



# AN ARTIST'S GUIDE

## TO LANDING GRANTS & GAINING FUNDING

**A R T W  R K**  
A R C H I V E

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# BEFORE YOU APPLY

## **Know your story and develop a strong point of view**

Jurors aren't just interested in your work, they're interested in what you're trying to convey. A museum might pick a theme for a block of exhibitions and will be more likely to consider your works if it fits within it.

Think about your point of view as an artist and how your work aligns with that point of view.

Does your work have a political or personal tone? How does the aesthetic or your techniques stand out? Piece together a comprehensive story that covers your position and fine tune it through practice. Tell the story a million times (at least) to friends and family.

Put together a submission kit and make sure to include your story. A submission kit can include an artist biography, a letter of intent, an artist statement, and a list of your exhibitions. These should be living documents. Revisit them at least twice a year to make sure they are still accurately portraying you and your work.

## **Showcase your work professionally**

Invest in high-quality images of your work. Your website is the obvious first choice for use but also think about having these images ready for press, social media, and submissions.

A traditional option is to put together a printed catalog of your work based on theme or content. Make sure to include dimensions, materials, and date for every piece. A curator will keep printed catalogs on hand for reference when putting together an exhibit.

An easy way to catalog your artwork with all the essential information is by using a system like Artwork Archive, an online inventory management system that organizes your artwork and

gives you the ability to export your collections for curators.

Take and seek out press opportunities

## **Nothing draws attention like press coverage.**

Having an exhibition covered or an artist profile published is an excellent way to market you and your work to a wide audience. Once you get it, brag about it by adding a section on your website, share links on social media, consider including selected press with your catalog or artist CV.

## **Show off your following**

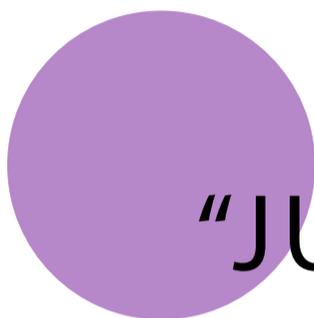
Museums and galleries are a business too and they have their own goals to meet.

Prove to curators and galleries that your work will help them meet their objectives by showing that you have a fan base who is interested in your work. Build a following on social media or think about post a hashtag with an exhibition so that you can track postings. Reach out to previous exhibitors for attendance statistics during your exhibition.

## **Build and foster personal connection**

Who you know will make all the difference. Connect on social media and in real life at events and conferences with curators and collectors. Studio visits are a great way to introduce them to you and your work and build a personal relationship.

Find the curators you're interested in attracting and find an event to bump into them at. Check your personal network six degrees of separation style and get an introduction to curators who interest you. Put your energy where it counts, don't chase establishments that exhibit sculpture if your medium is paper.



**“JURORS AREN’T  
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# PHOTOGRAPHING YOUR WORK

KNOWING HOW TO PROPERLY  
PHOTOGRAPH YOUR WORK  
CAN MEAN THE DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN BEING  
LANDING A GRANT AND  
BEING PASSED OVER.

As artists, we spend a ton of time perfecting our craft.

And then, after hours of working on a painting, exhausted and up against a deadline, we often neglect the most important part of the process: photographing the work. Too many of us are a little lost when it comes to the specifics and settle for a few sloppy shots before shipping the artwork out.

Since artists are required to submit work digitally for exhibitions, grants, talks and your public profile page, good photography offers the first impression of your art and your professionalism.

We frequently see artists with incredible artwork, but have images that are shot in dimly lit, sloppy environments that distort the original artwork.

Knowing how to properly photograph your work can mean the difference between being accepted to a show, or winning the favors of an important client or gallery director.

We put together a few guidelines to photographing your artwork so you can begin to photograph your artwork like a pro.

## **Hang your artwork on the wall**

We regularly see artwork photographed leaned up against a wall and shot from a downward angle. Find a neutral colored wall (white, black, gray) and hang your work at a height where the middle of your piece will be parallel to where your camera will be—either on a tripod or resting sturdily on a table or other surface.

## **Light your work properly**

If you are shooting your work indoors, do so in a room with plenty of windows and natural light. Some artists also enjoy photographing their work outdoors when it is cloudy or overcast, as indirect sunlight provides the best lighting. Natural light can be a beautiful way to photograph your work as long as it is indirect.

If the weather isn't cooperating, or if you are up against a late-night deadline, you will need to set up a lighting kit. The good news is, you don't have to spend a ton for a professional setting if you aren't ready to invest in one.

All you will need is two lights at a minimum for 2-dimensional work. We have used lighting stands that you often see in dorm rooms (the ones with three adjustable bulbs) or clamp lights. Place the lights halfway between the camera and the canvas at a 45-degree angle pointing toward the wall (this will help eliminate shadows and "hot spots" on the painting). If you have umbrellas for your lights, attach them now.

**LIGHT HACK:** If you don't have professional grade lighting kit, you can easily hack diffusing the light with a white sheet or white plastic between the lights and your work. This helps to evenly distribute the light. Alternatively, a few sheets of white foam core can be set up to simulate a "raking light" effect where the lights are pointed at the foam core and the whiteboard reflects the light back at the piece.

## **Adjust your camera and settings**

Once your artwork is secured to the wall, double check that the camera is set so the lens lines up with the middle of the painting. You want to position your camera so that the frame is filled with most of the painting, with a bit of background that you can crop out later. It is important for many juries to see the edges of the paintings to get a sense of scale.

The ISO and aperture of your camera are very important to get clear, crisp and bright images of your artwork. ISO references what film speed used to measure. The higher the number, the more sensitive the film was to light and the coarser the image. In this case, since we want very crisp images, we want a low ISO. Studio shots will generally be shot at ISO 100.

The f-stop of the aperture of your camera adjusts how much light is let through the lens by making the opening bigger or smaller. The higher the number, the less light is being passed through. With a DSLR the ideal range for shooting artworks is between f-8 and f-11.

**TIP:** Set your camera's timer to four or five seconds so that pressing the shutter button doesn't create a shake in your image.

