

The Frank-Ratchye Fund for Art @ the Frontier

A nighttime photograph of the Carnegie Mellon University campus. In the foreground, a large, white, illuminated dome structure sits on a grassy lawn. The background shows various university buildings, including a prominent white building with a pediment on the left and a large, ornate building with a green-lit dome in the center. The city skyline of Pittsburgh is visible in the distance under a dark night sky.

A grant program to support creative arts-research at
Carnegie Mellon University — administered by the
Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry

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Golan Levin & Nica Ross (Co-Directors)
Dr. Harrison Apple (Associate Director)

What is the **STUDIO**?

The **Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry** at Carnegie Mellon University is the central research laboratory of the CMU College of Fine Arts — dedicated since 1989 to the support of atypical, anti-disciplinary, and inter-institutional research at the intersections of the arts, science, technology and culture.

The **Frank-Ratchye Fund for Art @ the Frontier** (FRFAF), endowed in 2013 and administered by the STUDIO, is named in honor of the generosity of our benefactors, Sarah Ratchye (A'83) and Edward Frank (CS'85).



What is the **FRFAF**?

“Mighty Oaks from little Acorns grow.” — Thomas Fuller, *Gnomologia* (1732).

The **Frank-Ratchye Fund for Art @ the Frontier** (FRFAF) is an endowment to encourage the creation of innovative arts-research by the faculty, staff and students of Carnegie Mellon University. With this fund, the STUDIO seeks to support **groundbreaking projects created at CMU** — works that can be described as “thinking at the edges” of the intersection of disciplines.

The FRFAF supports approximately 50 grants per year, totaling ~\$50K annually.

Who is Eligible?

- Primary Investigators (PIs) must be **actively affiliated** with CMU
- **Faculty PIs** may be of any type: tenure-track, teaching-track, adjunct or instructional faculty, special faculty, visiting faculty, etc.
- **Student PIs** must be **currently enrolled** in a degree-granting program at CMU, and in good academic standing (not on probation, leave of absence, or suspension)
- **Staff are eligible.** So are project scientists, research staff, visiting scholars, postdoctoral researchers, etc., from any CMU department
- **More unusual entities** are also eligible: collaborations, teams, clubs, student organizations, faculty on behalf of a class, entire departments
- **Alumni cannot be PIs** (...unless they're **actively affiliated** with CMU)
- Must have completed documentation of any previous FRFAF awards...

What is Eligible?

The FRFAF aims to be the **most flexible source of project support at CMU**. It can be used to help realize:

- Independent arts-research and investigations
- Arts-research and investigations that have additional sources of funding
- Arts-research projects with CMU or outside collaborators
- Undergraduate and graduate thesis projects
- Classwork, class projects, final projects
- Less commonly: “enabling equipment”
- Weird but compelling side projects
- Skunkworks

The FRFAF has supported the creation of performances, installations, books, software, films, games, product designs, community projects, interventions, workshops, exhibitions, and more. Documentation of funded projects can be found online:

<https://studioforcreativeinquiry.org/frfaf-projects>

FRFAF Microgrants

- Awards of **\$500 or under**
- Decided by the Director or Co-Directors of the STUDIO
- Granted on a **rolling basis** within each semester **while funding remains**
- *Not just for students!* Microgrants are available to **any person** who is actively affiliated with CMU—whether **student, faculty, or staff**
- Are made available to assist projects that require **modest support**, or which arise between scheduled cycles for major funding
- Exist to spur arts-research investigations at their earliest and most fragile state, enabling **rapid-response research**
- Great for **zapping excuses**. The smallest FRFAF Microgrant ever was \$10!

FRFAF “Full” Grants

- For 2022: The program is offering award amounts of **\$501–\$5000**
- Available to **any person actively affiliated with CMU**,
Whether they are **student, faculty, or staff**
- Selected in **two rounds** (Fall and Spring) per academic year
- Selected by a **5-member Advisory Jury**
 - Comprised of the STUDIO Director(s); the Head of the School of Art; a CFA faculty not from Art; a CMU faculty member not from the CFA; and a non-CMU Pittsburgh arts professional
- The next deadline is **Feb 13, 2022**, at 11:59pm
- Application is online at <https://studioforcreativeinquiry.org/frfaf-overview>

How are Awards Selected?

