

EAST information sheets

07: Proposals

Introduction

The process of exhibiting work in galleries is usually initiated through proposals. Through a proposal the artist communicates an idea for an exhibition or performance and on the strength of this proposal the gallery chooses artists. Although this information sheet uses as an example the process of applying to public sector galleries, the information is equally valid to all practitioners and types of art organisations.

This information sheet is written with David Hancock, an artist and gallery professional, with experience of both sides of the process. It contains detailed instruction and tips on how to compose a successful proposals and make proposals work for you.

It is split into 2 sections:

1. Researching your proposal
2. Presentation

1. Researching your proposal

Whether you are invited by a gallery to propose work; applying to an open-invite; or speculatively writing to a gallery, the most important aspect of a proposal is to tailor it to the organisation. Each proposal should be like a conversation between you and that specific organisation. As such, it must specifically address aspects of that organisation: its location and ethos at least. Galleries tend to select on the strength of a proposal rather than the strength of your work.

Remember no proposal is a waste of time. Although you may not be initially successful you will gain in experience of the process and in exposure to the panel or curator (they may recommend you for another project).

Always remember to be nice! Awkward or demanding artists are rarely asked back and reputations can spread very easily.

Research

It is important before applying to gain a thorough understanding of the organisation in question. Through research you can tailor your proposal to link it to either: the organisation; its location; its agenda.

The organisation

- Contact the gallery and ask for information. The admin staff can provide all this - it is not necessary to bother the exhibitions staff at this stage. Ask to be sent general information, programme information and floorplans.
- Find out about the staff structure. Who should you address the proposal too? Are proposals judge by one or two curators or are they judged by a panel?
- Check out the galleries website. Also city guides and tourist information if you are not familiar with the area.
- Research previous shows and artists. Check out their websites.

Location

Does your work link it with a specific location? Consider:

- particular industries
- cultural heritage
- history
- local collections (E.g. Manchester City Gallery has a large collection of Pre-Raphaelite art)

Agenda

Whether a venue likes your work can be subjective. Therefore you should present an argument for them to accept your work aside from its quality. You maybe offered a show for reasons other than the curator liking your work.

NB. Public Galleries are publicly funded and therefore have a duty to engage the public.

Reasons for selection:

- Your work may offer the gallery an opportunity to target a particular audience e.g. young people, ethnic minorities etc.
- You or your work may be of local interest
- Your work may allow the gallery an opportunity to reappraise their permanent collection
- The venue is particularly keen to offer space to emerging artists
- You fit within the gallery's constitution

Other considerations

Space

Do you have enough work to fill the space? If not you could consider exhibiting with a group. This may have benefits in that you could include in

your group artists of higher status or who have already exhibited at the gallery in question. The downside is that a weak link in your group could cost you your proposal. Choose carefully.

Educational opportunities

If you are successful you will be expected to give an artist's talk at least. Many organisations ask for artists to undertake some kind of educational programme. Think now about how your practice could translate into a workshop. These can be rewarding in terms of exposure to young artists and financially you should expect around £150 a day for your time.

Artist Fees

All your expenses should be covered by the organisation. In addition you should expect an exhibition payment fee of £250. If you like you should ask for this in writing.

"Do not be a pain with the contract though. I have yet to come across an unreasonable contract and I know of artists who have lost exhibitions due to disagreements over the contract. In my experience, the sooner the contract is signed the better. Then the exhibition is assured."

David Hancock

Experimentation

Unlike commercial galleries where market forces and sales are considerations, public galleries allow more flexibility and experimentation. Try and push the envelope on your practice. More unconventional art forms are welcomed in public art spaces such as new media and live/performance art.

Audience

Public art spaces rely on public money which in turn is linked to increasing audiences. Suggesting in your proposal ways in which your work

will attract new audiences will increase your chances of success. Assess your audience and the organisations demographic. If your audience will add to theirs it might be the key to the success of your application.

2. Presentation

As we have discussed above, proposals will differ according to each situation. But all proposals should follow these guidelines and include:

A covering letter

A detailed proposal

Your CV

Your artists statement

Educational opportunities (if applicable)

Documentation

The overall presentation of your proposal is important. It should be neat, easily understandable and organised. If you are unsure about your written English skills consider asking a friend or associate for help in translating your ideas.

Covering letter

It is a good idea to get a gallery or arts organisation you have been involved with to write this letter by way of an introduction. This is more likely to attract the attention of exhibitions staff.

If this is not possible, then here is how you should write a cover letter.

Dear *(name of the curator or exhibitions organiser)*,

I have included with this letter, a proposal, which I hope you will consider for your exhibition programme at *(name of gallery)*. With my proposal I have included my artist's statement, CV and also a selection of slides of my latest body of work.

(Talk briefly about where you are at with your work, and a little about your

background. Try not to repeat information that is elsewhere.)

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, require any further information or perhaps to talk in person, and I would be happy to arrange a meeting at the gallery to discuss these ideas further. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

(Your name)

Detailed proposal

2 x A4 sheets maximum.

Summarise the details if you are invited to discuss the proposal you can elaborate on them then. Your summary should include:

- What you want to do?
- Why you want to do it at this venue?
- How would the venue benefit from your project?
- What would your project offer to the public?
- Link your project to either one of the following:

A service that the venue provides

A specialist part of their collection

Something that is unique to the history of the town

Do not propose work you have already made as most venues are booked up for at least one year, (usually two). It is always best to propose work that would be exclusive to the venue.

You should have already decided whether your project is feasible within the venue through research. Do not include unnecessary detail.

Do not include a budget with original proposal but prepare a rough outline

of costs if the venue wishes to discuss the project further. See **EAST information sheet 04: Pricing, selling and budgets** for help.

Your CV

2 x A4 sheets maximum.

In addition to regular CV info, this should include the following headers:

Education

Solo Exhibitions

Group Exhibitions

Awards

Residencies

Publications

Commissions

Artist's statement

1 x A4 sheet maximum.

Discuss the ideas behind your work. Be open and honest and do not over elaborate. This can include a short biography.

Education opportunities (if applicable)

1 x A4 sheet maximum

Details of your ideas for educational opportunities linked to your proposal can make for a stronger argument.

Documentation

Send a maximum of 12 slides/images.

Send a DVD or VHS of 5 minutes maximum.

This should include sample of your key works in an accessible format: slides, photographs, cd, dvd, video; and published material such as articles, reviews, critical texts, catalogues, etc.

It is important to have as much pre-prepared documentation available as possible. When taking slides, take at least 20 images of each work. Do not expect to receive documentation back. Slides are rarely returned, and if they are it is usually over 1 year. Also some venues wish to keep you on file.

Never include original artwork.