

FUNDING

Do You Need Funding?

Getting funding is an undertaking. Sometimes it's easier to look to the passionate people around you and see if you can all pitch in a small amount of labour to get something going. When something's volunteered powered it actually makes it easier to get funding for stuff in the future, because you've proven A) you can get shit done, and B) there is a community around you that cares about this stuff too. This will make your future proposals more substantial and credible and give you a chance to see if you actually enjoy doing the thing before you're spending money on it. Using volunteer power ethically and effectively is beyond the scope of this doc, but it's possible to get good at it! (See [TEAMS](#))

While it would be great to get paid to pursue a passion, in my experience it usually takes two years before I have enough credibility and community integration to actually get paid to do it. (This raises the question of who gets paid when limited funding is available. Many organizers believe strongly in paying artists before themselves, but this can lead to burnout.)

What Kind of Funding is Available?

This will require a combination of internet research but also community outreach to people in your region. Regional difference are huge. In Canada, where I am, there's lots of funding for arts & culture, but just a bit to the south there is comparatively little public funding. Many regions don't have a lot of game arts entities, so consider talking to people in other arts disciplines or related industries who have received funding already. It's always easier to have money-related conversations with people who you've built trust, so ideally you will have either connected with them beforehand or you can ask someone who trusts you for an introduction. Sometimes social media can show mutuals.

Project funding for which you pitch an idea for a time-limited project is much more common than operational funding, which can pay for any ongoing operating costs (including office rental, salaries) of an organization. An org I co-founded (Hand Eye Society) got operational funding from the Ontario Arts Council not too long ago, but it took almost a decade and many project funding approvals before the funder believed in the organization's artistic value.

Once you've made a list of possible funders, I usually put them in a spreadsheet and set a reminder to myself to look at any deadline a month prior. Rather than dive in to hundreds of pages of guidelines, I prefer to look at one at a time, when I have a deadline providing some urgency.

Does My Project Look Suitable?

After the deadline is a month out, I do another bite-sized bit of work: read the guidelines and write questions. I flag anything that either involves other people (ie. letters of interest) and things I haven't done before second (ie. an unfamiliar type of budget). Sometimes you'll discover that you need to be incorporated to qualify, and you're not, so skip that one. Some funders allow for incorporation after funding is recommended, which can make going down that road worthwhile depending on the amount

of money, and sometimes you can partner with someone who is incorporated (but that's something you don't want to rush into).

Some funders list the previous recipients of the fund, and you can consider contacting them though the considerations above still stand. If you're on good terms, people sometimes will let you look at their successful applications (though I personally wouldn't ask for that outright). If you're not, they might view you as a competitor. Relationships and previous partnerships are very important in these situations.

Contact the Officer/Getting Feedback

If after reading the guidelines you still feel like the project is a reasonable fit, it's time to reach out to the program officer/contact with the questions you have and a brief summary of your idea. Many are willing to talk on phone/video, and while intimidating, you can get a lot out of this. Mainly what you're looking for is where you stand between being eligible and competitive in the competition. They will rarely be super-encouraging but they usually know the jury well enough that they can give you insight as to whether your project is a good fit, or whether you're trying to put a square peg into a round hole. Don't do the latter, it's a waste of everyone's energy, though sometimes you can luck out with a sympathetic jury. Keep looking around for funding programs that might be better fits, and remember to circle back to funders to check in with their attitudes. Build relationships if you can.

Often you can ask for feedback on rejected applications, which can inform re-submits and future applications.

What Are the Funder's Goals?

When you're writing an application, figure out where the goals of the funder align with the project you're proposing. An industry stimulus program might want to help existing businesses in your region keep jobs and create new ones. An arts council might want to support the creation and exhibition of art in your region. In my region, the projects I propose to the industry funder are different from the ones I propose to the arts councils. Some project overlap both, but many either tilt towards one or the other.

Mentality and Approach

Writing applications is fairly boring and can be dispiriting. To deal with the power dynamic I often would start with projects I was passionate about and look around at ways to get them supported, but not make the success of the application the main reason why I did something. Often I do projects I see the community needs regardless of funding, and these projects are unofficially underwritten by the ones that do get funding.

I also carefully track my time with applications, because it makes it easier to plan for future applications (ie. I'll never try to do that again in two weeks - it took 55 hours!) and because it sometimes can feel longer than it actually does, because it's boring or emotionally tiring. These hours also can be recompensed in the future, if that's something you budget for.

Education for the Youth

Outside of arts and industry, I have had luck finding funding game creation programs for kids, running summercamps and STEM skill building in underserved neighbourhoods. This taps into community/education funding possibilities and can also be a way to create opportunities and connections with under-represented communities.

Funding Challenges for Game Arts

For many arts councils, you might have to spend the time to explain and demonstrate the artistic value of game arts. For industry funders, you might have to show how non-commercial work has value to the economy. In my experience this education can take a long time, but by doing interesting projects and showing off the community you're part of, people come around eventually. Sometimes they can become allies and advocates!

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