

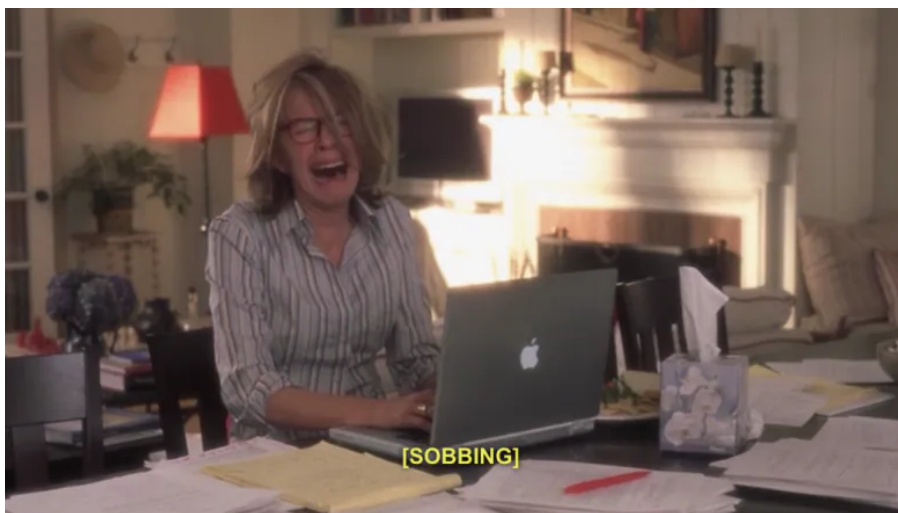
Arts · Point of View

Thinking of applying for an artist grant? Read these expert tips first

Six grant institution insiders share their best advice on scoring that coveted artist grant

[Chloe Rose Stuart-Ulin](#) · CBC Arts ·

Posted: Apr 23, 2018 3:00 PM ET | Last Updated: April 23, 2018



Diane Keaton applying for a grant, probably. (Something's Gotta Give/Columbia Pictures)

[comments](#) 

If you work as a self-employed artist in Canada, chances are you've perused the [Canada Council](#) website or the websites of the provincial funders and dreamed of what it would mean to receive a grant. Convincing the government to fund your artistic endeavours wouldn't just be lucrative — it would be career-affirming. Imagine telling your friends! Imagine updating your LinkedIn! Imagine never working a day in your life again...!

Then you click through to the application guidelines and, oh, *mon dieu*. There's just so much paperwork and budgeting involved. Maybe you'll just bookmark it for later.

The application process can be daunting, especially for emerging artists. But luckily for us, these six helpful grant organization insiders have shared their best pieces of advice.

Lise Ann Johnson: Director of Arts Granting Operations at the Canada Council for the Arts

Sean Devine: Program Officer at the Canada Council for the Arts

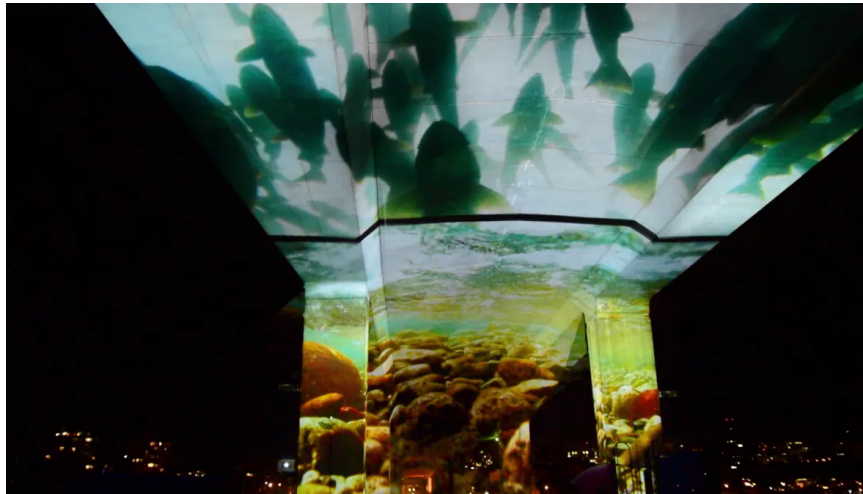
Julien Valmary: Director of Support and Strategic Initiatives at the Conseil des arts de Montréal

Marie-Louise Larocque: Project Manager at the Conseil des arts de Montréal

Lyne Lanthier: Program Manager at the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec

Pablo Rodriguez: Mentorship Program Coordinator at the MAI: Montréal, Arts Interculturel

Here's what they had to say!



Nettie Wild's stunning "Uninterrupted" installation, which CBC Arts profiled in 2017, was funded through the Canada Council's New Chapter program. (CBC Arts)

Apply to work as a peer assessor

JV: Apply to be part of the peer assessment committees. This can help you to better understand the dynamic and process within the artist councils. You will gain valuable experience and showcase your expertise.

