



Creative Lives

Briefing #91

How to write a successful funding application

Applying for funding is something that almost all voluntary and small organisations, and many individuals, will need to do at some point.

Writing a successful funding application is like a good recipe - it depends on a few ingredients coming together well. Finding the right funder, filling out the application properly and providing all the information required are the three key ingredients to a successful bid.

Many funding applications are unsuccessful - not because the funding body does not like the idea, but because the application is incorrectly completed, documents requested are missing, or it simply does not meet the stated criteria. Proper preparation will eliminate the chances of this happening, ensure that your time is not wasted and increase your chances of grant success.

This Briefing covers what you need to research, collate and prepare in order to communicate clearly with your funder(s). It also covers how to complete an application form and write a letter of application.



Preparation Step 1: Planning Your Project

A large part of fundraising success is down to good project planning. The more clearly you plan what you would like to do, and how you will carry it out, the easier it will be to present your project and its aims and objectives to your funder.

Thinking through the basic steps of your project (keeping in mind a funders' point of view) can be a good way to start:

Why?

- Have you identified a need for this project? Why is your project important?
- What positive things will happen if you are able to carry out this work?
- How does it tackle current issues or address priorities e.g. of the funder, local authority, national government?
- What will happen if you are not able to do it?
- Why are you the right people to tackle this problem?



What?

- What are you going to do and what will happen as a result of it?
- Funders may ask for your 'Outputs' – these are detailed activities you will carry out, services or products you will deliver, and details such as the number of people who will be involved.
- 'Outcomes' are the changes that will take place due to your project, and the evidence that proves it.
- How will you ensure good value for money and what will the impact be on those involved?

Who?

- Know who the direct and indirect beneficiaries are.
- Why should it be you who delivers this project? What evidence do you have to support this?
- What does the funder want to achieve? How can your project help them do this?
- Who are your partners (if appropriate)? How will you make use of networks to deliver the project and get the maximum impact?

When?

- When will the project take place? Make sure this is achievable based on the funder's guidelines and the turnaround of the grant application, and take into consideration time required to recruit and induct staff if required.

Where?

- Where will the project take place? Is there anything specific about this area* that makes your work a funders' priority?
- How will your work add to this community?
- How will your work complement other initiatives in the local area or plug specific gaps?
- What relationships do you have with other local groups?

* area may also have implications on where you can apply for money, as for small amounts of money, local trusts can be a good place to look. Some large funders also direct grants at certain areas where they do not currently have a good geographical reach.

There are also some 'management models' which are widely available and may help you think about and plan your project. For example:

- **SWOT Analysis** (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats);
- **PESTEL Analysis** (Political, economic, social, technological, environmental, legal).



Preparation Step 2: Finding the Right Funders

Researching and developing a positive relationship with your funder can enhance your written application.

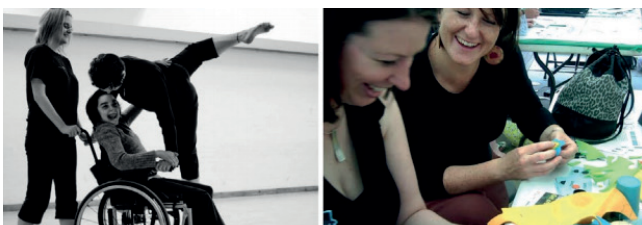
If you expect to submit a few applications, it is a good idea to plan a strategy and prioritise before you start. That way you can plan your time more easily and make the most of it. First of all, make sure you know when application deadlines are and how long it will take after submission before you hear about the outcome.

One or more funders?

Some funders may be willing to pay 100% of your project costs while others won't. Details of how much they can cover will be in the application guidelines. If, for example, a funder is willing to pay for 60% of your project, you will need to find another funder(s) to make up the shortfall (this is called 'match funding') - another reason why having a funding strategy is so important.

Bear in mind that you might not be successful, so it's important to have other potential funders to apply to.

Unfortunately, most funders do not fund ongoing running costs, preferring to put their money into specific 'projects' (i.e. an activity within a specific time frame, with a set purpose, and that can demonstrate one or more outcomes).



So you may want to consider what project management or overheads costs you could add to the final budget or how you could present core costs in the form of a project proposal, if appropriate.