### **Edit your photos to perfection**

There are plenty of free or inexpensive photo editing software alternatives out there that will help minimize any inconsistencies. While Photoshop still reigns king, Photoshop Elements or Gimp allow basic functions such as color correction, cropping, and other minor adjustments. Lightroom also offers a subscription-based editing program that professional photographers swear by.

### **Photographing 3D art presents additional challenges**

How do you showcase the dimensionality and texture of your artwork from just one angle?

We elaborated on techniques that can help lend 3D art gravitas and presence, even in a two-dimensional image. For many of these techniques, we recommend using a tripod and some form of standalone lighting. Also, try experimenting with different backgrounds or even consider building your own DIY lightbox.

### **Be aware of shadows & tone**

To achieve good shadows in 3D art photography, start by placing the lights about halfway between the subject and the camera. Then, carefully adjust the angle of the lights starting at around 45 degrees relative to the piece. Next, methodically re-position the distance of the lights from the piece to achieve dynamic—but not overpowering—shadows.

Use a neutral background. The white balance should be well adjusted and has a tone consistency between gray and white. Depending on your camera, this setting can be adjusted ahead of time or in post-production. Experiment with your white balance settings to achieve neutral grays and soft whites. The goal is to prevent the image from skewing too far towards brown, yellow, or blue hues.

### **Photographing Installation work**

Shooting installations can be challenging because of the difficulty in showcasing the entirety of the work without omitting important details.

In order to really do an installation justice, you may need to use a wide-angle lens. This might also mean zooming in slightly to correct for blur at the images periphery. Since you can't necessarily haul your own lighting to an installation, you may need to use a small aperture to get the best shot. To avoid any shakiness or blurring in these shots, use the camera's countdown feature and a tripod.

**SINCE ARTISTS ARE  
REQUIRED TO SUBMIT WORK  
DIGITALLY FOR EXHIBITIONS,  
GRANTS, TALKS AND YOUR  
PUBLIC PROFILE PAGE, GOOD  
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THE FIRST IMPRESSION  
OF YOUR ART AND YOUR  
PROFESSIONALISM.**

# WRITING YOUR STATEMENT

## WHAT IT SHOULD ANSWER AND WHAT TO AVOID

You might think, I speak through my art, so why do I have to write about it? And you're not the only one. So, consider your artist statement a welcoming guide to your work.

Once you've defined your art in words, you can speak clearly and confidently about it. And use the language in the rest of your marketing materials.

Use these 5 tips to write a compelling artist statement that will help win you more opportunities:

### **Tell a Story Instead of a Mission**

Your artist statement is your chance to tell your own unique story and share your world. It's what sets you apart from other artists. Tell your viewer why you create your art and what inspires you. Share what your art means to you and what is special about your creative process. The story of your art is much more welcoming than a mission statement. It allows the viewer to get to know you. And we suggest keeping it simple so your story doesn't get lost in the details. You can go more in depth if viewers ask.

### **Make it Unique to You**

Artist Gwenn Seemel recommends doing the "copy and paste test." Essentially, if you can copy and paste your artist statement into someone else's with no one the wiser, then it's not personal enough. You want to write something that can't be said by any artist. Write in the first person and tell people why you are original. Gwenn also says that your statement doesn't need to be written. With the rise of technology, you can now share your words via video. Watch Gwenn Seemel's informative video "Writing an Artist Statement."

### **Use Engaging and Specific Language**

Your art is fantastic. Write about your art in the way it deserves. Shy away from lines like "I like to use color." Expand and elaborate on how you respond to color. Step out of your comfort zone and truly speak from your heart. Say why your art gives you thrills. And consider using action verbs to take your statement up a notch. Instead of "My art aspires to," tell your viewers directly what your art does. And use language that anyone interested in your art will be able to understand. Keep it conversational and welcoming. Your statement speaks for your art when you are not there to.

Your artist statement speaks for your art when you are not there to speak for it.

### **Keep It Short and Sweet**

Sara Jones and Andrea Wenglowskyj of Kind Aesthetic suggest an artist statement should be between one and three paragraphs. You want just enough to guide the viewer and provide a framework for your art. If you explain too much or instruct, viewers can't make their own observations. And it's important for viewers to make their own intimate connection with your work. It will help a viewer become a buyer.

### **Ask For Second Opinions**

Before sharing your artist statement with the public, have friends give you feedback. Ask them if it makes sense. Also, ask them what they feel and see when they view your art. They might have a different perspective that makes you see your art in a new light. And what delights and engages one person, will probably interest others as well. You can use these discoveries to add to your artist statement.

# 5 QUESTIONS YOUR ARTIST STATEMENT SHOULD ANSWER

## Why did you make this work?

Why are you drawn to this topic? How did you choose a theme? With a theme in mind, do you know what drives your work? Do you have a goal or are you just having an emotional response to what you're doing?

## What does your work represent?

Does your art represent something you want to look to? represent a message about the world? Do you look on a piece of history or look to the future?

Our tip: giving too much detail up front can prevent your audience from being interested and grasp your artwork better. Artist statements are meant to be a starting point for conversation, not a final word. Always leave them wanting more. Too much detail up front and your readers' eyes will start to wander.

## What inspired this work?

What connection do you have to your art? What motivates you? Enthusiastically express why you create what you do and your audience will feel more enthusiastic about it, too.

## How did you make the work?

Why do you use certain materials? What techniques do you use? Is there a connection between your process and your art? For instance, reporting on a piece can help but it's also a reflection of your process and scope of your work.

## What does the work mean to you?

How do you put your own meaning on the work? This question should be answered honestly, knowing that this question has no intention of directing your viewers on how to feel or think. It's crucial to focus solely on your own understanding here because everyone views art differently.

The goal of your artist statement should be to widen the reach of your audience. And, laying down the law on exactly how to process your artwork simply defeats the point and might turn away buyers.

# WHAT TO AVOID IN YOUR STATEMENT

You are the one person in the world that knows your work intimately. You—and you alone—have spent the most time thinking about the themes and symbols in your artwork.

Your artist statement should be a written description of your artwork that gives deeper insight into your work through your personal history, material choices and themes you address. It helps both viewers understand what is most important to you and galleries explain your work to potential buyers.

Make the most out of your statement by avoiding these common downfalls.

