

[FRESH ARTS PODCAST] EPISODE 6: SHOULD I OR SHOULDN'T I INVEST TIME & FUNDS IN APPLYING FOR OPPORTUNITIES?

This is transcript of Episode 6: "Should I or Shouldn't I Start Invest Time & Funds in Applying for Opportunities?" from the Fresh Arts Podcast Should I or Shouldn't I, hosted by Reyes Ramirez, which was published on November 18, 2020 featuring Julia Barbosa Landois and Sarah Rafael García.

Reyes:

Hello, and welcome to "Should I or Shouldn't I?", a Fresh Arts podcast hosted by me, Reyes Ramirez, where we explore the decisions artists make every day to succeed in their creative practice. Today we're asking, should I or shouldn't I invest time and funds in applying for opportunities. We have artist Julia Barbosa Landois and writer Sarah Rafael Garcia to discuss. Hello, you two.

Sarah:

Hi Reyes, thank you for having us.

Julia:

Hi!

Reyes:

Hey! All right. So yeah, just, just quickly, in case the listeners don't know, could y'all introduce yourselves, starting with Julia?

Julia:

Sure. I am a multi-disciplinary artist, primarily visual. I've worked in video, performance installation, works on paper, many different media, depending on the project. And I've also worked in the art world as a teacher in academia in community and youth arts education, and also in the arts nonprofit work.

Reyes:

Sarah.

Sarah:

Hi, I'm Sarah Rafael Garcia. I'm a Chicana writer, author, but also, over the last five years, have been an artist-in-residence through multiple grants and community-based projects. And I am also the founder of Barrio Writers and LibroMobile, and Crear Studio.

Reyes:

Awesome, thank you. So I just want to give a quick disclaimer regarding this discussion in particular, 'cause it was kind of difficult to formulate the question itself, which, I certainly didn't want to connote whether you should or shouldn't apply for the opportunities. I mean, you should always seek to better your career, and access funds, particularly of your city. If your taxes or something like that are built into them, you should absolutely take advantage of any opportunities you can. But the difficulty was more in communicating, how do we convey what opportunities are good for you, 'cause there's so many different

kinds and labels. And you know, you'll see them in artists' bios, of, residency here, fellowship here, and grant from here. And what do those mean, and what, you know, what applies best to you in your particular situation? So I suppose my first question is, how do you measure what opportunities are best for you in your craft, your practice, your situation? And maybe going into a little bit why. Julia.

Julia:

Well, I'm a grant writer also, and so what I apply to that work is what I apply to the grant writing and opportunity applications that I do for my own art practice, and that is a ton of research before I even go in to apply for the opportunities. I'm also a parent of young children, and that is always a factor for me, in terms of my flexibility and how accommodating that opportunity may be for my particular situation. There's financial considerations, there's how much time you can take off from work, there's a lot of things that go into it. And so I think your best tool is just having as much information as possible and recognizing that opportunities that others have gotten are wonderful, but they may not fit you, and that's okay.

Reyes:

So, yeah, so for example, me... I always just, if I could, I would always take up a chance to go, you know, go sit in a cabin and write for three months nonstop, in the Ozarks, or whatever. However, that's just not, you know, to something you brought up,

that's just not entirely possible for everyone. Even me, I mean, I don't have any children, but I mean, I can't just email my boss and be like, "Hey, I'm taking three months off. "I'll see you later." You know, it is certainly kind of built-in, what is best for your situation. So Sarah, do you, can you speak to that? Kind of, how do you measure what opportunities are best for you in your craft?

Sarah:

Well, I think it's also important to say how and why I started applying to artist-in-residence, because I came out of my MFA program without a job, and it was difficult for me to find opportunities. So I started looking into artist-in-residency programs simply for survival, right? So the idea to have some income and possibly a place to live. So it was more out of, "How else can I receive funding for the work that I do?" And that landed me in my first artist-in-residence at Grand Central Art Center in Orange County, which is actually in Santa Ana, my hometown. But it took all those years for me to realize that that opportunity existed in my own city, because it wasn't a space that was seen to promote local folks. I never... I never did the research enough for that one to even realize what it meant. And at the time, the funding was coming from the Andy Warhol Foundation. Even when I got it, I had no idea, I didn't tie the name to the artist-in-residence. And so it wasn't until now, much later, how I realized that put me in a different spot, uplifted me in a way that a lot of folks don't realize that name recognition does happen in this field. And because my first

