
LEVITT FOUNDATION

GRANT WRITING & FUNDRAISING CAPACITY BUILDING

ABOUT ME

- Founder, Hilo Consulting (est. 2020)
 - Secured \$3.5M+ in foundation grants for nonprofits & NGOs (clients include Global Fund for Women, Limitless Horizons Ixil, Yamba Malawi)
 - AI capacity building workshops
- AI for Social Impact Advocate
 - Presentations and workshops at nonprofit & philanthropy conferences
 - AI for Social Impact Newsletter
- Beyond Work
 - Happy auntie, nature lover/tree hugger, non-fiction reader, self-taught Spanish speaker and ukulele player 🎵



A G E N D A

Poll

Fundraising for the Arts: State of Public Funding

Fundraising Diversification

Funder Cultivation & Stewardship

Grant Readiness

Grant Prospect Research

Grant Storytelling

Budget & Budget Narrative

POLL

- What type of nonprofit organization are you?
 - What is your organization's annual operating budget?
 - How many staff members?
 - Do you currently apply for other grants to supplement your music series funding?
 - How are you feeling about the current funding climate?
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FUNDRAISING FOR THE ARTS

- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) funding appropriations draft for FY26 slashes funding by 35%
- 40% of NEA's budget flows to regional and state agencies that regrant funds
- State appropriations for the arts are projected to decrease by about 7.4%
- 19 states decreased their arts funding projections for 2026, 6 held steady, 26 increased (including District of Columbia)
- Some major arts funders are increasing grant support in response, but often with restrictions (emergency relief, one-off, or partial matches)
- Foundations may fill immediate gaps, but sustaining funding is a challenge
- Foundations have finite budgets and concentrated geographic focus

STATE APPROPRIATIONS



How NEA Funding Effects State Appropriations

- Federal-State Partnership: About 40% of the NEA’s budget flows directly to state and regional arts agencies. **States must provide a match to receive these funds.**
- Stabilizing role: In many states, the minimum match is what keeps arts appropriations alive.
- Risk of retreat: Cuts to NEA therefore ripple down: fewer federal grants and less incentive for states to maintain their own appropriations.
- This makes some of the projected FY2026 increases (26 states!) notable—they show states willing to act even as federal support wobbles.

Jurisdiction	Enacted	Projected	Change
Alabama*	\$8,158,074	\$8,467,537	3.8%
Alaska†	\$917,200	\$1,046,600	14.1%
American Samoa*	\$338,500	\$475,750	40.5%
Arizona	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	0.0%
Arkansas	\$1,470,904	\$1,381,690	-6.1%
California	\$39,344,000	\$23,278,804	-40.8%
Colorado	\$3,330,259	\$3,382,279	1.6%
Connecticut*	\$6,908,696	\$10,641,275	54.0%
Delaware	\$5,906,800	\$6,434,700	8.9%
District of Columbia*†	\$47,200,959	\$45,731,408	-3.1%
Florida*	\$30,670,843	\$41,742,138	36.1%
Georgia*	\$1,587,150	\$1,587,150	0.0%
Guam*†	\$421,950	\$500,000	18.5%
Hawaii	\$16,050,597	\$4,028,811	-74.9%
Idaho	\$933,400	\$970,400	4.0%
Illinois*	\$34,397,526	\$24,440,800	-28.9%
Indiana	\$5,197,761	\$3,450,796	-33.6%
Iowa*	\$2,220,493	\$2,220,203	0.0%
Kansas	\$1,521,173	\$1,000,000	-34.3%
Kentucky†	\$1,833,500	\$1,860,300	1.5%
Louisiana	\$2,112,377	\$2,112,377	0.0%
Maine	\$1,041,201	\$1,137,355	9.2%
Maryland*	\$34,250,622	\$34,072,785	-0.5%
Massachusetts*	\$26,850,000	\$26,975,152	0.5%
Michigan*†	\$11,129,200	\$11,135,200	0.1%
Minnesota	\$58,321,000	\$45,484,000	-22.0%
Mississippi	\$9,943,577	\$9,894,957	-0.5%
Missouri*	\$54,437,132	\$21,920,619	-59.7%
Montana	\$1,134,039	\$1,386,144	22.2%
Nebraska	\$2,628,779	\$2,668,359	1.5%
Nevada	\$2,836,641	\$3,106,053	9.5%
New Hampshire	\$1,417,598	\$150,000	-89.4%
New Jersey*	\$41,055,000	\$35,455,000	-13.6%
New Mexico	\$1,689,800	\$1,694,900	0.3%
New York*	\$87,631,000	\$99,937,000	14.0%
North Carolina*†	\$12,408,629	\$11,721,478	-5.5%
North Dakota*	\$1,313,524	\$2,547,877	94.0%
Northern Marianas	\$188,144	\$161,377	-14.2%
Ohio	\$25,563,000	\$27,210,595	6.4%
Oklahoma	\$4,558,907	\$4,308,180	-5.5%
Oregon*††	\$8,059,487	\$14,680,304	82.1%
Pennsylvania†	\$10,643,000	\$10,878,000	2.2%
Puerto Rico*†	\$18,649,000	\$19,598,000	5.1%
Rhode Island*	\$2,395,211	\$2,414,865	0.8%
South Carolina	\$12,250,618	\$11,550,618	-5.7%
South Dakota	\$1,410,250	\$1,431,204	1.5%
Tennessee*	\$16,020,600	\$16,578,700	3.5%
Texas	\$14,319,358	\$18,288,573	27.7%
Utah*	\$10,835,100	\$10,024,700	-7.5%
Vermont*	\$973,848	\$1,471,800	51.1%
Virgin Islands†	\$366,475	\$366,475	0.0%
Virginia*	\$7,430,398	\$5,430,398	-26.9%
Washington*	\$7,095,000	\$6,585,000	-7.2%
West Virginia	\$811,500	\$1,028,838	26.8%
Wisconsin	\$1,083,000	\$1,083,000	0.0%
Wyoming	\$1,077,773	\$1,077,773	0.0%
Total	\$704,340,573	\$650,208,297	-7.7%

