

Passion for the Project— Bringing Your Application To Life

By Diana Hossack, Managing Director, Artistic & Audience Initiatives

The quality and quantity of the applications received by *The Opera Fund* and the *Canadian Opera Creation Program* indicate that, despite a tough economy, our field is committed to moving new projects forward. While this is good news for the future of opera, the result is a highly competitive application process.

In looking back over the past two granting cycles, it is clear that the standout applications are those that communicate the energy behind the project. Concise writing is less important than the ability to capture and communicate the company's passion and commitment for the proposed project. It is also important to remember that, while panelists are invited to serve because of their expertise, they are not familiar with every company and every artist. It is, therefore, the applicant's responsibility to thoroughly introduce the project and the players.

The application guidelines for both *The Opera Fund* and the *Canadian Opera Creation Program* are designed to be flexible and allow for creativity. There are no mandatory questions that must be answered; rather, applicants are asked to cover broad topics and are given questions as guidelines to stimulate thinking and writing of the proposal. The following suggestions may help strengthen future applications.

• Involve the Artistic Department

Development and artistic professionals are encouraged to collaborate on applications. Often, the professional who is "in the trenches" with a project can make the most compelling case for its funding; however, it is often not practical for artistic professionals to lead the application process, or for development professionals to be actively involved in the production process. Given these constraints, it is important that artistic professionals share their knowledge and experience with grant writers, and that grant writers make an effort to engage with the artistic process. Such collaboration will provide the grant writer with the information and project-specific language necessary to communicate the passion driving the project.

Once a final draft of the application is complete, it is useful to seek feedback from both an artistic professional directly involved with the project and an outside reader. By taking these steps, companies increase the likelihood that the proposal will effectively communicate the artistic vision of the project, the process that will bring it to life, and its relationship to the company's mission and repertoire.

• Relate the Project to the Company's Past, Present, and Future

Don't rely on panelists to make the leap from reading your mission statement and production history to understanding why this project makes sense in the scheme of your company's activities. Make the connections clear for them. Share the groundwork you have laid to prepare for a first-time venture with new works. If this is not a first-time situation, explain how this project builds on your past experience and advances your artistic vision. Personalize this information with a strategically placed quote from the artistic and/or general director about how this project fits into the company's programming.

• Incorporate the Artists' Voices

Don't just include biographies of artists—inspire the panelists by conveying the artists' commitment to your project. Many *Canadian Opera Creation Program* applications featured artists' perspectives. Some included a statement from the composer and/or librettist commenting on their excitement about the project. Others included statements from the entire creative team, including director and designers, discussing their connection to and involvement with the piece. In one case, a company had the entire creative team answer all the guideline questions and included the artists' perspective throughout the entire application.

Applications that incorporated these ideas came alive for panelists. The energy and passion driving these projects inspired lively dialogue and helped advance them into a category for serious consideration. "As a panel, all we have are the bones that we're looking at and the flesh on the paper," said Dany Lyne, designer and *Canadian Opera Creation Program* panelist, at Opera Conference 2002. "It has to come alive somehow."

In agreement, Gene Scheer, librettist and an *Opera Fund* panelist in 2002, stated: "In the end, it's really about passion. I think there's a real opportunity for companies to show that kind of passion, show that kind of dedication to a particular project, why they want to do it, and to be noted by whoever the next panel is." ♦

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