

Ian Thorp ithorp@umass.edu

December 5th, 2020.

10 St James Ave # 302
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Trustees of the Massachusetts Cultural Council,

I am writing to you to request your aid for an animation film competition, on behalf of the New England Foundation for the Arts, a non-profit organization.

The goal of this proposal is to develop and showcase talent for animators. Through a competition, animators will gain exposure for future endeavours, develop work for their portfolio, and potentially gain a financial reward to help with their expenses. Animation is, as you likely know, an expensive and time-consuming project, so having financial rewards for runner-ups and for different categories would be beneficial in helping the community. Animation is, in our opinion, an under-utilized art form, often being viewed by the public as undivorceable from Saturday morning cartoons. This presents a great chance to push the genre forward in the public mind and in the talent behind it.

Categories for different prizes include the first, second and third place finalists overall, as well as the winners for short, medium and long length films, being under five minutes, between five minutes and half an hour, and over half an hour, respectively. There will also be smaller but more numerous prizes for any animation that does not place in the rankings but is nonetheless judged to be of exceptional quality.

According to your website, there does not seem to currently be many grants related to animation. Our proposal would be treading new ground then, and expanding the domain of the Massachusetts Cultural Council. Massachusetts has a long history of producing high-quality art, and animation is yet another frontier to grow into. Making large-budget animation television shows and films is something that requires industry backing, which our state lacks, but smaller-budget animation is a place that we can still excel in as there is no need for a large industry to already be in place. This could also help Massachusetts residents who apply to obtain jobs in the industry, or perhaps to create a small industry within the state itself.

Thank you,

Ian Thorp



Credit: Ambreen Hasan on unsplash.com

A Proposal to Host an Animation Competition

Written for: NEFA (New England Foundation for the Arts)

Written by: Ian Thorp

12/5/2020

Table of Contents

The Issue at Hand 3

A Request 3

Proposed Work 4

Facilities 5

Personnel 5

Budget 6

Summary 8

The Issue at Hand

Animation is a unique field of art unlike any other. The flowing lines of animation deliver emotional resonances with instant acceleration, not unlike an electric motor. It is an artistic medium whose spellbinding charm visualizes the impossible and enthralls those who watch. The great ease with which animation can be consumed and enjoyed is inversely proportional to the general effort required when animating. Despite modern computer advances, animation can be a tedious, time consuming, and expensive endeavour. Even small personal projects of middling effort can be quite lengthy in creation. According to anime news site Crunchyroll, 30 minutes of a 2010 anime episode cost \$145,000 (Balistreri). The majority of the cost came from the act of animating itself. Animators, then, need as much help as they can get.

Additionally, there is a general stigma in our society that animation is an artform only appropriate for kids, with exceptions for comedy since shows such as *The Simpsons* began airing. With the increasing popularity of anime from Japan in the West, and Western cartoons that have become more thematically ambitious, this is starting to change. Animation still has a long road ahead of it until it is as fully respected as other mediums such as literature and paintings, however. Supporting the creation of new, high-quality animation is one way to help change this, both in the public conscious and in the self-esteem of its creators. Such respect is long overdue; while Steamboat Willie may not have been a tour-de-force of storytelling, the genre evolved greatly since. The genre is constantly evolving in new and unexpected ways, limited only by one's imagination (and budget).

One problem with animation in the West is that of its limited scope, which is partially a result of economics. Many animated series originate as comics, and this problem extends even there, with the economics relegating many comics to being printed on cheap newspaper with only a few garish colors because of the expense of colored ink. In the 1980's, many animated series were little more than toy advertisements, and it shows in the quality of the animation. Someone needs to pay for the creation of high-quality, ambitious storytelling in animation, and many in the industry such as studios and networks are either unable or unwilling to do so. Thus, it is important to both support animators financially, as well as create opportunities to raise the public consciousness and appreciation for animation. This would help create a self-sustaining economic cycle of animation, so that market forces can support the effort.

A Request

Our request is for \$30,000 in funds in order to run an animation competition. The money will be used both for prize money, and the organizing of the event. This event would be held on Friday, April 16th, 2021 giving enough time for animators to create their work if they haven't already, and for our judges to review the entries. A look at similar competitions reveals most calls last from 2-6 months (Wood).

