McKnight Theater Artist Fellowship Application Information Session
With **Julia Brown**, Artistic Programs Manager

Recorded February 2, 2026

Julia: Here's what we're going to do. I'm going to start. I'm going to share my screen and I'm going to take you step by step through our application process for the McKnight Theater Artist Fellowship. Some of you are joining from outside of Minnesota and are theater artists who might be looking to make a work sample for another purpose or you're an artist who is not a theater artist. You can take a little bio break if you would like during that first 10-15 minutes, and then I'm gonna pass over to Naomi who's going to start and then we'll have Isabel join to talk a little bit about her specific successful application at a certain point during the presentation.

So I'm going to start and share my screen. There we go. Alrighty. So, what we're looking at right here is the main Playwrights' Center website. This is our homepage. This is where you get to at pwcenter.org. To find our fellowship programs, you'll go to the top here and the programs button. And this will have all nine of our fellowship programs. Now, if you are a theater artist, an actor, a director, a designer, puppeteer, dramaturg, this is where you want to go. The McKnight Theater Artist Fellowships. But if you're also a playwright or you're interested in playwriting, you might be interested in some of our other programs as well. All of our application deadlines have passed for this year for the playwright specific programs, but they'll open up again in September. And if you want to talk to me about other programs you might be interested in, please reach out to me anytime. Happy to do that. But for now, let us focus. This beautiful photo of Greta Oglesby will take us to the theater artist fellowship.

So, this is where you'll find all the information about the program. As a quick reminder, it is specifically for artists who are in the state of Minnesota who are theater artists other than playwrights and who identify themselves as a mid-career artist. Now, what does that mean? It's somewhat intangible because a career, you know, an amount of work per year is completely different from an actor to a props designer to perhaps a puppeteer or an ensemble-created divisor. These are all very different ways of working with very different timelines and trajectories. So, we don't have a set number of years or number of projects that make someone mid-career. We kind of ask you to define that for yourself and our selection panel will talk about the eligibility of each applicant based on the idea of somebody who demonstrates a sustained level of accomplishment, commitment, and artistic merit. I sometimes like to explain it as it's not an early career opportunity, but it is also not for somebody who is retired and is done working. This is meant to be somebody in the middle who has a body of work that they can share and talk about, but also is continuing to make work and is going to continue making work in the future because this entire program is about helping to create an arts ecosystem where artists can afford and can stay in the state of Minnesota and make their work.

So what do you get if you get this fellowship? You get $25,000. That money can be used for anything that you want. It is not something you need to write a proposal for. You can get your kid

braces. You can go to France. You can pay down your mortgage. You can mount a one-person show. All of these are great things. All of these are successful uses of your fellowship funds.

There's a little bit more career and craft support if you would like to take advantage of it from the Playwrights' Center staff. All fellows receive support from the staff members. And there is some additional small amount of funding to create a piece if you would like to. All of that engagement is optional. The main thing that you get as a fellow is that financial support to kind of help—hopefully allow you to make some space in your life for your artistry.

You'll see a note here about advanced notification. You are not required to submit an intent to apply, but if you do, it means I can send you reminders about deadlines. Some of you would have gotten information about the session, things like that. It also allows you to share information about live performances that you might have.

So we have a panel, a selection panel for this program. Playwrights' Center staff is not involved in making selection decisions for any of our fellowships. We do not share our opinions on your application or your artistry at all. We bring together panels that are different every year of theater professionals who are generous of spirit, who are excited about supporting other artists. There are five panelists. Three of them are based here in Minnesota and two come in from out of town. So we have both the perspective of people who may know some of the applicant pool and know our environment and some folks who are coming in completely cold. And we have a variety of backgrounds, aesthetics, disciplines, you know, as part of that panel. The local panelists do spend time throughout the year and the application period going to see live work. So, if you would like, you have a live piece, once you submit an intent to apply, you'll be able to list that performance or run of performances that you have going on so that the panel can hopefully make it out to the show. We can't guarantee that all the panelists can make it to every show, but they do their best, and so you can list things that are happening through mid-May. I think that's—oh, here are the links, the important links, the intent to apply and adding an event to that performance calendar.