artist-in-residence was through the Andy Warhol Foundation, that elevated me in a different place that I could not have obtained outside of that experience. But going forward, and what I learned from that experience was that in a lot of ways, these systems are still based on who you know and if you have access to speak to them, what are they actually looking for, rather than what they say they're looking for. And I learned quickly that you do have to do the research to know if you really want to be a part of that experience. A lot of organizations also focus on meeting quotas. So, soon after, I received another extension to that residency, but through another patron. And I won't say their names, because I don't want to speak ill of people, but it's also one that I would not recommend for people to go through, because I was tokenized for my identity and for my projects in the community. And that also created a different experience, even in my own hometown, for me as an artist. So I think research now goes a long way. And that led me to research when I was applying to the University of Houston and Project Row Houses' fellowship. To me, it became more important that my objective in creating art and storytelling also matched the initiatives set by these artist-in-residency experiences. If I am speaking to being able to elevate stories from the community and giving back to the community, then I have to be able to do that in the space that is hosting me. And then whether or not you know that without receiving the opportunity, right? Sometimes, it's just a lived experience that takes you to the next opportunity. You have to know, I had to have a bad experience to be able to appreciate the better environment. And

now what I tell folks is yes, do your homework, just like I tell folks that for an MFA program, right? Research who has received these residencies before, what type of work do they do, count the people of color, right? Count the diverse and gender-inclusivity, as well, and know that you are creating a partnership that, not only about you being honored, but you being part of this community and upholding them to be more diverse and inclusive. So I think that's, for me, that has been the biggest lesson, is you definitely, like Julia said, you definitely have to do the research now. And also, know what you're worth, because right now with the pandemic, there's so many small grants for artists.

Julia:
Right.

Sarah:
And spending three hours to get \$500, you have to know if that's gonna be worth it to you, especially when that means there's about another 3,000 people applying at the same time.

Reyes:
I think that actually is a perfect segue into I guess an issue maybe we could discuss. Maybe it might be too early, but I mean, you know, why not? So, kind of fees and time. And I think kind of in the formulation of this question of, should I shouldn't I invest time and funds in applying for opportunities, I think that is, it's a consideration of how it's its own economy, how

it's its own, kind of even its own job. And so, you know, there are grant writers, there are grant managers, there are people who, this is what they focus on, this speaking the language of grants, or funds. And so fees and time, I think, is a really important thing to consider. And so could y'all maybe talk about what maybe your ratio, or maybe what, you know, what works best for you in terms of the consideration of those fees and time? So for example, I think at some point in my life, I was applying to the Wallace Stegner Fellowship, which is something I think out of Stanford or Princeton, I forget, but you pay 75 bucks to maybe get a no, right? Essentially, you pay 70 bucks to pretty much get to no, in terms of statistics, and the numbers of it. But once you get it, you get \$40,000 for two years, and you get a place to, I mean yeah, you get to live there, blah, blah, blah. And so Julia, could you talk about maybe your considerations and regarding that, as an artist, right? Like the fees and time dedicated to applying to these things.

Julia:

Sure. It depends on the project for me, also just because the media that I've worked in have been so varied, so the way that I structure it has varied widely. But, one of my first experiences with a grant and a public art project was a real learning experience in that regard. I did a project with, it was called a Master Artist program, with a high school in San Antonio. And an artist would go in, work with the high school students, and do a public art project for their campus. So it was a really great opportunity, and I had lots of fun working with youth. And I

decided to do this very labor-intensive project, which was doing a small mural and a little micro campus garden. So for this grant, there was a separate materials fee, and then an artist stipend. And one thing that I really learned from this project was not just how to budget my money, which I was pretty good at, but how to budget my time. So I picked this project that was extremely labor-intensive, and at the end, really, the hours that I put in really were not comparable to the fee that I was paid. But it was because I didn't really understand how that worked when I was going in. And then when I met other artists who had done it, they had done things like, "Oh, okay, "I'm doing this public art piece, "but I'm gonna have it fabricated." So they used the whole materials budget to have this piece of artwork fabricated. They weren't doing the physical labor. They did the intellectual labor of coming up with the idea, but then in terms of hours and physical labor that went into the project, they spent much less, and so it was more worth it for them. But they were veterans, and they, they knew better how to work a project like that. So since then, I've been better at it. I'm not the best, but... Yeah, I try to think about the time spent, even the time spent, put into the application. Like you said, you had an application that had a large fee, and then by the numbers, it was likely that you would get a no. But also, there are applications that take a lot of labor just going into the process. And like Sarah said, am I gonna spend that many hours and do that much paperwork for just a few hundred dollars at the end? Is that worth my time and my labor? And also really considering and talking to other artists, you know, using your

community as a resource, and using older artists and artists who've kind of been around the block a little bit more, asking for their help when it comes to figuring out how you might pay yourself, and also asking people that you're gonna work with, "Hey, I want you to write some music for me, "and I need you to give it to me straight. "What do you feel like your time is worth? "Because I want to pay you what you feel you're worth." And that also helps me reflect more on what I feel like I may be worth for this project.

