This Tips & Strategies document was prepared for Visual, Craft, Film/Video, and Choreography applicants. A FAQs document with general fellowship applications questions can be found here. When in doubt, please consult the grant guidelines or contact N.C. Arts Council staff. Contact information can be found at the end of this document.

► I’m an interdisciplinary artist. How should I choose what grant to apply for?

Choosing a discipline – visual, craft, film/video, or choreography – will determine which panel will review your work. For artists whose work could land in more than one category, it is up to you as to where you feel your work fits best. We can advise, but it is ultimately your decision as you know your work better than anyone else.

► Any tips on answering the narrative questions?

Your narrative should tell the panel how you would spend the award, how the grant will assist in your artistic development, and why it’s important that you receive the grant at this time. But remember that it is secondary in importance to the work samples you will submit. If you find yourself agonizing over your narrative, you may be spending too much time on it. Here are a few suggestions and reminders to help you craft an appropriate statement.

- **Get to the point.** You don’t have unlimited space, so save your lyrical and elliptical expositions for another forum. A typed page (roughly the space you have) is plenty of room to respond fully to the questions.
- **This is not a project grant.** You do not need to submit a budget. While you can propose an artist project to undertake with the grant award, it is not required. The fellowship is intended to give artists doing strong work some resources to continue exploring their work. Think about it as a grant for research and development.
- **Connect the dots.** What you should be able to describe in your narrative is where you are now with your work and where you would like to take it—the trajectory you see your work taking between now and the end of the grant year. A panelist reading your narrative - after having seen your work samples - should say to herself, “That makes sense. That’s a good direction for this artist to take his work.”
- **Know what’s important.** If your work involves unusual processes or is difficult to read in the work samples, you can use the narrative to amplify the panelists’ understanding. The narrative can also be used to discuss the significance of your work, though caution is appropriate here. There’s a difference between saying that your work addresses certain themes and saying what it means or touting its quality. Panelists are capable of drawing those conclusions on their own, and may not respond favorably to being told what to think.

You’re applying for a craft, visual, film/video, or choreography artist fellowship not a writer’s fellowship, so you don’t have to worry about literary style points. Nonetheless, a clear, clean, focused narrative
helps demonstrate your knowledge of your work and where you would like to take it. Here are a few general reminders:

- **Talk about your work, not about yourself.** These grants are intended to help you develop your work, so biographical details and personal philosophy should take a back seat to a discussion of the work you are presenting in your application.

- **Be descriptive, not interpretive.** Panelists want to know about process, technique, and what ideas inform your work. Avoid telling the reader what your work means (“The sun is a symbol for salvation, while the flowers suggest rebirth...”) or how well it conveys your message (“The use of ashes subtly underscores the theme of transience...”).

- **Use active voice as a general rule.** Active voice drives your narrative forward with a sentence structure that makes the subject the agent of the action the verb represents. (“I plan to experiment with larger-format paintings” or “The work dominates the space”). Passive voice typically slows the reader down and often creates an unnecessary ambiguity or ungainliness in the syntax (“The work is envisioned as a large, outdoor sculpture” or “Of especial note is the placement of the gargoyle...”).

- **Keep it simple.** Describe unusual processes or visual presentations by breaking them down into a sequence of production or experience (“Visitors enter the installation through a narrow door...” or “I use a three-stage firing process...”).

- **Know your audience.** Panelists are chosen from different areas of craft, visual, film/video arts, and choreography, but you can assume they will all be conversant with general concepts and terms and have at least a basic familiarity with a variety of media. If you are discussing specific processes or techniques in your area of specialty, however, it may require some additional explanation. Avoid gratuitous artspeak or academic jargon, unless you’re sure the panel will be receptive, you’re confident about your ability to use it correctly, and it’s relevant to your work. Though someone has doubtless written about the semiotics of crackelure finishes on glass, you’d be better off saving those observations for your next museum catalogue. There’s little to be gained by pretentiousness.

Finally, we would recommend composing your answers in a Word document. When you have a presentable draft, have a friend read it over for you and offer feedback. When you are satisfied with the revisions, you can copy and paste into the text boxes of the application. Be aware that you will lose your formatting in the transition and accents and other special characters translate poorly. Each question has a specific character limit, with an overall total of 4,500 characters and spaces for all three.

► **What should I consider in choosing my work samples?**

Please see the application guidelines for specific requirements for your discipline. For example, most visual artists should submit 10 jpegs. Submitting fewer begs the question of why you don’t have 10 images to show the panel. However, the 10 images do not have to represent 10 distinct works. You can include details or alternate views of work, if that will help the panelists appreciate subtleties not apparent in a single view. Generally speaking, most artists should show no fewer than six different works in the 10 allotted images.
For a visual artist’s work that is time- or installation-based, three or four works would probably be safe, keeping in mind the guideline requirements. Ultimately, it is up to the panel to determine whether they have enough to go on, but these rules of thumb should provide a guide.

