

Theatre Projects Program Screencast Transcript

Introduction

Hi there, this is Pat Bradley. I'm the Theatre Officer at the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) and I'm here today on this screencast to talk to you about our Theatre Projects program at OAC.

The first thing you need to know about the Theatre Projects program is a bit about timing. There are two deadlines a year: one in February and one in August.

The applications are available about two months before the deadline and it takes about four months until you receive the results of the competition.

Altogether that's potentially a six-month process, so you should be planning ahead and thinking about when to put in an application if you have a project upcoming that you want to apply for.

The next thing I'm going to tell you is that as of 2017 all applications are made online through our new online application portal system called Nova, which has been introduced for all 2017 deadlines. No more paper applications.

Applying online to Theatre Projects

I'm going to give you an introduction to the new system in just a moment. Go onto the internet and open a browser. Chrome seems to work really well with our system.

You can go to our website which is www.arts.on.ca and you arrive at the landing page. You can choose to browse our website in English or French. I am going to select English. There are a lot of features on this website but I'm going to just for now go directly into the grants system by hovering over the "Grants" menu item, and then selecting "Theatre" under the discipline list. That's the quickest way to get there.

When you go to the [Theatre page](#), there's an "[Apply now](#)" button next to the search bar but let's look at some of the information that's available on this page before we do that.

So this is the general Theatre page. There are some guides to certain things in the sidebar menu and then there's a listing of the programs in Theatre. We are specifically interested in "[Theatre Projects](#)" so we'll choose that one. When you click on it, a dropdown textbox appears and it gives us a little bit of basic information about the program and we go to the full details on the program by clicking "Learn More." So this is the [Theatre Projects page](#) and this has all the information you need about the program: its purpose, its priorities, deadline dates and the different categories and the grant amounts and various other elements about program, eligibility, etc.

Helpful resources for applying

On this page, there are some sidebar links to a bunch of resources that you will find useful. There is the [Guide to Assessment](#), which talks about how we choose jurors. There is a [Guide to Project Programs](#), a [Guide to Support Material](#), some information on [Support for Deaf artists and artists with disabilities](#) and many other useful guides.

Eligibility is over here on the right side. You can click there to find more about eligibility for OAC project programs and timing, when you can apply.

Before you go into the Nova portal, you can read what the [generic questions are for activity projects](#) programs, which is one of the types of programs that Theatre Projects is. We are going to examine slightly more detailed versions of the questions in a second with writing tips, but these are the general questions that we have in every single activity program. Questions about artistic merit, about what you're doing and who you're working with, with the word counts listed here.

So if you want to read the questions before you even get into the Nova portal you can do so. But I do recommend actually going into the portal. However, if you're working on an application and it's more than two months before the deadline, then the application won't be available in the portal, so you can read the questions here to get yourself ready to write the application.

There's also a link to a great little video on [preparing effective artistic examples or support material](#). Once we've read all this information, and read these guides to get more information, we can click on "[Apply Now](#)."

Nova online grant application system

This will bring us to grants.arts.on.ca, which is our Nova online grant application system. If you are not already in the system you will [click here to register](#) – a very simple registration process – with your email, your first name, and your last name, accept the Terms and Conditions, a captcha code, (I'm not a robot), and you will be registered.

I already have a couple of identities in the system so we're going to go in as "Declan Applicant" and we're going to see what Declan's up to and take a look at an application. So you will log in and you will arrive on the landing page. This will be your home page.

The home page will give you information about the grant application system, how to get tech support, when it's available, information about how to toggle back and forth between yourself as an individual and an organization and other information.

If you have any applications that are in progress they will be shown here when you scroll down. So in this demo, there are applications for our Declan, the applicant tester. Just a note that multiple applications

actually aren't possible. You can only make one application per deadline but in this demo we are doing some testing and so there are multiple applications here. When you scroll down on the home page there the programs that are open to Declan to apply that are coming up within the next two months. We are interested in Theatre Projects so we will click "apply."

Navigating through the application in Nova

The first thing you'll come across is an eligibility requirement question. We're just going to click "yes" that our answers to all of the above statements is "yes" and that allows us to click "apply." We will continue to an application.

