

g rants, grants, grants! Don't you just love them? Bobby just got one to make a film about telephone answering machines. Suzy just got one to write a script about her experience with a mime troupe in Nigeria. Claude got turned down, but the jury "appreciated" his work, and asked him to resubmit. Jenny was not so lucky. She was totally rejected, and now can't apply with the same project for a whole year. These are stories of heartache and triumph; stories of artists and charlatans. Yes, these are stories of the brave women and men who apply for, and in some cases actually receive, grants to help make their films.

In many ways, this is a personal journey. I've applied for grants (sometimes I've got them, other times... well... I haven't) and I've even sat on a few juries. It is my feeling that a great deal of mystification exists about the process of applying for grants. Certainly, I was amazed by what I learned the first time I served on a jury. Since arts councils are founded on a consummately democratic principle, I think that it is only fair that non-classified information gleaned from experience should be made available to the general community. It is with this in mind that I wanted to write this article. I've identified 10 of the most common myths.

1) No one on the jury reads the letters of recommendation.

This is not true. In the juries I have served on, not only were these letters read, they were often judged for their own merit in a separate "sub-evaluation". Winners of this "sub-evaluation" are noted and, should their candidates fail to get their grants, are individually contacted by members of the jury who personally offer their apologies. While this procedure may seem unnecessary, it is understood that these letters are often works of art in themselves, and should therefore be encouraged. Some of this country's finest filmmakers started off writing letters for other people.

2) No one on the jury examines the budgets in detail.

This is true. Next time you submit an application for a grant, cross out all references to equipment rental, crew, or film stock. Simply scribble down how much you think the movie will cost. Calculating this figure is not difficult. Simply take the budget of your favorite Hollywood film, cut it to a quarter, and add your living expenses. There's nothing intimidating about budgets. They're merely one of the many hoops to jump through.

3) Filmmakers give other filmmakers bad advice on grant-writing in order to cut down the competition.

This is nonsense.

4) Arts Councils profess to supporting personal "independent cinema", but what they really want to do is kick up their heels, let down their hair, and watch commercial entertainment. Applications should reflect this bias.

Yes.

5) Juries only watch the first few minutes of an applicant's submitted work.

If you're lucky. Actually, it's easier to answer this question in terms of frames. Film is projected at 24 frames per second. A jury usually lasts four days, at eight hours a day. Let's say that there are sixty-four applications. That works out to approximately half an hour for each application. Of that half-hour, the first 20 minutes is traditionally spent on listening to jury members regaling each other with amusing personal anecdotes concerning the applicant. If no one knows the applicant, these episodes are normally made up (e.g. "This sounds like the sort of person who would"... etc.). This leaves 10 minutes to actually look at the work. Well,

make that five minutes after the quality of the letters of recommendation are discussed. From this five minutes, the jury members take a well-deserved break, then readjourn. The first few minutes of a film? You'd be very lucky if the jury gets to see the opening credits.

6) Applications of quality are sometimes overlooked.

Never.

7) It's easier to get a completion grant than an initiation grant.

This depends on the jury's mood. There are instances when a person may actually apply for an initiation grant, and then be awarded a completion grant for a film that hasn't been started. This type of experience tests the very fibre of an applicant's sanity and, ultimately, strengthens the quality of Canadian artists.

8) Presentation of the application makes a difference.

Undoubtedly. The finest application I've ever seen had pop-up characters with every turn of the page. Don't be afraid to include T-shirts, coffee cups, and other "gimmicky" promotional material with your application. There seems to be a belief that arts councils are serious institutions. Well, the councils may be, but not the jury! Imagine them as a bunch of crazed teenagers just itching for a good time. If there's one word that should stick out in your application, it's "party".

9) Jury members steal ideas from projects they turn down.

This is a highly sensitive and controversial issue. The only way to find out is to try. Make a proposal as tempting as possible, then ensure that it will be turned down by asking your worst enemies to write letters of recommendation. Then, in a year or so, check the Canadian productions in your favorite local film festival. If your proposal shows up, then your worst fears have been confirmed, and *there's nothing you can do about it.*

10) There are alternatives to the existing system.

Of course. The best one that comes to mind is the Art Council of Telesinkel, a small village in the Carpathian mountains. Each year, every member of the community is given a 16mm camera and an unlimited amount of film stock. Then, applications are taken from talented individuals who *don't* want to make films. The competition, needless to say, is overwhelming.

LADIES and GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY

by Atom Egoyan