

How To: Literary Grants

Created by Mahak Jain (2020): www.mahakjain.com

Introduction to Literary Grants

The Basics

What's a literary grant?

- Arts funding from the government to support book-length literary projects in any genre for adults or children
- Some literary grants are not project grants but professional development grants—funding to support your skills or career development
- Our discussion will focus on grant applications for literary projects, but the same principles can be applied to other types of arts grant applications
- Literary grants are also available for organizations or collectives, but we will focus on grants for individuals only

What grants can you apply for?

- Toronto Arts Council (TAC): [Level One or Level Two grant](#)
- Ontario Arts Council (OAC):
 - [Recommender Grants for Writers](#)
 - [Literary Creation](#)
 - [Deaf and Disability Arts Projects](#)
- Canada Council for the Arts (CCA):
 - [Research and Creation grant](#) (under the “Explore and Create” banner)
 - [Short-Term Projects](#) or [Long-Term Projects](#) (First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples)

Who is eligible for grants?

- Most literary grants require prior publication, usually a minimum of three short pieces, or one book
- For example, here are the eligibility requirements for the OAC's Recommender Grants for Writers: three traditionally published short stories, comics, poems or other works for which you have received payment. Works can appear in magazines, newspapers, websites, and anthologies. Contest-winning work is considered publication
- Exception: The Toronto Arts Council's Level One grant is for writers who have only *one* publication

Who makes the decisions?

- Most literary grants are awarded by juries/committees (“peer assessors”) who discuss the applications and decide as a group who should receive funds. Juries/committees change every year.
- Exception: The Recommender Grant for Writers, with the Ontario Arts Council. The Recommender Grants are awarded by select publishing houses and literary magazines. You can apply to and receive money from multiple publishers/magazines simultaneously, which can help improve your chances.

What about the money?

- Each grant awards a different amount of money, either in a fixed amount or up to a maximum. Example: each publisher involved in the Recommender Grants for Writers (OAC) can award between \$1500 to \$5000. Request the maximum, always, though be prepared to receive the minimum.
- Some grants require you to indicate a budget—an hourly wage (OAC) or a breakdown of living or other expenses (CCA). You can indicate whatever wage makes sense for you but make sure your numbers allow you to receive the maximum. Organizations can't give you more money than you request.
- OAC's hourly wage, which is not for living expenses, means that the grant doesn't interfere with ODSP funding. This is a good thing!

Accessibility and Registration

Support and Setup

What application support is available?

- Each grant has an officer associated with it (contact information can be found on the grant web page). Though officers don't make decisions about who gets grants, they are often in the room when decisions are being made. So they have insights into what a jury is looking for.
- If there's any part of the application you are confused about or unsure of, reach out to an officer before the deadline for advice or tips.
- If you apply for a grant and don't succeed, you can also contact officers to find out what you can do to strengthen your application in the future

What application support is available?

- Application Assistance for Deaf artists and artists with disabilities:
 - Toronto Arts Council: <https://torontoartscouncil.org/grant-programs/application-accessibility-support>
 - Ontario Arts Council: <https://www.arts.on.ca/access-equity/alternative-services-and-application-processes>
 - Canada Council for the Arts: <https://canadacouncil.ca/commitments/equity/application-assistance>
- Note: You can also apply for supplementary funds for accessibility expenses incurred *during* the completion of the project. Expenses must be related directly to the project.

How do you apply?

- Applications are submitted electronically, which requires creating an account.
- Canada Council for Arts: Create and submit a profile in the “Portal.” Once your profile is approved, you can apply for grants
<https://apply.canadacouncil.ca/>
- Ontario Arts Council: Register for an account with “Nova”
https://grants.arts.on.ca/s_Login.jsp
- Toronto Arts Council: Register for an account with “Smart Simple”
https://tac.smartsimple.ca/s_Login.jsp

Creating an Application

The Components

What does an application require?

- Each granting body's application requirements are a little different.
- Let's review the requirements of grant applications from the three granting bodies, in turn. What similarities do you notice?