Here is the application landing page. We're going to very quickly go through some of the things here in the application. We're going to talk about them in more detail in a few minutes. There's a series of tabs across the top of the application that you can move around from one to another that deal with all the elements of the application that you need to supply before you can apply, starting with the project information, project title, project summary, which category, etc.

Access Fund tab: if you're an artist with a disability or a Deaf artist you can make an [application for funding to make the project accessible](#).

Artistic Merit tab: these are the generic questions that I pointed you to a few seconds ago. The writing tips that are specific to particular programs tell you, if necessary, how to answer the questions for the Theatre Projects program. Artistic merit, impact and viability are three criteria in the program; we'll be talking about them in a moment.

Budget tab: the budget is a kind of cool little form that you open in this way and you can fill in the revenues and expenses which must balance to "0" at the end of your budget. When you get down to this part of the budget, a note on the section "OAC grant request amount" – you weren't actually asked for that earlier. You fill it in here and it automatically populates all the other parts of the application that need to know what amount you're asking for.

So if I had filled in a bunch of information, I would save it here but because I haven't, I'm going to click "close" and we'll go back to where we were.

Support Material tab: here you include artistic examples and other support documents; we'll talk about them in a few minutes. But there's a bunch of technical information on this page about what type of files we will accept, JPEG, Vimeo files etc. Lower down the page we have the specifics about Theatre Projects and what is required for different kinds of applications and what support documents are required: generally always the CV, at least one or more, and then some others.

OAC Statistics tab: simple answer – are you a festival or not? Some voluntary statistical information where we try to track as much as we can, applicants and indeed jurors who come from our various priority groups and I'm going to talk about those in a few minutes.

If you would like to participate in knowing about who is applying and who is successful in our programs this is entirely voluntary and it has nothing to do with the actual assessment of the application.

Declaration tab: which is about agreeing to all of our terms and conditions. Then all the way down at the bottom of this page (and you can move from one tab to another at any time), are a couple of buttons. They are very important buttons – “save draft” in particular. As you're working on the application, filling it in, there are word counts down under each text box that tells you how much you have left.

So that's all great and as you fill these things in you should save as frequently as possible. If your phone rings and you walk away or your dog starts to bark or your child needs you, you may leave the application too long and you may lose some material; so save frequently. The “validate application” button is your friend, this is a great button as it tells you which of the required parts of application have yet to be filled in. I'm going to press it now, the screen is going to tell us that we're missing a million things.

Ordinarily you might realize that you've forgotten one or two things and these errors are all hyperlinked to allow you to go back to the thing that needs filling in. So for example we had an invalid start date. Well that's because we didn't fill in a date at all. So we click on the error and it pops us back to the field to fill in our start date.

So that's how the portal for applications in Nova works and the method by which you will be filling in your application.

For all of the text boxes, I would recommend preparing your answers in a program like Microsoft Word and turning on the word count so you know where you are because you can't do a spell check once you're here. Then you can copy and paste into Nova.

Just a reminder the [Theatre Projects page is on our website](#) under grants and Theatre Projects includes guidance on the program, on our project programs in general, and on things like eligibility and how to do support material and artistic examples.

Nova is available at grants.arts.on.ca directly.

Granting process – peer assessment

Now I'm going to talk a little bit about the granting process. The OAC uses a form of assessment of all applications called “peer assessment.”

This allows us to use the expertise that exists in our community to make final decisions about grants so your application will be read and considered and rated and ranked by your peers. A jury is generally (in this program) a jury of five and within those five people we have a whole lot to represent.

We have to represent geography, we have to represent generation, and we have to represent type of practice. So a jury would often have a playwright or two, a director or two, people that are producers / playwrights / performers / artistic directors. So we look at a variety of actual practices. We look at a variety of disciplines within theatre.

So, I look at the applications to see – Do we have a lot of theatre for young audiences? Do we have a lot of music theatre? Are there physical theatre applications or puppetry that requires very particular expertise to understand?

And we also look at our priority groups – are there applications from Indigenous artists? Well, then we would make sure that there was an Indigenous juror on the jury etc. So I'll talk about the priority groups in a second, but within those five people we try to represent the applications. Now that's actually not possible with merely five people but over time I think if you look at the people who have been jurors, you will see all of those representations of the entire province, of different generations, of different forms of practice, of different disciplines within theatre, and of our priority groups. The jurors receive electronic access to your applications and the ability for them to make notes and to score the applications on the criteria that we're going to talk about in a little bit.