FRFAF Proposals are competitively evaluated based on:

- The vision, originality, quality, and potential impact of the proposed project
- The professional, artistic, and/or technical capabilities of the applicant(s)
- The feasibility of the project
- The proximity of need (timeline)
- The potential impact of our support on the project and for the artist(s)
- **The extent to which the proposed work “pushes the envelope”
— fulfilling the specific mission of the FRFAF grant program,
to support interdisciplinary art(s) “at the frontier”**

What's This “Frontier” Business?

“Relevance to the FRFAF program” is a key question on our application form. It asks:

- In what way is your proposed project a form of **research**? Which **envelopes** are you pushing? Which “**frontiers**”* are you exploring? What’s **new or novel** about what you’re trying to do?

Frontier is a fraught concept, imbued with colonialist concepts of "discovery" and extractive intentions. We prefer a concept of "futures" over "frontiers", as futures can belong to everyone while a frontier in human experience is typically a conquest. Even so, the frontier is much like concepts of the "future," in that there's an **unknown** space into which one can **project one's curiosity**.

At its heart, the FRFAF is intended as a grant for **encouraging questions and curiosity**.

(*Note: these don't have to be technological futures or frontiers!)

How Competitive is FRFAF?

The FRFAF is an endowed grant program **within a school**. For many, FRFAF will be the very first award on their CV. It's meant to be relatively low stakes, but also model the challenges of outside grant programs. Because we aim to support (i.e. **educate**) as many people as possible, **larger grants are more difficult to secure**.

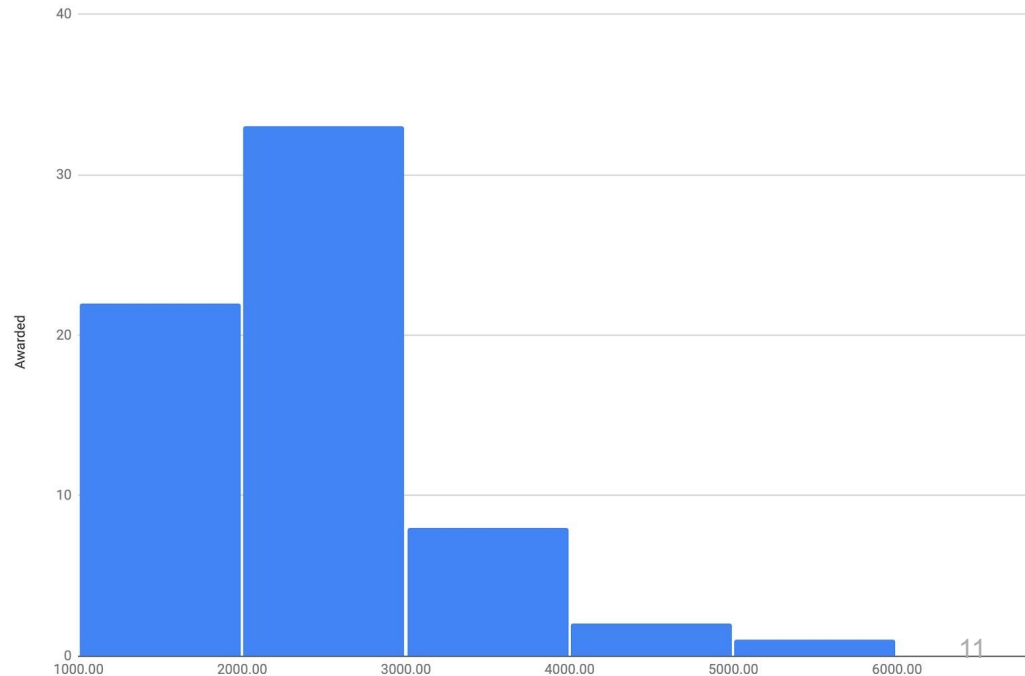
- It's comparatively easy to secure a \$500 Microgrant.
- It requires good diligence to secure a \$1000 award.
- It's **twice as difficult as that** to secure a \$2000 award.
- It's **twice as difficult again** to secure a \$3000 award.
- It's **twice as difficult again** to secure a \$4000 award.
- You need a **remarkably compelling** proposal to receive a \$5000 award —which could otherwise be used to support 10 (or more) Micrograntees.

