

GRANTS

As Christine Cassidy notes, “grants come in many forms—cash, time, publication, or a combination of all three” (1996, 17). This entry focuses on the first form: money. Interested readers should also consult the entry on “Conferences, Colonies, and Residencies” for grants that focus on organizations primarily offering time and/or a quiet place to write.

“Contests” discusses venues offering award money in conjunction with publication.

“Free money” is every writer’s dream, and, once in a very great while, some of it may fall directly into a talented writer’s lap. A few grants don’t even have to be applied for; they are simply given to writers an organization deems worthy. Most famous, perhaps, is the MacArthur Foundation Fellows Program, the so-called genius grant, which currently pays recipients \$500,000 over five years. Beneficiaries of this grant are selected based on “their expertise, accomplishments, and breadth of experience,” and they may do whatever they wish with the money (MacArthur Fellows Program 2004). Awards from the Lannan Foundation and the PEN American Center may not be nearly as lavish, but most of their grants are similar to the MacArthur fellowships in that there is no application process.

The majority of grants, however, require that the candidate actually send in an application. Luckily, the grant application process is often easier for creative writers than for others. The applicant fills out the required forms and may have to show some evidence of past accomplishments (writers applying for grants from the National Endowment for the Arts must have a certain number of recent publications to their credit); he then attaches multiple, usually anonymous copies of his work and waits for the results. Ideally, the strongest writers get the grants, although different judges will obviously have different notions of what “strong writing” is. In any case, a careful appraisal of the application form is crucial: “The whole package should be read carefully again and again. And again. And *again*. Each reading will reveal something that was missed during an earlier reading” (Karsh and Fox 2003, 38). Among the easy mistakes grant applicants can avoid are submitting a rejected grant application without making major changes to the new version, assuming that the funding source has no changes in its budget situation from year to year, and spending insufficient time and money in making the grant proposal look as professional as possible (Browning 2001, 245–47).

Most grants come with some restrictions: there are strict deadlines, and only authors living in certain places or writing in certain genres may apply. Especially if it is funded from public coffers, the grant may stipulate how the prize money is used. Yet for all the strings attached to them, grants from national and state governments have become increasingly scarce in the past two decades. The U.S. Congress, which funds the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), has been controlled by a

conservative Republican Congress with a demonstrated suspicion of, if not outright hostility toward, the arts, in particular arts that challenge the status quo. As a result, lawmakers have been increasingly keen to have a say about what will or won't be funded. The NEA has managed to keep afloat in the face of threats to eliminate it altogether in some measure through the agency of conservative poet Dana Gioia, appointed chair of the NEA during the first term of George W. Bush. While Gioia, a former advertising executive, has been criticized by many writers on the left, he has been successful at his job because he is able to speak the language of his budgetary masters.

Overall, though, difficult fiscal times have caused many state and local governments to decrease arts funding dramatically. As of this writing, the statewide budget for the California Arts Council is practically nonexistent. Ironically, though, the Marin Arts Council, representing a wealthy county north of San Francisco, was at the same time offering creative writers grants of \$4,000 to \$10,000. Because funding for state and local arts organizations is so uncertain, some private foundations have emerged to pick up the slack. The Artist Trust in Seattle (www.artisttrust.org), for instance, only awards grants to writers and artists living in Washington State, but it is not associated with the state government itself. In fine, searching for grants is a hit-and-miss process, but a thorough investigation is likely to turn up some surprising opportunities.

So where do creative writers go to look for grants? The Foundation Center in New York (www.fdncenter.org) is a good place to start. The center has an "Opportunities" page and publishes an inexpensive annual, *Foundation Grants to Individuals*, with more than six thousand listings, many of them relevant to writers. PEN American Center publishes the biannual *Grants and Awards Available to American Writers*, but at a list price of more than \$150, most writers will have to use this book in the reference room of their libraries. *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Presses* (Dustbooks), along with *The Writers Market* (Writers Digest Press) and its associated specialty guides—*Poet's Market* and *Novel and Short Story Writers Market*—also contain a section of grant listings. Unfortunately, with up to eighteen months' lag between when the grant information is submitted to the publisher and when it actually appears in print, these listings may be out of date by the time writers read them. And many books with promising titles such as *Funds for Writers* or *Money for Writers* are not updated annually, and so are virtually worthless. Probably the most reliable and up-to-date Web link is the *Poets & Writers*

Grants & Awards page (www.pw.org/mag/grantsawards.htm), which is accessible whether or not a writer subscribes to the magazine. The page lists the deadlines for and briefly describes upcoming grants, contests, and residencies; normally, there is also an e-mail address and link to the grantor's home page.