



THE JIM HENSON FOUNDATION

GRANT WORKSHOP

February 7th, 2026

ABOUT ME

- Director, Puppet, Media Designer and Technologist
- Founding Artistic Director of Rogue Artists Ensemble in Los Angeles
- Recipient of multiple Jim Henson Foundation workshop and project grants
- Have served on grant panels at the local, state and national level including currently serving on the board for The Jim Henson Foundation.
- Understand the challenges of grant writing and seeking funding, for less conventional work such a puppet theater
- Currently - Universal Creative as the Assistant Director, Immersive and Interactive Experiences for the global portfolio

www.SeanCawelti.com – if you want to see my work





THE BIG PICTURE

WHERE DO I GET \$?

- Funding can come from many places
- Individual contributions
- City Agencies
- State Agencies
- Foundations – such as the Jim Henson Foundation
- Clubs or Organizations – such as Puppeteers of America

RESOURCES FOR FUNDING

Work can be supported in many ways – through financial contribution, in-kind contributions of goods or services (space, materials, equipment), marketing / word of mouth support, and more!

- Start with your community – who in your circle might have ideas or connections on support
 - Find your local city arts grants agencies and explore funding opportunities
 - Local libraries often have **FREE** accessible **Grant Databases** you can use
 - Consider what businesses or other organizations are doing work that has a **similar impulse** – reach out and see if there are partnership possibilities or opportunities to collaborate
 - What community members have high visibility that can help raise awareness for your work?
-



THE JIM HENSON FOUNDATION

GRANT APPLICATION OVERVIEW

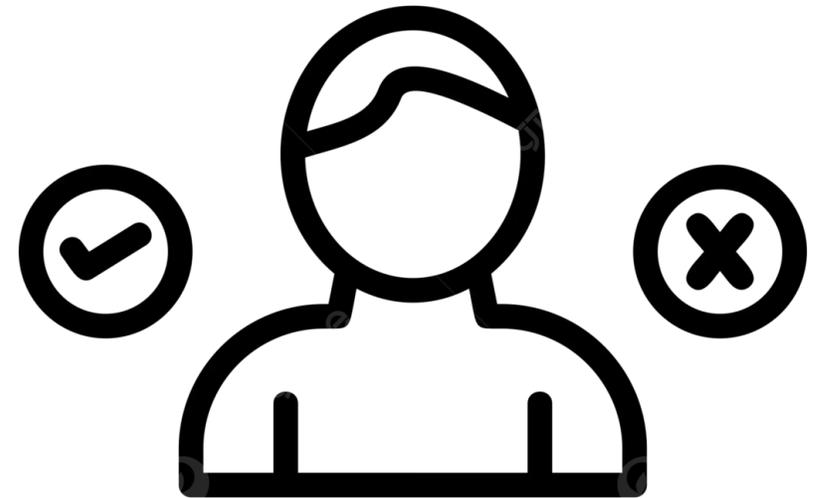
THE JIM HENSON FOUNDATION - FUNDING TIMELINE

- March 3, 2026 Letter of intent online submission deadline – **Our focus today**
- June 5, 2026 Notification of application status - notified if you are moving forward
- September 9, 2026 Full proposal online submission deadline
- December 9, 2026 Final notification
- January 4, 2027 Funds become available



HOW GRANTS ARE DECIDED

- Grant panels like the board members at The Jim Henson Foundation are looking at a few points:
 - Is the project clear?
 - Is the artist prepared?
 - Does this align with the Foundation's mission?
 - Does this project represent true excellence in puppetry?
- We also look at eligibility realities:
 - Is the project / artist eligible?
 - The timeline works within the grant guidelines?



**LOI =
LETTER OF
INTENT**

**IT'S JUST TWO PAGES
YOU CAN DO IT!**

PAGE 1 – YOUR LETTER (DIRECT FROM WEBSITE)

- Your **complete contact information**, including mailing address, phone number, email and website address
 - The category of grant you intend to apply for – **Production, Workshop or Family**.
 - A clear description of the planned project, including the **dramatic arc** of the piece, the **types of puppets** that will be used, the **lead puppeteer**, the **lead puppet designer** and **builder**, and your **timeline** for the work including any **upcoming workshops, residencies, or performances**.
-