Sizes of Typical FRFAF “Full” Grants to Students

For **students**, since 2013:

- 66 Full grants, totaling \$140K+
- Full Grant **median** was **\$2000**
- Full Grant **average** was **\$2129**
- 92% of all grants were \leq \$3000
- **The largest FRFAF student grant ever was \$5000.** Grants of \$4000+ generally went to teams
- (In addition, since 2013, students have received **272 Microgrants** of \$500 or less)

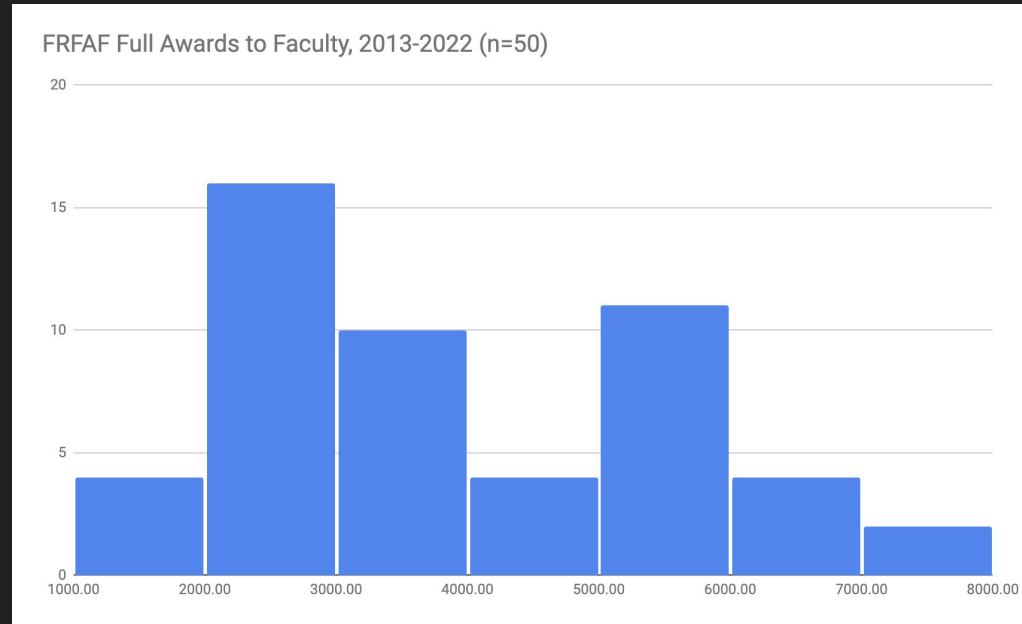
All Full FRFAF Grants to Students (n=66), 2013-2021



