

GRANTWRITING TIPS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

The Ohio Arts Council (OAC) staff has compiled the following grantwriting suggestions based on past observations and panel comments. While every application is different, in general the most competitive OAC applications are those that consider the following (arranged in order according to the application process):

1. Prepare to write a great application.

- ☐ **Read the [Guidelines](#).** Familiarize yourself with the program to which you're applying, including changes from previous years. Some programs have specific requirements for multi-year funding requests. Pay special attention to the "Review Criteria"—these are the exact criteria that will be used by panelists as they read and score your application.
- ☐ **Review all [deadlines](#).** If this is your first time applying for funding with the OAC, consider requesting feedback on your application from an [OAC program coordinator](#). You can do this automatically in the ARTIE online grants system until two weeks before the deadline.
- ☐ **When in doubt, ask.** If you are unsure which program is most appropriate for your project, if you are having technical difficulties with an application, or if you have other questions, [contact us](#). The OAC has a coordinator assigned to every grant program. We would be happy to assist you!

2. Begin your application in [ARTIE](#)—and start off on the right foot.

- ☐ **Double-check your ARTIE profile for accuracy and completeness.** Emails related to your application will be sent to your profile's address and to the primary contact listed on the application. Make sure the email address you choose is *accurate, monitored*, and can accept OAC emails. (Don't let us end up in your "junk" folder!) Choose a descriptive project title (if applicable). The primary contact listed should be able to enter into contractual obligations on behalf of your organization (if your application is recommended for funding).
- ☐ **Use the organizational history section.** Provide a concise summary of your organization's history, highlight major accomplishments and milestones, and make sure items are up to date.
- ☐ **Align the "Participation" page with your narrative.** How many people do you think will be affected if your organization receives this grant and carries out this work? Ensure that estimated numbers of artists participating, adults and children benefiting, etc., match those described in later response items.

3. Write a clear, descriptive, well-thought-out narrative with the evaluation criteria in mind.

- ☐ **Make your narrative easy-to-read.** Use a positive, straight-forward tone in the present or future tense that casts your organization's work in a positive light. Don't use tentative language or write in the first-person point of view.
- ☐ **Tell the panel who, what, when, where, and why.** Assume every panelist is learning about your organization and/or project for the first time. Include descriptive details. Make sure panelists understand what you plan to do. Include the activities (and/or outcomes or outputs) that will result from this work.
- ☐ **Talk about your impact.** Describe what difference your work will make, why it will be valuable, and why it is essential that it be supported with public funding.

- ❑ **Describe how you'll know you've made that impact.** Program evaluation can seem daunting, but it doesn't need to be. Describe how your organization will know whether it has been successful—what observations will be made, how data will be gathered, or how impact will be measured. A basic discussion of your evaluation plan will greatly enhance your application.
- ❑ **Use quantities wherever possible.** Including relevant data—for example, the *number* of performances, the *duration* of a workshop, the *size* of a mural, etc. This will provide helpful background for panelists. Estimates are OK; if funded, your organization will be asked for detailed information on outcomes later.
- ❑ **Cite statistical references.** Only include statements you can substantiate. For example, if you state that your program is the only one of its kind in your area, explain how you know this. If you state that your work generates a particular economic benefit to your community, cite the source of this calculation.
- ❑ **Think broadly about accessibility.** Making programs accessible to people with disabilities is important (and [ADA compliance is required](#)), but accessibility is more than just wheelchair ramps. Consider how your programs are made easy-to-access for *all* potential constituents, including those coming from diverse cultures and under-resourced areas or backgrounds.
- ❑ **Consider how you'll ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion.** The OAC funds organizations using public dollars, so making sure programming is open to all people is important. Your organization should be prepared to describe how it will implement inclusive practices, evaluate its work with an eye toward racial equity, and keep moving toward systems that benefit everyone.
- ❑ **Use formatting to improve readability.** ARTIE accepts rich text, so feel free to use bolding, italics, headings, bullets, etc., to improve the way you tell your story to panelists.
- ❑ **Explain how you will market your programming.** Make sure your narrative includes a concise summary of the ways your organization will make others aware of its work. You can refer again to the program's review criteria to see exactly how panelists will evaluate your approach.
- ❑ **Have an unbiased third party read your application.** After finishing your narrative, find out if your writing makes sense to someone unfamiliar with your organization or the OAC application process. Look for ways to be clearer and more understandable. Leave yourself time to edit and revise your work.

