Seeking Support For Your
CREATIVE PROJECTS

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Educator Mary Virginia Swanson breaks down funding and sponsorship options for long-term photography projects
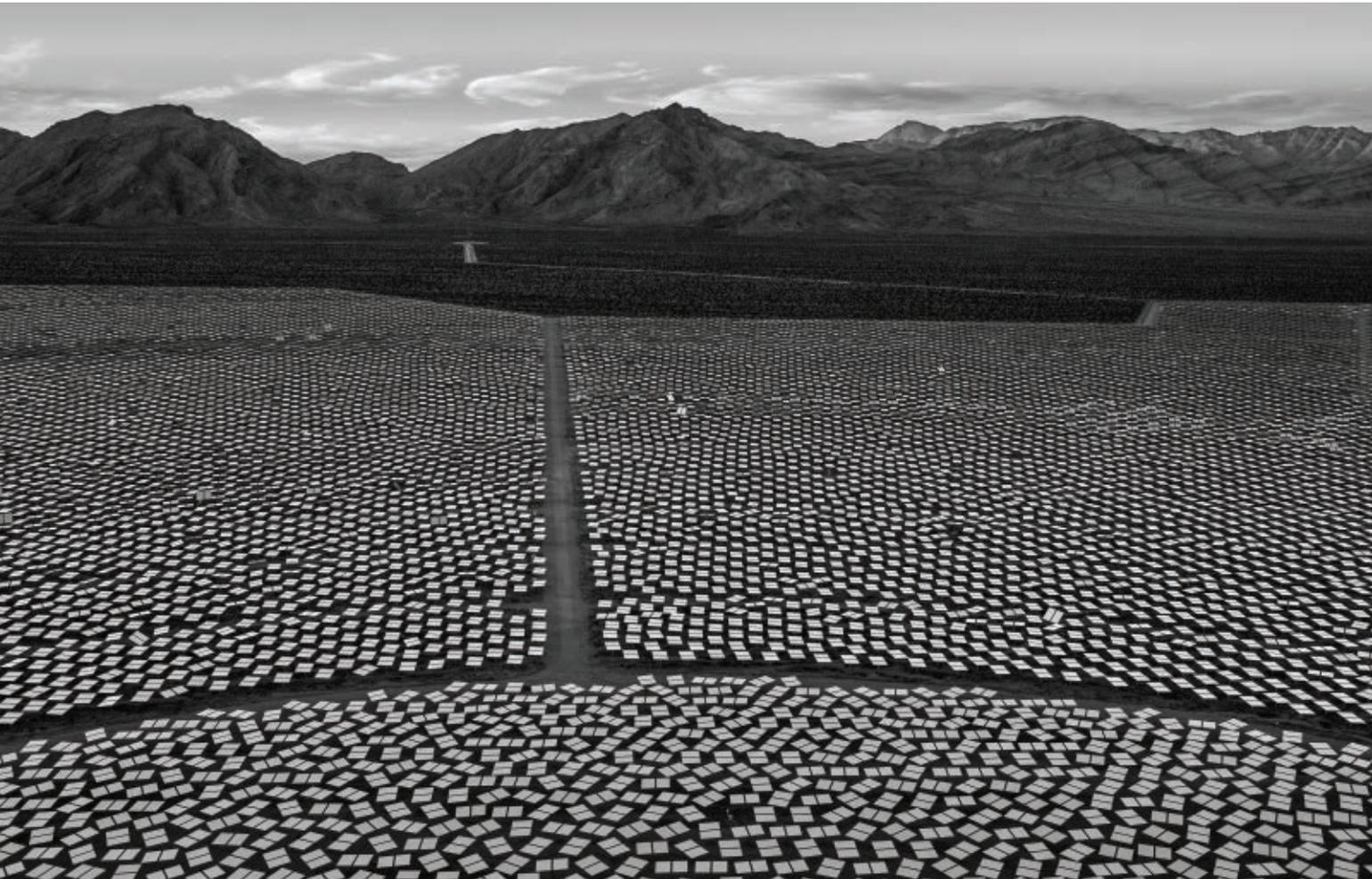
This article is excerpted from Chapter Five of Mary Virginia Swanson's book *Finding Your Audience: An Introduction to Marketing Your Photographs.* Order it at <www.mvswanson.com>.