Reyes:

Yeah, Sarah, please, if you want to add onto that, the question of, how does one, what's your ratio, what's your formula, in terms of what fees and time you invest in applying for these opportunities? And I think, I mean, again, just for clarity's sake, I do not apply to the Stegner anymore. I just don't have it in me to give another \$70 every year to get a no. But, please.

Sarah:

Yeah, I, so again, because I started this process when I was literally, you know, working minimal hours on contract work, and on food assistance, 'cause I couldn't make ends meet, I'm very modest in the way I apply and approach these. It's more about what can sustain me. And from that first experience, you know, I was willing to do everything to get the artist-in-fellowship, right? So I was like, "Oh, you need visual art? "I got that." And before that project, I had never done visual art, or

collaborated. So I was like, "I can add music! "I can do visual art! "I can work with people!" And so I had this huge project to do in one year's time. And you know, like Julia, echoing everything Julia just said, you take it because of the opportunity at that point, without knowing how much of the labor it's going to cost. So now, I always, I have a project in mind, and I don't, I don't create new projects for new grants. I pitch the same project to five grants in a year, and hope that one of them pans out. As far as paying fees, Reyes, I, I don't like paying fees! I have other bills to pay. So there's very few times prior to receiving a full-time job recently that I ever paid fees. I looked for the ones that had no fees, because I couldn't afford that \$75 no. I looked for organizations, again, looking at like-minded organizations. I love applying to Hedgebrook, you know, the writers residency. It's for women, or folks who identify as women only. And if you can't afford their fee, which is actually under, I think it's 40 or \$50, you can ask them to waive it, and no questions asked, and they waive it. So I always look at folks who take that into consideration. And what I advise younger, or emerging of all ages, artists, is the same thing. If you don't have the money, don't use it for that. There's so many opportunities to apply for free and receive something, rather than investing and not applying at all, right? What I do for bookkeeping purposes, and to give myself some opportunities to pay it forward, is when I do get an honorarium, whether it's an artist-in-residence or for a speaking engagement, I put away some money just for these fees. And in other words, oh, this is, 'cause it's a job. Like we've said,

it's a job to apply. It's the labor behind it, right? And it's on a whim, so you don't know if you're actually gonna get it. There are no guarantees. So when I do get an honorarium for a speaking engagement, I put aside part of my artist-in-residence money, it goes back to do this all over again. And that's how I approach it. And then, you know, I think also asking folks who I do know who have received something similar, "Do you think this is a good price? "Is it worth investing?" And then the other thing is, if you just believe in the organization, and you like the work they do anyways, and you know they pick phenomenal people, and even if you don't get picked, the person who does is amazing, then I'm okay giving them \$40.

Reyes:

Yeah. And I think you both touched upon this, but... I mean, I always joke that if there's a grant for \$10,000 to dance, then dang, I'll dance for you, you know? And I think there's this thing of, yeah, what do you apply, and how, where it's like, do you fit what you're doing to the grant, or do you kind of just apply to the things that apply to you so that you can, you know? 'Cause there is kind of chances of increased chances. It's almost kind of like a game of probability, where it's like, if I'm not a dancer but I apply to a dance grant, the chances of me getting that, hmm, I don't know about that. But if it's something that's more general. Anyways, there is kind of almost a funky math you have to do. And whether or not, if, you know, again... If you've never written, let's say, 10 poems before, then maybe it's not worth applying to the Stegner and paying

that \$70. That's certainly a math, a ratio one has to do. So I forgot to kinda give some context. So Julia, just for people who don't know Julia, and I gleaned this from your website, so hopefully, you know, I'm not peering too much into your life, but you've-

Julia:

Okay.

Reyes:

You've received residencies with Lawndale here in Houston, Santa Fe Art Institute. I don't want to butcher the name, so I'm just gonna say Norway, you've received residencies in Norway, in Germany. And Sarah, I mean, you're actually, just kind of as a little factoid, you're from Texas, but you're not in Houston right now, you're actually one of the very few guests, if not the only guest, who's not currently living in Houston to be featured on this podcast. But you've received artist-in-residencies at Grand Central Art Center in Santa Ana, the KGMCA-PRH fellowship, and right now, you're the, you're one of the Recovering the US Hispanic Heritage program slash US Latino Digital Humanities fellows here with Arte Publico Press. So kind of one of the things that I, in curating the guests for this show, I certainly wanted to ask people to join who apply to these different opportunities and get them. And so I guess my next question then is, what do you feel are the benefits of certain opportunities? And so, and if you can, maybe do your best to kinda define them, 'cause I think people do get caught

up in fellowships, versus a residency, versus a grant, versus et cetera. So, Julia, yeah, what do you feel are the benefits of certain opportunities that you applied to, or ones that you're driven to apply to?