4. Include a logical, mistake-free budget that aligns with your narrative.

- ❑ **Make sure the budget aligns with the narrative.** Most (but not all) programs ask applicants to complete a budget that explains how OAC funds will be spent. Panelists will review these budgets to make sure they make sense, contain no obvious errors, and fit the project as described. For example, if you provide an earned income estimate for ticket sales, make sure it's the same estimate you mentioned in the narrative.
- ❑ **Double-check program match requirements and the allowable request amounts.** *Program guidelines change periodically.* If your organization has applied before, make sure you know the required match and maximum award size for this year.
- ❑ **List all applicable in-kind support—and be descriptive.** State all applicable in-kind donations to demonstrate community support, including volunteer hours. In-kind donations should be listed on their own worksheet—not represented in the expense or income worksheets.
- ❑ **Use the budget narrative box if needed.** ARTIE will take care of your math, but if there are any budget fluctuations or figures you think may raise a red flag for a panelist, use the text box on the budget tab to share clarifying information.
- ❑ **Check the [Introduction and Overview](#) document as you describe proposed OAC-covered expenses.** The Introduction and Overview document lists specific funding restrictions, such as capital expenses above \$1,000, hospitality expenses, restrictions for educational institutions, and out-of-state travel, to name a few. Some other specific restrictions exist; be sure to review this list before submitting your proposal.

5. The most competitive applications include helpful key hyperlinks and/or support materials.

- ☐ **Share the most relevant hyperlinks.** ARTIE allows you to embed links to online materials right from your narrative—board lists, artist bios, event calendars, news articles, strategic planning documents, and so on. (See the “Instructions” tab for help.) In that way, panelists can click on them as they read. This is a quick and easy way to round out your application and save you from uploading lots of support material documents that are already available online.
- ☐ **Refer to the “Support Materials” tab in ARTIE.** For materials *not* available online, ARTIE provides a place for you to upload files into your application separately. Be sure you’ve included everything appropriate to your OAC program and project. Consider including materials that enhance your written application, provide background on your organization, and put a human face on your work. *More is not always better!* Remember that panelists review many applications and have limited time to review materials.
- ☐ **Make sure your materials are current.** Panelists will visit your website and other relevant links and pages, including social media. Make sure all are up to date, operational, and present the best possible impression of your organization’s professionalism and quality.
- ☐ **Consider uploading an audiovisual sample.** Submitting a rich, easy-to-understand work sample appropriate to your art form can greatly enhance panelists’ understanding of your work. Audiovisual materials can be uploaded in the “Audiovisual Work Sample” upload field under the “Support Materials” tab. Your materials should be relevant to the project and no more than three years old.

6. Final details can be critical to your success.

- ☐ **Got a quick question?** As the deadline approaches, reach out to your program coordinator to ask any questions if you are unsure how to proceed.
- ☐ **Do an ARTIE error check.** Before it's time to submit your application, let ARTIE's “Check for Errors” function look for any missed fields or misaligned requests. You'll be prompted to fix anything that presents a problem. If no errors result, you're all set to submit when ready! Note that ARTIE does not allow the use of symbols (i.e., commas, dollar signs, etc.) when entering budget or participation numbers.
- ☐ **Don’t wait until the last minute to apply!** Staff illnesses, technology glitches, and other surprises always crop up at the worst possible times. You’ve spent so much time preparing your application—don’t miss the deadline! Your organization takes a substantial risk by waiting until the last day to apply for funding. Plan to apply two to three days beforehand and leave time to deal with any final issues that might arise.
- ☐ **Plan to listen to the panel meeting.** Most OAC panel meetings are open to the public and audio-streamed online. There are few better ways to improve as a grantwriter than to listen to applications being reviewed by skilled OAC panelists.

Preparing a grant proposal is hard work, and every funder is different. As a steward of taxpayer dollars, the Ohio Arts Council’s process must be rigorous, and our panelists tend to be thorough. Our staff is knowledgeable and ready to assist you as your organization navigates the process. Whether you are an experienced grantwriter or doing this work for the first time, we hope you find our ARTIE system and program guidelines easy to understand and intuitive. We hope the organizational self-examination, reflection, and preparation our process requires also helps you to refine processes, hone the way you talk about your work and impact, and better communicate your value. In this way, grantwriting may help your organization seek other funding and further strengthen your ability to achieve your mission.

Thanks for reading as you prepare your application and remember to contact us with questions along the way—or with any feedback on how we could improve our own processes. Good luck!