Many artists are no strangers to financial difficulties, and animators are no exception. The thought process behind having so many smaller awards for exceptional quality is to help support

the community financially, and not have it merely as a first-place prize to fight for (though that is the largest prize and carries the most prestige). We will not mention how many of these smaller prizes we are giving, so that animators produce their best work, aiming for the grand prize. Even animation that was not the absolute best is still probably quite good and took a large amount of effort to make. We expect to screen between two and four hours worth of animation. based on the fact that most major animation festivals receive over a thousand entries, we do not foresee a shortage of available entries to fill this time even though we are a much smaller competition (across staff).

This request is made on behalf of NEFA, an organization that supports a variety of art-related efforts. As members of the Massachusetts Cultural Council, you are likely already familiar with the level of success and organization NEFA is known for.

Proposed Work

The ultimate goal is the creation of an animation competition in the form of short, medium and long-length films, created by teams of no more than 7 people with major roles. Smaller roles such as short voice acting, music or editing contributions can be ignored against this limit. We chose this because animation often requires not just the actual animator, but the writer, and occasionally voice actor(s), musicians and more, though this is sometimes all done by the same person, which will be taken into account. In the interest of keeping this competition limited to independent animators, the team size is small, though we do not feel that it is necessary to restrict the size to a single person. The competition will consist of:

- The recruitment of judges for the animations
- The framework for accepting and storing the animations, as well as the funds
- The renting of a venue to show off the winning animations
- Hiring a lawyer to help review all terms and conditions
- The creation of our website

Judging Criteria and Rules

The exact judging criteria will be left to the judges to decide, but the judges are expected to operate on the idea that they are judging for artistic merit and technical skill first and foremost. The rules may be subject to change if our judges or lawyer feel there is a need, but our plan is a fairly standard one for art competitions, including:

- Our judges will first select which entries they feel are suitable to enter into the second round of competition. From here, they will take a closer look and select the winners and eligible honorary mentions.
- All creators retain the right to their works, while agreeing that if their work wins, it will be shown at our festival.
- Entries must either be in English or contain English subtitles
- Entries must be composed of animation for at least 70% of the film's runtime
- In terms of age restriction, entries allowed are roughly up to rated R film-levels

- Work need not be original for the competition but must be the creator's own work
- All entries must be submitted by the deadline, April 2nd

There will likely be other rules to make it a more comprehensive list but they should be unsurprising for anyone who has hosted an art call before. We chose to not force original works only, because it appears to greatly limit the entries (graphic artists guild).

As mentioned earlier, the festival is planned for April 16th. This gives us several months to prepare and complete all of the work listed above. Recruitment of personnel can begin immediately upon receiving funding, and will continue up until April 16th. The cutoff point for new entries is planned for April 2nd, to give the judges ample time to review all entries.

Facilities

The only necessary facility for this project would be the location where the winning films are shown. For this, we are renting a meeting room in the Hynes convention center for the evening of the screening. Everything else can either be carried out online, or does not require a physical presence of our own. In a sense, the main "infrastructure" would be our website. The meeting room we will rent covers catering as well. It says that food is not covered under your grant terms, and if we are unable to separate the two cost-wise then we will not use your funding for this portion of the festival.

Personnel

For our judges, we have chosen three members with great experience in the industry.

[name omitted here]

Associate Director, Character Animation Program at CalArts

[name omitted here] is the faculty and associate director of the character animation program at CalArts. He has also taught animation at the graduate level for six years in Taiwan, and has been a visiting faculty member of the Beijing Film Academy. He already has experience as an animation judge at the Beijing Film Academy's 13th annual animation festival, as well as the 2015 Golden Panda film festival. [name omitted here] brings a great amount of experience and insight to our project.

[name omitted here]

Animator, Creator

[name omitted here] is an accomplished animator and creator of animated series, including Samurai Jack and Dexter's Laboratory. With his extensive knowledge of the industry, [name omitted here] brings years of experience and expertise in both the technical details of animation but the other components to create a complete work of animation such as storytelling.