Julia:

Before I address that question, I just want to mention something really fast that I didn't mention in the last question, which is a resource called wage. It's an acronym, W-A-G-E, Working Artists and the Greater Economy. And it's a website that you can go to, and it has a fee calculator for artists, depending on, what size of institution, different, whether they're doing a lecture, or they're doing a project, all different kinds of levels of art labor, and different disciplines, and what are some suggested fees that you might be paid. So it's just a really good resource if you're, if you're not sure how to pay yourself or others, it's a good place to start.

Reyes:

Thank you.

Julia:

Sure. Okay, so... Tell me again, I'm sorry.

Reyes:

It's all good, it's all good. So what do you feel are the benefits of certain opportunities? So again, revisiting the context of, you've had residencies, you've received grants. What

do you feel are the benefits of certain, of those certain opportunities?

Julia:

For me in particular, they have been concentrated times of research and kind of broadening my horizons. Lawndale is the only residency I've done that was a really long-term, one-year residency, and so I was able to really dive in and start a new body of work. When I've done other shorter-term ones, it's not easy for me to crank out a new body of work in a month or three months. And so it's more time for me just to think and to research. So for example, Berlin was a really great opportunity, and very specialized. It's an opportunity for artists in San Antonio. I am from there, I moved to Houston about three years ago. And you get to go to Kunstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, stay for three months. And for me, especially working in something like performance art, when I was living in San Antonio, there just wasn't a lot for me to see to be able to hone my craft. And so this was a really great opportunity for me to go to this international center for all kinds of contemporary art. And in particular, I made it a point to go see every single performance art project that I could while I was there, done by people from all over the world. And it was a once in a lifetime opportunity for me to just be a sponge there.

Reyes:

I'm sorry, could you say where this was?

Julia:

In Berlin.

Reyes:

Okay.

Julia:

So, it was incredible. The drawback is that it was, it costs a lot of money. I got a free place to stay, I got a small stipend, but the stipend was small in the sense that it didn't cover all of my living expenses while I was there. I had rent paid for, but it's expensive to live in Germany. Even food is expensive in Germany. So I had this really amazing opportunity that pushed my work forward in a lot of ways, and I came up with projects that then, I was able to execute successfully later, but I also went into a bunch of credit card debt. And that's, you know, that's a pretty big deal.

Reyes:

Yeah, yeah. And I mean, I will say that I think you brought up a really great point of, especially because there's, you just see a lot of them, a lot of residencies are one month, three months, one year, two years, and I think that's certainly something to account for. For me, yeah, I agree with you. This year, I was supposed to have done a essentially three-week residency in Memphis, Tennessee, which for me, yeah, I'm not really gonna start or finish anything in three months, in three weeks, it's more of just a continuation of efforts that I'm already doing.

But again, you know, to each their own. Sarah, could you kind of address that? What do you feel are the benefits of certain opportunities? So just for our listeners, residencies are usually opportunities where you go live somewhere. It's usually tied to an institution or organization, but they usually provide a space for you, and there's usually kind of something that makes it unique, where I think for you, Julia, it seemed to have been, you get access to all these different performances and different artists in the community. But Sarah, can you speak to, yeah, what are the benefits of certain opportunities that you like or apply to?

Sarah:

Yeah, so the first one I ever had was really great, 'cause it was very timely in my life, where I didn't, I didn't know what I was gonna do if I didn't get the artist-in-residence. I didn't know where I was gonna live or what kind of funding I'd have. So it really helped me not worry about rent for a year, which turned into three years, which is a huge privilege. But every six months, I would get that stress, like, "Oh my gosh, what's gonna happen in six months?" And I think after that first year experience, my goal was always, "I don't think I can do this "for a short period of time and that be my only income," because like you said, Reyes, you're constantly wondering, "How am I gonna finish this? "How am I gonna do it?" And deadlines become real. My first project, I proposed writing a book, doing a musical, and visual art exhibition in one year's time! 'Cause I was willing to do anything for that opportunity, 'cause I needed