FUNDRAISING DIVERSIFICATION

Traditional Avenues

- Individual donors
- Monthly donors
- Board of Directors
- Membership programs
- Corporate sponsorships
- Grants
- Earned income (fee for service)
- Emergency relief campaigns

Getting Creative

- In-Kind Support
 - Municipalities waiving permit fees
 - Volunteers and community partnerships
- Collaborative fundraising and resource-sharing with other arts organizations
- Advocacy
 - Invite policymakers to your events
 - Empower your audience to advocate for the arts

FUNDER CULTIVATION & STEWARDSHIP



Cultivation

- Grant awards are the result of relationships, not just good proposals
- Start building relationships either before you need funding or when a grant cycle is open
- Think partnership, not transaction
- Send an email introducing your organization, indicating alignment with their funding priorities, and requesting a meeting
- Leverage board member connections for warm introductions
- Invite funders to experience your programming

Stewardship

- Detailed impact reports with stories
- Behind-the-scenes access
- Recognition opportunities
- Annual cycle: Plan touchpoints throughout the year, not just during grant periods

GRANT READINESS

Common Attachments

- 501(c)(3) determination letter / MOU with fiscal sponsor
- Latest financial statements / 990
- List of Board of Directors and key staff
- Strategic Plan (sometimes requested)
- Organization Budget

Organization

- Mission Statement
- Supporting Statistics
- Target Population
- Success Metrics
- Monitoring & Evaluation Plan
- Testimonials & Photos

Grant-Specific

- Project Budget (if applicable)
- Community Partners
- Funding Sources
- Other Funder Attachments
 - Logic Model
 - Theory of Change

GRANT PROSPECTING



Traditional

- Foundation Directory Online (now Candid)
 - Pros: Some libraries offer free access
 - Cons: Time and labor intensive, static, limited access for free users
- GrantStation
 - Pros: Free monthly newsletter with open opportunities
 - Cons: Subscription fee required for access
- Foundation websites/newsletters
 - Pros: Up-to-date information
 - Cons: Requires consistent review
- Government grant portals
 - Pros: Up-to-date information
 - Cons: Ongoing administration changes

AI-Enabled

- Instrumentl
 - Pros: Real-time opportunities, grants management capabilities, new AI features
 - Cons: Expensive (first tier is \$179/month for nonprofits with budgets less than \$500k)
- Deep Research (ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity)
 - Pros: Automated research tool based on user prompt
 - Cons: Limited to 25 queries per month, \$20 monthly fee

RESEARCH PROMPT ✨

Task: You are a grant researcher. Identify new private foundation, corporate, and public funding opportunities for ABC ORG, a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit. We are an arts and culture organization that presents free outdoor concerts, music series, and community-based arts programming. [Insert your mission here.]