[name omitted here]

Independent animator, YouTube creator

[name omitted here] has been a staple of the YouTube community for many years, first finding his start on the website newgrounds.com, once and arguably still a juggernaut in the independent animation scene. [name omitted here]'s presence is important because of his perspective as someone who started out on his own, becoming one of the most well-known individual animators on the English-speaking internet. [name omitted here] also has a well-received animated series critiquing video games and other types of art, demonstrating his ability to judge other works.

Lawyer:

[name omitted here]

Contract Lawyer

[name omitted here] graduated from the university of Florida in 1993 and the University of Miami Law School in 1996. He has been voted as one of the top 5% of lawyers in New England for half of the past decade, and has won numerous impressive cases. That being said, we expect his role to be a minor one in working with us on the contest rules and requirements.

Media Manager:

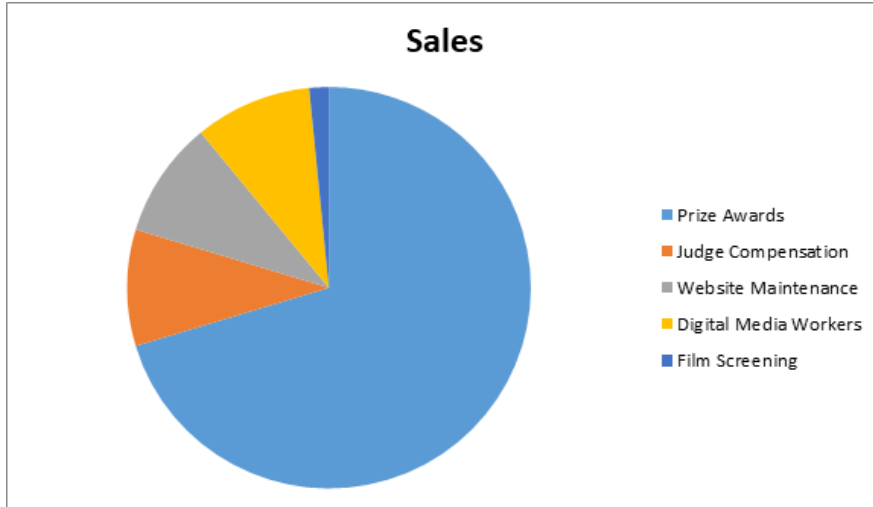
[name omitted here]

Communications Specialist

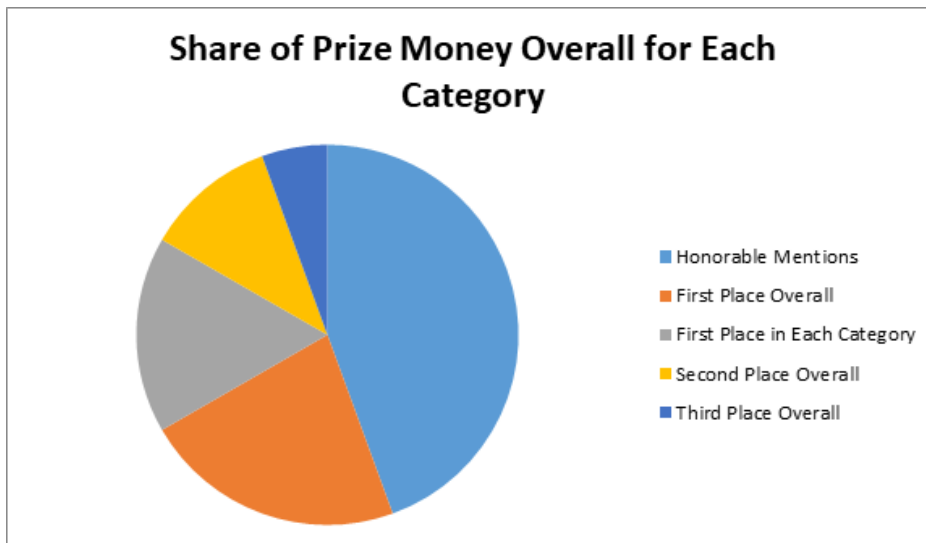
[name omitted] graduated in 2017 from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in Communications. He has experience creating and editing filmed footage for companies in the Worcester area, and has a keen interest in animated film as well.

