

Writing an Effective Decentralization Grant Program Application

For the Decentralization grant 2019 funding cycle, the Community Arts (Reach), Arts in Education (Spark) and Individual Artist (Ripple) categories received 31 applications from Genesee and Orleans County totaling just under \$100,000. GO ART! had \$70,000 to distribute from the New York State Council for the Arts. 25 requests were funded (either fully or partially) and 6 were denied funding. The grant process is competitive. Writing a clear and effective proposal is crucial. This handout will help!

Application Clarity and Completeness

“Application Clarity and Completeness” is just one of the criteria (listed in the Guidelines) that are considered by the panel when making funding decisions. Please take note of the other criteria!

- **Read the application, guidelines and instructions carefully.** The Decentralization materials are fairly dense. Leave yourself the time to study the guidelines, fill out the application carefully and make sure you have the time to collect the required attachments and information. Many people fill out the application without reading the guidelines. This is a mistake!
- **Answer each question and do not leave blanks.** If I could sum up my grant writing advice in a few words, it would be “Answer the questions.” Missing, vague or incomplete information will hurt your chances for funding.
- **Correct spelling and math count.** If an application is poorly presented, the panel may assume your project will also be poorly presented. Check your spelling, math, punctuation and general presentation.
- **Do not project an attitude.** Avoid anger, sarcasm, or criticism.
- **Be clear and concise.** Do not use “grant babble” which I define as a lot of words intended to impress but which actually do not answer the questions. A proposal is not a personal statement, nor is it a history course. It is a request for monetary support of a project. Having said that, the decision to fund or not fund is made by people - so your narratives do not have to be dry or merely technical. Go ahead and be personable. Generate enthusiasm and excitement!
- **The panel may not be familiar with the arts organization or artist’s work.** Don’t assume that grant panels will know of your work and what you do.
- **Take advantage of the draft review.** The opportunity to have the grant coordinator read your request ahead of time can make the difference between being funded and not being funded. Often, grant writers are so close to and familiar with their project that they don’t realize that they are leaving out important information. Although the grant panel reads all the requests in the weeks before they meet as a group, they only have a limited amount of time to discuss your proposal at the actual panel meeting. You do not want them to spend those minutes clarifying your request. When the applications are ranked against each other, the difficulty they may have had understanding your proposal may affect getting the grant. Drafts sent at least two weeks before the review deadline are required if you would like it to be reviewed. (The closer to the deadline they are sent, the less time the grant coordinator will have to respond.)
- **Be clear about your funding needs.** Quantity does not necessarily equal quality. In fact, too much information about other programs that are not fundable might be confusing unless you are

very clear about what portions of your activities you wish to have funded. Make sure that you express your need for funding clearly.

Your Narrative and Budget Should Match

Your written “Detail Statement” and your budget provide the same information in two different ways. One is a narrative description and the other is a list of costs.

There are two fundamental mistakes made in applications:

1. An item is included in the budget that is not mentioned in the narrative.
2. An item is excluded from the budget that is mentioned in the narrative.

The panel will find these inconsistencies. They discuss them!

Here is an example of a narrative and budget that match:

NARRATIVE

The concert will include 3 musicians...
We'll advertise our concert with paid ads in two local newspapers and with a mailing...

BUDGET ITEM

Musicians (3 @ \$100/ea) \$300
Advertising (Ad in Journal) \$214
(Ad in Times) \$200
500 postcards @.23 \$115

Provide Breakdown of Costs

On the budget page of the application, you will see that a narrative breakdown of your expenses is required. For example, you may have a Space Rental expense of \$500. An itemization might read “4 rehearsals @ \$75 ea, 2 performances \$100 ea” = \$500.

Check Your Math *

Every year, at least 20% of the applications have budgets that don't add up correctly. Please check your math very carefully. Once your requests are submitted, they will go to the panel with the mistakes. This never leaves a good impression with the panel.

An Example of a Poorly Written Application

This page and the budget page that follows are an example of a poorly written request. An explanation as to why follows.

1. EVENT INFO: List Activity Date Time Location Fee Audience Size
2. SUMMARY STATEMENT:
3. DETAIL STATEMENT:

Describe your project in this portion of the application. Address all points listed below. You do not need to write a separate paragraph for each bullet. Just make sure that every point below is covered somewhere in your narrative.