When we meet at the Ontario Arts Council, they usually have four to six weeks to do the reading as there's a lot of reading. And when they come in to meet at the Ontario Arts Council we start by looking at what their preliminary scores were and we have discussion about applications that are very far below the line, that's going to be the cut-off line, and get some feedback for those, and then we have a thorough discussion of all the other applications.

And then we spend about two and a half to three days in the room at OAC discussing those applications, talking amongst ourselves, amongst the jurors, about the elements of the application and the criteria and all the other things that we consider like the priority group status of applicants and we make final decisions after a final score. The jury walks out knowing whose gotten grants and for how much. So those are the elements of their decision-making.

Application success rates

One of the first things I tell people about this program is that it's a really competitive program. It's kind of a discouraging thing to start with, but it's encouraging in other ways. The numbers run something like this: we get 120 to 140 applications at each deadline and depending on a bunch of different factors, we fund between 30 and maybe 35, maybe 38 or 39. I don't recall that we've ever actually funded as many as 40

recently, so obviously the competition is fierce and we are only able to fund maybe a quarter to a third of the applications we receive.

So on the one hand that's discouraging but on the other hand that means that there are many applications that are worthy that we just don't have enough money for. So because you do not receive a grant you should not draw the conclusion that your application was no good, or that your application didn't have any merit. We'll talk about feedback at the end of this little screencast.

Who can apply

So, who can apply? This program is open to individual artists, ad hoc groups and collectives and incorporated not-for-profits. We treat all three types of applicants in the same way and there's no benefit to you to being one or the other.

The biggest question I get in this part of the world is "Should I apply as an individual artist on behalf of my group? Or, should I apply as the ad hoc group?" And there are two elements that will help you make that decision, that's entirely up to you. You should consider banks and you should consider taxes. The bank issue is that if you choose to make an application under the name of your collective and you don't already have a bank account, if you are successful, that's the name the cheque will be made payable to.

We can't look at the application on behalf of the "Hamlet Collective" and then "Pat Bradley" wants the cheque in her name. We cannot do that as it's not a possibility within our system. So if you apply as the "Hamlet Collective" and if you are successful, you will get a cheque in the name of the "Hamlet Collective" so make sure that you're able to cash that cheque.

If you choose to apply yourself as an individual on behalf of the group or even as an individual, it will obviously be easier to cash the check, but at the beginning of the following calendar year, we will send you a T4A for tax purposes.

Application categories

We have five categories in this program to allow applications to find the right place. We discuss them within the categories, so this allows us to not rocket around from a playwright who wants \$3,500 to do some research and some writing and to do a first draft of something, to be followed immediately by \$120,000 major production of a brand new musical. So that we're talking about like things together, and comparing like things to like.

So there are two creation categories. One is a straight-ahead creation, maximum \$5,000 and the other is creation in residence, maximum \$10,000. The "creation" can be any sort of creation, it can be a

playwright sitting at a computer, a playwright doing research sitting at a computer, it can be a group of creators that come together and create in whatever process they use, etc. So you just have to describe what it is you're doing and how you're approaching it.

The "Creation in Residence" grants are meant to replace a former program called "Playwright Residency" which no longer exists in our new program redesign but those activities will still be funded through the creation in residence. That, as well as you describing what you're doing, you or your group will also have found an Ontario-based not-for-profit professional theatre that wants you in residence, that is willing to work with you in in whatever ways you design or you and the theatre design the residency.

So one of the support documents you need for that category is a letter from the theatre outlining their support of your project and what they're going to be offering you. "Development Workshops": just exactly what it sounds like. Things that are moving towards production that will have some form of public presentation to allow you to get audience feedback and that are not final productions yet because the next category is "Productions."

The question I get asked most frequently about categories is: "Should something that is in the Frost Bites Festival in Hamilton, the Undercurrents Festival in Ottawa, the SummerWorks Festival in Toronto or any similar kind of festival be a workshop or production?" It depends about how you're thinking about it and what the objectives of the activity are. Are you seeing this as another element of your development, getting in front of an audience in a relatively low-risk situation, or are you seeing it as the world premiere?