Budget

Our grant request is for \$30,000 to cover the expenses for judges, prizes, digital media workers, a lawyer and catering services. We plan on paying each judge \$1000 for their time, as well as \$400 for our lawyer's services, \$3000 for all expenses related to handling the media, \$600 for the creation and maintenance of our website, \$500 for the film screening, and \$22,500 for prizes. The chart below summarizes the costs visually.



Breaking down the costs for the prizes, the top prize is \$5000. Our second and third place prizes, \$2500 and \$1250, are half, and then a quarter of the first place prize, while the prize for short, medium and long length films are equal to the third place overall prize. Additionally, we decided to set the awards for excellence at half of the third place overall prize, because as mentioned earlier, part of our goal is to help animators financially. After subtracting the prizes mentioned above from the pool of \$22,500, that leaves \$10,000 for these honorable mentions. At \$625, we could afford 16 such awards. By advertising the total amount of money available in prizes, we hope to encourage a greater volume of submissions.



Note: This chart combines all “Honorable Mention” and “First Place in Each Category” prizes into one section each.

We have chosen to not include entry fees, so as to be in keeping with our philosophy of reducing financial strain on the artists. This makes us more reliant on grants as a result, since we have no other income.

According to several sources such as websitebuilderexpert.com, a simple website’s creation and hosting for several months generally costs several hundred dollars.

Summary

The State of Animation

We are quickly reaching a critical juncture in the status of animation. With your help, we can raise the profile of the industry and help support animators both locally and nationally. We believe that this also represents an opportunity for the Massachusetts Cultural Council to expand further into the field.

Almost all forms of art greatly benefit from extra financial support, and few benefit more than animation. In terms of time spent versus money made, animation is often a poor investment, both for business owners and for employees, including independent ones. What allows the industry to exist is a passion for the artform. There are very few “serious” animated series or films in the West that are aimed at adolescents or adults. In this regard, Japan is, frankly, decades ahead of us. Despite being the wealthiest nation in history, our country has a complete blindspot here, one that is largely created by the economics of the situation. With your help, we can bring animation closer to its time in the sun that it deserves.

What Makes our Proposal Unique

We believe that our project is charting new territory, both for the Massachusetts Cultural Council and for the industry in general. There is a great amount of untapped potential waiting to be explored within the medium. Small-scale animation is something that only really became able to exist within the past decade-and-a-half as the internet has grown. Although open nationally, by focusing on Massachusetts, we hope to contribute to expanding the local talent pool of animators within the state.

Thank you for taking the time to read our proposal, and we hope we can work together to support an important creative industry.

Bibliography

- ACR Staff. "10 Top Animation Film Festivals Around the Globe." 10/5/2019.
<https://www.animationcareerreview.com/articles/10-top-animation-film-festivals-around-globe#:~:text=The%20festival%2C%20which%20receives%20more,detailed%20submission%20guidelines%20and%20deadlines.>
- Carney, Lucy. "How Much Does a Website Cost?"
12/1/2020.<https://www.websitebuilderexpert.com/building-websites/how-much-should-a-website-cost/#:~:text=How%20Much%20Does%20Building%20a,cost%20of%20%241%2C000%20per%20year.>
- Hasan, Ambreen. *Confetti Celebration*. The Color Factory, San Francisco, United States.
Unsplash, <https://unsplash.com/photos/E9ANYNkN4Sc>.
- "Suggested Guidelines for Art Competitions and Contests." *Graphic Artists Guild*.
<https://graphicartistsguild.org/guidelines-for-art-competitions/>.
- Wood, Aaron. "Ibero-American Animation Quirino Awards' Call is Open for 4th Edition."
11/23/2020.
<https://www.skwigly.co.uk/ibero-american-animation-quirino-awards-call-is-open-for-4th-edition/>
- Ballistreri, Emily."How Much Does One Episode of Anime Cost To Make?" 10/30/2011.
<https://www.crunchyroll.com/anime-news/2011/10/30-1/how-much-does-one-episode-of-anime-cost-to-make>

The requirements for requesting funding from the MCC are available here:
<https://massculturalcouncil.org/communities/festivals/application-process/>