## **Avoid having just one version of your artist statement**

Your artist statement is a living document. It should reflect your most current body of work. As your work changes and develops, so will your artist statement. Since you will be using your statement as a basis for grant proposals, cover letters, and introductions, it's important to have multiple versions of this document.

You should have three basic statements: a one-page statement, a one or two paragraph version, and a brief two sentence version.

The one-page statement should be used to talk about your larger body of work that will be used for exhibitions, in your portfolio or in an application. A longer statement should address the themes and concepts not immediately apparent in your work itself. This can then be used as a reference for journalists, curators, critics and gallerists to promote and talk about your work.

You can use two-paragraph statements (about a half page) to talk about a specific series of your work or more succinctly covers the most important information about your work.

The short, one to two-sentence description will be the “elevator pitch” about your artwork. It will address the main idea behind your work, be easily inserted into your social media bios and cover letters, and capture that attention of anyone who hears it. This is the phrase that you will rely on to quickly explain your work to fresh eyes so that they can better understand it.

## **Avoid using art jargon and overly intellectualizing your statement**

This isn't a time to prove your background and knowledge of art theory and history. We trust that you have the accolades and education to be where you are—you made that evident in your artist bio.

Too much art jargon can isolate the viewer and push them away before they have even had a chance to see your work. Use your statement to make the mission of your artwork more clear, not more obscure.

Assume that everyone who reads your artist statement isn't an artist. Use simple, clear, and short sentences to deliver your point. It is most impressive when you can carry across a complex idea in simple terms. Don't obfuscate your point with overly complex writing.

Re-read your writing when you are done and highlight any potentially confusing sections. Then, try to explain what you really mean out loud. Write that down.

If your statement is hard to read, no one will read it.

YOU SHOULD HAVE THREE BASIC STATEMENTS: A ONE-PAGE STATEMENT, A ONE OR TWO PARAGRAPH VERSION, AND A BRIEF TWO SENTENCE VERSION.

**Avoid generalities**

You might want to try and include the biggest ideas about your work, but avoid talking about your work in general terms. Think about two or three specific pieces and describe them, their symbolism, and the ideas behind them in detail.

Ask yourself: What was I trying to convey with this work? What would I want someone who has never seen this work before know about it? Would someone who hasn't seen this work understand, at least on some level, what I was trying to do and what it looks like? What is the story? How did I make this work? What do I want viewers to see?

Answering those questions should help you develop a statement that makes the reader want to go see your exhibit or look at your work. Your title statement should be a question that viewers might have when they see your work.

**Avoid weak openings**

You want to come across as strong and confident in your work. This is many people's first introduction to your work. Make sure you start strong with a compelling introduction sentence.

Avoid phrases like "I hope you like it" or "I hope you can see it." Remember, you are already doing that through your work. Replace these phrases with strong action words like "reveals," "examines," or "questions."

We are not secret about our work, and that's why we have a website. There is no place to reveal these ideas. We need to know about the artwork. It's not an artist's job to tell us.

Talk less about what you are attempting to do with your work and more about what you have done. If you are having trouble coming up with a specific example, think of a specific piece of work and weave it into your narrative. How did it make people feel? How did it affect them? How have people responded? Have you had one or two big shows or memorable events? Write about those.

**The last word**

Your artist statement should communicate the deeper meanings of your work with clarity and precision. It should draw the viewer in and make them want to learn more.

With a well-crafted statement, you can give insights into your work, including your personal history, material choices and processes. Taking the time to make your statement clear and concise not only helps viewers understand what is important to you, it helps you understand more about your work.

TALK LESS ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE ATTEMPTING TO DO WITH YOUR ARTWORK AND MORE ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE DONE.

# ADVICE FROM GRANT-GIVING INSTITUTIONS

“HOW CAN I ACTUALLY GET AN ARTIST GRANT?”

## TIPS FROM NYFA, ARTISTGRANT.ORG, AND ARTADIA ON HOW TO STAND OUT IN YOUR APPLICATION.

In a career path that can sometimes be financially unpredictable, grants can supplement your income as an artist—helping to pay for materials, studio space, or even rent. With a little legwork searching for the right grant opportunity and due diligence on your application, you can secure a grant and focus on your work without the day-to-day pressure of paying bills.

But, what happens when you apply time after time and you don't get the results (and funding) you desire? It's easy to feel frustrated and confused, especially when you feel like you were a good fit for the opportunity.

Which brings us back to this frequently asked question among artists, “Is there any way to get an inside scoop? How can I get a leg up on my application?”

While there is no quick fix for securing an artist grant, there are a few ways to make sure you are putting your best foot forward!

In this two-part series, we are taking a deep-dive into the process of applying for artist grants. First, we got answers from artists who've been there and succeeded, and now from the grant-giving institutions themselves!

If you want to increase your odds of getting that coveted artist grant, take a look at what three grant-giving organizations revealed about the process:

### **The first thing to remember? Every grant opportunity is different.**

That means every application is different, and so is every jurying process.

Some focus solely on the images artists provide of their work, others take materials like artist statements and CV's into account, and some award artists based on merit or financial need alone.

“We select almost entirely on artwork images,” explains the Director of ArtistGrant.org, Dennis James. “It doesn't matter to us if an artist has a great deal of training or is self-taught. People become artists in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons—all valid.”

The New York Foundation for the Arts Grants Program, however, operates somewhat similarly. “Only the applicant's work samples and corresponding descriptions are reviewed in the first round, so the work samples need to be strong in order to carry an application into the next round,” clarifies Hannah Berry, Program Associate, and Gabriella Calandro, Senior Program Officer at NYFA Grants.

“The panel has access to read the applicant's support statements, including the work statement (i.e. artist statement), in subsequent rounds. The support statements help to shed more light on the work samples submitted, and allow the panel to get a better understanding of an artist's practice.”

And even then, sometimes a juror makes a call on which materials to consider.

In the case of the Artadia awards, Executive Director Carolyn Ramo explains, “Images matter a tremendous

amount. CV matters very little—as we give merit-based awards, there is almost no consideration of exhibition history. A statement is considered mostly during the last conversation, if at all, which is why we ask that it be brief. Each juror is different though and some do read the statements carefully.”