So you choose whichever fits for you and know that you will be considered in the category with all the other development workshops or all the other productions so it's important to make the right choice depending on what your objectives are.

The final category is "Festivals and Theatre Initiatives." Festivals is pretty straight ahead and theatre initiatives are things that don't fit in anywhere else but that have general benefit to the theatre community. So they can be things like, we've funded collective, community-based professional development workshops. We have funded quite a few of those actually; professional development. We funded joint marketing ventures in individual communities of indie theatre. We have funded the occasional book. So if you've got some wild and wacky thing that you think might fit there, give me a call. We'll talk about whether it fits in or not.

Priority groups

So I've talked a couple of times about our priority groups. I'm going to tell you who they are and I'm going to tell you what that means in the context of grant applications. Indigenous artists; artists and arts organizations in regions across Ontario (that means outside the city of Toronto) which is the "M" postal

code – so anything outside the city of Toronto – is considered to be regional. Artists of colour, Deaf artists and artists with disabilities, Francophone artists and new generation artists who are professional artists from 18 to 30 years old. All of these groups have been chosen for one or more reasons. Some of them are historical, some of them are legislative, some of them are an acknowledgement of systemic bias over many years. They're all groups that we want to pay particular attention to.

When we ask the jurors to read the applications, we say please pay attention to who's writing the application and if they're serving one of these priority groups. And secondly, when we get to actually making the final decisions on who's getting a grant, we frequently take that into account. If we have two applications that are more or less equally weighted and we can only fund one of them, we will look at it – okay that one is from Atikokan and that one is from Toronto. We're going to fund the regional one.

That is from Indigenous artists and that is from mainstream artists. We will fund the Indigenous artists. So we use these to make those final decisions and we use them throughout the process.

I'll just say a word about francophone artists. The Francophone department at the Ontario Arts Council, has a program called Jets de théâtre. So we do not accept French language applications here. So in a general way, the francophone priority is not kind of at play in this program, but we do often enough get bilingual applications and they are absolutely welcome and we will pay attention to the francophone artist approach in those.

Assessment criteria – Artistic Merit

So the priority groups are one element of our decision-making process. The first element or the overriding element in all of our programs are the criteria, by what criteria are the applications judged. And in this program there are three. And, I'm going to talk about them one by one. The first one is artistic merit and there's a whole series of questions that you will answer in the Nova application portal that will help the jury judge your artistic merit. The history. What is it you want to do? What is your artistic goal? Who are your collaborators and how did you choose them? Which artists are you compensating, etc.? And then there are some elements that backup that judgment of the artistic merit; CDs and bios and artistic examples.

Artistic examples and support documents

I'm now going to talk about specific artistic examples and support documents. This program requires some kind of support or artistic example to help the jury make their judgment and decide who gets a grant. The most important and common is the script sample. Most applications require a script sample either from the piece that you're working on now, that you're developing or that you want to produce. Or if it's a brand new project, something that you have developed before. A previous project that will give them an idea of your, you or your group's, abilities and approach as a theatre maker.

You do not need to send the script sample if you're proposing to do Shakespeare because we all know what he was about. The script samples a maximum of 15 pages. You will attach a PDF and upload it. If you are applying for music theatre you are also required to give us some audio files. So the script sample plus the audio files.

If you are doing a piece that is not script-based and in which there's not really any point of giving a script sample; if you're doing something that's very, very physical with no script behind it; or, if you're doing something that is say a clown piece entirely in gibberish, you can give us a description of what you're doing rather than a script sample, or in lieu of a script sample. But you can also give us video files and other applicants are also allowed to give us up to one video or audio file.

So if you've given a script sample and it's not music theatre you can choose, if you wish, to add an audio or video file as another piece of artistic example. Really only give it to us if it, number one, is going to help the jurors understand the application and your artistic vision or, and or, if it supports what you say it does.

We do get video support material that actually is not a good example of what applicants say it's going to be; so be very careful when you include it. Because it's actually not required unless these cases where you're doing music theatre or were you doing non-script based work that is very difficult to explain. Otherwise we also require some support documents and some of them are contextual.

