

Note that the tips below are relevant to most proposal processes

Find out which galleries, art spaces and organisations accept proposals

- Galleries have different processes and requirements for proposals, and not all galleries accept proposals.
- Be aware of the gallery's proposal process well in advance of the deadline. You can usually find out online or request information.
- This may include exhibitions, calls for specific locations (windows, light boxes, billboards), journals, funding, conferences, events, awards and so on.
- Look locally, nationally and internationally

Key information to check

- When are the proposal deadlines? How often do they occur?
- Are you eligible to apply?
- What is the selection process?
- How should proposals be submitted e.g. online or hard copy?

Before you apply

- Ask yourself - Is the gallery or organisation a good match with your work?
- Do your research on the gallery/organisation. Make sure you have an understanding of who they are and what they do. When you do a site visit make sure to physically walk into the gallery and see the current exhibition and space. Go to their openings and shows. What sort of work do they normally show or support? Is there anyone you know who has previously shown there? Could they offer advice?
- It can be useful to get the galleries/organisation's advice on submitting a proposal before you apply. You could send an email or call and arrange an informal meeting. Be prepared to introduce your idea briefly, be concise. Allow plenty of time – don't call and expect someone to meet you that day.

When arranging to meet

- It is best to have a solid idea in mind and some work underway. In many cases, you will get better feedback if it is in relation to a specific idea rather than a general desire to have an exhibition.
- If you are applying for a significant opportunity then meeting or discussing your project with the gallery/organisation well in advance is best. This will also mean the organisation has some understanding of your work and idea prior to the proposal review. This may be useful for them in terms of programming, considering what support is required, speaking to your work during assessments etc.

Writing the proposal

- Start well before the deadline.
- Read the criteria! Make sure your work is a good fit for the gallery. Look at their mission and vision statements online or similar. Make sure you are familiar with their previous projects and that you have visited the gallery space. If your work is not a good fit, then look for another opportunity. If it is, then:
- Have a clear idea of what you want to do and how you can make it happen. Consider the criteria and how your work relates. Make this evident in your proposal.
- Answer the questions. If the application asks for something specifically then be sure to respond to it.
- Be thorough yet also clear and concise.
- Include your contact details.

In general proposals should outline:

- Concept (your ideas) **Why?**
 - Physical description (how the show will look e.g. media, approach, how it will work in the space) **What?**
 - How it will be achieved: Provide pragmatic details including timeline, installation requirements, and budget if applicable. A floorplan, sketch or diagram of what you would like to achieve in the space may be useful.
- How?**

- If including a budget, be upfront and clear about costs to give galleries a good sense of the scope they may have to assist. State what you can offer financially, and “in kind” (free) to the project, so that the gallery/organisation can see what sort of effort you are prepared to put in.

Concept

- State your idea upfront.
- Be clear about why your proposal is relevant to this specific context i.e. why this gallery/space/place? This could be because of the type of gallery and audiences it attracts, e.g. community based, artist run. Or, it could be the ethos of the gallery or the actual physical space that’s important.
- Provide some detail, or at least a note (as the supporting material will illustrate this more fully), about the work’s context within your own practice. That is, does it represent a departure from earlier work / the continuation of a series / a collaboration / does it respond to or build on something else you have done?
- Indicate the timeliness of your project: why is it significant that the work be shown now, how is it relevant to the space and the place and the time?

Physical description

- Describe how will the work operate in the gallery/space? Is there an expectation of audiences i.e. interaction / prior knowledge / sound or other sensory components?
- Include a selection of relevant images. This could be works in progress, drawings or images of previous similar works and past works. Ensure the images are readable and easy to view. E.g. 1-4 images per A4 sheet. Make sure the image file size is not HUGE if you’re emailing the application. If emailing each image it should be low res – around 100 – 500KB. Hyperlink to your relevant moving image content online.
- Ensure some images address the concerns presented in your proposal. E.g. use of media or space.

What if I haven’t made the work yet?

- Most galleries do not expect artists to have made or completed all the artwork for an exhibition at the time of the proposal. In fact, for some exhibition panels, this can be off-putting, as if the project is already all sewn up. Many galleries want to work with the artist to develop the project in some way.
- The idea and work should be underway and some evidence should be presented and backed up by your images and supporting information.
- You need to provide assessors with evidence and give them the confidence that you can achieve what you say you will do to a high standard.
- If you can’t say ‘what’ exactly, say ‘how’ – talk about the process involved. Use supporting images.
- If you are proposing a big leap or change of direction in your practice then evidence through imagery, trials etc. and a strong rationale is recommended.

Interactive and community-based projects

- The strongest proposals clearly address how specific audiences will be engaged if that is a focus of the project. They typically include a plan of how people or communities will be approached and encouraged to attend or take part.

Supporting Information

- Remember to have your information arranged in reverse chronological order, most recent first.
- Support material can include a short bio or CV separately (note this should be art-focused only. Include any exhibitions, awards, relevant experience, bibliography) and any relevant catalogues or writing on your work if you have it.
- Art CV/Biography may include: Education, Awards, and Residencies, Exhibitions (solo/group), Bibliography (Publications, Reviews, Articles), Arts Employment or volunteer positions, Workshops.
- Look online at different dealer galleries to see how they present artist bios and CVs.
- You will usually be asked to include images of previous work. Include a well-chosen selection of your best and most relevant work. E.g. If your exhibition is focussed on installation be sure to show ways you have dealt with space in the past. • Do not include every single work you’ve ever made.
- Do include a link to your website if you have one
- If you work in moving image, performance or sound, make sure to provide appropriate evidence of this. Provide links to specific works on your website/ works online. The best format is to provide thumbnail images and a short, one-line description of the piece with a hyperlink in your supporting info. Don’t expect assessors to go searching blindly for your website or specific works online. Consider one site where all of your work can be accessed online.
- 2D works are often best photographed straight on.