a place to live! And, "Sure I can do this!" And even when I was looking for a publisher, the only one that said yes was Cesar Ramos, who's amazing. And he was like, "Girl, what were you thinking? "One year to write a book?" But it really wasn't one year, it was from March to December to write a book, because the rest of the time had to be used for the exhibit. And so I think now, in retrospect, that it did teach me a lesson, is that I can't go in thinking that I have to produce something. And I think that's why I really appreciated the university... Sorry, it's a really long acronym, KGMCA, Project Row Houses fellowship, was because they were not about the final product. They were about, "What do you need to continue "the type of work that you want to do?", were it artwork, research. It was more research-based, and they supplied mentors, which is an opportunity I've never had, my whole life, never had relevant role models and mentors, whether it's academia or the arts. So that was something that drew me to that experience. And that's a huge, you know, perk to when you're looking at fellowships and artist-in-residencies. It's more about, sorry, it's more about what tools you can take with you, too, afterwards. So to me, that's what's important. It's not so much of, "What project can I get out in three months, "and get that on the CV?" No, to me, it's like, "What skills can I "pick up along the way and continue to develop my craft?" And so now, when I applied for the Recovery Program through Arte Publico, they are definitely giving me more unrestricted time and funds than the previous two. And I govern my own time and research, and they're giving me a platform to display my work. They're also an academic

fellowship, which, I applied as an artist, not as an academic. And the fact that they were open to that I felt was also speaking to the lack of visibility of the arts within the institutions, and being recognized as scholarly work. And that was something else that I was drawn to. How do we change the perception of the audience, saying that artists are also historians, archivists, academics, researchers, right? 'Cause we use all these things in our art to produce that final product, right? So when I look at artists and opportunities now, I look, financially, can it help me? What skills can I learn along in this process? I can't produce anything in three months, so I don't apply to those, unless it's just straight up unrestricted funds. And so now, all of the ones I have applied to, like Julia said, it's an opportunity to learn, too. I did the ASU. Reyes, you did that one, too, the Desert Nights, Rising Stars fellowship. It didn't pay us anything, but it gave us a platform. And so that's where we talk about, you invest in the opportunity, rather than your gain financially. You invest in the opportunity, because it's something that you're interested in anyways. So that's the only time I apply, is if the opportunity itself offers something that I'm looking for or haven't obtained on my own.

Reyes:

Yeah, and the idea I got-

Julia:

Although-

Reyes:

Sorry, go ahead, Julia.

Julia:

I was just gonna say, it's sort of like professional development.

Sarah:

Yeah.

Reyes:

Yeah, and I think that kind of, that certainly brings up a really great point of not just looking at opportunities as monetary, or, I mean, those are incredibly important, to be compensated for your work, and the monetary, you know, benefits, and in space and time, but it's also, yeah, a thing of networking, or of connecting to other people who you could help, or they could help you. Or it's, yeah, again, giving that, being given that platform to test something out. For the ASU fellowship, and so just for listeners, a fellowship is usually, I think, correct me if I'm wrong, but a fellowship is usually tied to an academic institution, or it's usually, you receive a fellowship to contribute to something, or to use the resources of an institution to further something. At least that's what my experience research has said. Which is to say also, again, some fellowships or residencies may give you access to something, I'm speaking as a writer, so I don't really need particularly that

much in terms of resources to do my craft, but maybe if you're a sculptor, maybe you get access to a shop that lets you work with metals. Maybe you've never had a steady way to work with metals in your practice. Or another might be, I guess in the world of literary arts, a printing press. Some spaces might give you a printing press, or a screen printing press. Some might give you access to studios, blah, blah, blah. And so I think that's another thing to keep into account. How do these opportunities expand your network, or your ability to be influential, or... 'Cause I think another tie, and this can go into the limitations of the next question, right? What are the limitations of certain opportunities? 'Cause there are some applications, or some that, opportunities that are tied to institutions or what have you that require let's say three letters of recommendation. And it's kind of like, if you get into the practice of just asking the same three, and I'm guilty of this myself, where you ask the same three people for letters of rec, it becomes exhausting, not only on you, but on the people you're asking, you know, to help support your work. But that's also another kind of limitation of, if it's tied to an academic institution or something like that, it's usually gonna ask for two to three letters of rec, which, recommendations, which is gonna get tiring in its own right. But yeah, Julia, could you kind of talk about maybe what are some limitations of certain opportunities? Like grants or residencies.

Julia:

Limitations. Well.

Reyes:

Like-

Julia:

Yeah, go ahead, what were you-

Reyes:

Yeah, like for example, certain grants ask that you, you know, you get a certain amount of dollars, but you have to complete it in six months, or you have to complete it in one month, or you have to have matching grants.

Julia:

Oh, that's a huge one, is matching funds. I have yet... It's something that I apply for all the time in my, my nonprofit work, but as an individual artist, I have yet to get a grant that depends on matching funds. That's really hard. Especially when different grants have different funding timelines. And so you're, you're trying to match up, "Okay, "I want to apply for this one opportunity, "and they say that you have to have a match, "but then how do I know what the match is? "Because I can only apply for that three months later," or something like that. So, those can be really hard to line up in terms of time. Of course, time itself is a big limitation. And just goes back to that I, what we talked about in terms of research. And it's all a process. It's all a learning process, in terms of learning about how you as an individual work, how much time it takes you.

