

## **WORK-IN-PROGRESS GRANT**

### **Tip Sheet**

*by Susan A. Burgess*

Every year awards totaling \$8,000 are available to SCBWI members who apply for the Work-In-Progress Grants. Just as important as the money is the prestige of having a project deemed "worthy of publication." Every year there are editors watching for the Bulletin announcement so they can contact Grant recipients. Receiving a Letter of Merit is also notable validation.

Preparing the Grant application packet is similar to submitting an editorial project. Successful applicants are skilled writers, have a knowledge of what's marketable, and pay careful attention to detail.

Send for the current "Work-In-Progress Grants" Guidelines and Application Form -- there are changes from year to year. Fill in the Application Form fully and completely.

The judges' criteria for selection include: quality of writing, probability of eventual publication, and an indication the grant money will be put to good use. The judges are reminded annually that most W-I-P Grants were created in response to pleas for unencumbered time and supplemental basic support. Only the non-fiction research grant has restrictions on the use of the grant money.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the Grant Coordinator, by email at [wipgrants@scbwi.org](mailto:wipgrants@scbwi.org).

### **APPEARANCE**

Make your submission a clean, legible, professional package. Information on the Application Form should be printed by hand, typed, or word processed devoid of cross-outs and insertions. Here, you may use single-spacing. Put your writing sample and synopsis on white paper and use standard (1" minimum) margins. For legibility, use 10- or 12-point type and double-space everything. The SCBWI publication "From Keyboard to Printed Page..." details accepted formatting.

### **THE APPLICATION FORM**

Select your grant category with care. The "General Grant" is a large catch-all category with diverse competition. Unpublished picture book writers may find it more appropriate to apply for the Barbara Karlin Grant, a separate SCBWI award specifically for picture book texts. The "Contemporary Novel" is specifically for "here-and-now" stories, realistic fiction taking place within the current 10-year period. The "Non-fiction Research Grant" is for any research project with a Dewey Decimal number. Folktales, individual or collected biographies, and poetry collections are all considered non-fiction.

It's important to note that the grants are for one book-length writing project, not a body of work, not a series of books, not a collection of material -- unless that one project happens to be a single volume of stories, poems or biographies. Even if the project is envisioned as a collection, there must be unifying elements -- a conceptual wholeness. The project may be a mass market or trade book, for children or young adults.

On your application, be sure to designate which of the three grants you are applying for: General, Contemporary Novel, or Non-fiction Research. The Unpublished Writer Grant cannot be applied for specifically. Any applicant who has not already published a book for children or young adults is automatically considered for that grant.

Include any background -- professional or personal -- that establishes your personality and individuality. Whether you

skydive or drive a school bus, the information is helpful. Please do not include published clips, letters of endorsement, or a detailed genealogy. They will not be sent to the judges.

Be brief but specific about your use of grant money; it should be clear you have thought about how the money will be spent. If you need travel money, specify your destinations; if you plan to attend a conference, indicate which one. Given two equally meritorious projects with comparable writing, judges will turn to an applicant's use for the grant money to determine selection. Study the "use of grant money" suggestions and restrictions; make sure your application adheres to them.

### **WRITING SAMPLE**

This is the heart and soul of your application. Please limit the sample to 2,500 words -- but make it long enough to engross the reader.

What do they want? Over and over judges say they like to see the opening chapter of a book. "If your first chapter isn't something that will take a judge's breath away, it isn't going to compel an editor to read past it either!" Some even confess a sample from the middle makes them suspect the writer has no confidence in the opening. Fiction projects must be nearly ready for an editor before they are ready for the W-I-P Grant Judges. Non-fiction projects must have clearly defined scope and sequence. Send consecutive pages, not bits and pieces. Avoid ending the sample midsentence or mid-thought.

The judges also look for: 1) an original style or voice; 2) a strong theme; 3) settings established with sensory images; 4) young reader appeal; 5) for fiction, characters that come alive; and 6) hooks that "make me wish I had the rest of the manuscript."

### **SYNOPSIS**

Include a double-spaced synopsis or summary no matter how short the manuscript -- without it the application is incomplete. The synopsis may be only three sentences, but must not exceed 750 words. Help the judges visualize your project by mentioning the intended audience, and anticipated number of pages. A 250-word/one-page synopsis is the professional norm, so please be succinct.

In a synopsis there's no need to give a blow-by-blow account of the action, but you need to present not only the beginning and middle but also the ending. This is no place for teasers or cliffhangers. The judges want to know where you are going with your story.

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

- One judge observed that the application is a "quick sell" packet. The writer has 20 to 30 seconds to grab the reader's attention and hold it. There must be impact -- without gimmicks.
- Proofread your application packets, especially the writing sample and synopsis, very carefully. Use a spell-check or dictionary.
- Use your name as it appears on your membership card as we need to be able to verify your membership. If you are not sure how we have you listed in our records, please contact [membership@scbwi.org](mailto:membership@scbwi.org), and we can look you up.
- Limit the packet to 15 pages. Submit seven separate collated sets of information -- gathered in the order stated. Securely staple each set. Because application packets undergo multiple handling, heavy-duty staples are recommended. High quality photocopies increase legibility and foster a professional appearance.
- A complete outside return address corresponding to inside information helps the processing. So does easy access to the contents.
- The acknowledgment postcard should require only a quick signature.

## **JUDGING PROCESS**

All applications in compliance with the guidelines are sent to two readers, professionals in children's literature. All applications selected by both readers go on to the judges.

There are separate judging panels for each of the four grants; each has three people: an SCBWI Board member, an acquiring children's book editor, and an established writer. First, applications for the three categories are judged, and the winners and runner-ups are pulled from further consideration. Then those judges nominate projects from the pool of unpublished writers for the Unpublished Writer Grant. The Unpublished Writer Grant is selected by yet another judging panel.

The judges make no reports and applicants receive no critiques. All winners and runners-up are notified by phone around Labor Day (early September). Other applicants whose projects were finalists will receive a Letter of Merit. Public notice is posted on the SCBWI website and printed in the Bulletin. All Work-In-Progress Grant winners become ineligible for future W-I-P Grants; runners-up may continue to apply.

A well-fashioned application packet takes thought, care and time. Every year there are Work-In-Progress Grant winners who confess they almost didn't bother to make the effort, but invariably applicants report that -- winner or not -- they learned a great deal from the process.