- *Please write a clear, concise, detailed description of the project.*
- *Name artistic personnel. Speak about the qualifications or experience of your proposed artistic personnel. Note that you will also be attaching a resume. The caliber of the artistic personnel is a major consideration for the panel.*
- *Describe or name the administrators of the project and their qualification to administer.*

- Describe the size & type of audience that will be served by project. Comment on community interest in your proposed project and community benefit.
- Speak about the need for these funds.
- Note: Any expenses described in the narrative should be found on the budget page of this application. Any costs listed in the budget should be described in the narrative.

Medina is a town that lost its industrial base twenty years ago, and suffered serious economic decline from which is never fully recovered. Not only has the town seen a loss of shops and municipal services, it has also lost population. In the 2000 census, Medina was listed as having close to 5,864 people living within its town limits. In 2014 that was down 8.6%.

We have been presenting an important chamber music series in Medina since 1991, and regularly receive very positive press reviews for our efforts. Our exciting concerts are presented in the town's high school auditorium and are sometimes attended by over 50 people. Our ten musicians are drawn from the faculty of the local junior college, which was founded in 1982 and has several professional and technical degree programs. We perform a variety of music, from chamber to the moderns, and vary the ensemble to include trios, quartets and the full chamber orchestra. We are proud of our ability to publicize our concerts widely, including newspaper ad, local radio spots and a mailer to our membership. We hope the panel recognizes our significant accomplishments in this relatively poor community, and fully supports our request this year.

An Example of a Poorly Written Application (con't)

PROJECT EXPENSES	Provide Breakdown Below	A. TOTAL EXPENSES	C. FUNDING REQUEST
Artistic Personnel	5 x 3 x 100	\$1,500	
Technical Personnel			
Space Rental		\$500	
Equip. Rental Supplies	Music Stands	\$350	
Travel			
Advertising Promotion			
Remaining Operating Expenses (itemize)	Rental Scores, recording space	\$550	
	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>\$2,975</u>	<u>\$</u>

PROJECT INCOME	Provide Breakdown Below	B. TOTAL INCOME
Admissions		\$850
Membership, Dues		
Workshops, Sales		
Contributions Individual		\$250
Contributions Corporate		\$250
Other Grants (not DEC)		
Other (explain)		
	TOTAL	\$1,250

Subtract “B. Total Income” from “A Total Expenses”: \$1,725

What is your Funding Request: \$1,725

An Example of a Poorly Written Application Explained

The application and budget presented in the previous two pages pose many problems. The grant panel would have too many questions and would probably be unable to fund this project due to a lack of information.

On the Detail Statement:

- What are the project dates and audience size? The event information was left blank.
- The Summary Statement is also left blank. This brief summary of the request is necessary.
- In the Detail Statement narrative, what does the first paragraph have to do with the request? The applicant doesn’t make the point.
- In the second paragraph, who is “We”? It doesn’t actually state who is in charge of the series.
- It says that over 50 people sometimes attend the concerts. We wonder about the rest of the time.
- They didn’t answer all of the questions listed, such as the number of events, locations, times and dates. We aren’t given the names of coordinator and the artists involved.
- They don’t actually state what they need the money for. Many of the expenses in the budget are not addressed in the narrative.
- There are some spelling mistakes. This isn’t a huge big deal but does communicate to the panel that someone was not paying attention.

On the Budget Page:

- What is “5 x 3 x \$100” under “Artistic fees”? I would guess this means 5 musicians at 3 concerts, but that would be a guess. It could mean 3 musicians at 5 concerts. The narrative says 10 musicians and the ensemble includes trios, quartets and the full chamber group. So I don’t get it!