Funding Needs: Grants in the range of \$10,000-\$100,000 (multi-year if possible) to support free concerts, community engagement programs, arts access, and public space activation.

Deliverable: Create a well-organized table of strong funding prospects. For each prospect, include:

- Funder Name
- Website
- Contact Information (email/phone if available)
- Average Grant Award Size
- Grant Deadlines
- Funding Priorities
- Why They Are a Strong Fit for ABC ORG (explain alignment with live music, community arts, placemaking, public space, cultural equity, or community engagement missions)

Parameters:

- Only include strongly aligned funders (arts & culture, music, placemaking, creative community development).
- Prioritize foundations in [MY CITY/ STATE].
- Exclude funders that primarily support art museums, visual arts-only, or large national institutions, unless they are a strong fit.
- If information isn't available (e.g., average grant size), mark as N/A rather than guessing.

GRANT STORYTELLING



Components of a Proposal (General Operating & Project-Based)

- Mission / Vision
- Overarching Goals
- Need for the Program
- Programs/Project Description
- Activities
- Timeline
- Monitoring & Evaluation
- Budget / Budget Narrative



Questions to Consider

- What do you do? (your mission)
- Why does this matter? (community need)
- What makes you uniquely qualified to do this work? (unique approach)
- What do you need to fund? (general operating or specific program)
- What are your expected outcomes? (your short-term and long-term impact)
- Who is impacted by your programs? (testimonials and photos)

BRAINSTORMING WITH AI ✨

Connecting Mission to Funder Priorities Prompt:

"Please help me brainstorm how my organization, which presents free outdoor concerts to activate underused public spaces and increase access to the arts, relates to [INSERT FUNDING PRIORITIES, e.g. cultural equity, community engagement, placemaking, or youth arts]. Provide examples of alignment that I could highlight in a grant application."

Crafting a Compelling Case for Support Prompt:

"Please help me craft a compelling statement that highlights the urgency and significance of funding my organization, which brings free live music to diverse communities, because of [FEDERAL FUNDING CUTS]. Frame it in a way that appeals to funders who care about cultural vitality."

"Help me explain why outdoor concerts matter for community building."

"Create three different ways to describe the economic impact of our festival."

"Suggest evaluation metrics for a free community concert series."

EFFECTIVE PROMPTING WITH AI ✨

TCREI Framework (Credit: Tina Huang)

Task: What exactly do you want the AI to do?

Context: What background information does the AI need?

Resources: What materials, data, or examples can you provide?

Evaluate: How will you assess the quality of the output?

Iterate: How will you refine the prompt for better results?

Remember:

Free Versions (ChatGPT / Claude / Gemini)

- Omit private/sensitive data (with free tools you're paying with your data)

Paid Versions

- Opt-out of model training
- Deep research and other extra functionalities

OTHER USES OF AI FOR GRANT WRITING ✨

- Proofread documents
- Check for grammatical errors
- Ensure coherence and clarity
- Provide suggestions for improvement
- Offer alternative phrasing

Sample prompt:

"Review the following draft of our grant application. Assess whether the writing is clear, concise, and logically structured. Identify any sections where the meaning could be confusing or redundant. Suggest revisions that would make the text more coherent and easier for a funder to read."

Remember: Human in the loop!

BUDGET & BUDGET NARRATIVE



Principles for Strong Budgets

- Every line item should connect to program goals
- If you include it in the narrative, it should be in the budget
- Include realistic indirect/administrative costs
- Show other funder commitments and in-kind contributions
- Check if funder has a specific budget format!

Common Categories for Arts Programming

- Personnel (including benefits)
- Artist fees and contracted services
- Equipment rental/purchase
- Marketing and outreach
- Venue costs
- Administrative overhead

