

# DASH'S TOP 10 TIPS

funding applications



[www.dasharts.org](http://www.dasharts.org)



# INTRODUCTION

**A lot** of artists and curators have told us how difficult it is to write applications for commissions and other opportunities, and that they aren't sure what to put into their bids. Commissioners tell us they get many applications that don't cover the commission's brief, are far too long, and are not easy to read.

This all suggests a need for guidance that could help to change the mis-match, especially for Disabled artists. Our apologies if this guidance is trying to teach some of you things you already know very well.

## In this guidance, what do we mean by...?

**Commissioner:** This is the person/organisation who are creating a project and want to find an artist to make it happen.

**Selection panel:** The panel is usually made up of a number of people with different experiences, and which will look at and judge the suitability of your application.

**ACE:** Arts Council England.

# BEFORE YOU START

Get lots of advice and guidance before you apply, from a commissioner's point of view it's always very easy to tell who has read the guidance and who hasn't. You can usually find online resources like guidance documents, information sheets, quizzes, videos or forums on a commissioner's website. These can help you think about what you want to apply for, and what you need to include in your bid.

Some commissioners will also happily talk to you about your bid beforehand. They can tell you where you might be going wrong, or whether there are things you'll need to do before you apply. This is probably one of the most useful things you can do when putting together a bid, so always check to see what support is available and don't be afraid to ask silly questions! (There are no silly questions!)

Time your bid right: it's no use rushing an application and sending it in on the off-chance. You'll have a better chance of success if you are really ready to get started on your project. To prepare, make sure you've spoken to as many people as possible who you want to be involved such as: artists, partners, mentors and venues.

You should also think about why now is the right time to apply and explain that to the commissioning body in your bid.

# TIP ONE:

## Accessibility of the application process

If the application process isn't accessible for you, then contact the commissioner and ask them to provide the materials in a way that works for you. This may feel awkward, and as though you are challenging the commissioner, but how can they get a good response if some people can't apply for the opportunity? And how will anything change if we don't inform and educate? If the commissioner makes this conversation difficult, would you really want to work with them?

Many commissioners already have processes in place to help those who experience barriers to their services and are more than happy to help. Some commissioners (like ACE) already have Easy Read versions of guidance or have budgets for access, so don't be afraid to ask!



# TIP TWO:

## Read the brief and respond to what it's asking

The brief is where the commissioner is telling you:

- What the project/commission is
- What type of work and what sort of artist they are interested in
- What conditions apply to the brief, such as the timescale for completion
- What the budget and fee will be

It is so easy to skim over, misread or miss out an important part of the brief. Read it carefully, and then read it again and again until it makes sense to you. If you're not sure about something in the brief, ring or email the organisation. They will usually be very happy to answer any questions.



# TIP THREE:

## Tell your story

Applications are a form of storytelling and it is very easy to forget this and write very dry impersonal bids. Everyone likes to read stories, and you will find it much easier to make your bid very personal.

- Write the story of your journey as an artist
- Where did you start from?
- Where are you now?
- Where do you want to be?
- Write about what inspires you to create art

Avoid trying to appeal to them with your life story, but instead try to inspire the reader with what you want to achieve and why. Remember, commissioners have their own objectives which your bid should aim to help them achieve. Keep your writing simple and avoid acronyms and jargon.