I talked before about that letter from the theater if you're applying for Creation in Residence. If you're doing a shared production with some other theater; if you're doing a production and it's a shared production, co-production in association with, we require a letter from your partner and CDs or support documents as well for you and/or your group. But there are other not required, not mandatory, optional documents that you can include. Letters of support and/or letters of reference that are as specific as possible about you and the project; and, reviews, if you've got reviews that really support the work. Particularly if you are remounting something you've done before and you have a review of it.

Assessment criteria – Impact

So that was artistic merit and the elements that help the jury make their decision on artistic merit. The second criterion is impact and this is very contextual to the project. How will this help your career or your group's development? That's the number one question and if you are asking for a creation project that is probably the only impact that you're going to be talking about at this time because you're not actually at this point intending to reach an audience.

You're not actually serving anybody except yourself and beyond that may include artists from one or more of OAC's priority groups. But we're really looking at the impact on the project and on the artists at that point. Do you have partners? You probably don't have partners in a new creation project. But as different kinds of projects come up these will be a more important; if you're doing a production. We really want to

know who it is you think will be the audience for this piece and how you're going to reach them. That's actually in the next criterion, which is viability. So artistic merit; impact; and, viability is the last one.

Assessment criteria – viability

The viability is just what it sounds like. It's all the really practical elements. What's your experience in handling projects and budgets? What's your work plan? What kind of timing? When are you doing things? There's a chart that opens up that allows you to fill in your general work plan with high-level benchmarks and objectives and timelines and things? How are going to raise enough money? If you don't raise enough money or if you don't raise as much as you're putting in the budget, what are you going to do about it? That's a super important question.

Try not to avoid it. Some people do because they're afraid the jury is going to say well if I have a backup plan they know I don't really need the money at all, but that's not the case. Everybody knows that everybody needs a backup plan and that if you don't get everything and you have no plan for how to proceed otherwise you probably won't get rated well enough to get the funding; even if the other elements of your projects are really great. And the audience I talked about before.

Who is it that you think you want to reach? How are you going to reach them? How are you going to get them through the door? Will they buy tickets or give donations or whatever.

Budgets and budgeting

And then the budget is an important element of the judging of viability. I'm going to say a few words about budgets and budgeting because people are often really afraid of them or really hate them. So I'm going to talk about the approach that you should take with budgeting. Two things about a budget: a budget is actually telling the same story as all those words that you've used to describe your project and describe how you're going to do it in other parts of the application.

So what you might call the project description and the budget, they should be telling exactly the same story but in different languages. One in beautifully written, no doubt, English. The other in numbers and practicalities. So you want to make sure that your budget tells the same story as the rest of your application.

The other thing about the approach and philosophy about a budget is that it's a speculative document. It's not a real thing yet. It's projected numbers. So you have to figure out how you're going to project those numbers and guess what it's going to cost and how much you're going to bring in. My recommendation to applicants is that when you're thinking about your budget, develop the budget that is the budget that will allow you to do this project perfectly and completely realize your artistic vision and aspirations. We don't live in that perfect world so that if you don't get everything you asked for you can still do it very well with fewer resources. But don't start with saying, "well the cheapest I could do this for is this". That's not a really good place to start a budget because you have nowhere to fall back on.

Second question: do you start with revenues or expenses? There is a lot of debate about this. But I always start with expenses for this reason: they're generally easier to estimate. If you're going to rent a studio for rehearsals you can find out how much that studio costs. You can ask around and find the cheapest studio. If you're going to engage other artists on your project and you have to follow a certain contract or way of engaging them you know how much that's going to cost. Revenues are harder to guess at or to project. But here's the thing. You can't do budgeting by going, "Okay, here's all my expenses. This is how much it's going to cost to do this project". And, then when you go on the revenue side you realize there's no way you'll ever be able to raise enough revenue to do it that way so you just double the numbers.

Anytime you put in a number that's not well thought out and not rationalized the jury will notice it because again they're your peers. They do what you do. They know what it takes to produce theater, or to do a workshop, or to bring a group of people together to create. So it's a back-and-forth. It's an iterative process, a budget. You may start with the expenses move to the revenue and go, "Wow. Okay, I don't know that we're going to actually be able to rehearse for 17 weeks, so let's go back to the expenses and see what I can do," and, so you're back and forth, and back and forth, until you get to where you want to be.