BUDGET SAMPLE

Budget Category	Total Project Budget	Request to Starr Foundation	% of Total	Budget Notes					
Program Expenses									
Portable Sound Equipment	\$4,000	\$1,000	25%	Battery-powered PA systems and acoustic amplification for outdoor/small venue performances. Essential for accessibility in spaces without electrical access. Investment covers 3 portable systems.					
Site Permits	\$2,350	\$500	21%	Permits for performances in public spaces, site preparation for parks and community gardens. Includes basic seating arrangements (blankets, portable chairs) and weather protection equipment.					
Community Partnership Events	\$2,500	\$500	20%	Collaboration costs with neighborhood organizations, community gardens, and resident associations. Includes refreshments for planning meetings and small thank-you gifts for community partners.					
Transportation & Logistics	\$1,000	\$200	20%	Vehicle costs for equipment transportation to 8 neighborhood sites. Includes gas, vehicle maintenance allocation, and occasional rental costs for larger equipment moves.					
Emergency/Weather Supplies	\$800	\$100	13%	Tents, tarps, and indoor backup venue rental for weather contingencies. Folding chairs and basic comfort supplies for audience.					
Insurance (Multi-site Coverage)	\$750	\$250	33%	Special event insurance covering performances across multiple public and semi-public spaces. Required for city permits and community garden partnerships.					
Photo/Video Documentation	\$850	\$200	24%	Documentation across diverse neighborhood settings creates compelling storytelling materials for future fundraising and community engagement.					
Marketing Materials	\$800	\$250	31%	Neighborhood-specific flyers and community board postings in multiple languages to reach residents who may not access digital media.					
Subtotal Program Expenses	\$13,050	\$3,000	23%						
Personnel Expenses									
Neighborhood Outreach Coordinator	\$30,000	\$5,000	17%	Professional coordination essential to manage 24 performances across 8 neighborhood locations serving estimated 1,200 total attendees. This position ensures consistent quality, builds trust with diverse neighborhood groups and develops site-specific programming.					
Musicians & Artists (Contract)	\$12,000	\$2,000	17%	\$500 per performance for professional acoustic artists ensures high-quality intimate experiences critical to building neighborhood audiences and trust. 24 performances featuring mix of solo artists, duos, and small ensembles. Rate reflects acoustic/simplified setup while maintaining professional standards. Artists selected for cultural diversity and ability to engage in community spaces.					
Subtotal Personnel	\$42,000	\$7,000	17%						
TOTAL	\$55,050	\$10,000	18%						
				In-Kind Contributions					
				Neighborhood Venues (donated space)	\$3,200				In-kind venue use across 8 neighborhood locations valued at \$400 per performance demonstrates strong grassroots community partnership and volunteer support from residents.
				Volunteer Labor (setup, outreach)	\$3,600				120 volunteer hours @ \$30/hour reflects robust neighborhood engagement and organizational efficiency. Community members assist with setup, promotion, and audience engagement.
				Equipment Storage (donated)	\$1,200				Secure storage space for portable equipment donated by local businesses demonstrates private sector investment in neighborhood programming and organizational sustainability.
				Subtotal In-Kind	\$8,000				
				Other Funders					
				Prinz Foundation \$12,000 (confirmed)					
				Edmund Foundation \$15,000 (anticipated)					
				Dear Foundation \$5,000 (pending)					

OTHER USES OF AI FOR FUNDRAISING ✨

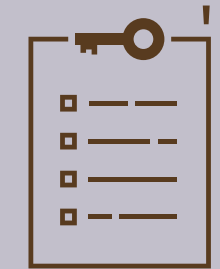
- Repurpose grant proposal content
 - Create social media content
 - Create fundraising campaigns
- Use prompts to change the tone/language/style of the grant text

Social media sample prompt:

“Please take the following grant proposal text and repurpose it into engaging social media content. Create short posts tailored for LinkedIn (professional tone), Twitter/X (impactful and concise, max 280 characters), Facebook (community-oriented), and Instagram (inspirational with emojis and hashtags). Provide 2-3 variations per platform, simplify technical language where needed, and adjust tone and style to match each audience while keeping the core message accurate and compelling.”

Remember: Human in the loop!

KEY TAKEAWAYS



CONSIDER YOUR UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION

Hone in on what
makes you uniquely
you



HIGHLIGHT THE URGENCY OF THE MOMENT

Create a compelling
case for funding



BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Consistent
cultivation and
stewardship



LEVERAGE YOUR EXISTING NETWORK

Warm introductions
are always better



USE AI

5-minute AI
experiment to try a
new tool



RESOURCE TOOLKIT



- Video recording + slides
- Grant readiness self-assessment
- Sample materials: General operating proposal narrative and project budget templates
- AI prompts worksheet: Ready-to-use prompts



THANK YOU!

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[AI for Social Impact Newsletter](#)

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Q & A