Presentation

- A4 is the standard size unless specified in the application form.
- **Keep the presentation simple and clear.** Your images will show your work, so don't try and "pretty it up" with fancy paper or folders. These tend to be distracting and hard to scan or photocopy.
- **Use paragraphs and section headers** to clarify your information and make it easy to read. Use page numbers, footers (with project title and your name) and a standard font size.
- Most organisations will provide information on how proposals should be submitted e.g. a single pdf, a hard copy, multiple copies. Stick to the guidelines. Make sure your proposal is easy to access and read.
- Be aware that most organisations will send all applications to a panel for assessment. Your proposal should be **easy to send** (a single pdf) or copy (not bound). Avoid sending multiple documents and single images.
- Do not rely on inserting links to websites. If an image is important then include it.
- **Consider the length of your proposal.** Your proposal should be thorough yet clear and concise. The length may be informed by the significance of the opportunity e.g. a proposal to have a single work included in an exhibition would be shorter than a significant funding proposal. If you are unsure, ask the organisation in advance.
- **Label your files with your name** (not the gallery's name) for each download/file.
- If your work does not produce well as images, in some cases you may be able to include actual works or copies of works e.g. photographs. This is not typical, but it can be worth asking.

DO

- Assume the person reading your proposal has no prior knowledge of your art practice.
- Get someone else to read your proposal before you send it. Ask someone to provide feedback and to proof/edit the proposal. Even if your project makes sense to you, it may not be clear to others. Have you addressed the basic details of your project? *Who? What? Why? How? When?*
- Be clear about how far along the project is: if the ideas are still in development, or you are open to discussion and advice about how your ideas may be refined in execution then say so.
- Be specific – don't send the same proposal off to 50 galleries – think about what you're doing and why you want to do it at the gallery/organisation.
- Be clear and concise. Only include relevant information.
- Create a sense of 'this is what I am doing and I'm going to make it happen – get on board.'
- Think about other events that may inform, expand and/or promote your project e.g. a performance, artist's talk or radio interview. Consider how you want your work portrayed and how people could engage with your work.
- If you are considering giving an artist's talk, then think about the structure and strategise if necessary. If you tend to get stage fright, you could invite someone to do a talk for you on a specific topic; or you could be in a "discussion" with someone more confident and have the person prepare some questions in advance.
- Consider group proposals: sometimes a collaborative project is a good way to approach a gallery for the first time, and to gain practical experience in developing an exhibition.
- Think about contextual information to support your project. Consider if a publication or another platform is applicable to your project.
- If you are planning on being the curator, and charging a fee, then make sure that the artist/s fee gets acknowledged first and foremost. Some spaces do not pay a curator's fee.

DON'T

- Try too obviously to mould your project to suit the needs of the gallery or funding. Be strategic (but not overtly) in "ticking the right boxes."
- Include anything that's not relevant.
- Use too much copied and pasted material
- Include your life story or personal journey. Keep focused on the project.
- Have spelling mistakes.
- Send HUGE attachments.
- Ask to meet the organisation the day before the proposal is due.
- Be too disappointed if you are not successful the first or second time you submit a proposal. Many of the best projects have occurred following numerous developed proposals. Writing a proposal is never a waste of time as it helps you to clarify and communicate your ideas. You may well re-use or re-work the content at a later stage.

- Be surprised if you are asked to submit further information or to clarify some details. Some organisations may invite you in; ask to visit your studio or to see some art works before making a final decision on your application.

Applying for Residencies

- Make sure to situate yourself in the destination and put this in your proposal. Imagine what it would be like to be there, what you will do, who you will connect with, what museums and galleries are there/nearby and accessible, what artist collectives there might be to engage with, what kinds of materials/resources, etc. are available. This requires a high level of research of the area and city, and indicates to assessors that you are serious about being there rather than in any other city.
 - A timeline of your planned activities and creative milestones can be useful for assessors to see.
 - Think about the reach of your work, organisations who offer residencies want to see further connections and outcomes from the opportunity they are offering, add a short list of potential spinoffs into your application.
- Ultimately a proposal is about the art work. Even an excellent proposal can be unsuccessful if the work isn't a good fit with the gallery or opportunity.

What if I am unsuccessful?

- Ask for feedback. Not all organisations will be able to provide detailed feedback due to external assessments and the volume of proposals received. However, many will be able to provide some information by email, phone or in person.
- Listen to the feedback and be sure to apply it to future proposals.
- If appropriate, you may be able to ask the gallery/organisation for their advice or suggestions on an alternative venue, funder etc.

What if I can't get a show anywhere?

- Hire or find an alternative venue and have your own exhibition – this could be short and sweet, just a single night or weekend show.
- Think about starting something yourself. It doesn't have to be a gallery. It could be a one-night show in an empty space or an exhibition in someone's living room. Be inventive. Think about garages, studios, window spaces, parks, hotels, bars, halls, vacant spaces ...
- Group shows are always good places to start as are small-scale projects e.g. window works or billboards
- Propose one-off events for galleries – public programming or performance based.
- Get involved as a volunteer – through this you will develop a community and have more opportunities and experience, as well as references.
- Consider publications, websites, blogs and social media as a way to stay engaged and to generate a public profile.