- They want \$500 for “space rental”. They do not itemize (or explain) this as requested. I can guess, based on their narrative, that this is for the high school, but I’m not sure. Is the \$500 for performances or rehearsals? Also, who needs \$75 for travel? These items should be itemized.
- I also wonder about \$350 for music stands. Is this for 10 stands? Musicians always own stands, so this need isn’t clear. While this grant doesn’t fund equipment, it is okay to include such items in the budget so that the panel gets a complete picture of the event costs. But it should have been explained.
- I would also have to call and ask about the rental scores and recording service. Where does the figure \$550 come from? I need a breakdown. Also, the narrative doesn’t say anything about the concerts being recorded. Does this relate to the project?
- Under income, we need to know how they estimate \$850 for “Admissions”. The application asks for a breakdown, such as 100 tickets @ \$8.50 each.
- There is a math mistake. The income adds up to \$1,350, not \$1,250. Their grant request is therefore \$1,625, not \$1,725.
- They also left column C empty. Page 8 shows you how this column should have been filled out.

An Example of a Well Written Application

The example and the budget that follows is a very well written request.

A panel would probably have no questions. All italicized questions on the application have been answered. It is clear from the budget that the organization would like GAP to fund all of the artistic expenses with the remaining towards marketing.

1. EVENT INFO:

List Activity	Date	Time	Location	Fee	Audience Size
Chamber Music Quartet	Sunday, Feb. 9th	2pm	High School	\$3	75
Chamber Music Group	Sunday in May	2pm	High School	\$3	75
Chamber Music Trio	Sunday in Oct.	2pm	High School	\$3	75

2. SUMMARY STATEMENT:

The Johnstown Performing Arts Group requests \$1,400 to fund artistic fees and increased publicity costs for three chamber music concerts for the Johnstown community.

3. DETAIL STATEMENT:

The Medina Performing Arts Group has been presenting chamber music concerts in Medina since 1991. The board of directors is made up of five of the musicians that regularly perform with the group. All of our musicians are drawn from the music faculty of the local junior college (See attachment for a brief paragraph about each musician). We perform a variety of music, from the classics to the moderns, and vary the ensemble to include trios, quartets, and the full chamber group. The board meets 8 times a year and performs all tasks associated with the logistics of the concerts. Currently, the chamber music series is the only classical music presented in the town of Medina.

In 2013 we will present three concerts: The first will be on Sunday, February 9th and will feature a chamber music quartet playing Mozart and Bach. The musicians will be available to the public after the concert to chat and answer questions. The second concert will be in May and will feature the full chamber group (8 musicians). The last concert will be in October and will feature a trio. Each concert will be on a Sunday and will start at 2pm. All will be held at the High School auditorium. Exact dates and programs for the second and third concert will be confirmed by February. We charge \$3 for performances but do not turn anyone away if they can't pay.

Attendance at these concerts has not been wonderful, although we have an enthusiastic core of followers. We would like to increase attendance from an average audience size of 25 to 75. We would like part of the grant funds to help with the cost of publicity so that we can get the word out to the public. We currently send out a mailer to our membership (150 people) and utilize whatever free publicity the local newspapers offer. This year we would like to print and distribute posters, send out an additional 500 postcards, send an e-blast using the collages listserv and pay for three print ads in the Orleans Hub paper (one before each concert). We would also like to pay the musicians \$100 each for each performance. In the past we have only been able to pay \$25 each which is much too little. We pay a minimal fee to the High School for a custodian.

PROJECT EXPENSES	Provide Breakdown Below	A. TOTAL EXPENSES	C. FUNDING REQUEST
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Artistic Personnel	1 st concert: 4 musicians / 2nd: 8 musicians / 3rd 3 musicians. Total 15 @ \$100 each =	\$1,500	\$1,400
Technical Personnel			
Space Rental	Custodian for 3 concerts \$50 x 3	\$150	
Equip. Rental Supplies	3 display ads @ \$200 ea B&W postcard printing \$45 mailing \$144 100 posters	\$600 \$189 \$45	
Travel			
Advertising Promotion			
Remaining Operating Expenses (itemize)	Rental Scores, recording space	\$550	
	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>\$3,034</u>	<u>\$1,400</u>

PROJECT INCOME	Provide Breakdown Below	B. TOTAL INCOME
Admissions	75 people / 3concerts @ 5 ea	\$1,125
Membership, Dues		
Workshops, Sales		
Contributions Individual		\$250
Contributions Corporate		\$250
Other Grants (not DEC)		
Other (explain)		
	TOTAL	\$1,625

Subtract "B. Total Income" from "A Total Expenses": \$ 1,409
What is your GAP Request: \$ 1,400