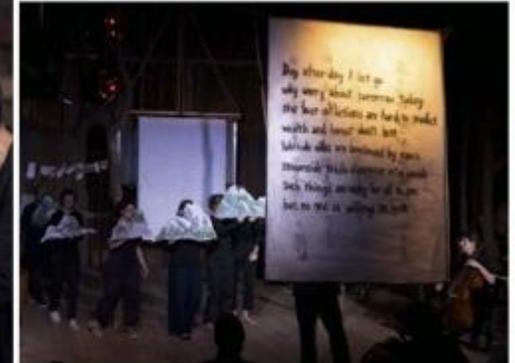
PAGE 2 – VISUAL (DIRECT FROM WEBSITE)

- **Puppetry is a visual medium, the one-page visual you submit is essential to the letter of intent phase of the process.**
 - This page can be photographs of the puppet(s), a working sketch or illustration of the puppet(s), or a combination of images that show the puppetry in the proposed project.
 - Do not include images of other artists you are inspired by who are not attached to the project. If these kinds of inspirational images are included, your application will be disqualified.
 - **All images must be original work and have the artist/source identified.**
-

EXAMPLES OF VISUALS

A good visual shows scale, craftsmanship, and how the puppets will function in performance.

Documentation of Stonehouse Workshop as part of the [Blackbird Creative Lab](#), Lake Geneva, Wisconsin performance June 2024. This 2-week workshop involved 20 musicians and Tom and Blair as puppeteers.



Cumulo - Image Samples
Concrete BOOM! Volume 3
Photos by Stefan Hagen

Plum in mid-air.

Featuring Ash Winkfield, Emily Batsford,
Sophia Zukoski



Plum tries to catch a cloud.

Featuring Arielle Lever, Ash Winkfield,
Sophia Zukoski, Emily Batsford



Close-up of Plum in mid-air.
Featuring Emily Batsford



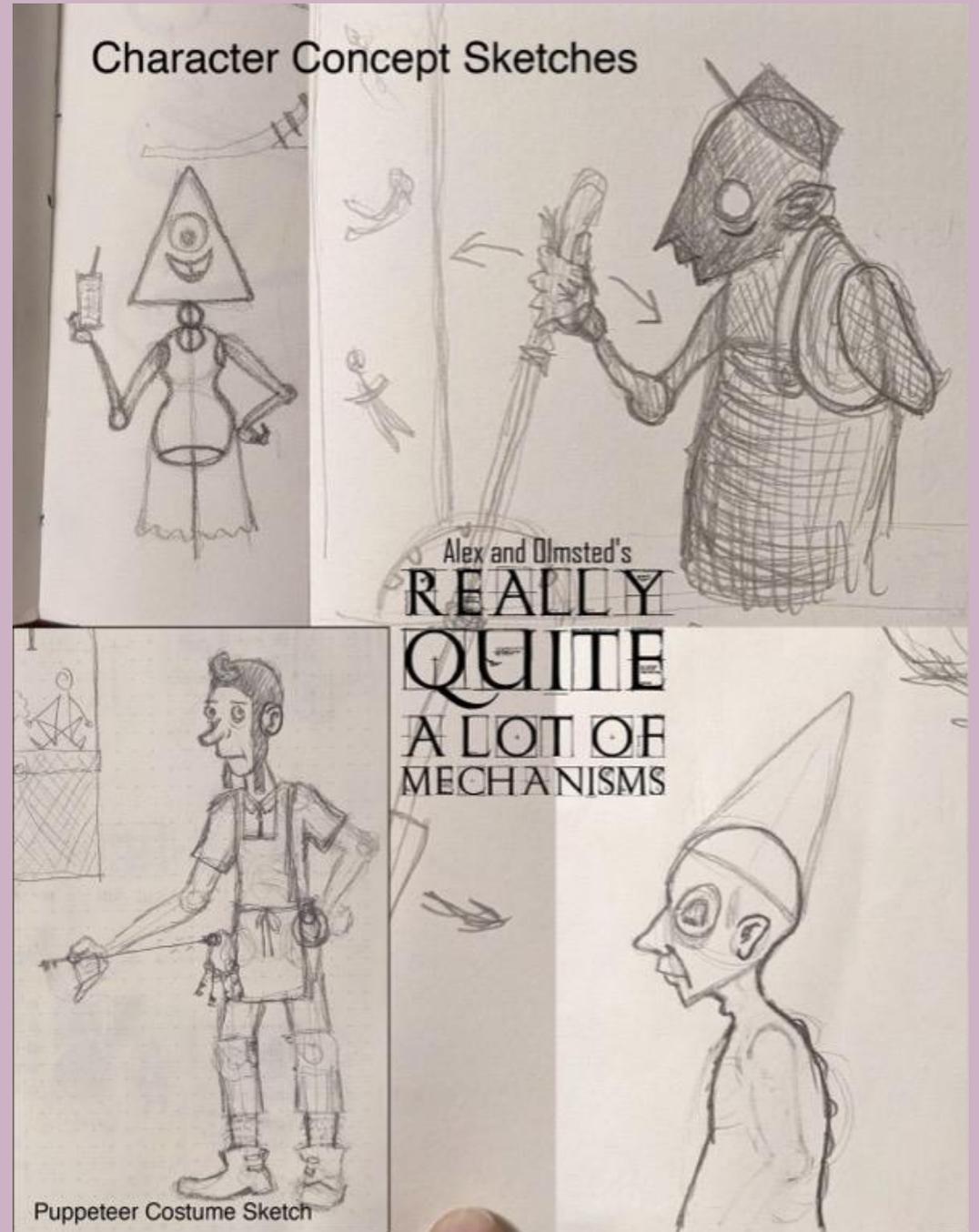
Plum meets her former self on a cloud.



