

# Criteria for Nonprofit Grants

## A Guide for Thoma Foundation Grant Applicants

Updated April 2021. Access the web version of this document [here](#).

### How to apply for a grant from the Thoma Foundation

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Our process is designed to be straightforward and personal. Please follow these steps:

1. Use the [Grants Portal](#) to submit a 200- to 300-word project synopsis, called a Letter of Inquiry (LOI).
2. We accept LOIs year-round, with quarterly deadlines.
3. Following our quarterly deadline, the application is reviewed internally by our grants team. We only respond to projects that meet our criteria. Allow about a month for our team to contact you.
4. Selected applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal, including an extended project narrative, a timeline, and a line-item budget.
5. The grants team is available to answer specific questions during the process.

### Criteria: What are we looking for in an LOI?

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Grant applications are evaluated by six criteria: **alignment, leadership, innovation, timing, feasibility, and reach.**

#### 1. Alignment

*Does the project align with the goals, mission, and collecting fields of the Thoma Foundation?*

Alignment is the first metric by which we evaluate all applications. The Foundation funds projects that substantively engage with our fields of interest. We most frequently fund projects that are directly related to a specific artist in our collection or to a particular subfield within our collections. As a reminder, the Foundation loans all of the objects in our collections to AAM accredited facilities. We invite you to explore our [collections pages](#) as you assemble your LOI, and to reach out to our grants or collections teams to learn more about our areas of interest.

*Does the project enhance our target regions?*

We fund projects from across the United States and abroad; however, we are particularly interested in receiving proposals for projects based in or serving our target U.S. regions: Arizona, Illinois, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. International projects are restricted to the Art of the Spanish Americas, with a preference for organizations located in South America.

*Why do you want to partner with the Thoma Foundation?*

We are a small, personable team that hand-selects our granting partners in an effort to build a stronger network of specialists. In your application, we welcome you to directly address why you want to engage our singular Foundation.

**Example:** The Heard Museum’s exhibition *Leon Polk Smith: Hiding in Plain Sight* exemplifies a project well aligned with the Thoma Foundation’s priorities and interests. Located in Phoenix, the Heard Museum lies within our area of geographic focus. This exhibition highlighted the achievements of a postwar abstract artist represented in the Thoma collection and even emphasized the artists’ origins in rural Oklahoma, another area with strong personal and historical connections for our founders.

## 2. Leadership

*Who are the leaders behind this project? Do they have the drive to carry the project to fruition?*

In all of our grantmaking, we seek to back leaders who can make a difference. Rather than thinking of our grants as going to organizations or institutions, we value direct, personal relationships with individual leaders. When we evaluate LOIs or initiate conversations with museums or other cultural institutions, we are looking for engagement and buy-in from the executive leadership. We prefer to receive LOIs where the executive director or other senior leadership had not only endorsed but helped shape the project.

**Example:** Our recent [Equity Grant](#) to [Moving Arts Española](#) (NM) was largely motivated by the superlative leadership demonstrated by co-founders Roger Montoya and Salvador Ruiz. Their decades-long engagement with the community they serve and commitment to improving educational opportunities for young people in Rio Arriba County and beyond prompted the Thoma Foundation to make a matching grant that would help MAE increase capacity by serving high schoolers who had aged out of the organization’s existing programming.

## 3. Innovation

*Does the project drive the field forward? Does it disrupt conventional thinking around the topic?*

We are inspired by people who invent solutions in pursuit of progress, and we want to hear about your ingenious “big idea.” The Thoma Foundation funds projects that advance scholarship in our specialized fields. We require programs to be accessible and public-facing. Whether it’s an overdue monograph on an artist in our collection, an exhibition that re-envision a historic grouping of works, or a conservation project that uses new imaging technology to spur art historical insights, the Thoma Foundation wants to help your organization realize its cutting-edge vision.

**Example:** The Thoma Foundation was a proud supporter of [Rhizome’s Net Art Anthology](#) (2016), an ambitious publication that retells the history of a field of artistic practice in which even the most influential works often fade into obscurity as a result of technological obsolescence. The work offers a selective cross-section of a field of practice whose richness and breadth is rarely grasped, even by scholars and practitioners.

## 4. Timing

*Will the Thoma Foundation be an “early funder” on this project?*

We like to be “seed funders” of major projects, entering partnerships as early funders on the ground floor. We require 12-month advance notice to consider support of major projects. We do not provide emergency funding for late-stage projects.

**Example:** A recently approved grant from the Thoma Foundation will fund an exhibition opening in 2023 that has been in development with a major Los Angeles institution. Our Curator of Digital Art had been in conversation with the team at this organization over the course of several years, from initial ideation to eventual execution. Being involved throughout the process allowed us to develop a relationship of trust and collaboration with this partner.

## 5. Feasibility

*Does the project have realistic outcomes?*

We expect projects to produce tangible deliverables with calculable metrics. We determine if your project goals and outcomes are feasible and realistic based on our knowledge of your organization and its leadership. We welcome direct contact from your organization's executive director, president, and/or thought-leaders to discuss their investment in the proposed project's success.

**Example:** We recently supported Newberry Library's *¡Viva la libertad! The Age of Revolutions and Latin America* (2021), an exhibition that showcased the Newberry's collections of late colonial and early Republican material from Latin America. It also included a robust series of public programs sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and presented in partnership with the National Museum of Mexican Art, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, and other institutions. The thoughtful partnerships already in place for this exhibition spoke well to the project's overall viability and its impact within the Chicago area and beyond.

## 6. Reach

*Do you have audience impact?*

We prefer to support projects that engage both mainstream and scholarly audiences from all walks of life. To us, accessibility means organizing an exhibition that travels to museums in multiple regions, publishing a printed book that includes a thoughtful digital component, or revamping K-12 curriculum for the digital era. We expect organizations to dedicate marketing, publicity, and education plans to their proposed project.

**Example:** *Georgia O'Keeffe: Living Modern*, a recent exhibition supported by the Thoma Foundation, generated broad scholarly and popular appeal. O'Keeffe's iconic apparel functioned as the centerpiece of this widely traveled exhibition while Wanda Corn's insightful catalog provided new research-driven insights into the continuity between the artist's creative practice and broader lifestyle choices.

## Resources



- [Previous Thoma Foundation Grantees](#)
- [Our Collections](#)
- [Grants Portal](#)
- [Contact Our Grants Team](#)