Sizes of Typical FRFAF “Full” Grants to Faculty

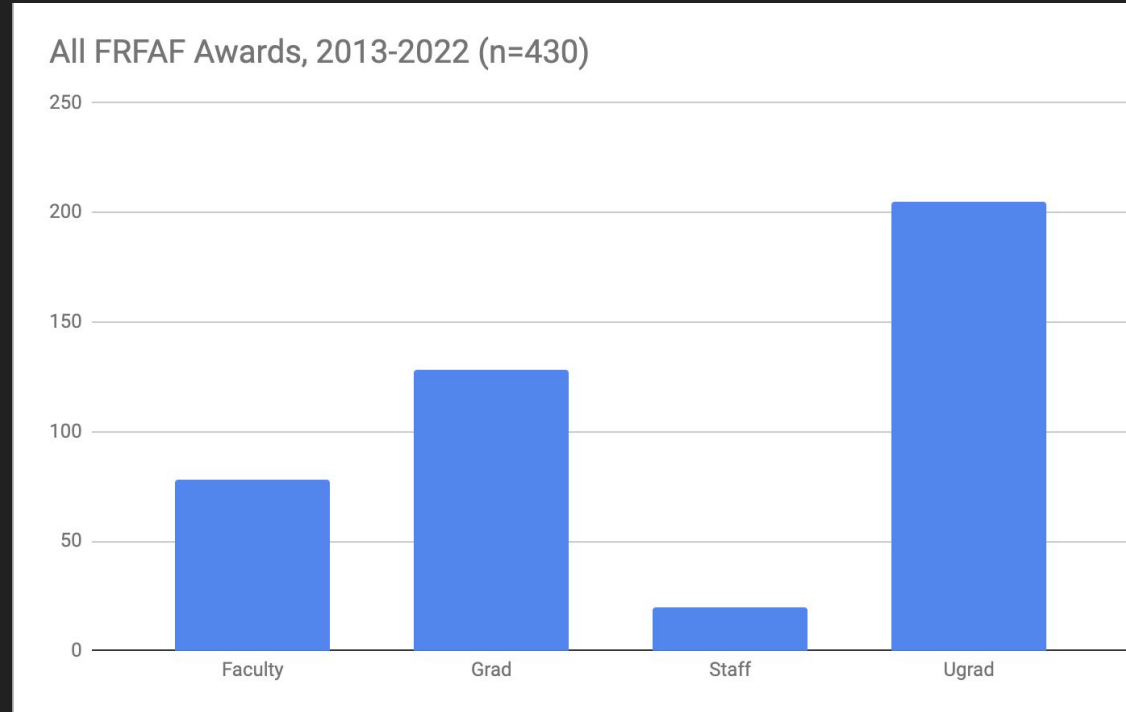
For **faculty**, since 2013:

- 50 Full grants, totaling \$183K+
- Full Grant **median** was **\$3400**
- Full Grant **average** was **\$3590**
- 82% of all grants were \leq \$5000
- **Largest faculty grants of \$7000** went to collaborative teams
- (In addition, since 2013, faculty have received 27 Microgrants)



Who Has Received FRFAF Awards?

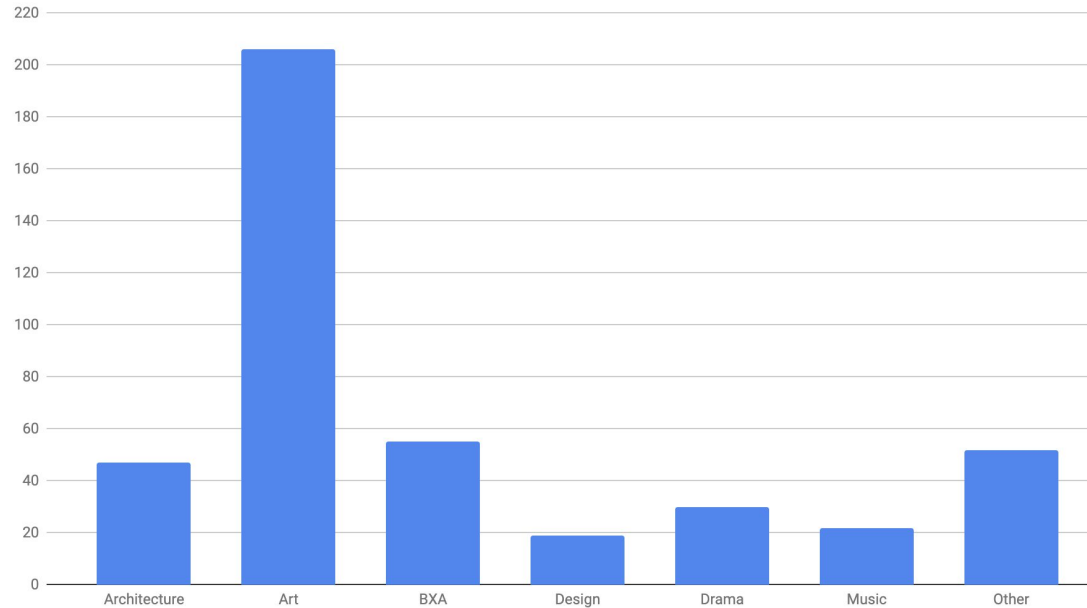
- Since 2013, **430 grants** awarded, totaling **\$487,598**
- Faculty, Graduate Students, Staff, Undergraduates



Who Has Received FRFAF Awards?