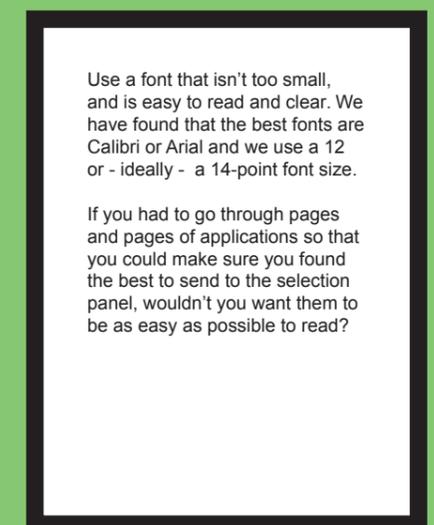
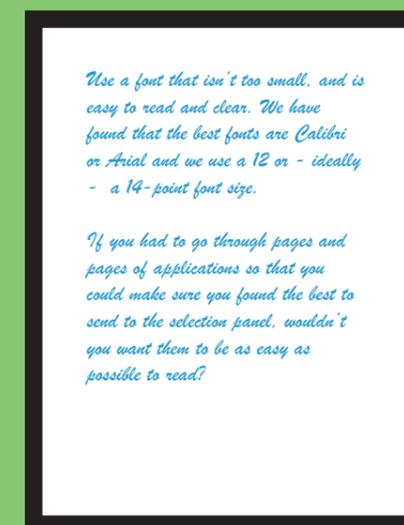
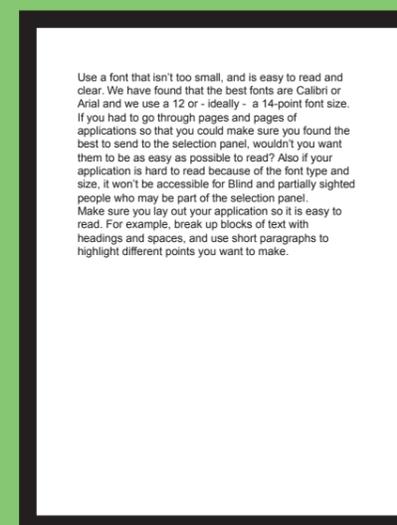


# TIP FOUR:

## The font, size and layout

Use a font that isn't too small, and is easy to read and clear. We have found that the best fonts are **Calibri** or **Arial** and we use a 12 or, ideally a 14 point font size. If you had to go through pages and pages of applications to send to the selection panel, wouldn't you want them to be as easy to read as possible? Also if your application is hard to read because of the font type and size, it won't be accessible for Blind and partially sighted people who may be part of the selection panel.

Make sure you lay out your application so it is easy to read. For example, break up blocks of text with headings and spaces, and use short paragraphs to highlight different points you want to make.



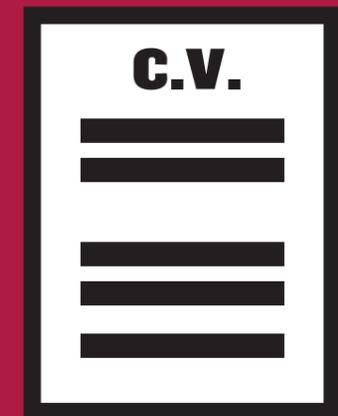
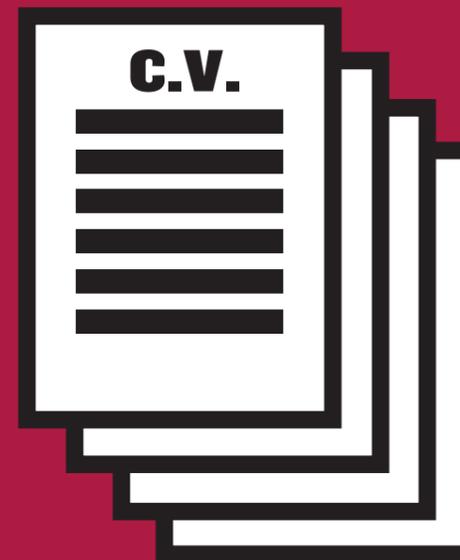
# TIP FIVE:

## Your C.V. (Curriculum Vitae)

Your C.V. is where you tell the commissioner about your work and practice history. It needs to be brief, very clear and easy to follow.

- Write it backwards, with the latest job/exhibition etc first.
- Don't go back more than 10 years.
- Divide it up into different areas of work; for example, exhibitions, commissions, employment, blogs etc.
- Keep it brief - 2 sides of A4 in 12 or 14-point font size should be enough.