Do you need more time? Do you more space, instead? You learn more about how you crank out the work. I work I think a little slower than a lot of other people who are in visual arts may work, and that's something I have to keep in mind when I'm applying for a grant that's project-based. But I know that now, because I've been doing it for awhile. So you're learning about the opportunities, but you're also learning a lot about yourself, your own practice

Reyes:

Sarah.

Sarah:

Yeah, I think for me, what I've also learned is that I work best when I collaborate, because I don't feel alone in the practice. And some of the limitations when, that I see in grants is that it's, it's all dependent on you. And it's definitely all dependent on, a lot of them require a final product. There's very few that don't. So now, when I look now, I think about, "Who's gonna give me "the opportunity to evolve with the project, "versus stick to the linear timeline?", because I know myself now through my own practice, I might end up doing something completely different than I thought because of the things that I encounter. I mean, most of my work deals with anti-gentrification, and cultural storytelling, and a lot of historical, BIPOC historical research. So I might get swayed a different way based on what I find in those topics. You know, a lot of it has to do with, like Julia said, just knowing what

kind of artist you are and having that experience. But for me, some of the limitations have also been that I may not agree how the institution uses my information and my projects in their stuff. And that has been, you know, I have had one bad experience where I've had to tell them they can no longer post about me, because they're still benefiting from that patronage that they did for me, and using that as a leverage to gain more funding for their own organization. And so that's also, again, doing your research is really important. And then the other thing is, if you didn't apply for a collaborative project and you do have to outsource some of your own money to be able to complete the project, that's another issue, right? So you have to think about when you're doing project-based art projects, or art, that you do have to say, "Wait, are they gonna have funds for the project? "Or is it, my flat fee is everything?" And then, but there's also liberty, because when I was applying to grants for the the fellowship I'm a part of now, I didn't have a job. So this was like, "Oh, great. "I'm gonna have unrestricted funds to do my project." I now have a full-time job. I don't have the hours to put into the project that I thought I would. So I was able to re-grant that money to someone else, and I was able to find a research coordinator who also benefited from the title and the funding, because I paid out some of the money that would have been used for my income towards that research, a young research coordinator who's also an artist. So I think some, you have to be aware of the restrictions of what you're applying to, and see if they actually are what you can stick to for that time being. And then there's paperwork. We all know

funding doesn't come on time. And you proposed a timeline, and sometimes it is timely, because whatever you're doing has to start this time and end this time, but you don't have the money. So that's something else to consider, is, that's why we get into debt on our credit cards, huh Julia? 'Cause sometimes, sometimes, you're starting the project with no money, and sometimes they don't pay you the money upfront, they pay you in parts, so you can't get to the next part of the project 'cause you're still waiting on the money. You know? And I think that's something real that a lot of artists don't realize, is that sometimes, the payment's going to be late. Or as we're seeing in Houston, sometimes, it's gonna get cut, and without having a backup plan. So I think those are the, some of the limitations that I see are limitations you can't control, which is life. And you do have to have a plan B just in case. And I think a lot, I wouldn't have, I didn't have a plan B for my first project. I had several plans for my Houston project. And then the project I have now, I was just fortunate that I had a job, because you know, the money still hasn't come, because it's an institution, and going through the paperwork. But I, luckily, I have a job that I can put up the money to start the project, right?

Reyes:

Yeah, and so, I mean, there are just so many nuances to this conversation that we're not just gonna have time to get to. But hey, more reason to have more episodes. But I think another thing to also keep into account. just really quick, is yeah, seeing what grants or what opportunities require that you have a

sponsor. Some places will not let you apply, even have your foot in the door, without a nonprofit backing you, or anything like that. So that's another thing to keep in mind, of the limitations. Again, like I said, we're not gonna be able to touch on every subject, but another thing that I definitely want to get to before our time is up is rejections and feedback. 'Cause I think, I think there's kind of something to be said of... I think obviously the best advice is, "Oh no, you know, it is what it is. "You know, you can't win them all." But it's also, to a degree, it is a little bit soul-crushing sometimes to invest so much time and funds into applying for something and then not get it. And so kind of, could y'all, could you, Julia, talk about, what is your method of dealing with rejections, and feedback, and all that stuff?

