IV. Application Advice

Researching and applying for funding and related professional opportunities is an integral part of the professional artistic experience. Though it is highly exceptional for a single award to cover the total cost of tuition or a large project (such as a thesis or feature film), any support, no matter the size, can make an important contribution towards offsetting your educational expenses and the development of your creative work. The following advice, gleaned from the experiences of successful SoA student and alumni applicants, will help develop and refine your funding research and application writing skills.

A. Artists' Funding: A Variety of Resources
Professional artists' funding support comes in the form of scholarships (for education), fellowships (for education and/or to develop new work), residencies (low-cost or free space to create work), contests (for finished work), and grants (funding for a specific project). Many artists also rely on individual donations (either their own savings or contributions from others), in-kind donations (free goods or services), loans (especially for students), and other revenue streams (ticket sales, etc.) Be as creative in your approach to funding, as you are with your work.

B. Are you the right fit for the funder?
Determine what makes you a distinctive applicant by expanding your search for funding beyond your creative field or concentration. Funding for graduate students and artists is typically categorized according to the criteria listed below. What about you or your work qualifies you as a potential award recipient?

- Citizenship (U.S. Citizen or Permanent Resident, Foreign Nationals)
- Creative Field or Medium (Film, Theatre, Visual Arts, Writing)
- Creative and/or Academic Merit
- Disabilities or Illness
- Ethnicity
- Financial Situation
- Gender
- Geographic Region
- Military Service
- Professional Organization (union membership or corporate employer)
- Religious Affiliation
- Sexual Orientation
- Social Organization (Greek society, Rotary, etc)
- Topic (human rights, etc.)

Look for awards according to this expanded range of options.

C1. How to Research: Cast a Wide Net
When researching, cast a wide net and think creatively. Lesser-known awards that have small applicant pools tend to be under-subscribed, which increases odds in your favor. If
you receive a small award, your subsequent application to a national award will be significantly more competitive.

PLEASE NOTE: WE ARE SORRY TO INFORM YOU THAT COLUMBIA'S SCHOOL OF THE ARTS DOES NOT CURRENTLY SUPPORT THE JACOB K. JAVITS FELLOWSHIP FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE YOU MAY NOT APPLY A JAVITS AWARD TOWARDS AN SOA EDUCATION.

C2. How to Research: Read the Fine Print Before Applying
Once you have found some awards for which you may be eligible, pay close attention to the following details that may affect your application or your ability to accept an award before you begin your application:

- **Age restrictions**
- **Application criteria:** If award guidelines explicitly state the funds are not for student work, they will not fund your student work, no matter how well you try to disguise it. The same applies for other criteria. Don't waste your time.
- **Application deadlines**
- **Application fees**
- **Application notification:** Pay close attention to when you would actually receive the monies for which you are applying.
- **Award amounts:** These may be variable, particularly with rewards that are renewable.
- **Award requirements:** Some funders require community service.
- **Citizenship or residence requirements:** Not all funders define residency the same way.
- **Rights/residuals:** A sponsor organization may make claims to your work.
- **Special application instructions:** Follow the application instructions to the letter. If you have any questions, check the funder's website for applicant FAQs or contact the funder directly.
- **Standardized tests:** Some scholarship funders want standardized test scores, even for students looking for funding to support an M.F.A.

Understanding the fine print before beginning an application will save you time and increase your odds of filing a successful application.

C3. How to Research: Get to Know the Funder
Once you have found an award to apply to, research the funder's mission statement, board of directors, and former grant recipients to get to know the funder better. Contact the funder if you have questions. Some funders will not accept inquiries about their application process, but others are willing to answer questions.

D. The Application Process
Most applications for artists' funding require some or all of the following: a personal statement, project proposal, project budget, C.V., and work sample. You may also be
asked to submit **letters of recommendation, financial information (tax returns or a FAFSA), or academic transcripts**. Here are some guidelines for building strong personal statements and project proposals.

**D1. Personal Statement**
Funding opportunities exist to fulfill a specific need. Study the funder's mission statement and guidelines closely. Use these as a guide for writing your personal statement. Tell your story, highlighting your specific talents, skills, and financial need to demonstrate why you are the right person for a particular funder's guidelines. The final draft of your statement should dovetail the funder's mission and award guidelines with your previous experiences, current goals, and financial need.

**D2. Project Proposal**
The same theory and principal behind writing a strong personal statement applies for writing a winning project proposal. Make explicit how your project will fulfill the funder's mission statement. Clearly outline why your project is ideal and how you will execute it. Explain how your project will benefit from the foundation's support. Funders are as interested in a reasonable plan of action as they are in the ideas behind your project.

*For a more in-depth tutorial on proposal writing basics, go to the Foundation Center's on-line learning lab: http://fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1.html*

**D3a. Finances or Budget: Scholarships**
Most scholarships require financial documentation such as a tuition bill or other personal financial information. This is typically limited to receipt of your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the FAFSA Student Aid Report (SAR), which is generated once your application is complete. You can file your FAFSA here: http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/ Always keep extra copies of your Student Aid Report (SAR) and income taxes on hand for scholarship application purposes.

**D3b. Finances or Budget: Grants**
Most grants require a budget statement. If your award application requires a budget, the revenues and expenditures of your budget math must add up. Be sure to include in-kind donations or student resources as revenues: such budget lines illustrate that you have support from multiple sources. It is important to demonstrate that you know how to use money wisely and efficiently. Funders will know if your proposed expenses are reasonable or not.