You'll see some eligibility breakdown here. We'll talk about that in a minute when I show you the actual application. But as you're looking at this page, you can determine if you are somebody who is eligible. You can also take a look at the community values of the McKnight Foundation. I think it's always good to know kind of who you're trying to get into business with to see if they're a foundation that you feel aligns with your own personal values. You'll also see there's a preview of the application so you can see what we're going to be asking you for before you begin. But I am going to hop down and actually start my application.

So you'll see it pop up here at the bottom of the screen. It says click here to access the application in SlideRoom. So that's where you want to be looking. You'll click this button and it's going to take us away to SlideRoom. SlideRoom is the name of our application platform. It is a separate platform and separate site than the Playwrights' Center site. So you'll see our logo is here, but if you look at the URL, it says slideroom.com. The reason I want to highlight that is that if you are a Playwrights' Center member and you're used to logging in on our website, your login

won't automatically work on this site if you've never used it before. So, you'll probably need to create a new account. You can do that by clicking sign up here in the corner. Or if you've applied in the past or for some other program that uses this platform, you can just put your information in, which I shall do right now.

Now, it's going to take me to my account page. If I need to change anything like my name or my email address, I can click account information here, and that allows me to do that. This page is going to show me all of the applications that I have in progress from different years whether I submitted or not. And in the directory, it's going to show me all of the programs that are currently open for Playwrights' Center. So once you log in, click on Directory. You'll see there's two programs currently open. And we want the Theater Artist Fellowship. So it's going to take us to this page. It has the same breakdown that we just looked at. And you'll see an opportunity to preview the application. Again, if you want to have everything ready before you start, you absolutely can. But I'm going to click Begin Application.

The thing to know about SlideRoom is blue is our active color. So when something is in blue, it means we can click it and it'll do something. And we're going to let it think for a second. This is always the part that takes a while because I traditionally have about 70 windows open with 70 tabs each. Now, it's going to take us to our application page. So, I will put my phone number, my mailing address, and this is our new address at Playwrights' Center since we have a new building. I will say that if your current mailing address is outside of the state of Minnesota, you're going to get an email from me asking about that because you do need to have been a resident of the state of Minnesota for at least one year prior to the application deadline. So, you need to have lived in this state since at least March 27th of 2025, in order to be eligible to apply this year. So, if for some reason you've got a mailing address that's out of state, for some reason, that's where you're getting your mail, either put a little context here or I will reach out to you to make sure that you are eligible for this program. That eligibility requirement comes from the McKnight Foundation directly. So, it is not something that is flexible for this particular program.

The next question is about pronouns. Totally optional, but do know throughout this process, our panelists and staff will be talking about you and your work. So that's why we ask for this in order to be able to do that accurately, but again, totally up to you. Now is the question about residency. So again, have I been a resident for a year? I will say yes. I will tell you a thing that I wish SlideRoom did, but it does not. If you click no to any of these eligibility questions, it will not kick you out of the program. It's not quite sophisticated enough to do that. So, it will let you go through the entire process even if you say, "No, I'm not eligible for this program." It happens every year in every application cycle that some folks do that. And I am here to tell you, please don't spend your time doing that. If you are not eligible for the program, I will be checking and we will not be able to consider your application. So, I am just asking you to please maximize your own time and don't go through the process of submitting an application if you are not eligible. So we'll say yes, I'm a resident.

We're going to ask if you've received a McKnight fellowship in any discipline in the past. If you click yes, it will ask you a couple other questions about what was the discipline and what year.

The reason we ask that is McKnight requires that you sit out for five years after receiving a fellowship before you're able to apply again. It's one of their ways of spreading the love around the community. So for example, once Isabel is done with her fellowship in July of this year, she can't apply for this McKnight program or any other McKnight program for 5 years after that date. But I will say no because I have not received a McKnight fellowship.

Next, we have another question breaking down the eligibility. We take eligibility seriously, so we want to make sure it is incredibly clear. So I'm going to say yes, I'm eligible to apply for the program. If you have questions about any of these eligibility terms, please email me, call me on the earlier side as opposed to 15 minutes before the deadline because I want you to have the information with enough time to make a strong application.

One other McKnight rule is that you may only apply for one McKnight fellowship in any discipline in a particular program year. So if for example you're a theater artist but you're also a musician or you're also a composer or a ceramicist or a community engaged artist, you will need to choose each year which particular discipline you're going to apply for in that year. And it's something where all the different program partners we share our applicant lists with each other to make sure there's no doubling up. Here you've got a list of all the other disciplines that exist and where they're hosted so that you can be able to choose for yourself which program you want to use. So I will say I've not applied to another McKnight fellowship.