Similarly, filmmakers and choreographers are asked to submit a ten-minute sample of their work. Submitting only six minutes of footage would raise legitimate questions. On the other hand, the optional full work is exactly that: recommended but not obligatory.

➤ Any other tips on how to choose work samples?

Thanks for asking! We can’t say it enough—work samples are the most important part of your application. These specific tips apply best to visual and craft applicants, but all applicants should submit a well-documented, recent, and coherent body of work.

You should pick images and video work samples that are:

- **Documented well.** Poorly focused, framed, cropped, or exposed images or video documentation do not convey the level of professionalism panelists expect—and it’s easy for them to pass over your work quickly as a result. You can document your own work, if you’re confident in your ability; but if you are not so confident, it’s a wise investment to hire a professional objects photographer to prepare a high-quality portfolio for you, or a competent digital videographer to document your time-based work. It is money well spent if you plan to apply for grants, submit work to competitions, send work to commercial galleries and museums for consideration, or any of a number of other opportunities where first impressions matter.

- **Part of a coherent body of work.** You may be multi-talented artist who is facile in several media, but it’s generally not to your advantage to show the panel all you can do. Making a statement about a single body of work is difficult enough in the limited space or time allotted; if you dilute the focus, you risk confusing the panel about who you are and what you do as an artist. Even with the first round of application review being online, there is a lot of work to consider so panelists will only have a relatively short amount of time to assess your work. Consequently, it’s usually better to present a single artistic vision.

- **Recent.** Submit work completed in the last three years (five years for film/video). Fellowship grants are not lifetime achievement awards. They are offered biennially and are intended to recognize artists whose recent work is exemplary. Can artists submit older work? They can, but panelists will be instructed to give work completed in last three years a clear preference—unless there is a very compelling reason, which should be noted in your work sample description.

➤ What should I include in my descriptions on the inventory form?

This can be a short annotation (no more than 2 sentences) that can further explain technical aspects, like operating or sequencing of a work, and/or features that may not be evident in the work sample. We really do not want to see the following in annotations:

- Descriptions that tell the panel something they can see clearly in the work sample: “This is a picture of a house on a hill,” or a laborious retelling of the plot of your film work.
• What the work is supposed to mean or how the viewer should think or feel about it. Panelists are pretty savvy; if you try to tell them what it means or spin their response, you may not get the reaction you desire.
• Who bought, commissioned, or exhibited, presented, or screened the work or any awards it has won. This is résumé material.
• Step-by-step details of conception or fabrication. These are best left for the narrative, though an abbreviated version can be incorporated into the medium description.
• Your personal philosophy of life: To the degree it’s relevant to your work—and many times, it’s not—the appropriate place for such ruminations is in the narrative or artist statement.

► How are my work samples evaluated by the panelists?

While all components of the application are required, none is more important in the evaluation process than the work samples. Panelists are instructed to make their recommendations using artistic merit as their guiding criterion, so it is essential that applicants choose strong work that is well-represented by the work samples. There are five (more or less) components to artistic merit:

• Content: a meaningful and well-formed idea, theme, story, or concept
• Form: a structure that successfully develops the story and theme and supports the underlying intent of the work
• Technical quality: the quality of sound, video, image, etc.
• Aesthetics: creative use of materials in relation to the form and content of the work
• Originality: fresh ideas and approaches to form and content resulting in insightful, moving, and/or provocative work

► I have helped to make some films. Am I eligible for the film/video fellowship?

To be eligible, you must have completed at least one film or video as the primary maker. Typically, this means you were the director, though in some instances other team members may fit the definition more accurately. For any art form, we want our applicants to be the individuals with creative control of the work they have submitted (or shown on their résumé). Film applicants whose only role was screenwriter should apply in the following year for our screenwriting fellowship.

► I make films for both commercial and independent purposes. May I submit samples of both?

Please submit only independent work. Commercial, educational, and industrial work all tend to fall short on the originality measure, as they are often works for hire. Do not submit trailers or promotional shorts, even of independent work. Panelists want to see the real thing, not its glossy distillation.

► May I submit work I completed as a student in an academic program?

No. The conditions and nature of academic programs are fundamentally different than those of working artists. We would like for Arts Council funds to support artists who are creating strong work as independent professionals.
► May I submit works-in-progress?

You have to be very careful about submitting works-in-progress. By their very nature, they are not a finished product and thus are, in some ways, unresolved artistically. Understand that if you use a work-in-progress as your primary work sample, it will be evaluated against finished work from other applicants. Film/video and choreography applicants can submit a work-in-progress as their optional full work sample, along with finished works in their ten-minute sample.

► I still have questions after reading this. Whom should I contact?

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