*For more proposal budgeting basics, go to the Foundation Center's on-line learning lab: http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/budget.html*

**D4. Support Materials**
Make certain your support materials fit the application guidelines to the letter. (If not, they most likely will be thrown out!) We have done the research. When we contacted the Princess Grace Foundation to find out why SoA applicants lost out in application rounds,
we were told they made it to the penultimate cut, but were not selected due to the sloppy presentation of their support materials.

D5. Final Steps
Have someone proofread your application. Make copies of everything you submit, including support materials, and send your application with delivery confirmation well in advance of the deadline, if possible. Best of Luck!

E. What To Do When You Receive an Award
Celebrate! Thank the funder with a letter, not an email. If the award has any compliance requirements or reporting that you must complete, follow through with them in as professional and timely a manner as possible.

F. What To Do If You Do Not Receive an Award
Contact the funder for panel comments, if available. This type of follow-up demonstrates a commitment and can be an important step towards building a relationship with a potential funder. Many applicants who do not see success in round one, may receive an award when they apply again.

G. Awards and Your Overall Financial Portrait
When awards are paid to an individual, they are taxable as income, but most scholarship monies are paid directly to the applicant's school. Due to government regulations concerning financial aid packages, if a scholarship is paid to you directly, it must also be reported to Student Financial Services. Check with Student Financial Planning for more details at http://www.columbia.edu/cu/sfs/index.html.

H. Fiscal Sponsorship
Although some foundations and other funding agencies give money to individuals, many funders only support projects administered by non-profit corporations that are tax exempt under the Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3). If you have a project that fits a foundation's guidelines, but do not have your own non-profit certification, you may still apply for these grants by arranging a certified 501(c)(3) to serve as a "fiscal sponsor" on your behalf. This organization will receive and disburse funds to you for your project. Got to Fiscal Sponsorship in our Links and Resources section for a partial list of sponsors.

For more information on how fiscal sponsorship works, go to the Foundation Center's Guide to Fiscal Sponsorship and Affiliation:
http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/fiscal/index.html

I. Frequently Asked Questions: The Application Process

I1. I have never applied for anything before. What can I do to get started?

Think of this as the first steps you are taking towards a lifetime of securing funding. According to this big picture, no time is wasted. Break down your research and
application preparation into small blocks of time, such as one hour per week. Keep track of what you research by printing search results and taking notes. Add deadlines to your computer calendar so they repeat each year. Program the calendar to send you a message thirty days before an application is due.

12. Last year I was not a student and made decent money with my full-time job. I am worried no funder will take me seriously once they see my tax return. Should I bother looking for any awards?

Yes. Many scholarships are merit-based. Others will scrutinize your financial details and may not grant you an award, but it's always worth contacting the funder to find out if you should throw your hat in the ring.

13. This application requires that the applicant submit his/her parent's tax returns, if they are under age 28. I'm under 28, but I am financially independent and want to apply for this award. What should I do?

Typically you see this kind of requirement with awards that fund undergraduate students as well as graduate students. Most likely you will be able to send in your own tax return, but contact the funder directly to verify this.

14. You keep saying I should contact a funder directly, but what if they say do not contact them or they only list a mailing address?

Not all funders are willing to divulge application information, but many are. Some also host workshops on how to apply for their awards. Check their website for any FAQ sections or events. If a funder explicitly states that they do not want applicant inquiries, ask the ARC staff to contact the funder on your behalf.

15. I am a student and found the perfect award for my project. The application says students cannot apply, but don't you think I should apply anyway?

Yes and no. Again, contact the funder. If you will graduate before the award term would begin, you may be eligible to apply. If you are still ineligible, wait until you graduate. Trying to sneak an application past a funder when you do not legally meet the requirements would constitute an act of fraud. Do not assume that funders cannot tell the difference or will not follow up to find out the truth. It is best not to risk blowing a potentially lucrative relationship.

16. There is an award from my home state that I want to apply to, but I don't live there any more. Should I still apply and use my parent's address?

It depends on the application. Most funding with geographic restrictions will require that you submit some form of residency proof. Requirements can vary tremendously from submitting copies of your driver's license to state tax returns to a copy of your high school diploma. When in doubt, ask the funder.
17. This application requires a transcript and G.P.A., but all of our classes are pass/fail. What should I do?

Submit copies of your transcript, plus your undergraduate transcript, if required. As for the G.P.A., ask your references to address the quality of your work and the School of the Arts' grading policy.

18. Shouldn't I over-inflate my budget numbers to make sure I get an award?

No, but you should arrange your budget wisely. Think of as many expenses as possible, itemize them, and price them out realistically. Give a full portrait and do not forget to add a personnel line for your individual compensation. If you are not certain how much that amount should be, tally up your monthly living expenses. A realistic budget is more likely to receive funding and it's always better to receive a little bit of money than none at all because the budget seemed inappropriate.

19. I have always heard that funding is about who you know. I don't know any of these board members or staff people. What should I do?

Who you know can make a difference, certainly with particular types of awards, but most people who have no connections to a potential funding organization do receive awards. Several awards require that panelists recuse themselves if they know an applicant or are familiar with his or her work. You can also take the time to get to know a potential funder by attending their workshops or events and see for yourself if it makes a difference.

110. Is there any way I can increase my chances of getting an award of any sort?

Taking the time to write a strong proposal and submitting your finest work are the best ways to increase your chances of receiving an award. A little networking can help, too. Professional networking organizations either offer their own awards or assist their members with finding funding. Plus, getting involved in a professional networking organization will help you meet other people in your field that will help you with other aspects of your professional development. For a partial list of these organizations by Division, see the Jobs and Career Development section of this site under Links and Resources.