Among the greatest gifts an artist can receive is support in one or more forms to continue and complete a project. The encouragement and support from friends, family and community can come to you in many forms and help sustain your passion to tell your story.

Two questions that are essential to ask when beginning your path toward completing your project are:

1) Who else is interested in this subject?
2) What do I need to produce this work?

For most artists, support is necessary for research on their subject, production of the work, creating prints, installing exhibitions, and publishing the work. The path to support begins with research.

Resources to support photography

projects can take many forms. Some artists need research and travel funds to move projects forward, others need studio space and art-making materials. Upon completion, additional support may be needed for the preparation and touring of exhibitions and related publications. Assistance for artist's efforts can be found in a variety of forms from public support, private industry, foundations and social media.

TYPES OF FUNDERS
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES:
Programs established and administered by a branch of the federal or state government to foster the arts in our country.

Diverse programs for individuals exist at multiple levels throughout most of the United States, administered by local, regional, state and federal programs. Depending on the community, political environment and cultural legacy, many areas are known for providing outstanding support for emerging and professional artists, offering funding for professional advancement, studio space and emergency grants. In addition to funding allocated for the arts, many cities have dedicated funding for a "Percent for the Arts" program from hotel taxes, new stadium taxes, state lottery income and other revenue sources. Government funding can vary from year to year depending on economic conditions. Start local. Begin your research by looking into local funding opportunities and whenever possible engage in face-to-face dialogue with potential funders.

PRIVATE OR FAMILY FOUNDATIONS:
Private, nonprofit organizations with grant programs determined and directed by its trustees/directors.

Private foundations typically have a clearly defined and often more focused mission, and support projects that align with their existing initiatives. Example: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation <www.gatesfoundation.org>, whose initiatives include improving global health, preventing disease, combating hunger and poverty in developing countries and improving public education.

Family foundations often have multiple areas of interest, reflecting the backgrounds and experiences of the founders. The late Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) was generous during his lifetime and beyond; gifting artwork to organizations that championed causes he believed in was a frequent activity. He established the foundation in his name in 1990 (rauschenbergfoundation. org) and the organization thrives today, underscoring Rauschenberg's belief that art can change the world. The Foundation's program areas include broadening Rauschenberg's legacy and offering grants to emerging and established artists through its residency program, fostering collaborations through targeted philanthropic initiatives that engage art, education, activism and collaboration.

CORPORATE FOUNDATIONS:
Programs established and administered by a philanthropic division within a for-profit corporation for the expressed purpose of supporting their stated brand values.

Corporate support is often limited to disbursement within the geographic region(s) in which the parent corporation's headquarters and local branches offices operate, thus more directly benefiting their employees and their communities.

Each type of funding source—government, private and corporate—will have formal guidelines available with clearly described areas of charitable support and paths to submission, many noting first what they do not fund. Some long-established charitable foundations target their support, seeking partnerships directly, and therefore will not accept unsolicited proposals. An increasing number of foundation grantmakers are requiring proposals to be submitted online, contracting with companies such as CyberGrants (cybergrants.com) to facilitate

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all aspects of the application process.

GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS AWARDED TO INDIVIDUALS:
There is a long tradition of grants given to artists based on the quality of their artwork. Numerous philanthropic family foundations such as the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation's "Fellowships to Assist Research and Artistic Creation" (gf.org) as well as federally funded programs at the city, state and national level, award funds to artists to initiate, produce or complete their work. Large numbers of artists apply for such awards, the receipt of which adds prestige to your professional résumé.

Artists are required to submit examples of their work, and in some instances, to provide letters of support from respected individuals in the field.