- 430 grants since 2013
- Awardees from more than 20 departments
- 47% to School of Art
- *More outreach is needed.*

FRFAF Awardees by Department, 2013-2022



How Can FRFAF Awards be Spent?

- Purchasing supplies (tax-free)
- Purchasing equipment (which the awardee keeps)
- Paying outside services, contractors, consultants and collaborators
- Hiring student assistants, experimental subjects, etc.
- Taxable “activity payments” to other CMU staff/faculty
- Bringing guests/collaborators to CMU
- Business meals for teams, workshop food, exhibition hors d'oeuvres
- Expenses for travel, when it is required to *realize the project*.

Not permitted: conference travel.

How Can FRFAF Awards be **Directly Disbursed**?

Grants may be **directly disbursed** in any of the following three ways (including in combinations):

- **By direct purchases** through the university's accounting system — in which the STUDIO or another departmental business administrator makes tax-exempt purchases of supplies or equipment (etc.) on the awardee's behalf;
- As **reimbursements for expenses**, upon submission of valid receipts and justifications;
- **For students only**, the option also exists to **receive a check** made out to the awardee. Students who elect to receive all or part of their award in cash will receive a “**non-qualified scholarship**” in the form of an electronic bank transfer for the specified grant amount. *Note: this may be taxable income.*

How Else Does the STUDIO Support FRFAF Projects?

The STUDIO provides a very wide range of **custom support** to grantees, assisting **on a case-by-case basis** with things like:

- Business management (purchasing, payroll, travel arrangements)
- Creation of business **contracts** (e.g. including rights management)
- **Compliance**, bureaucratic wayfinding, circumbureaucracy
- **Writing**: grant-writing, fundraising, marketing and public relations
- Introductions or access to local and remote **expertise**
- Providing or reserving **space**, and loans of special **equipment**
- Other assistance (e.g. **program coordinator, staff videographer**)

What's the FRFAF Grant Process?

1. Make an **appointment** to speak with the STUDIO's Associate Director
2. Students should secure a **recommendation letter** from their advisor
 - Advisor: Is this student **capable** of their proposed project?
 - Advisor: Are you **in fact advising** this project, and do you **endorse** it?
3. **Submit** the online application; **wait** a few weeks...
4. If awarded, **sign** the FRFAF Award Agreement
 - "I agree to **provide documentation** of the supported project"
 - "I agree to **acknowledge the support** of this Fund wherever the work is presented"
5. **Confer** with the STUDIO's Business Manager to buy stuff & pay people
6. After some time, have a **check-in conversation** with the Associate Director
7. When completed, **submit** your project documentation (online)
 - At a **minimum**: 100-200 words of narrative description, some images, and a video if possible. These will be presented on the STUDIO's website, image/video archives, and publications.

Minimum and Maximum Requested Funding

The FRFAF application asks you to specify a *range* of funding. These numbers give the Jury **flexibility**, to better serve more people. Specify:

- The **bare minimum** you need for your project to succeed
- Your **maximum** request, and what you would do with it

Grantees receive more than their minimum about 25% of the time.

Minimum Amount Requested from FRFAF (\$): *

What's the bare minimum amount of funding you need in order for your project to succeed?

Your answer _____

Maximum Amount Requested from FRFAF (\$): *

What amount of funding would make this project great? You are especially encouraged to complete this field for 'Full' grant requests (requests over \$500).

Your answer _____

Maximum Amount Justification:

Please describe how your project would benefit from the additional funds, if the maximum amount were awarded.

Your answer _____

What if My Application is **Rejected**?

- Please **apply again!** Sometimes our Jury actually really likes your project, but simply chose to prioritize other applications that had more pressing schedules and urgent deadlines.
- **Make an appointment!** Our Associate Director will discuss feedback from the Jury to help you understand why your project wasn't selected.
- **Typical problems** with proposals:
 - The project is not **well-explained**. It's not clear what your project *is*, or how it would take shape.
 - The project is not obviously **research**. It's not clear how it is new, compelling, curiosity-driven, etc.
 - There's a **logistical issue** you haven't considered. What you've proposed isn't possible, legal, etc.
 - You requested funds in a more competitive bracket than necessary. The Jury might've been willing to risk \$2500 on your project, but at the \$5000 you requested, they were seeking a slam dunk.

