

Arts Funding Applications: Guide to Project Statements and Artist Statements

Council for the Arts at MIT, Fall 2020

When you fill out your Preliminary Proposal, you will be asked to provide a brief project statement. A strong Project Statement gets to the point very economically. It's worth reflecting on the key components to be sure you can present a clear snapshot of your project.

If your project is selected and you are invited to submit a full proposal and have an interview, you might hear from us with some feedback to be sure it is as strong as it can be.

7 Tips on Project Statements

1. Focus on the who, what, where, why, how, and when.
2. **Who:** Tell us who you are, as a person or an organization, what you do, and a little bit about why you do it.
3. **What:** Tell your reader what you're going to make. Art? Performance? Music? Multi-media? Something else?
4. **Where:** Tell us where your project will be made, rehearsed, performed, exhibited.

We know that while the campus is closed, and so much of our world is virtual, the "where" of an event might be a bit different than usual. That's okay! "Where" could be a series of live performances on a social platform, videos posted to YouTube or a website--or things we can't even imagine yet but that you are thinking of. The only key part of "where" is that we want you to be safe--so please be sure your ideas fit within public health and MIT guidelines.

5. **Why (and why now):** One of the Council's key criteria for funding projects is that they engage the MIT community. That's more important than ever. Even as we are physically distant, we will be looking for proposals that are focused on engaging and building community. Sometimes there is more than one "why" to a project, based on what it means to the maker(s) or performer(s) and what your hopes are for your audience.
6. **How:** Tell us how you're going to do what you propose: will you be working individually in a studio? Rehearsing and performing? Here we are looking to learn more about the feasibility of your project.
7. **When:** Customarily, the Council funds projects that can be completed within six months to a year from being funded. A solid explanation of when you will debut your project, perform or exhibit your work, or share it with the world, will mean that you've thought about a project timeline, from how long it will take to prepare to do the project to launch it into the world.

Sample Student Arts Group Project Proposal

We will perform the soundtrack of *In the Heights* (ITH), a musical that celebrates a Latino immigrant neighborhood in NYC, so that we can showcase our Latino community at MIT. We want to remind the broader MIT community of the immigrant struggle, and expose them to Latino cultures.

We'll also be giving ourselves a taste of home, and a chance to explore our own identities. Our Latino-majority cast will dance and sing the music of ITH for two nights in a show that is open to the public. While we won't present the entire script, we will put on a quality show with costumes, choreography, make-up, stage lights and microphones in 26-100.

While most of our peers are familiar with Anna's burritos or club reggaeton, we want to give them a performance that features so many other essential elements of our identity. We want to fill the gap MIT's student theatre groups have long avoided: telling stories focused on people of color. The music is beautiful and the lessons are important – and the necessity of recognizing diversity is as important as ever.

We've already received many words of encouragement in response to our audition announcement. The students who know this show want to see it – and those who don't know it need to. Now is the right time for us to celebrate our heritage.

Notice how this paragraph begins with a strong opening sentence that combines what and who.

Here's one way to show community engagement

More of the who, this time the performers and the size of the audience they want to reach.

Notice that the who, what, when and where were pretty straightforward and didn't take that much space to explain. By telling the reader more about what is motivating them to put on this performance, this proposal very effectively explains how this performance is meaningful to the performers and will make a significant contribution to MIT's community.

Sample Student Arts Group Artist Statement

We are Sakata Afrique. Afro-Caribbean dance is an art form that encompasses many world regions and musical genres whether it be Soca, Dancehall, Reggaeton, Afrobeats and more.

Notice how this paragraph identifies the group that is applying, and introduces their artistic focus.

As a team, our strengths lie in our members. Some are new to dance and others are experienced members of other dance teams who each bring their experiences into our movements.

Tells more about the who of the group, which is important to support the why of their proposal.

Each year, every member of the team teaches a choreography that could be original, a blend of different choreographies they've seen and they teach it to the team. We practice 5-6 hours a week perfecting our craft and ensuring that we are able to be a good representation of the art form that we speak for.

Introduces what the arts group does as part of their regular activities.

While the team's primary influences and motivations are to preserve Afro-Caribbean dance cultures, we equally serve as a community for students who are interested in or part of the culture. We hope that our presence is a reminder of the diverse backgrounds on campus and an opportunity for learning and conversation in a less rigid environment.

Notice how the who and what come together to support both the why of the proposal and a compelling statement about community engagement, for performers and for the broader MIT community.

Sample Individual Artist Statement

Informed by my architectural background, my work tackles social and political themes through the lens of everyday spatial and material culture. The spaces and objects I study in my work allow me to unravel tensions related to gender, property and voice in the city.

Written by a graduate student scholar-artist, this first paragraph establishes the context and frame within which the artist makes her work.

Derive and road trips are typically my starting points to explore the properties of objects and spaces I study. I use a variety of media including photography, printed matter, performance, sculpture and video.

Here we hear more about the how of the project, in this case, how the artist works and the materials she uses.

In my project Sidewalk Salon, co-authored with David Puig, I explored Cairo through the lens of an overlooked and apparently banal object. Combining photographic documentation of street chairs, interviews with chair dwellers, as well as fiction and poetry, the work examined what lies beneath an everyday object, providing an alternative socio-political perspective of the city.

A previous example of the artist's method elaborates her approach and has the added benefit of showing her experience working in the way she is proposing to do again.

Currently, I am working towards developing a new artist book with Editions Fink, the book will include photographs, interviews, essays and fictional narratives. For me, an artist's book represents an individual artwork, with its own architecture, which expands exhibited works and allows the possibility of acquiring an artwork for little cost.

Shifts from past to new project. We learn she has started a new project (her reason for applying) and we learn more about the "why" of her chosen medium.

In my forthcoming book, I hope to give insight into my research as an author, giving an immersion of references and new perspectives commissioned writing. It is also a way to disseminate ideas widely and open discussions, with an extended life, beyond the lifetime of a show.

Here we learn more about the artist's imagined audience, via the proposed book that goes beyond a suggested exhibition. This gets to the issue of community engagement.