Now I'm going to choose my theatrical medium. You can choose more than one and also if what you do is not accurately described here you can click Other and enter whatever you would like. I do want to flag an important thing here. You can choose as many disciplines or theatrical media as you would like, but just know that the panel is instructed to hold all of the mediums that you choose with equal weight. So if you say, "I'm an actor and director," the panel is going to look at your application as an actor and a director equally. And so if you feel like you have work samples and a resume and an artist statement that speaks equally strongly to both of those elements of your work, absolutely choose multiple. If, for example, you've been an actor for 25 years and you just directed your first piece and don't have much of a sample from it, that may end up counting against you because the panel kind of takes you at your word. If you say you're an actor and a director, they're not going to determine that one is less important than the other. You can absolutely mention other work that you do in your resume or your artist statement if you want to say, you know, here's how this other work influences my acting or designing, whatever it is. But just be aware that this option here is quite important because it frames how the panel is going to engage with your application. So I'm going to say I'm a dramaturg because I'm a dramaturg.

And we're asking how did you hear about the fellowship? That's just so we know how our outreach is working and what's the most impactful way to do that.

Now this is the foundation community values statement again. So I'll say I've read that and all of this is my materials.

You can see it's autosaving. It does that every few seconds. You can also always click on the button if it makes you feel more emotionally secure. To move on, I can either click continue to the next step or next up here.

It's going to take us to our demographic form. You can watch any of the other information sessions that we've done where I go through step by step of this form. To save time and make sure that we can move on to the actual meat and potatoes of our session, I am just going to have my answers copied, and then if you would like to ask any questions about this form or anything once you're working on your application, please reach out to me. I'm happy to chat about it.

So, now we get to the attachments. This is basically what your application is made of. There's a note here letting you know that the primary language that we use as a staff and on the panel is English. That doesn't mean that no one speaks any other languages. It just means that we can't guarantee that our panelists will all have facility in any language other than English. You are more than welcome to have parts of your application, your work sample be not in English, but just be aware if you want everyone to understand that text, you may want to, you know, make a note or a translation or something like that. It's completely up to you how you want to frame your own work.

The first thing that we're going to attach is our artist statement. We'll hear a little bit from Isabel about how the artist statement works with the rest of the application. We also did two of these working sessions on that topic over the past few months. If you weren't able to join, but you would like to see the recording of those sessions, please email me and I'll be happy to share that with you. I won't take a ton of time talking about the statement and how to make a successful statement because that information is available. Just reach out.

So, I'm going to click choose a file, which will allow me to open a window for my own computer, and I am going to choose my artist statement. It's important to to note that we can only open PDFs. It will let you upload a different file type, but then no one can open it, unfortunately. I wish it just blocked everything but PDFs, but again, it's not that smart a system. So, do make sure that you choose a PDF document. If you don't know how to make one, reach out to me. I can help you with that. If a non-PDF ends up being attached, you'll get an email from me saying, "Hey, I need a new document."

The next thing is a 1 to2 page resumé or bio. And I will say the artist statement can be a maximum of one page, and the resume can be a maximum of two pages. We do stick to those page guidelines. So, make sure that you're making those edits before you apply. The resume or bio can be in any structure you would like: in a narrative, in a list, however you want to format that is completely fine. I just recommend that you make sure it's legible. As with any of these documents, font size, margin size, font type, we don't care. But if it's wall-to-wall six-point font, it won't endear you to the panel. That's what I'll say. If it's impossible to read, you're kind of shooting yourself in the foot. So, now I've uploaded my resume.

We're going to go to the work sample information sheet. This is a very important part of the application because this is your way to provide context to the panel of the work sample that you're creating and that we're going to talk about today. I've seen some people kind of not utilize this document and it's kind of a missed opportunity for their application. So, this is where you give the basic information like, what piece is this from? What was your role in the piece? That's very important particularly if you're applying in multiple different mediums. Folks need to know is this where you were the director, the actor, what was going on here. You might want to say what year it was, what theater, if there's other people in the image or the video with you. But this is also your chance to say, "Here's why I chose this clip or this image, and here's what I want you to pay attention to. This is a great example of my physical comedy. This set design really shows my use of sustainable materials. This was a piece I directed for young people, and here's how I approach TYA versus other, you know, productions." All of this kind of stuff can help tee up what your panelists are about to experience. So definitely take advantage of this opportunity. Kind of pretend like you're talking to them, like you're about to show this video or this audio and this is your way of introducing it.