Just like a college application, job interview, and so on, the best thing you can do is find out as much as you can about the process and tailor your application to fit that specific opportunity. Art marketing doesn’t stop at selling your work, you have to sell yourself, too.

“Do the research! Make sure the funding you’re applying for is the right fit, and look for grants and awards that support practices or projects similar to your own,” asserts the NYFA staff.

So, how do you know what each institution is looking for?

### **Grant organizations aren’t as mysterious as you might think.**

Why? Because jurors don’t want to spend time looking through applications that don’t fit the requirements for the award!

And, all of the institutions we spoke with agreed on this front.

“I do believe that most grantmakers are fairly transparent,” expresses Artadia’s Ramo. “Artists are welcome to ask us questions, though we found 100% of questions are answered in our extensive description of the application.”

James echoes this sentiment: “A quality institution notes if they receive many questions on a particular topic and will provide the answer through website and application criteria updates.”

NYFA provides information on their selection principles and panel processes on their website’s FAQ page and Fellowships main page, as well as through email correspondence. They even have created online content on NYFA’s blog that highlights application tips to help artists in preparing their submissions.

“We believe in the importance of being accessible to our applicants and providing the information they need to create strong applications,” stress Berry and Calandro.

While it’s easy for artists to use elusiveness as an excuse to ease the pain of rejection, artists have take responsibility and put the work into what you are applying for. Because in the end, it will only increase your odds of securing the award.

And while you should feel comfortable reaching out with questions like these three organizations suggest, make sure the answers you are looking for aren’t already right in front of you—whether on a FAQ page or in the clues of past winners.

“To provide more information about our selection process, Artist Grant is asking shortlisted artists permission to post images of their work and website links on our social media pages,” says James. We already post images and links of the winning artists. We hope the short list provides insight into the wide range of creative efforts we consider.”

### **Only submit what is required—and nothing more!**

With only one shot to do so, artists are eager to impress in their applications. And while sending extra materials might lead you to believe you are getting an edge up on the competition, grant givers actually disagree.

“Artists should carefully read the application instructions and submit all requested materials in the required format. Not following guidelines (such as how to name your digital files) gives an institution a legitimate reason for disqualifying a submission,” admits James.

“Do not send unasked for materials. The committee is trying to be equitable in viewing all the same type of materials from each candidate and will not consider the extra materials.”

Instead, spend your time and efforts double checking and perfecting what is asked for!

“You might be surprised how many artists send us links to parked web pages (i.e. URLs not attached to active websites), or work from disciplines we don’t review. We only view submissions with all requested materials,” he stresses.

Here’s a great tip from NYFA:

“Do reach out to your friends, fellow artists, and arts professionals to review your application and discuss your work. Having a second set of eyes always helps, and can often clue you into what may be missing in your application.”

### **Images are your foot in the door.**

Another point made extremely clear by these grant givers? No matter the opportunity and the materials they consider, you **MUST** have outstanding images of your artwork.

It can’t be avoided—the art is what this whole grant thing is about, right?

“We recognize that artists are likely best able to communicate their work visually, so we do consider images as the most important part of the application,” says Ramo. And though viewing times vary, you may not have all that much time to impress the jurors.

“On average,” the Artadia director explains, “each application is reviewed for about 30-45 seconds depending on the total applications submitted.”

In the case of NYFA, image work samples are reviewed one-by-one, in quick succession. However, the moderator will stop on the 1st and 6th images to read aloud image descriptions (i.e. title, date, medium, etc.), averaging 15-20 seconds of viewing time for the 1st and 6th images.

That being said, you don’t always know which images will be reviewed and for how long. And, the only way to combat that is by absolutely making sure all of the images you submit are up to par. As with any portfolio, you are only as good as the worst image. Only submit what you consider your best works—work that will help you send the message that

you are outstanding in your field.

ArtistGrant.org’s suggestion? Check off these four criteria: in focus, not keystoneed, no distracting background details, and well lit.

“An artist need not have access to expensive equipment. A cell phone camera and natural sunlight can work well,” recommends James. “And consider installation and/or detail shots if a singular frontal view doesn’t capture the viewing experience.”

### **Now, let’s talk about the jurying process**

These are the questions we hear most frequently from artists curious about the selection process:

Are there any pre-stated criteria or a rubric which the jury works from? Or does the institution rely exclusively on the juror’s personality and taste?

If there are pre-stated criteria, how well are the jurors coached by the institution in regards to their criteria and core values before they start judging the applicants?

And the answer is... jurors know what they are doing!

Not only are they selected based on their experience both as jurors and artists in their field, but the best organizations will strive for diversity and fairness in their panel of judges.

Ramo touches on all of these points in the Artadia award process:

“We have three jurors and a rotating group of jurors in order to account for each person’s preferences and taste. And there has to be some sort of consensus for an artist to move forward,” she says. “We speak with each juror before they start the process and explain what merit means to us. Most jurors are well-versed in a jurying process, however, we do circulate our criteria.”

The staff at NYFA agrees: “We maintain that the NYSCA/NYFA Artist Fellowship be peer-reviewed, and that panelists be practicing artists experienced in the disciplines they are reviewing.”

“NYFA makes every effort to assemble diverse panels, considering genre, gender identity, ethnicity, cultural background, geographic location, etc,” assert Berry and Calandro. “Panelists are given extensive information discussing our code of ethics, our firm stance on conflicts of interest and biases, our dedication to supporting artists of all backgrounds, and our continued interest in working towards inclusivity and accessibility for all applicants. “

And as far as rubrics go, James wants artists to rest assured that they aren’t as big of a deal as they may seem.

“People love and hate rubrics. Rubrics are helpful because they clarify criteria. However, they may stifle creativity, or an artist may self-select themselves out of applying if they don’t believe their work meets a criterion (when it actually does). While a rubric may help a selection committee be more objective in whittling down the application pool, the committee must still decide among the remaining artists.”

#### **Another tip? Submit your application ASAP.**

“To all artists everywhere... please do not wait until the last hour to submit the application!” urges Ramo.