Selection panels skim read a CV, so if you put in too much and it isn't easy to read they will miss a lot of information.

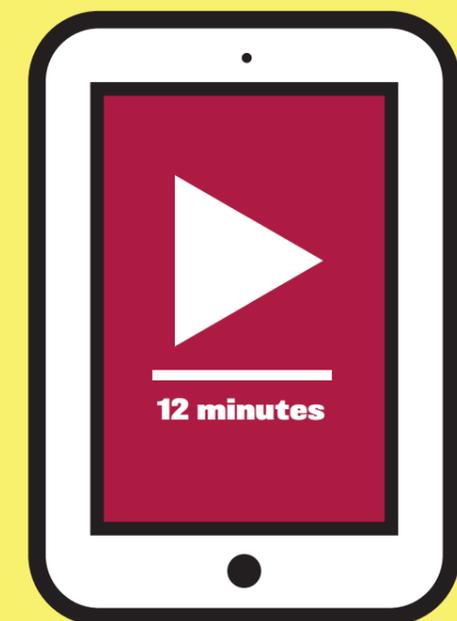
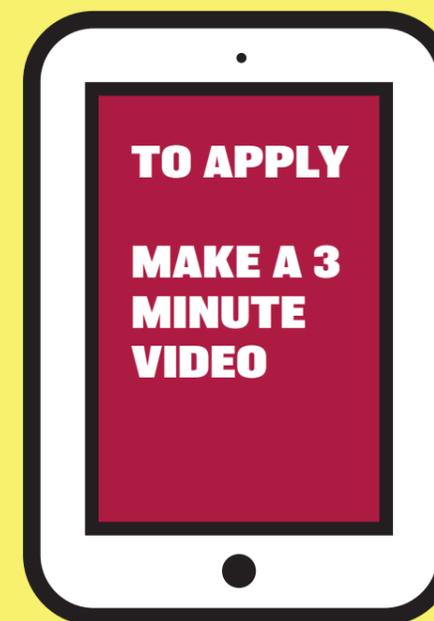


# TIP SIX:

## Word count/time limit for audio and film

If there is a word or character count in the questions being asked, then stick to it. Commissioners often want to limit the number of words to make it easier to read.

Your application may be rejected if you don't stick to a word count! Similarly, if you are sending in a video or audio, keep to the time limit. Even if no time limit is specified, no more than 5 minutes is enough.

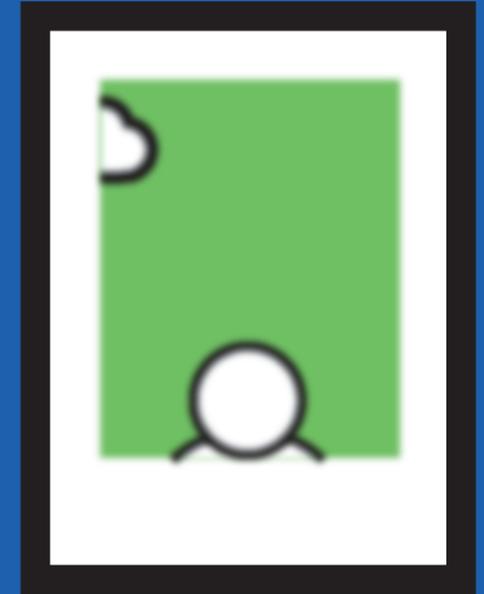


# TIP SEVEN:

## Images of your work

Be very selective about which images to use. Different pieces of your work will be appropriate for different opportunities. Well-presented images are essential: a poorly-presented image will make your work look bad, or give an impression that you don't care about your application. Make sure it's clear what the image is showing.

If the commissioner asks for 10 jpegs of a certain resolution, then provide them to that standard. Don't send in links to your website as a replacement as panels don't have time to look through websites. Similarly with social media sites, make sure the link takes you directly to the page you are referring to.

