeline/Management Plan:** This is vital for every application Here's where you will reveal the sequence of events that will lead up to the final performance, workshop, or exhibit. Grant reviewers like to know that you put some thought into how to present your project. It gives us that warm, fuzzy feeling inside, so humor us. A good way to accomplish this is to describe what tasks will be completed before and during the project.
- **Publicity:** If you are having an event how will you promote your program? Will you write press releases, create advertisements, design flyers? Describe-in detail-what steps you will take in marketing your event or exhibit.
- **Outcome Evaluation:** How will the success of your project be measured? One way to measure success is to compare the attendance at your performance or exhibit with similar events. Other ideas include questionnaires, surveys, etc. , you should be clear on how you will evaluate the success of your project before it happens – don't let evaluation be an after-thought! You will be required to report it. ECRAC does have outcome evaluation resources for you.
- **Experience:** This relates to that part on résumé that talks about what experience you have in this or that job? Well, that's what this is all about too. Grantors want to know if you are up to the job to complete this grant project. By this time, you've dazzled them with your management plan/timeline and the way that you have completely described what you are doing, but just in case...this is your moment to really send in a home run. Remember if attending a workshop or working with a

mentor or an artist you will also need to include their résumé and the information on the workshop.

- **The Slant Question:** Invariably, each funding organization will throw in a few questions which reveal their funding priorities. These "slant questions" reflect the mission or purpose of the funding organization: they are what makes it unique.
- One last thought about project narratives: often narratives are limited to a certain number of pages, with some granting agencies even limiting the margins, font, type size and other details. Make sure to keep your narrative within the grantmakers framework! Some agencies do not even copy the additional pages that applicants submit when sending copies to grant reviewers. This means that portions of your grant that exceed this stated limit may not even be read by the reviewer!

Budget hints

DOES THE NARRATIVE TELL THE SAME STORY AS THE BUDGET?!

Budgets are generally divided into two categories: income and expenses. Income includes ticket revenue, grant amounts from other organizations, in-kind gifts (see below for an explanation of in-kind gifts), your own financial contributions to the project, etc. Expenses include the cost of materials (like paper, pencils, etc.), artist fees, equipment rental, printing, promotional costs, etc. The total of your income less expenses must be equal for your budget to be balanced (i.e. income less expenses equals zero). I cannot say this enough times! must be equal, must be equal, must be equal....

Each granting organization has its own list of "do's" and "don'ts", so make sure to read the guidelines carefully. Because most granting agencies often only fund organizations, if you are an organization it is always a good idea to consult with the budget wizard (every organization has one) before you fill this section out. Budget wizards (otherwise known as Business Managers, Financial Directors, Controllers, etc.) can make sense out of all the little lines and dots, and help you to make a budget that reflects real figures, not something you dreamed up!

If you are an individual and have found a grant funding source be thankful for the chance and make sure your budget makes sense. If you are an artist just ensure that the budget reflects your entire project and that the budget tells the same story as the narrative. If not, it will raise red flags and you will score lower during the grant round.

Here are some general tips to help you with your budget section:

- **Be realistic.** Call the store and get a quote, or get quotes from the internet etc. These supportive details (such as a written quote from a store or rental agency, etc.) are not only smiled upon but are required. Panelists often scrutinize budgets, and look for overbloated expenses as the first area to cut or as a reason not to fund the project. Review boards are extremely appreciative of realistic budgets, and reward those who are realistic in their expenses. If it is a workshop, include the brochure that outlines expenses.
- **Be honest.** The last thing you want is a grant officer discovering that you said you applied for, say, \$1,000 at XYZ Funding Agency, when you really applied for twice that amount. Believe me, this HAS happened, and you must be aware that once

your grant is sent to a funding agency, the information is now public information. This will totally destroy your credibility with any agency if you do not present a truthful budget, and will seriously jeopardize future grant applications to that agency.

- **Show off your ingenuity!** Many granting agencies appreciate a little ingenuity on the part of applicants. For example, if you are able to secure an in-kind donation of goods from a local business, or if you can cut your costs in other ways reviewers will be very appreciative of your efforts. Just make sure to document this in your narrative and in your budget.

Budgets are a way for you to leave the admiring crowd of reviewers with a clear sense that you know what you are doing and how much it is going to take for you to accomplish your goal. If you are awarded funding, remember to work closely with your organization's financial officer to ensure that you fulfill the granting agencies' budget reporting requirements.

What is an In-Kind Donation?

An in-kind donation is a gift of goods or services which are provided at no charge (or a reduced fee) that would normally be considered a program expense. Here are some examples:

- a business photocopying your programs for you
- a costume supply business donating the use of costumes
- a designer who donates his/her services to create a poster
- a volunteer paying the postage to mail a press release

In kind donations are viewed very positively by granting agencies because they show that an applicant is really making a special effort to ensure the success of their project. Remember to always send a letter of thanks (and a free ticket or invitation) to any business or individual that makes a contribution to your project. Also be sure to indicate their support on all printed materials and publicity (wording might include: "This project was supported in part by XYZ Corporation," or, "We would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of XYZ Corporation, who donated paper for the invitations." This small consideration will go a long way to ensure the success of your event, because those that contribute to your effort are also your best promoters! In addition, if funded by ECRAC there is a required statement to use regarding the grant funding. It will be in your notification of grant award and not using the statement jeopardizes future funding.

Additional Materials:

It's always a good idea to provide what's lovingly referred to as "supportive detail" with your grant. Translated, this means anything that can provide the reviewers with more information about your program, event or exhibit. Additional materials are outlined in your grant checklist.

Select materials that can easily communicate your message in a short span of time. When you are compiling your additional materials, you might discover that there are some materials which would be useful to include with your actual proposal (such as slides or

photographs of an exhibit, for example), provided you haven't exceeded the page limit described in the grant guidelines. Never reference the grant reviewers to research anything on a website! It is the grant writers responsibility to have everything needed in the grant application.

Pay close attention to how you present these materials and that your application is complete. You want the grant reviewers to pay attention to the substance of your application not your structure.

A word on artistic samples for individual artists:

Show off your artwork in the best way possible. Following these generic tips may help:

1. As you select a work sample for submission, remember that artistic excellence is the primary criterion for artists. It is important that the samples you submit represent your work at its best. Put your strongest work sample first.

2. In general, work samples should:

a) be from within the last four years,

b) support the intentions stated in your grant proposal, and

c) illustrate a cohesive vision in your work. In general, ECRAC is not looking for a range in abilities.

3. Link your work samples to your work plan. When it comes to the grant review, ECRAC often seeks out a link between work samples and artistic direction. For example: A grant reviewer is impressed with a writer's prose, but notes that the artist could use some work on character development. The panelist will be impressed when, in the plan, the artist notes, "In the next year, I plan to work on character development. I will use this grant to ..."

4. Tie your work samples to your proposal as closely as possible. For example: If your plan is to take time to complete a work-in-progress, you are strongly encouraged to submit a sample of the work-in-progress, as well as an example of completed work.

FINALLY some last general hints...

Know the grant application:

- read your grant application and grant guidelines very carefully a number of times, know the directions and follow them;
- know the deadline and earliest project start dates, we can't change them for you;
- if you aren't sure about something in the application or guidelines call the office it can be very informative;
- proof read and have someone else proof for grammar and spelling;
- help reviewers give your application a high score by putting it in the order specified on the checklist and making sure all required pieces are included. No reviewer likes to hunt through a proposal to find where the applicant responses are;
- also, keep in mind that you can review successful applications just contact us for an appointment.