Canada Council: Research and Creation

- **Project Description:** Explain inspiration for your project or why you wish to undertake it at this time (750 words)
- **Project Plan:** Identify key steps and dates for their completion (250 words)
- **Artistic Growth:** How will this project contribute to your artistic growth or advance your artistic practice? (500 words)
- **Additional questions that may or may not apply:** about any artists you might be hiring and/or residencies you might be completing. There's also space to supply information not captured by the questions above.
- A budget and a writing sample, with explanation of how it relates to the application

Ontario Arts Council: Recommender Grant or Literary Creation

- Artistic Merit section:
 - About you, the writer: Describe your overall artistic work, history and achievements. What is important to you in your work (cultural influences, your identity, geography, community, language, etc.) and why? (300 words)
 - Project Plan & Description: What are you planning to do, and what do you want to achieve with this project? (425 words)
- Artistic Example section:
 - A writing sample
 - Describe how the artistic examples relate to your application. (Maximum 150 words)

Toronto Arts Council: Level One or Two

- A curriculum vitae or biography (max 3 pages)
- Project Plan & Description: Briefly describe or summarize your project. Describe the genre, format and structure of your writing project along with its length (approximate number of words, pages, poems, essays or chapters). State what stage of writing you are at and how many pages are written to date. (Don't exceed space provided—for me, approx. 600 words)
- Writing Sample

So, what are the major components?

1. Description: What do you want to create? What makes this project necessary (for you and others)? Do you know what you are setting out to do?
2. The Writer: What experience do you have? Do you have the commitment or resources to pull off the project? How does this project “fit” your practice?
3. A Plan: How do you intend on completing the project? How much have you already done? Is your plan reasonable for the duration of the grant?
4. Writing Sample: Do you have the skills to complete what you’ve set out to do? Can you give a “sense” of the project in practice?

Creating an Application

Process and Product

What makes a successful grant application?

- A grant application doesn't bear a relationship with publishing.
- Writers/projects that are unsuccessful with grants are published all the time, just as writers/projects that are successful with grants are not.
- A writer with fewer accolades or less experience can receive a grant over a writer with far more experience and accomplishments just because their grant application is stronger.
- What does this mean for you? A grant application is a distinct literary form. Your application will be judged on your ability to succeed within *this* form.

What's the purpose of a grant application?

- The purpose of a grant application is to **convince** the reader that your project should be funded. This means the application is persuasive, not descriptive.
- **What are you trying to convince the reader of?** Literary grants are awarded to projects of “artistic merit.” A writer might have merit, but a project may not. More precisely, you must convince the reader the project that **will result** (note the future tense!) from this grant application is going to have artistic merit. A grant application is “suggestive” of a future outcome.

What's your audience looking for?

A grant application should “suggest” three important elements to the reader:

1. Originality (The What)
2. Value (The Why)
3. Viability (The How)

What is meant by “originality”?

- Your application is likelier to catch the attention of a jury if it is concerning a subject or topic that is unusual (content) OR if you are approaching a familiar subject or topic in a manner that is unusual (form). This will suggest to the jury that there is a “need” for this project, since nothing like it exists.
- Originality can be indicated implicitly or explicitly. Brainstorming Exercise: Assume that there are three other grant applications concerning a similar subject or topic (you might find it helpful to research existing books that are similar). What makes your project stand out?

What is meant by “value”?

- “All who study creativity agree that for something to be creative, it is not enough for it to be novel: it must have value...” (Weisberg, *Creativity*, p. 4).
- Another way to think of value: what makes your project *necessary*? What need does this project meet?
- There are two types of value that your grant application should address: personal value and community value.

What is meant by “personal value”?

- Something has compelled you to complete this project. What is the source of this urgency? What impact will completing this project have on you? How does the project fit into your artistic practice?
- Personal value gives the reader a chance to understand you as an artist and how this project relates to you. This isn't just about your career as a writer—it's about what drives you as a person, what types of questions you are asking and what you are curious about.
- Still, be careful about how “personal” you are. You are applying for funding for your project, not you, so don't take attention away from the project. Share purposefully: only as much as needed to provide context for the project.

What is meant by “community value”?

- Indicate implicitly or explicitly what impact the project will have on others, or what about the project will resonate with your community. This isn't about being “useful” or “profitable.” Literature can make others feel less alone in the world, can make them feel represented, and offer solace. How might your project do this?
- Brainstorming Exercise: Who will connect most with your project? Who needs this project as much as you? How will your project connect with those unfamiliar with your subject / topic?
- Avoid grandiose statements about the impact your project will have. The jury doesn't expect your project to be revolutionary and will find such claims off-putting.