Julia:

I was thinking recently about how hard it is as an artist to deal with the constant rejection. Even when you've had a lot of successes, you still get a lot of rejections, and it can feel really soul-crushing. And then somehow, I ended up being a nonprofit grant writer. And so now in my day job, I also have to deal with all this rejection all the time. So I don't know if that's better or worse, It's thickening my skin, I'm not, I'm not quite sure. But being proactive about asking for feedback is so important, because 99% of the time, they are not gonna offer it to you. And sometimes, when you ask, they're still not gonna give it to you. But when a place is generous enough to give you feedback, it is really helpful. And sometimes, it's not about

the quality of your project at all, it's about who the jurors happen to be at that time and what they in particular are interested in personally. You know, maybe it's just not the right fit for that institution, even though it's a really great project idea. There are so many reasons that you could be rejected that don't have anything to do with your artistic quality, the artistic merit of the project, or, you know, your worth as a person, all of those kinds of things. Yeah, I just try to get as much feedback as I can. And also on the front end, I try to get feedback sometimes before I even submit an application, maybe from a close artist friend, or if there's someone that I know who's gotten that opportunity before and I feel comfortable approaching them, then I may ask them, "Hey, I know you got this grant in the past. "Would it be okay if you took the time, "could I buy you coffee, "and would you take the time "to read my proposal really fast?" And all they can say is no. So it's worth it to put yourself out there sometimes and ask for help. And then you just pay it forward, and you offer to do that for other people.

Reyes:

Yeah, I will say that I think ironically, I've received a grant for a project that I thought up in a fever dream or something like that, and wrote it really quick. And then there are some that I mulled over and poured hours of work in making a grant, into finding this grant, and to finding this project, and then just not getting it, repeatedly. And so there is something to be said of the process itself. I think one grant I was asked to

read for, they essentially gave me a thick stack of applications, and I had seven hours to read it, and I think they're in alphabetical order. So I was like, I feel sorry for someone who has a Z in their name, which is, you know, the situation is what the situation is, as you said, Julia. Sarah, yeah. Kind of addressing, how do you deal with rejections and feedback?

Sarah:

Well, what's funny for me is I can remember the best rejections I've ever gotten, because they were so nice and so empowering that I don't feel like they were rejections. And I only, I hope there's some organizations and grant gatekeepers listening to this. So one is, for institutions, Harvard writes the best rejections. They like, "You're so great! "I'm so sorry we can't take you." That pretty much sums up their beautiful letters. I mean, but it's really great. It's a, I was like, "Wow, I feel so empowered now! "Harvard rejected me really nicely." Feminist Press, one of the best literary rejections I've ever received. They basically said, "Our board is not ready for you." Like, "It's this board. "It's not you, it's us." And then they complimented certain parts of the project that I proposed. So I was just like, "Wow, that's great." And I think you, again, the reason I think these rejections are so great is 'cause they provided some feedback. Hedgebrook, and you know, they tell me where I ranked every year, and I keep applying to the Hedgebrook because of that. They make me feel so good. And then they pick really phenomenal women, so I'm like, "Well, okay, she's way

better than me." And so, but they write a pretty lengthy rejection letter that tell you where you ranked in the application. And I don't know if they write the same letter to everyone, like everybody made it to the last hundred, right? That could be the case, but I think it's that they provide that ranking system. And then there's the ones that provide nothing but the generic template that everybody gets as a rejection. And one of the things that I tell folks is also, think about the percentage of luck, or not luck, but, 'cause I want to say we are chosen by the merit of our work, but the chance you'll have of getting the grant is important, and it goes back, again, to the research. If someone that pitched something very similar in style and in content that you're about to pitch got it last year, then you're most likely not gonna get it the following year. So I think that's also another way how I deal with rejection. It's like, "Oh, I realized they funded something similar "to me the year before. "I should have known that before I applied." Because a lot of times, we have a project in our head, and we don't even think that somebody else might have done something similar, 'cause you know, it's such a great project. Like you said, Reyes, we've been dreaming about it. But I think that also plays into it. And also, demographics play into it, gender plays into it. So you really need to do the research to understand the rejection. It's like, who got picked the year before me and the year before that? What are the topics they're addressing this year? Did I actually pitch to those topics, or did I just run with this idea that's been stewing in my head? Now that I'm on the other side, I'm like, I'm one of those grant

gatekeepers, you know, I keep very bureaucratic notes on why they didn't fulfill the rubric to obtain the funding. But my agency, we don't provide feedback unless it's asked for, and we definitely don't offer it. So it is worth always asking. I know that there's also, like Julia said, speaking to people that have received it, like shout out to Ariana Brown, because they just posted that they're putting up their grant acceptance to NALAC for people to utilize as a form to understand the process, because they understand that it is very much a model that we don't speak in everyday, grant writing.

Julia:

NALAC doesn't give feedback, right?

Sarah:

They do, actually, it's just very generic. I've gotten feedback.

Julia:

I applied once and, I didn't get any feedback!

Sarah:

Oh, you have to ask-

Julia:

It was a while ago, though.