Typically grants to individual artists are awarded directly to the person receiving the award, rather than requiring that funds be administered by a fiscal agent that then disperses the monies to the award recipient.

Accomplished artists are widely familiar with publications and websites that provide information on grants to visual artists; emerging photographers/artists should invest time becoming familiar with these resources. Start your search for funding in your own community, as many county and state programs offer public sessions to advise artists of application procedures and deadlines. The public is often allowed to observe the jurying process when government funds are being awarded, which can provide valuable insights into the grant-giving process (volunteer to assist during the granting cycle if you are able to do so). Join email lists for local and state arts organizations to receive information on funding opportunities and approaching deadlines.

↘ IN ADVANCE OF PREPARING YOUR PROPOSAL

1 DEFINE THE LANGUAGE OF YOUR PROJECT
Being able to discuss your project in industry-standard terminology will add credibility to you and your work. Take note of how experts utilize subject-specific language to discuss issues related to your topic.

2 PRACTICE WRITING ABOUT YOUR PROJECT: 1+1+1+3
In order to most easily facilitate the various proposal guidelines you are likely to encounter, you should be able to sum up your project in the following formats:

❶ SENTENCE
This is referred to as the classic "elevator speech." You meet someone at a reception, a lecture or on a plane who asks, "What is your work about?"

❶ PARAGRAPH
Most submissions for portfolio review events and juried competitions will seek a brief artist's statement on their work.

❶ PAGE
Many arts grants will require a one-page-maximum description of your project.

❸ PAGES
In this longer format, expand on the purpose, content, context, values, intention and affiliations.

Whether or not you are awarded a grant or fellowship, judges are often influential individuals in our field who you will want to become aware of your work.

GRANTS AND SPONSORSHIP BASED ON THE SUBJECT OF YOUR PROJECT

What is the subject of your artistic explorations? Are you making work that addresses social or environmental concerns? Is your work created in response to a specific place or culture? Are you exploring the sciences or other fields through your project? By seeking out private foundations and corporations that share a passion and commitment to a common subject, you are far more likely to be successful in finding support for your projects.

The majority of philanthropic foundations and corporations give grants or offer sponsorship based on the subject of the work you are pursuing and/or the geographic area in which your project is based.

Many companies have established a separate foundation to provide funding support and this information may be available online. The Foundation Center (foundationcenter.org) is a useful source. Conduct a search on its home page on "FUNDER DATA" by the specific corporation name; if it is a formally established foundation there will be a direct link to their website, mission statement, deadlines and contact information. If you don't yet have a lead to follow by name, start with a search by ZIP code: you may be surprised to find like-minded philanthropists doing great work nationally or globally who are located nearby.

◎ UNDERSTANDING CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP

Many corporations or small businesses welcome the opportunity to partner on visual projects that bring their corporate culture to a broad audience or in some cases bring their brand to a very targeted demographic.