Repeat Funding: Policies (I)

- **We love it** when people return to the watering hole! Since 2013:
 - 46 people have received 2 awards
 - 15 people have received 3 awards
 - 8 people have received 4, 5, or 6 awards
- You **can't be the lead applicant (PI) on two active** FRFAF projects.
 - But you **can** be a (secondary) collaborator on someone else's active FRFAF project.
- **Documentation for prior projects** must be officially submitted through our online form before any new applications will be considered.
- The Jury **may evaluate the documentation** of your prior project(s) in making decisions about your new applications.
 - *(Did you acknowledge FRFAF support on your personal web page for the project, as you **agreed to do contractually** when signing the FRFAF Award Agreement?)*

Repeat Funding: Policies (II)

- No project may be funded more than twice.*
- Applicants are limited to one award per academic year.*

* *In the fine print, there is a small and rare exception:*

- Sometimes, the Jury lacks confidence in a project or applicant, and wants to see a “proof of concept” for a proposal before awarding a large Full grant.
- Other times, a Microgranted experiment is so **unexpectedly compelling**, that it would be a pity to make the grantee wait a whole year to get follow-on funds.
- Thus, a **rare exception** is sometimes made such that an applicant is permitted to apply for a Full Grant, following a Microgrant, for the same project, within a single academic year—**pending the Jury’s review** of the project’s interim documentation. Such a project could theoretically be funded a maximum of 3 times (i.e. Micro+2 Full).

Do Projects Fail?

It happens. *It wouldn't be research* if there was no chance of failure.

Since 2013,

- 6 projects (1.4%) were **canceled** (funds were returned)
- 5 projects (1.1%) **failed outright** (funds were spent... no results)
- **Many** (~5%) projects had to adapt to changing circumstances, and took different directions than initially proposed

What Other Sources of Funding Are Available? (I)

The STUDIO's Steiner Visitor Invitation Grants

- The STUDIO's **Sylvia and David Steiner Speaker Series** brings creative individuals who push boundaries, defy definition, and demonstrate excellence in the arts, to our campus for deep engagement with our students and faculty. This grant program provides support to CMU faculty, staff and students who wish to organize a Steiner visitor for their courses, departments, degree cohorts, or student clubs.

The STUDIO's Director's Fund Sponsorships

- The STUDIO's **Director's Fund** was created to put power behind original ideas that can only come from our CMU faculty. With this fund, the STUDIO sponsors faculty-led, student-intensive initiatives that cross boundaries, create new collaborations, and push cultural norms. Available exclusively to full-time CMU faculty, sponsorships can provide up to \$2,500 of flexible research funding and other support for one academic year. Proposals are accepted on an ongoing basis, and awards are made at the Director's discretion in consultation with STUDIO staff and stakeholders.

What **Other Sources** of Funding Are Available? (II)

- **SURG** (for undergraduate students)
- **SURG/Crosswalk** (for interdisciplinary undergraduate projects)
- **ISURG** (for undergraduate research projects while studying abroad)
- **The Henry Armero BXA Award for Inclusive Creativity** (for undergraduates)
- **GuSH & GuSH/Crosswalk** (for graduate students)
- **CFA Fund for Research and Creativity** (for full-time CFA faculty)
- **Simon Initiative Grants** (Eberly, for faculty)
- **Mellon Foundation Seed Grants** (Eberly, for faculty)

Find Out More

- **Apply!** Due Feb 13, 2022:
<https://studioforcreativeinquiry.org/frfaf-overview>
- **Submit documentation!**
<https://studioforcreativeinquiry.org/submit-documentation>
- **Come speak with us!**
 - **Dr. Harrison Apple, Associate Director** <happle@andrew.cmu.edu>
 - Golan Levin & Nica Ross, Co-Directors

Thank You!