

Qualities of Successful Dane Arts Grant Applications

What are some of the elements grant reviewers are looking for when reviewing and evaluating grant applications?

In an effort to provide as much information as possible about how to prepare a successful grant application, included below are important points drawn from grant reviewers' feedback related to past applications. Reviewers include staff, grant advisory panels composed of knowledgeable citizens, and Commission members. We hope this summary provides information about what the Commission seeks in strong applications and identifies common shortcomings.

Requirements and Guidelines

- Always pay close attention to requirements and guidelines. They may change from cycle to cycle. Applications must be complete, fulfill requirements, and adhere to guidelines.
- Applications that include a grant amount request in Budget Summary exceeding upper limit will be ineligible for consideration and review.
- A budget error may disqualify an application.
- Primary activities falling outside a project period (see Application Deadlines & Project Period Dates) may disqualify an application.

Overall Application

- Clear, concise, direct writing, free of typos or spelling and grammatical errors –these types of errors tend to become a negative diversion and suggest a lack of attention to detail.
- Clearly explain reasoning behind your project and the ways in which you are going to make it happen. Be a strong advocate for your project and make a compelling case for funding.
- Details are important, but stay on message. Extraneous information tends to bog down your application and create a distraction.
- Artistic work samples tend to strengthen an application but are typically not required. The Commission favors quality over quantity related to supplemental materials.

Community Impact

- Strong evidence of a project reaching a specific, new or underserved audience is important. It is not enough to say that such an audience is the target audience; describe it and demonstrate how you will serve this audience.
- Appeal and reach to a large community segment are valuable. Again, be sure to detail your plan and ability to achieve this kind of goal.
- Applications that demonstrate a high level of consciousness regarding how to provide access to target audiences tend to be stronger. For example, access can relate to offering opportunities for those with disabilities to participate, making your project available to people from a wide variety of income levels, and any additional ways to give more people opportunities for engagement in your project.
- Evidence of strong, relevant partnerships or collaborations with other community organizations may add value to your project. Demonstrate they have been explored, considered, and confirmed, if appropriate.

Budget

- If the amount you've requested in grant funding is a large percentage or singular component of your overall budget, reviewers may be concerned about risk. Solid funding from a variety of sources strengthens your application.

Other

- If your project or organization has been in operation for a while, strongly demonstrate your track record for success.
- If your application reflects a new venture, the successful track record of the participants involved with the project will be important. The Commission desires confidence that project will be accomplished, and in the way described in the application.
- Innovation and creativity will strengthen your application. Provide evidence that you've learned from and improved upon what you do from past evaluation and experience. Evidence will be especially important if you apply repeatedly for the same or similar projects or programs over time.