Plum is attacked by a cloud creature.



Character Concept Sketches



Cumulo - Image Samples
Concrete BOOM! Volume 3
Photos by Stefan Hagen

Plum in mid-air.
Featuring Ash Winkfield, Emily Batsford,
Sophia Zukoski

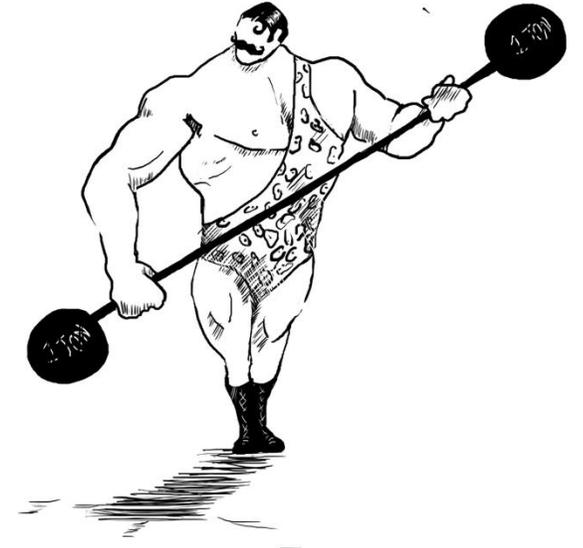


Plum tries to catch a cloud.
Featuring Arielle Lever, Ash Winkfield,
Sophia Zukoski, Emily Batsford

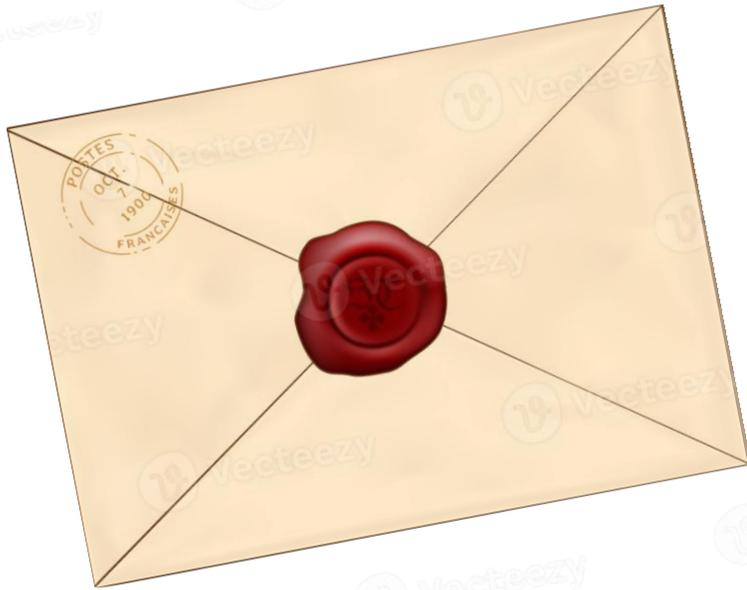


A STRONG PROJECT DESCRIPTION

- What the show about?
- Who is this show for? – target audience
- What types of puppets are used?
- How are Puppets essential to the piece and story?
- Who are the artists making this work and what are their roles?
- What is your timeline? – share any upcoming work being done and your plan for completion
- Other funding you have secured or are going to seek out? Who is supporting this work?