When considering which corporations are likely to respond positively to your project, pay close attention to the photographs corporations feature on printed materials, media campaigns and on their website. Is portraiture important
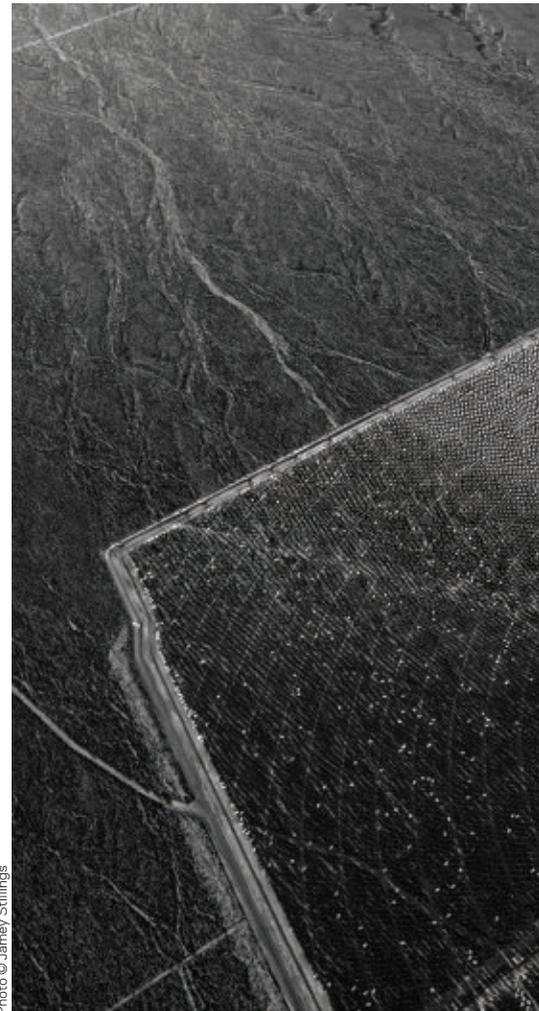
to convey their brand? Are they focused on who makes their product, who buys their products or the locations where their offices are located? Or do they feature landscape photographs in their branding, signaling an appreciation for the environment? Are they declaring they are utilizing "green" business standards? This will give you a sense of their corporate mission and corporate culture, as well as a window on the role photographs play in communicating their corporate message.

Many recently established corporations that do not yet have a history of funding visual arts projects may welcome your proposal to engage them in alignment with your project. If your mission is consistent with theirs, it may well be a good match. One advantage to seeking support from younger corporations not yet listed in guides to funding sources is turn-around time can be relatively short, often

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reviewing applications as they are received.

A DIFFERENT PATH TO FINANCE YOUR PROJECT: CROWD-SOURCED FUNDING

Crowd-sourced funding is an important development for people seeking an alternative form of fundraising for their creative project. While there are slight variations in procedures and policies of the crowd-funding companies entering this market, the basic premise is the same. You create a campaign for your project following detailed guidelines (including an informational video clip), and if accepted, a page about your project will be featured on the host company's website. Visitors who wish to contribute to your project can do so directly from your campaign's page and are frequently rewarded with incentives such as small prints, copies of publications and more. Utilize email and social media platforms to spread the word about your project and important funding deadlines. If your financial goal is reached within the time allotted, individuals who have pledged support for your project will at that time have their pledge amount withdrawn from their designated credit card and you will receive the value of the donations at that time, less pre-determined service fees. Upon completion of your project you will be required to deliver any premium products you have promised to donors in return for their financial support.

The two most prominent crowd-sourced funding companies that artists are utilizing to seek support are, in order of their founding dates:

INDIEGOGO
www.indiegogo.com
Founded in 2008
Indiegogo presents more funding options to those who are considering supporting your project. If you have a partner non-profit organization that is serving as your fiscal agent, donations can be processed through the organization's PayPal account, giving donors a tax benefit for supporting your project. Another important aspect of Indiegogo's model; if your project is not fully funded by your stated deadline, you will still receive the promised support from donors.

KICKSTARTER
www.kickstarter.com
Founded in 2009
Kickstarter is an all-or-nothing funding platform for creative projects: if you do not reach your funding goals by the stated deadline, none of the funds pledged will be secured from the sponsors. Additionally, your project will be recorded on the Kickstarter website as "Unsuccessful." Nearly 90,000 projects have been funded since Kickstarter launched in April of 2009, the majority of which asked for less than $10,000. Unsuccessfully funded projects number over 150,000 to date, but 79 percent of projects that reach more than 20 percent of its goal end in success. Kickstarter's current project funding statistics are updated daily on their website at <www.kickstarter.com/help/stats>.

To evaluate if this method is appropriate to you and your project, research and gain a broad understanding of the type of projects that have been successfully funded. Assess the clarity of the stated project goals and benefits offered to those who donate to the project(s). Be clear about all related fees and charges to you and to donors before submitting your project to any crowd-sourced funding company.

Today it is easier than ever to reach out to the public for help, and like-minded people are responding, making the benefits of finding your audience a path to achieve your project goals. **EDU**