We require in all projects, except creation projects, that you have other sources of revenue. That you have, particularly in productions, some kind of earned revenue or at least a pay-what-you-can contribution. That there is some kind of fundraising whether it's a small fundraising event or whether you've done a fund-what-you-can, crowd funding platform, or anything else.

And generally unless there's a really good reason we look for applications to other funders as appropriate. It depends on where you live as to whether there'll be municipal funding or how much municipal funding or whether it's only available to organizations or to individuals as well. But you should talk about that when you're talking about what your revenue sources are.

"We've applied to the City of Ottawa for this" or "We haven't applied to the City of Ottawa for this because we're not eligible this year." Or, "We live in Atikokan and there is no municipal funding for the arts." Just give the jury enough to understand where your numbers come from. And I pointed out that piece in the application that talked about supplementary budget material, if necessary.

So if you don't feel that you've given the jury enough information, give the rationale for the budgeting or a level of detail of breaking down, say the artistic fees, from one large lump sum to a series of different people who are working for a different amount of times and some are being paid weekly and the director is being paid a lump sum and this is what it's based on.

That's all the kind of information that if you can't explain it in either the budget form with the notes in the budget form or the notes in the viability section then you can add another document that breaks that down

further. The jury really requires that detail for a couple of reasons: one is to make sure that artists are being compensated properly and that you've thought about all the things that it's going to cost to do the project or all the potential sources of revenue; and, secondly to compare. To sort of look across and go, yes, these applications which both say productions are comparable and that's how we can compare them.

The rationale for revenues in particular is very important. So as I said it's kind of easier to estimate expenses or find out what they might be. Any rationale you can give the jury for the amounts that you've put in for your revenues is very, very helpful.

So for instance you might say, "In our last production, which was a Fringe production, we earned \$720 in box office and this time we know we can do better because we have an established track record and we captured all those people's addresses so we're projecting \$1,500 for this production because it's going to be longer." That's the kind of rationale that is incredibly important and very, very helpful for the jury to make their decisions.

Results and feedback

And finally results and feedback. As I said earlier, results will be available in four months. You'll get an email that will tell you to log into the system and take a look at some new piece of information for you which will include the notification of whether you've been successful or not and a list of the successful applicants, the jurors' names and the amounts of the grants which we've always provided but on paper. And, if you are successful, there will be instructions included on how you should get your cheque and, there, that's done.

No, it actually isn't. The next thing is super important. Call for feedback. Three exclamation points. We give feedback. It's not to make people feel badly or anything like that but to potentially help them do a better application the next time. Please call for feedback. It can be incredibly helpful.

At a recent Theatre Projects jury that we did, of the 31 I think we funded, seven were resubmissions from the previous deadline that had been unsuccessful. The applicants called me for feedback. I told them what the jury didn't understand or the things that were less clear or budgets that didn't make sense and there were resubmissions and they were successful this time. I can't always give you the secret key to the next application but usually there's at least a couple of things that may have seemed crystal clear to you but weren't clear to the jury and that I can help you with.

So please, do call for feedback. Call as soon as you can after you've received the results just because my memory starts to go and I'll read the notes but I won't remember them as well as shortly thereafter. And the deadlines are staggered so that in an ideal world if you're unsuccessful at one and you call for feedback you will have plenty of time to incorporate that feedback and put in an application at the next deadline.

Resources

So the real last thing is just to remind you of a couple of resources that are available to you. The OAC website has a plethora of resources on putting in a grant application including a PDF book called the [Survival Guide](#). It's a little out of date because it doesn't contemplate the electronic applications which are still new but there's really great information in there. It's on the resources tab of our website.

And, finally if you listen to this and watch this screencast, if you've read the guide to project grants and the guide to assessment, if you looked at the application and you still have questions, please [get in touch with the Theatre department](#).

You can get in touch either with Lucy Gouveia, who's the Theatre Program Administrator, or me, Pat Bradley, Theatre Officer. So thank you very much for joining me today for this screencast and I look forward to seeing your grant application in the future.

Thanks a lot and goodbye.