

Application Narrative Pre-Submission Self-Review Tool

(For Artist Grant Applicants)

Use this tool to review your written responses **before you submit** or during workshops and office hours. It helps you check for **clarity, alignment, and completeness** based on what panelists are actually reading for.

This is not a checklist or a scoring sheet — it's a way to step into the reviewer's perspective.

1. Big Picture Test

Before looking at individual questions, ask:

- Can I clearly explain, in one or two sentences:
 - What kind of artist I am?
 - What I want to do with this grant?
 - Why this opportunity matters *right now*?

If this feels unclear, your narratives may need tightening or refocusing.

2. Artist Bio & Artist Statement

(Identity & Practice)

Reflect on the following:

- Does my bio clearly explain **who I am as an artist** and where I'm based?
- Does my artist statement explain:
 - What I make?
 - Why I make it?
 - What shapes my work (place, culture, experience, ideas)?
- Do these two sections **complement** each other rather than repeat the same information?



Ask yourself:

If someone skipped everything else, would these sections still give them a clear sense of my artistic identity?

3. Grant-Specific Narrative

(Career Development, Collaboration, or Fellowship)

Ask yourself:

- Have I clearly answered the *actual question being asked* for my grant type?
- Is it obvious what I am asking the grant to support?
- Does this section explain **why this opportunity fits my current career stage**?

For clarity, try this sentence test:

“This grant will help me _____ by allowing me to _____, which matters now because _____.”

If you struggle to complete this sentence, revisit this section.

4. Specificity & Focus

Review your narrative with these questions:

- Have I named **specific goals, activities, or areas of growth**?
- Could a panelist tell what I actually plan to do — not just what I care about?
- Did I avoid vague phrases like “expand my practice” without explanation?

If something sounds general, ask:

“What would this look like in real life?”

5. Why Your Art Matters

(Purpose & Impact)

Reflect honestly:

- Did I explain *why* my work matters beyond myself?
- Does this section show:
 - Connection to community, culture, audience, or artistic field?
 - Alignment between my values and my proposed activities?
- Is this grounded in my real experience, not abstract language?



Ask yourself:

Who is affected by my work, and how?

6. Artistic Process & Skills

(Excellence & Readiness)

Ask:

- Did I clearly describe *how* I make my work?
- Does this section help a panelist understand my:
 - Skills?
 - Techniques?
 - Creative approach?
- Do my descriptions match what someone will see in my work samples?

If not, consider adding one concrete example of your process in action.

7. Alignment Check (Very Important)

Review all narratives together:

- Do my answers reinforce each other?
- Is there a clear line between:
 - My artistic identity
 - My experience
 - What I'm proposing now

Nothing should feel contradictory or disconnected.

8. Tone & Voice

Ask yourself:

- Does this sound like *me*?
- Is the tone confident but not exaggerated?
- Did I avoid trying to guess what panelists “want to hear”?

Panelists respond best to **clarity and sincerity**, not jargon.

9. Final Reflection Question

Answer this in one or two sentences:

What do I want panelists to understand most about me and my work when they finish reading this application?

If your narratives don't clearly support that answer, revise with that goal in mind.

Facilitator Tip (Optional)

In workshops or office hours:

- Ask applicants to read **one paragraph aloud**
 - Ask listeners: “*What did you understand this artist wants to do?*”
 - Gaps in understanding often reveal exactly what needs revision
-

If you'd like, I can:

- Adapt this tool by **grant type** (Career / Collaboration / Fellowship)
- Pair it with a **peer-review worksheet**
- Convert it into a **fillable PDF or Google Doc**

Together with the résumé self-review, this gives applicants a strong, realistic way to self-assess before submitting.

How to Use the Narrative Self-Review Tool

All applicants should first complete the **Application Narrative Pre-Submission Self-Review Tool**.

After reviewing your full application, **apply the lens below that matches your grant type**. These lenses highlight what panelists emphasize most for each category.

Use the core tool — then apply the lens that matches your grant type.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT GRANT LENS

For artists building or advancing their careers

Panelists are asking:

- Is this artist ready for a clear next step?
- Are the goals specific and achievable?
- Will this grant meaningfully support artistic or professional growth *right now*?

Apply this lens to your narratives:

Ask yourself:

- Have I clearly described **what I will do** with this grant?
- Are my goals **specific, realistic, and appropriate** to my experience?
- Does my application show why this opportunity matters **at this moment** in my career?

Sentence test:

This grant will help me _____ by allowing me to _____, which matters now because _____.

If this sentence feels vague or overly broad, revise for clarity.

⚠ **Common pitfall:** Writing about passion or vision without clearly naming activities or outcomes.

ARTIST COLLABORATION GRANT LENS

For two or more artists working together

Panelists are asking:

- Why are these artists collaborating?
- How does the partnership strengthen the work?
- What becomes possible together that could not happen alone?

Apply this lens to your narratives:

Ask yourself:

- Is it clear **why this collaboration exists**?
- Are individual roles and contributions visible?
- Does the application describe a **shared creative process**, not just parallel practices?

Sentence test:

This collaboration matters because together we can _____ in a way we could not individually.

If your narratives sound like two solo statements combined, revise to emphasize the collaboration itself.

⚠ **Common pitfall:** Describing each artist well, but never explaining how the work is truly collaborative.

ARTIST FELLOWSHIP LENS

For established artists with a strong record of achievement

Panelists are asking:

- Does this artist demonstrate sustained excellence?
- Is there clear artistic maturity and reflection?

- How will fellowship support enable creative exploration or a new direction?

Apply this lens to your narratives:

Ask yourself:

- Have I clearly articulated **significant artistic accomplishments**?
- Am I reflecting on my career, not proposing a project plan?
- Is my future direction **credible and grounded** in my past work?

Sentence test:

At this stage in my career, this fellowship will allow me to _____ in order to explore or deepen _____.

If your response reads like a project proposal, refocus on reflection and artistic direction.

⚠ **Common pitfall:** Over-planning or under-reflecting.

Final Reminder for All Applicants

Panelists are not looking for perfect language or a single “right” approach. They are looking for:

- **Clarity**
- **Alignment**
- **Honest reflection**
- **Readiness for the opportunity you chose**

Use the core self-review tool to strengthen your application — then use the appropriate lens to fine-tune it.