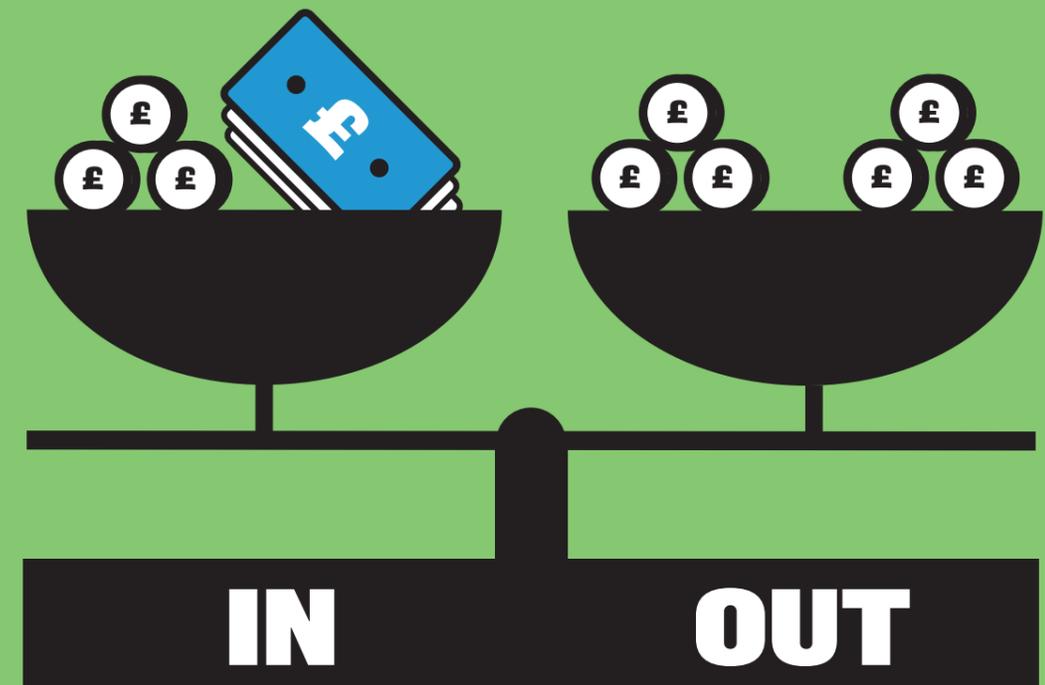


# TIP EIGHT:

## Budget

If you need to provide a budget, take your time and provide as much detail as possible. The budget is the 'nuts and bolts' of your bid. It shows not only how you see the expenditure and income for your project, but also how you see the breakdown of the different strands in your bid and how they support each other.

It is usually hard to make any changes in a budget once you have submitted it. Check all your assumptions. Check all your figures several times, check that they all add up and that the expenditure balances with the income.



# TIP NINE:

## Get a friend or friends to read your draft

This is essential. You will think what you have written makes sense, but another person may see that you have left out essential parts of your story which could cause confusion. Sometimes you have to state the obvious! Be selective with who you ask to provide you with feedback. You need someone who understands the processes, the sector, and is brutally honest. Ask your friend to give you very particular feedback. Ask them questions like:

- Does it make sense?
- Do I sell myself?
- Have I answered the brief?
- What is missing?
- What is not clear?
- How does it look?

DASH is happy to read draft applications and provide feedback, as are other similar organisations.



# TIP TEN:

## Competition, confidence and good luck

Most commissions and opportunities are very competitive, so you must be prepared for your bid not to be selected. There is also a large dollop of luck in getting a commission! Try to see each bid as a learning opportunity, so that you feel more confident with each bid whether you are successful or not. If you find that being unsuccessful seriously affects your confidence and mental health, take a break and be selective about which opportunities you apply for.

Ultimately, you should view any rejected bid as useful experience in finding out what worked and what didn't. Many commissioners will provide feedback of some sort and may have Customer Services teams or other staff who can help you strengthen your next bid. Don't be afraid to get in touch and always be learning!







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Supported using public funding by  
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