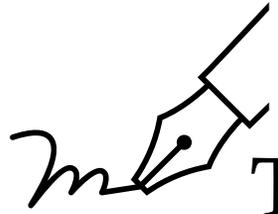
LETTER TIPS – THESE ARE KEY!



- Write assuming the reader knows nothing about you or your project
- Help us understand what the project's mission or intention is – what are you exploring through this work and why is it important to you?

HELP THE READER FEEL YOUR EXUBERANCE!

ONE SENTENCE MISSION STATEMENT EXAMPLE



TITLE OF SHOW is a LENGTH-minute TYPE OF PUPPETRY work by ARTIST/COMPANY that tells the story of BRIEF STORY IDEA, exploring THEMES.

THIS DOESN'T HAVE TO BE COPIED EXACTLY AND CAN BE CUSTOMIZED EASILY

PUTTING IT TO PRACTICE

Saltwater Saints is a **shadow-puppet and object-theater piece** by **Driftwood Collective** that tells the story of a **coastal town confronting disappearance**, exploring **resilience and communal memory**.

Bone Orchard is a **full-body puppet and mask work** by **Aaron Delgado** that tells the story of a **gardener who resurrects extinct animals**, exploring **responsibility and creation**.

NOW EXPAND ON YOUR MISSION STATEMENT

- Suggested flow:
 - Mission Statement – project manifesto – high level (we covered this)
 - More about your project
 - About the artists
 - Funding request
 - Wrap up

HELP THE READER FEEL YOUR EXUBERANCE!

ABOUT THE PROJECT

- What is the story?
 - Share a broad high-level overview of the basic premise or concept.
 - You can pick a key moment to expand on, especially if it helps in sharing your vision for the piece.
 - What type of puppetry, how is puppetry essential to your piece?
 - Provide clear examples of the types of puppetry – include the scale and approach to creating them (design / build)
 - The Jim Henson Foundation supports puppet theater so make sure we understand **how puppetry is at the core of your work** and not just an add on.
-

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

- Who are the lead artist(s)?
- What are their roles?
- If you are a collective or group, share a bit about your practice and background.
- If there is room you can also bring in a mention of past work or experiences.



FUNDING REQUEST

- What category of funding (workshop, project, family)
- What is the money going to be used for? (supplies, paying artists, venue fees)
- This could be the area you mention other funding sources or touch upon your plan to secure funding.



WRAP UP

- Thank you for considering (project name)
- Remind the reader why it's important to support (with your support this project / we will be able to....)



GRANT WRITING TIPS

- **All those basic rules of writing really matter here!**
 - Make sure to include paragraph breaks and ensure that visually it is easy to read
 - Have at least one person (maybe more) read your proposal and get feedback. Make sure they are clear on what the piece is and what your goals are.
 - Don't get too fancy with the formatting and let the text speak for itself. This is not a decorative resume.
 - Use at least an 11 point font with standard 1" borders, so your words have room to breath
-

A.I. – A HELPFUL TOOL WHEN USED WITH CARE

- Chat GPT and other services can be a great help with proof reading
 - After you write a first draft try copy and pasting it (or drop a PDF in) to your A.I. software and ask it for a ‘light proofread’ or ‘polishing pass’
 - This will help keep your original intention intact
 - You can ask for feedback and not have it directly edit or change your text too.
 - A.I. can also be a helpful resource in editing down longer proposals to make sure they are aligning with page limitations.
 - It’s not a replacement for writing your proposal and is important to make sure that your LOI is still in your voice.
 - **A.I. is not a replacement for providing YOUR vision for YOUR work.**
 - **A.I. should NEVER be used to create visual elements for your proposal.**
-

MOST IMPORTANTLY

BE YOURSELF

- Help us feel your individuality
- Don't be afraid to let us in your process
- Share challenges or triumphs



ONE FINAL TIP:

**A SMALL, CLEARLY ACHIEVABLE
PROJECT IS STRONGER THAN A
MASSIVE, VAGUE ONE.**