“Most grantmakers, including us, will not extend the deadline for those that miss it. Our application is simple and if you can, submit it within the first week of the announcement.”

And, Artadia is not the only organization who feel this way! This was one of the biggest “don’ts” that organizations warned of.

“Don’t wait until the day of the application deadline to submit your application!” says NYFA’s Berry and Calandro, for this reason, you might not have considered. “Fellowships staff is available 5 days a week to answer any questions you may have in regards to the application process. If you run into problems at the last minute, we may not be able to help.

“But,” they add, “even if you apply the day before, we will assist in every way we can.”

With deadlines being notoriously hard to keep track of alongside the million things going on in your art business, the best thing to do is find a system to stay organized. And, an art inventory management system like Artwork Archive is an extremely easy tool to use, made specifically for artists.

Not only can you keep track of application dates, but you can manage your entire portfolio, high-resolution images, important piece details, documents you’ll need to apply, and more. You can even schedule reminders to be sent straight to your inbox when it’s time to apply.

No more letting application deadlines pass you by! You’re an organized artist on a mission.

#### **Don’t ever give up on applying.**

It’s what successful grant recipients stressed as well!

You can’t take the rejection personally explains James: “What guides the final decision may differ in every competition, depending on the shortlisted artists and committee composition.”

Call it luck. Call it a numbers game. But, just because you aren’t selected for one opportunity doesn’t mean you aren’t deserving. Decisions will always depend on the current cycle of competition and jurors, and you never know when all the pieces of the puzzle will come together.

“Do continue to apply!” expresses the NYFA staff. “The best way to up your chances of receiving a grant, fellowship, or funding is to hone your practice of applying.”

And, you know what they say: practice makes perfect! Keep researching opportunities, learn what other artists did to land their grants, perfect your images and statements, and always, always apply again.

“Apply for as many competitions as possible—you’re more likely to be selected and any rejections sting less,” agrees James.

# ADVICE FROM ARTISTS WHO HAVE GAINED FUNDING

Have you been chasing the elusive artist grant without getting the results (and funding) that you desire?

Applying for grants and funding opportunities year after year with nothing to show can leave you feeling stuck, disheartened, confused and, at worst, questioning your path as an artist.

There is no quick fix for securing an artist grant. While most grants are highly competitive and specific, there are some tricks that you can be doing to make sure you are putting your best foot forward.

We asked four artists who've applied and gained funding for their artwork to give us their best tips on securing grants, so you can increase your odds of getting that coveted artist grant.

Here's what they had to say about landing their first (and second, and third) big artist grant.

## Apply, apply, apply... then apply again.

"Reeling in a grant—like so many other things you apply for—is numbers game," stressed Sawyer Rose, a 2018 ArtistGrant.org recipient and 2017 The Awesome Foundation grant recipient. "There are always more qualified applicants than there are spots."

What does this mean for artists in the grant application game? Put simply: apply to as many opportunities as you can ... and keep applying.

Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant recipient, Carlo Bernardini admitted, "I had already applied for this award a few times previously." And when we asked Lorna Ritz, a 2018 Gottlieb Foundation grant recipient, how many grants she had applied to, she answered, "Many, including this one, maybe 30 times."

Artist after artist we've talked to admitted that they've applied to dozens and dozens of grants each year—sometimes applying to the same award for years before finally snagging the prize.

Even if you have a great application, you can still get edged out based on the applicant pool in that current cycle. But, remember that it doesn't mean you aren't deserving.

"I've also been on the jurying side for programs and exhibitions, and I've had to turn down many terrific applicants simply because I couldn't take everyone," admits Rose. Her advice? "Send out as many applications as you reasonably can."

## That being said, make your application count.

While it's a smart move to apply frequently and then apply again, you have to make sure you are spending your time wisely. That means applying only to the grants for which you fit the qualifications.

Lorna Ritz elaborated on her experience applying for the Gottlieb grant. "I fit the qualifications to a T, which is why I read and reread the essence of what the Gottlieb grant wants to fund: under income, needing to paint better paintings, offering affirmation, and being older," expressed Ritz.

"I keep applying, but only for grants that are appropriate for my work. I am highly selective which ones those are; otherwise, it's such a waste of time all around."

And while it seems like an already lengthy process, there's no way around it: you have to do your research and find out exactly what each grant committee is looking for from the artist.

One way to get the inside scoop is to look at past winners, suggests Rose: "Who else has won the particular grant you're thinking about applying for? Most granting organizations post past winners on their websites. Is your work somewhat similar to that of other awardees? Great! Because even if they're giving grants to painters, looking at past winners' works might let you know that they mostly grant to abstract painters."

That's where you will get a lot of your clues!

Not only that, but pay great attention to the level of work that committees are looking for—whether that's the artwork as a whole, the quality of images, or even a winning artist's website. That way, you understand the level your application needs to be at, too, and what you should improve on before hitting "send".

## How else can you figure out if you are a good match?

"Grant applications vary widely, of course, and when I'm looking for grants to apply for I think about a few different things: how much, how often, and who else," explains Rose. She breaks it down for us here:

**How much:** Not only how much grant money are they offering, but also how much is the submission fee? You can't forget to factor that in. Also, how much time will you spend on the application? Some grant applications are quick and easy, and others have a lot of specific requirements. Only you can decide if the cost-benefit favors investing your effort.

"THERE ARE ALWAYS MORE  
QUALIFIED APPLICANTS THAN  
THERE ARE SPOTS."

**How often:** As in, how often does the granting foundation make an award? Many organizations only give grants once a year, but some make awards every quarter or even every month. I love to apply for monthly/quarterly grants that fit my work because I can try a couple of times if I have to (assuming the submission fee is reasonable). Which is not to say that you shouldn't bother with submitting for a yearly award-- go for that too!

**Who else:** Who else has won the particular grant you're thinking about applying for? Again, see if your work is somewhat similar to that of other awardees. It's a quick way to gauge how good of a match you might be.

### **Tailor your application to each and every opportunity.**

This is a big one! Because every opportunity is different. And, committees see a lot of applications. They'll be able to tell when you've put in the work and addressed exactly what they've asked for, versus sending out the same old materials to every opportunity.

Our tip? Do your due diligence on each required section.