SD: Not only do [jurors] submit better applications later on, they will inevitably become better artists over the span of their career. When you're a juror, you're exposed to the artforms and art processes of people across the country. Emerging and well-established artists walk away from the experience saying they learned so much.

“There's a lot of planning involved and a lot of artists don't expect it. People are shocked when they realize how much time artists spend thinking and doing administrative work pertaining to grants and other projects.”

- Pablo Rodriguez, Mentorship Program Coordinator at the MAI: Montréal, Arts Interculturel

Get started early

PR: Know what the deadlines are. Plan in advance. There's a lot of planning involved and a lot of artists don't expect it. People are shocked when they realize

how much time artists spend thinking and doing administrative work pertaining to grants and other projects.

SD: Starting ahead of time is useful — imperative, almost. That said, we're all human beings, and many of us will start writing the grant the night before it's due. I'm guilty of that as well!

Call a program officer with your questions

SD: We always ask that applicants get in touch with us well in advance of submitting their grant, particularly if they're an emerging applicant. If I do identify gaps, I try to give some guidance.

ML: It is always advisable to contact a program officer to ensure your eligibility and to ask your questions, however simple they are. They can also tell you when to expect an answer.

Look at the CVs of past winners

PR: Look at other artists' CVs! What does their overall career "parkour" look like? That can be really helpful in identifying points of reference.

LL: Read the [CALQ's annual report annexes](#) to see which artists received grants, in what programs and for what amounts. The annexes also list which artists participated on the various juries. Talk to the grant recipients you know!

Keep your application language simple and clear

LL: Clarity is important — keep it simple. State what you want to do, why and how you will go about it. Try to convey what motivates you in wanting to do this particular project and why it is important to do it now.

SD: You should always be answering the same three questions: Why do you want to do this? How are you going to do it? Are you capable of doing it? Those are the kinds of questions that really excite a jury.

“We often find that emerging artists ask for too little money. They come in with these projects that are very interesting, but — perhaps it's the fear of asking for too much — when we look at their budgets, the people they're hiring are not going to be paid a professional wage.”

- Sean Devine, Program Officer at the Canada Council for the Arts

Remember: the jury is made up of fellow artists

LAJ: Sometimes people take their marketing language and use it to write grants, and that's a real fundamental mistake that we sometimes see newer applicants

making. You have to realize that you're talking to your peers. They don't want to be sold your project in a communications or marketing way — they want to be engaged with what's artistic and interesting about it.

SD: One way for applicants to help rise above the rest is to make it personal. Speak in such a plain language that when read, it almost feels as though you're having a conversation with that person. By doing that, you're establishing a personal connection.

Pablo Rodriguez: "If you hear from your peers and friends that they too didn't get their grants — if you can see other people persisting through it — it can be heartening."

Be realistic about your funding needs (asking for too little can be a red flag)

SD: We often find that emerging artists ask for too little money. They come in with these projects that are very interesting, but — perhaps it's the fear of asking for too much — when we look at their budgets, the people they're hiring are not going to be paid a professional wage.

LAJ: A jury might sometimes look at a budget like that and it calls into question the feasibility of the project. It's double-whammy: you're not paying your artists enough when they deserve a living wage, and, frankly, we don't know how you're going to pull this project off with so little resources.

Have someone unfamiliar with your work read over your application

JV: Having someone who does not know anything about the arts read your application can be a good way to ensure that the application is not lost in obscure vocabulary and that your intentions are clear.

SD: It never hurts to let someone from your community or your family read your grant before you click that submit button. Does it make sense to them? Are they getting lost in the process?

Get involved with your local artist associations for support and resources

PR: Mentorships, coaching, community events — all of these intermediaries are really helpful in building confidence. If an artist doesn't have access to mentorship at this level — and a lot of them don't — then they really need to cultivate those connections. This is really fundamental to how the milieu works; people share information. It's horizontal. A lot of access [to funding structures] comes through informal channels, like by going to an exhibit opening, or a book launch, or a post-show gathering.

“Having someone who does not know anything about the arts read your application can be a good way to ensure that the application is not lost in obscure vocabulary and that your intentions are clear.”

-Julien Valmary, Director of Support and Strategic Initiatives at the Conseil des arts de Montréal

If rejected, ask for feedback and try again

JV: A refusal can mean many things. Sometimes it's simply due to a lack of funds. It's always useful to get feedback and, if you have direct contact with the agent responsible for your request, contact them by phone or in person.

PR: It's likely that you won't succeed at this one grant application. So what do you do when you fail? You have to be okay with that news, which is far more difficult if you're isolated. If you hear from your peers and friends that they too didn't get their grants — if you can see other people persisting through it — it can be heartening.

Just apply!

SD: The first mistake that potential applicants do is not apply. We often hear: "Oh, I don't know if I should. I don't know if I can." And I always use this quote Wayne Gretzky's father told him growing up: "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take!"

These interviews have been shortened and edited for clarity. With their permission, the responses of Julien Valmary and Marie-Louise Larocque have been translated from French.