



## Grant and Proposal Writing, shared best practices

From a panel discussion at Culture PEI's "Skills Exchange" forum in Charlottetown on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013, featuring visual artist Gerald Beaulieu, Darrin White of the Prince Edward Island Council of the Arts, and Sue Urquhart of PEI 2014 Inc.

**Sue Urquhart:** "highlight the buzz words in the grant application and give them right back to the granters. Use those words and put them into your application. Understand the language *they* [the funder] are using. Follow *their* process. That's what they want. The best tool you have in writing a funding application is the funding application. They've given you all of the information. Read over the funding application more than once".

**Darrin White:** "make sure your language meets the objectives of the funding program. Make sure your application is actually complete. It's sad to see an application not go forward because someone did not meet the mandatory requirements of the application".

**Gerald Beaulieu:** "don't descend into 'art speak'. People tend to descend into 'art speak'. Juries read right through it. If your mother doesn't understand the language in your application, re-do it. Be comfortable with the language you are using".

**Sue:** "get to know your [funding program] program officer. They're there for you. Pick up the phone. Call them. That's why they're there. Develop that relationship. They want you to succeed. Make sure you write with clarity. You don't need to put a novel together. Keep it simple, and make sure the important information is at the top of your application".

**Darrin:** "be concise. If your actual project is buried [in your application], the jury might not have the patience to get there. Start with your proposal details right at the top, and provide other details in order of importance. It's helpful to construct something of a narrative, to engage a jury, and to give a jury reason to be engaged".

**Gerald:** "these are grants for professional artists, so you have to present yourself as a professional. You have to be able to articulate what you are doing, orally, and in writing. Work at it. Perfect it. Have your proposal reviewed, have someone read it. Don't send in your first draft. Send in your fifth or your sixth".

**Sue:** "what are your measureable outcomes? How are you going to measure whether your project succeeds? Will you distribute surveys? Track attendance numbers? Can you provide testimonials? If there is someone who can speak about your work or past projects, include their name, include their quote in your application".

**Darrin:** “when you are proposing something in the art world, it’s incredibly important to be knowledgeable and current in the discipline you are working in. Give the jury a sense you know what’s going on in your discipline, provincially, and nationally. Engage the jury in your story: ‘I’m headed in this direction’ or ‘this project is important because...’ Read articles in magazines and journals specific to your discipline”.

**Gerald:** “I haven’t made a grant application in which I didn’t already have an exhibition secured. Inform the jury and funders that you have an outside agency interested in your project, a place where an audience can see it. Have an idea *where* your project will go or be shown.”

**Darrin:** “be informed. Know what’s going on. Be new. Be unique. Bounce your ideas off people before it comes to us, to make sure your idea hasn’t already been done. We make no secret that our [PEI Council of the Arts fund grant program] success rate is one in three, or one in four. Call us and find out why you weren’t funded. It could have been something structural and abundantly fixable, and we can help with that”.

**Gerald:** “most submissions require technical elements. Test it. Test it on a Mac or on a PC, and send your [portfolio or work sample] in a format or file that is most common so people can open it. Check the number of megabytes. Support material is the key thing. Support material is critical. Down the road, follow all of the other requirements - file all the final reports, credit the funder, don’t jeopardize your future funding. Don’t get cocky and confident – approach every grant application like it’s your first time. The usual outcome to submitting a grant application is failure. You’re going to fail. It’s extremely competitive. Being persistent and tenacious are your biggest assets. Rejection is the norm, so don’t get too emotionally invested”.

**Sue:** “keep your language clear. Put the important information at the top. Get someone else to read it. Get another set of eyes on your proposal before you submit it”.

**Darrin:** “help the jury see how its funding program will be integral to your artistic process. How will this grant help your artistic process?”

**Gerald:** “relate your application to specific outcomes. Look at [a funder’s] entire range of programs. There are grant programs to support creation and production, but also for exhibition and for where your work can travel”.