Some grants require a written essay, some focus solely on high-quality images, and others require a serious estimate of how much funding is required for the project you're proposing.

For example, when it came to Bernardini's grant application, he says, "My works are based on a type of large-scale urban installation and involve higher or lower construction costs based on the size they must reach. The estimate must correspond to what is declared."

These committees want to be sure they can place their trust (and more importantly, their money!) in you as an artist. If there's a disconnect between what is proposed and what is feasible, your application may not be taken seriously. Give yourself enough time to call it a job well done by keeping track of the deadline well in advance. Artist statements and projects estimates should not be left to the last minute.

"Do not hurry the grant," stresses Ritz. "Take time to put the materials together, (only for what is being asked), and review it many times over before submitting."

And, if you aren't a good match? Don't apply!

It will only take up valuable time, money, and energy that could be better spent making your application stand out for the grants you should really be going after.

### **Your next task: show the jurors that you are deserving!**

You've found the perfect grant opportunity, fantastic! But your work is far from over. You have to make your application stand out.

"The best advice I've gotten on how to craft a stand-out application is to write with a little spunk!" says Rose, and for good reason. "Jurying can be a tedious process, especially if you have hundreds of artists' works to look through. Don't let your reviewer glaze over and pass your application by."

"Even if your work statements are super-duper-serious, you can show a bit of your sparkling personality in the cover letter, for example. Jurors are humans just like everyone else. If you can create a connection with them, you're more likely to move to the next round."

Another great tip? Remember that the grant has a greater purpose—it's not all about you! Show them that you understand the impact your work will have on the world through your writing.

"I spent a lot of time thinking about the meaning of the grant," admits Ritz. "I read for what they were looking to fund over and over again until ideas sank in so that I would write the answer."

They wanted committed painters, passionate about painting, reflects Ritz: “How can I put that into words in the narrative statement, that most expressed how it was always painting that drove me deeper into living a life of meaning through the progress of the paintings over decades? I took a lot of time breathing into the narrative statement.”

Not only that but her application images echoed what the institution was looking for in a recipient; it was evident that her painting has evolved over the years. “They have you send the past 20 years of images. They want to see consistency and growth. My narrative statement was as clear and as honest as I could possibly have written about my goals in the paintings.”

### **Always be ready to apply.**

Are you ready to apply when the perfect opportunity springs up? Because we’d all hate for disorganization to be the only reason you aren’t accepted for an award you really deserve.

“It was quite a long process applying for the Gottlieb grant because of the need for images of work done over a long period of time,” explains Arlene Santana, a 2018 Gottlieb Foundation grant recipient who needed to display a consistent body of work in her application. “Up until few years ago, I did not photograph all of my work, and certainly not on a daily basis, as I do now.”

While Santana was able to make due with what she had, she wouldn’t recommend following in her footsteps: “I was able to document enough early work from early photos made into jpegs, but it took a lot of research and extra time. The application process showed me the importance of archiving and documenting work year by year, and I’m doing a better job of that now.”

And you don’t have to reinvent the wheel, either! An art inventory management system like Artwork Archive is an extremely easy tool to use to stay organized, and it’s one artists (like user Sawyer Rose!) recommend.

Not only can you keep track of your entire portfolio and important piece details, but also application dates, documents you’ll need to apply, and your exhibition history. You can even schedule reminders when it’s time to apply!

“I had applied for a different grant several years before. I think I wasn’t ready at the time because, although I had been painting consistently, I had not been showing recently. Having a regular track record of exhibits is important,” advises Santana.

When you have a way to stay organized, you’ll skip the last minute scramble and save yourself from a bunch of headaches—now and later down the road.

### **These artists’ biggest piece of advice?**

It doesn’t matter how many times you’ve been turned down, you cannot let the fear and pain of rejection keep you from applying.

“My advice is always to try to grasp that these can be important opportunities for the realization of your project,” says Bernardini. Do you have enough passion for your work, do you believe in it enough to put yourself on the line? It’s not always going to be easy, but the things in life that are worth it usually aren’t.

“There’s never going to be a point in your career where you cease to face rejection. There isn’t a magic threshold you’re going to pass after which grant money falls in your lap every time you ask,” acknowledges Rose.

“I think it helps to keep in mind that rejection is a part of the game and that no one catches the big fish every time! But your chances will be better if you cast your line more often.”

Ritz echoes these same wise words: “Don’t not apply because you can’t take rejection; do not allow that to be the reason, for then, you will have already lost.”

### **It can be done, and it is worth it.**

While it can be hard to imagine finally landing that financial boost, don’t give up on yourself, your talents or your path in the name of fear or rejection.

Ritz told us about the moment when she finally got that confirmation letter. “Each time the letter came it was a rejection—annually. (I did not miss a year). This time when the letter came, I held the envelope up to the sky and saw that there was no check inside, so I did not open it right away. I thought to myself, ‘I will try again next year with even better paintings,’ she confessed. “You can imagine my surprise when I opened the letter and there was the ‘Congratulations.’ It was as though I could not read English!”

Her biggest tip for artists? Work on self-belief. “Have faith that you are deserving if you work hard and consistently make progress,” she says.

That faith in herself ended up getting her through the hard times and guiding her to success: “It bought me time and gave me peace of mind, which is from where imagination can freely flow.”

# HOW TO FIND, LAND, AND MAKE THE MOST OF AN ARTIST RESIDENCY W

## **Advance your art career with an artist residency**

When you're working to make it as an artist, residencies allow you the space and opportunity to create and pursue your art career goals. Residencies provide you with the time, support, and continued education to develop your art practice.

There is a wide range of residencies out there, and no two artist residencies are the same.

Residencies can be fully funded or require payment from the artist to participate. They range in support, prestige, facilities, and location.

That means in order to find a residency that is worthwhile and will be beneficial to your career, you need a plan of action to make sure that you are applying for the right opportunities.

Plus, when you find that perfect match, you will want to ensure you are a competitive applicant.

Read on to hear our seven tips for choosing the right residency, being a strong applicant, and then making the most of your residency opportunities.