So I will choose my file and upload it. If any of my files I need to change or update or something like that, I can click this little trash can. It will get rid of the old file and I can upload again.

So now we're going to go to references. SlideRoom calls them references. We call them "statements of working process." We're asking for two letters from specific people who you've worked with in the past. This can be, you know, directors, producers, actors, designers, dramaturgs, educators, classmates, really anybody who has a perspective on your artistry and your body of work. Who you think would speak to your strengths. Some things that I recommend are letting them know about this fellowship, what you're applying for, why you think you're a good fit. Maybe note some things that you're saying in your artist statement or some of the pieces you're adding into your work sample so that the person writing your letter can also highlight those things and kind of support the arguments that you're making. Above all else, whether you, how much information you give them or not, make sure you give them time to do this. So ask them before you put their information in this system, and open this application and at least put the references in as soon as you can. You don't want to make this request the day before the deadline and then have somebody not able to help you complete your application. You'll see that these statements of working process are due the same day as the rest of the application, and this is how we add them. We click add reference. We put in the name of the person that we want to write us this statement. You can put in as much or as little of this information as you need, but you definitely need the name and the email address. If you want a personal message, "hey, this is the statement we talked about." Absolutely, you can do that. And then we click send request.

The second you hit Send Request, an automated email goes to that person and it says, "This is a request for a reference for such and such a person for this fellowship. Click this link." And it takes them through submitting or typing in a statement for you. You will need to do two of them because we are requesting two statements. So I put in that information, send request. And now I've completed it. If say, Emily comes to me and says, "I didn't get it. Can you resend it?" Click

this resend button. If she says, "Oh, I forgot to tell you I have a new email address." You can click edit and you can change that. Once you've submitted your application, if you need to change anything about the reference or if the person sends it to you instead of submitting it to the system, you can send them to me or talk to me about it and I can help you attach it.

So, we do the next button, the portfolio. This is the work sample. This is what we're about to talk about, so I won't talk too much about it. Just know that you are allowed to pick up to two of the three types. So we can have image, audio and video. So you can do image and audio, audio and video, video and image. You can't do all three. And there are limitations for each one.

Video and audio can be up to 4 minutes total. Whether that's one 4-minute clip or a bunch of short clips that add up to 4 minutes. And images can have, we can have 10 image files. They can be just one photo. They could also be a collage if you wanted to. Sometimes folks will have a sketch of a costume and then a photo of the costume as one image that they've edited together, but it's a maximum of 10 of those essentially. Like if you think of it as like a printed photo, 10 of those.

So here's how you add it. You click add media. You can either select files from your computer, which I will select a random photo I have. And you can see complete means it's all uploaded. You can also upload from a Dropbox or you can link to something like a YouTube video, a Vimeo video, SoundCloud, things like that. If you have a private Vimeo video, I recommend including that URL and the password into your information sheet because the panelists will need the password in order to access it. So, do be sure you do that. Otherwise they won't be able to see the video and that's kind of not the point.

If you have applied in the past, as you can see, I've done one of these every year. You can also copy things that you had from previous years. So, if you're reapplying and you only want to change certain parts of the application, you can choose work samples from the past.

But, I will say this is good. My work sample is the Pillsbury House logo. It'll work great for me. So, now I'm going to click next. This takes us to the end. There's a little bit of information just to know about how the selection process works. We click submit application. We get the happy green check mark. It means that we are done. If you submit your application and something needs to change before the deadline, like you've written a new artist statement or you realize you made a mistake, email me. I can un-submit your application. You can make changes and you can resubmit. But this has to happen before the deadline. After the deadline, we cannot make any changes to anybody's application.

So that was as fast as I think I can go. I am going to stop my screen share. If you have questions about anything, please email me. You can also save it for the end when we do some Q&A. I'm happy to answer specific questions about this application. But for right now, I'm going to pass over to Naomi.