What is meant by “viability”?

- viability (noun): ability to work successfully (Oxford Languages)
- A jury might acknowledge a project is original and offers value, but the project may not seem viable—which is to say, unlikely to fulfil its promise.
- Perhaps the jury thinks the project is unlikely to be completed during the duration of the grant (usually 1 year) or the writer doesn't have a realistic understanding of the demands of the project or the writer does not seem capable of handling a project of this scope.

How do you demonstrate “viability”?

- Give a sense not only of what you plan to do but also how.
- Indicate how much of the project has been completed and what remains to be completed. How many pieces or pages have you completed thus far, or what research have you done? What will you be working on for your grant—a first draft or a revision?
- Indicate any (if applicable) research you plan to do. For some grants, you can “budget” research expenses, while other grants will not cover such costs.

How do you demonstrate “viability”?

- Demonstrate you have a plan for how you will tackle the subject matter / topic by providing a synopsis of the project. How detailed will depend on the project. Sometimes its enough to indicate the main character, the setting, and the primary conflict, or an application might provide more details about the plot.

How do you demonstrate “viability”?

- In addition to a plan, you also need to indicate your competency / ability to handle a project of this type or scope. This will depend on the writer and the project. Competency can be implied through:
 - the writer’s professional experience (the “writer’s bio”)
 - personal experience that makes the project achievable for you
 - the coherency and cohesiveness of the application, which can “convince” the jury of a writer’s ability and potential

How do you demonstrate “viability”?

- Your grant application as a whole should be focused when describing your project. Demonstrate a strong understanding of your project by providing sufficient background or context that will help the jury understand the project’s concerns.
- Too much or too little information, and the reader will assume you either lack focus or depth, which may suggest a project is not yet “viable.”

How do you demonstrate “viability”?

- The writing sample is a crucial indicator of “viability” used to assess the writer’s ability to execute the project. Ideally, the writing sample will relate to your project, either explicitly or tangentially. You should indicate the connection between the writing sample and the project.
- In an ideal world, you submit your best writing *and* writing that is related to the project. This can be tricky if you are funding a project that you have not yet started to work on. In this case, either work on and polish a few pages that relate to the project, or choose a piece that relates most closely in subject matter or style.

What form should the application take?

- There's no one way to do a grant application. The structure of an application can vary as well as the tone.
- This means that you have freedom in *how* you organize information in a grant application. What's more important is that the application meets the demand for originality, value, and viability.
- Like any piece of writing, a grant application should contain a beginning, middle, and end. It should be organized logically, the language should be accessible, and it should be proofread for errors.

Now what?

- If you receive a grant, you must formally accept and submit a “report” once the duration of the grant has passed, summarizing what you have achieved. If the grant was not for living expenses, you may need to provide a summary of actual expenses.
- If you don’t receive a grant, contact the support officer for feedback. Since they sit with the jury during deliberations, they may have real notes to pass on to you.
- Sometimes, you can’t apply for another grant until one is finished. If that’s not the case, apply again with another project next year even if you already received a grant, or revise an existing application and try again. Juries change every year!

Further Reading

Links and Resources

Further Reading

- “Show Me the (Writing-Grant) Money!” by Jessica Westhead: <http://open-book.ca/Writer-in-Residence/Archives/Jessica-Westhead/Show-Me-the-Writing-Grant-Money>
- “Canada Council Grant Application Walk-Through” by Michael Melgaard: <http://www.michaelmelgaard.com/canada-council-grant-application-walkthrough>
- “Why You Should Apply for a Canada Council Grant Every Year Until You Die” by Sherwin Tija: <https://qfwrites.wordpress.com/2019/12/28/why-you-should-apply-for-a-canada-council-grant-every-year-until-you-die-by-sherwin-tija/>
- “The 6 Essentials of Writing an Artist Grant (from Someone Who’s Written Her Fair Share)” by Hanan Hazime: <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/the-6-essentials-of-writing-an-artist-grant-from-someone-who-s-written-her-fair-share-1.5156048>
- “Grant Writing 101” by The Future Is You and Me: <http://thefutureisyouandme.com/grantwriting>

Questions?