## **Research the past participants and residency**

You likely have a mental short-list of artists that inspire you and your work. Artists that you admire in their craft and career. Approach researching residencies as you would research a crush. Google the artist's background and see where they went early in their career (or whatever stage you are currently at).

Check out their CV for residencies they attended and look at the residency's alumni page. You can learn a lot about what you will gain and who the residency is looking for from researching who also attended the residency.

A residency is as much about your time away and studio work as it is about the connections you will make there. Make sure that the community the residency fosters is one that you will push you to grow creatively and professionally.

This is a group of people that will form important contacts for you as your career progresses.

## **SEVEN TIPS TO FINDING THE RIGHT OPPORTUNITY AND BECOMING A COMPETITIVE APPLICANT.**

### **Write down your practical needs to live & work**

With so many different opportunities out there, hone in on exactly what you need and want from an opportunity to help you find the right ones.

### **Ask yourself a few practical questions to get going:**

Are you able to travel for a residency?  
 What is your time availability?  
 Do you need funding?  
 What type of funding do you need?  
 What will I need to pay for while away?  
 Can I work remotely or part-time while at the residency?  
 Will I save up enough to cover my time away?  
 Will the living situation be conducive to my work?

After addressing these practical questions, get into the nitty-gritty. What is it that you want out of a residency opportunity and what type of residency structure would be best for you?

Some artists use residencies for the community component, being able to be surrounded by other working creatives. Outside of art school, your next and most valuable critique might be from your fellow residents or from a visiting curator/art professional connected to your residency. If you crave continued education, collaboration, or support from a residency make sure to apply to opportunities that build this social element into their structure.

Other artists use residencies for a creative retreat and value the alone time and creative focus that separation from daily life allows. If you are seeking an experience of isolation look for residencies that create natural environments for introspection and focus like residencies within national parks on an offseason with fewer people.

### **Don't go into debt for an opportunity**

In both the application process and during your residency, make informed financial decisions and advocate for yourself in a way that won't leave you stressed about money.

Many residency applications require a fee. If this is a financial burden for you, you can ask for a fee waiver. Granting institutions and residencies understand that artists are working hard to support themselves and many provide this service—you just have to ask! If you are in a situation where a fee waiver would help you, reach out. This is why these opportunities are created in the first place. You have nothing to lose and might even benefit from having more direct contact with the people running the residency you're applying to.

When you're looking at different opportunities to apply to keep your finances in mind.

Create your own cost-benefit analysis of each prospective opportunity. Take into consideration expenses like food, housing, transportation, materials, and weigh these costs with what an opportunity will provide you (both materially and in terms of opportunity).

While some residencies and opportunities provide stipends and support, others don't. A general rule of thumb for artists applying to opportunities is to not pay more than your current cost of living to take part in an opportunity. If it does, think creatively about how you can lower your other costs during that time. Can you sublet your apartment? Can you line up enough residencies back-to-back to travel and get rid of your lease for a period of time?

Artist residencies can help you put your name on the map, but make sure that you're not risking your financial security by taking on opportunities that cost you more than they are worth.

### **Understand your strengths within the scope of the residency**

Know yourself. Know the opportunities. Follow up with residencies. Apply, reapply, and then apply again.

Think of applying to opportunities like high school students consider applying to colleges. Apply for opportunities that are a “fit,” “reach,” and “safety.”

Understand your background and skill set. Be able to see where you would fit into different residency qualifications. Are you an emerging artist, an early career artist, established, mid-career?

Apply to different levels of opportunity and then know to reapply in the future (and save your application fees for ones you know you aren't ready for quite yet).

Don't burn out on spending all your time and energy applying to “reach opportunities” either, make sure that your efforts are balanced between big-ticket-harder-to-get residencies and more attainable opportunities.

Read the qualifications for the residency and make sure that you are a match before taking the time to apply.

### **Stand out with your application**

Residency programs will often receive hundreds or thousands of applications for a few spots, especially those that offer funding.

Make sure that your application stands out by first reading through what is required of you. You don't want to be automatically disqualified for something that is in your control like the number of images or image file size.

There are three aspects to an application that you will want to hit: high-quality photographs of your work, engaging and clear writing, and making deadlines.

Photographs of your work are almost as important as the physical work itself since that is all that jurors have to judge you on. After you create a work, make sure you photograph it with professional lighting on a clean, white background. Need more tips on how to photograph your work? [Get them here.](#)

Compelling and concise writing will give the application panel a way to get to know your vision and goals as an artist. This will be where you can explain what you want to accomplish at the residency and what you plan to do with your time there. Don't overcomplicate things with too much jargon. Explain your project as you would to a close friend. Then, re-read your answers and have someone else read over your application and give their feedback about both clarity and punctuation.

Hitting the deadlines and filling out a complete application will automatically put you in the top half of the pile. You might be surprised at how many applications are sent in with incomplete information on an artwork, incomplete forms, or past the deadline.

Be prepared for applications by organizing your artwork images and information in something like Artwork Archive, an artwork inventory management system that helps artists catalog and manage their artwork. Plus, keep track of different deadlines in Artwork Archive's calendar and set reminders so that you never miss an important date.

When you apply to a residency, don't be afraid to reach out. Asking more questions shows that you are invested in an opportunity and genuinely interested.

In an interview, be prepared. Make sure you know the program and ask thoughtful questions to your interviewer. Research previous program alumni. Mentioning artists that you respect who have done a residency in an interview shows that you were thoughtful in your application process.

Be professional and personable. Reach out when you are not selected to learn how you can continue to improve your applications in the future.

### **Say "yes" while you are there**

Now that you've landed an opportunity, make the most out of it.

Residencies provide a unique opportunity for you to go outside your normal day to day life and engage in a completely new experience. Whether your residency is on the other side of the world or in your backyard, get excited about it and treat it as a completely new experience.

A hot tip: say "yes" when you are there.

Have you ever noticed that when you are outside of your comfort zone, like when traveling, or in a different country, you are more likely to try new things or take on experiences that you wouldn't normally in your day-to-day? Embrace this idea of your residency as something new, exciting, and different by saying yes to all parts of your residency.

Optional workshop? Say yes. Curator visit? Yes. Community exhibition? Yes, please.