Sarah:

You have to ask for it. It is available, and they have a

deadline of when you can ask for feedback.

Reyes:

Wow. In all that, our time is almost up, but I just want to say that I think ultimately, when you apply to something, you're essentially believing in the merit of it. Whenever they don't choose you, when they choose a different winner, you have to accept that they won it because they're good. Their project is good, and their project has value. 'Cause if you don't believe that, then why did you apply? If they chose you, are you saying therefore, "They just chose me because, out of luck." Sure, yeah, but it's also, you have to believe in the merit of the winner. But I mean, the converse is also true, where I've applied to literary prizes and the demographics and the aesthetics may be pretty much the same every year. And I think at some point, I have to decide, "Okay, this is not worth investing time." And you know, like I said, like a Stegner, they're looking for something specific, in my mind. And so is that worth, again, investing \$70 a year in? Well, that's up to you. So kind of the last section I'd like to do is, again, there's just so many things we could talk about, but time is time, it is what it is. Some quick questions. Just some fun questions. Don't feel like you have to be committed to these answers, but just for whatever you feel right now. Julia favorite takeout, in Houston?

Julia:

Favorite takeout. That would have to be Shri Balaji Bhavan,

which is a Indian, vegetarian, amazing restaurant.

Reyes:

Nice. Sarah, in your time in Houston, what was your favorite takeout?

Sarah:

Ooh, that's easy. I already had the answer before you gave it to me. Soul Food Vegan. It's the only place I can have, I'm gluten-free and almost vegetarian, and none of it's by choice, it's by digestive issues, so, Soul Food Vegan has the best po' boy in town, and so it's the only place I can eat where I don't feel like I was on a diet. And you know, my palate is content, and my belly is too full.

Reyes:

Nice. Let's see, favorite Houston artist, Julia.

Julia:

Oh, that's so difficult.

Reyes:

It always is! That's why I like asking this.

Julia:

Gosh, I'm just gonna say the first thing that came to my head, and I think it's because this person is an old friend, and that would be Jamal Cyrus.

Reyes:

Nice. Sarah.

Sarah:

Other than you two? Just kidding. I know, that's a tough question you're asking me in front of two Houston artists. I mean, I'm gonna-

Julia:

Pressure's on.

Sarah:

I know, the pressure's on. So I say, other than you two, Matt Manalo. I really appreciate his work, and also, because we share common ground of researching history and representing it to counter the history that is told by this country.

Reyes:

Absolutely. Two more questions. Julia, something everyone in Houston should experience once.

Julia:

Oh my god. Well, I've only been here for three years, so I still have to experience a whole lot in this city. I am gonna say the James Turrell sculpture on the Rice campus, as a thunderstorm is rolling in. You get to see the sky through the window, and the clouds and the roof are all changing color. I was there when

lightning was striking, and that was a pretty amazing experience. We have lots of storms, so you'll probably have that opportunity a lot.

Reyes:

Amazing. Sarah.

Sarah:

Well, I had to avoid a flooded street once in Houston by ducking into Station Museum, and literally spent a few hours there until the water went down. So, that's, I mean, I love Station Museum anyways, so yeah. If you ever need to avoid a flood.

Reyes:

I will let them know the endorsement. Great stuff. All right, finally, yeah, just any upcoming projects, or things you just want to let people know about, what you're doing. Julia.

Julia:

I am working on two collaborations, which, I don't collaborate that often, and so this is newer territory, and kind of exciting for me. But I'm working on a performance project with some other people that is about the migrant crisis, and family detention. And I'm also working on one that is totally different, that is an animation project about trauma recovery, in the place of nature in trauma recovery.

Reyes:

Nice. Sarah.

Sarah:

I'm currently, like I said, fellow for the US Latinx Digital Humanities through Arte Publico and the Mellon Foundation. And they actually just featured my project today on Twitter and all of social media. So I'm working on the Modesta Avila Obstructing Development project, which is a digital humanities and storytelling. But also one thing important to remember is that the grants and aid have reopened and are available now. So for those of you that are interested in that type of work and project, the deadline is, let me look it up, January 29th, 2021, so you have until then to submit. And then another valuable resource that I just want to tell folks about is the Alliance of Artist Communities. Check out their website. They have been an amazing conference that I was able to attend with support from a CCI grant and Project Row Houses. It was the most informative conference I've ever attended as an artist. It did cost money, and it is not cheap, but it's definitely something to invest for professional development. And that's the Alliance of Artist Communities.

Reyes:

Awesome, thank you. Anyways, thank you, you two, for coming onto the show. Thank you for all the knowledge and insight you just provided. Good luck with everything, and I hope you stay safe and stay well.

Julia:

Thank you for having us!

Sarah:

Thank you, Reyes!

Spokesperson:

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