Saying yes allows you to make the most out of your experience and ensures that your art-making is an active process. Saying yes will connect you to other residents, creatives, and to your residency's larger community.

Remember that you are dedicating this time and space for your art, double down on this dedication by fully engaging in the process and embracing the opportunities that open up with your residency.

### **Stay connected after the residency**

In the same vein of being a "yes" (wo)man, use your residency experience to build and sustain connections.

Being involved in residencies connects you to a hyper-specific community of creative people with similar experiences and goals. The people you work with in a residency might be future collaborators for projects and exhibits.

You might revisit the place you spent a residency and re-engage and partner with local groups for future projects.

Just because you are leaving doesn't mean that you will be finished interacting with the people, place, and ideas that were meaningful to you during your residency.

Make sure to stay in touch with the admin of the residency as well as the artists. The art world is small, you never know where the people you interact with will end up and how you both might mutually benefit from staying in contact.

In the future, if you have questions about different residencies or opportunities, the admin from a previous residency are knowledgeable people to bounce ideas off.

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# PRACTICAL DO'S & DON'TS FOR THE APPLICATION

Don't eliminate yourself from the race before it's started. Having been a juror for several national shows and membership drives, artist Heather Arenas weighs in on the best practices for submitting to juried art shows, grants and other applications.

Some of these tips may seem obvious to some artists, but they continue to escape others.

You could be throwing your money away if you pay to enter a show but don't take the extra time to give the jury something usable. Make sure you stay in the game by following these tips. Here is what a jury looks for in a submission.

## **Do crop your images down to the artwork itself**

Having part of an easel in your photograph may make the composition better, but you should avoid including outside objects. Only include what you are being judged on — the painting (or other artwork).

Don't include yourself standing next to your artwork, parts of the background, the door to your studio or even the sliver that shows that it wasn't cropped straight.

You might be surprised at the number of submissions that have the artists thumb in the shot because they had to hold the painting with one hand and the camera with the other. Don't be that person.

Lastly, the frame is not your art — crop the frame out as well.

## **Don't include your watermark in the image**

While watermarks have their place and time, avoid including an image with your name across the middle of the painting. "We are judging the painting, not your Photoshop skills," says Arenas.

It is also best if your signature is discreet. Some competitions require that no signature be present at all, so make sure to read the prospectus carefully.

## **Do submit a clear photo**

It is also disappointing for a jury to receive a painting that they could assume is wonderful, but they can't see the brushwork because it's blurry. There are several tutorials on photographing your work out there. If you don't have the right equipment, pay someone to do it for you.

It may not be cost effective at first, but consider if you will want to make prints of your artwork later when making this decision.

## **Do keep your portfolio consistent**

If you are submitting more than one piece, the pieces should be similar in subject or medium — if not both. Submitting a pencil drawing with oil paintings or, worse yet, a painting with sculptures in order to show that you are a multi-talented artist rarely accomplishes that goal.

Most artists are more proficient in one medium over another. Jurors want to see consistency. They just want to know that you are not merely a one-hit wonder. Show them that you can recreate your work with the same level of skill again and again.

If you submit figurative work, a still life, and a landscape, it doesn't give the jury a clear idea of the subject matter that interests you. You know better than anyone what you like to create — present that to the jurors.

When you only get one shot, make it the best shot you can deliver.

ARTIST AND JUROR HEATHER  
ARENAS SHARES THE BEST  
PRACTICES FOR SUBMITTING  
TO ART SHOWS & GRANTS.

# RESOURCES FOR GRANTS

Getting an artist grant allows you to worry less about running an art business and gives you more time to focus on what you really love: creating art.

How do you find the perfect artist grant? Simple. We've rounded up some sites for you to peruse artist grant opportunities and find the funding you need.

## CaFÉ

While you may know this site for its wide array of calls for shows, exhibitions, and residencies, this site also boasts a collection of grants and awards. Search through the listings at no cost which cover all the need-to-know details for applying, including entry deadline, fees, location eligibility, and more.

## The New York Foundation for the Arts

Not just for New York-based artists, NYFA is a goldmine of opportunity. The site not only lists grants and awards available for artists, but everything from residencies to professional development. In their Advanced Search feature, select exactly which opportunity type you are looking for to make your search for funding easier.

## The Art Guide

Not sure if you want to apply through a third party, Art Guide is the free artist opportunity site for you. This call for entries website allows you to apply directly to the organization hosting the show. You can also register and post your own events for free - perfect for those involved with artist association shows. The list is updated daily so there'll always be a great new opportunity to pursue.

## Artwork Archive

Free to peruse, we feature everything from dream residencies and life-changing grants, to fun festivals, art business workshops, and competitions for some extra cash. We make it easy to search, too! Filter by opportunity type, location, event dates, eligibility, and more to find exactly what your art practice needs to flourish.

## Artist Trust

The free opportunity list at Artist Trust offers calls for funding, studio space, employment, housing, and residencies as well as art shows. You can easily filter your search by the desired category. You can also search by a specific discipline. The disciplines range from photography and public art to emerging fields and visual arts. The calls include international opportunities too.

## Cranbrook Academy of Art

The Cranbrook Academy of Art Library's website includes individual artist grants, grants for specific regions in the U.S., and even international grants for which artists can apply.

## ArtDeadline.com

Another site you may have heard of is ArtDeadline.com. According to their website, it is "the largest and most respected source for artists seeking income and exhibition opportunities." The site may cost you a subscription fee of \$20 a year to view the majority of its opportunities, but you can still browse many grants listed for free on their homepage and the @ArtDeadline Twitter account.

## ZAPPLication

Make ZAPP your go-to for art fair, show, and festival opportunities. Similar to CaFÉ, everything is done online. Never waste money sending in images on CDs or slides again! Register for free, upload your work and apply all online. The jurors score online too. You will receive email notifications of the status of your entry and any other necessary details. It's as simple as that!

## Patreon

We admit, this is not a site where you can search for grant money, but one you can still get lots of funding for your art business. Sites like Patreon allow you to create different monetary tiers for your fans to donate, such as \$5, \$75, or \$200 dollars a month. In return, you gift your subscribers something of corresponding value, such as an art screensaver download or an art print of their choice