Who to target

Identifying the most appropriate funders for your organisation and project can be the most important stage in the application process. Thorough research at this point will avoid time wasted applying to funders who may not even have an interest in your project or area.

Match, don't shoehorn

There is no point trying to squeeze your project into funding criteria that is not really appropriate. A good rule is to see how your aims and objectives match the funder's needs and priorities. Based on this, you should be able to prioritise your applications by evaluating:

PROSPECT

(the chances of success)

£££

(the amount of money you can expect to get)

TIME

(the amount of time the application will take you and the amount of time it will take for you to get the money)

Plan ahead

Allow yourself plenty of time for writing a funding application. Make a note of the deadline for submissions and the 'turnaround time' as these can vary greatly between funders (e.g. monthly, twice yearly, etc.). If you are planning a big project and are applying for a larger sum of money, allow for 6-9 months.

How to write a successful funding application

Use the funding resources available to find funders to whom you are eligible to apply. There are websites (see Further information and resources) and specialist funding directories.

NOTE: Remember to make sure that you are reading up-to-date information, as funders can change and amend guidelines and objectives up to three times a year.

Check the Guidelines

Once you have found the funder you would like to apply to, read the guidelines more than once. Make sure you are eligible and meet all requirements (e.g. is your group organised in the right way? Can the funds be used for your project? Is there a list of exclusions? Do you have to be a registered charity?)

It can be helpful if two people read the guidance notes, jot down what they think the key elements are, and then compare notes. This method will not only ensure that your organisation is eligible, but also keeps the funder's objectives at the forefront of your mind.

Do not be afraid to contact funders to discuss your project idea(s), their requirements or ask questions if you need to. This may be an especially good idea if, for instance, you are concerned that a similar project may already be running, or you would like to discuss your project before spending time on the application process. They will probably be able to give you advice about what interests them most about the project, suggest a good time to send your application in to catch the next funding decision meeting and, most importantly, whether they have money and how much!

If you do contact funders, always be professional and make sure you are well prepared. Check restrictions on what the funder can spend their money on – you may need to specify exactly what you will use their money for, as some items in your budget may not be fundable by them.

Find out if match funding is required – if so, how do you plan to raise the rest of the money and when will you know if you've been successful?



You're ready for the application

Now that you're certain you can apply, you can turn your attention to the funder's template application form or letter of application.

Action step #1: Starting your application

The title

To enable not only your stakeholders but also your funders to know instantly what your project is about, choose a title for your project that is clear and self-explanatory (e.g. 'Computers for Creative Kids').

Be realistic

The best projects are usually small but have a direct, measurable impact which can be considered a success. The most important things are that you are addressing a proven need and that your aims and objectives are clear and realistic. A project that is achievable, useful and focussed will show funders that it has been well-planned and organised.

Stay focused

Make sure you and your colleagues are clear about who is co-ordinating the project and the funding applications. Keep sight of your project plan and original aims, especially:

- What you are asking for – how much money, over what time period and for what purpose. Where appropriate, let them know what you have already and how you will get the rest;
- How will you specifically use the money to achieve your aims?;
- When you describe what you want to do, emphasise the things which the funder will be interested in (taking relevant points from the funder's guidelines will help).

Benefits and Evidence

Remember that funders are often more interested in who will benefit from your project than the needs of your group or organisation. Demonstrating these benefits is vital, and can be done in a variety of ways:

- **Statistics** – use surveys, census, council records or any statistics in your area to help prove your project is needed. Statistics greatly help funding claims when presented properly with a good application;
- **Be specific** – avoid vague statements and be as specific as possible about why your project is needed at this time;
- **Explain** – use plain language to explain who will directly benefit and how from your project;
- **Use evidence** (where possible) to back up claims of your achievements: testimonials, positive reviews or press, pictures, recordings and case studies.

Project costs

Make your budget as accurate as possible but don't panic – you won't know everything before you start the project and making small changes to the budget is normally okay as long as you keep your funder informed.

Work out a breakdown of the costs and be realistic. People sometimes think that by asking for less they have a better chance of being successful. But, if the budget does not match the aims, it just looks like it's not costed properly.

Equally, do not inflate the budget artificially. Experienced grant assessors can always spot over budgeting. If your group does not have a financial officer or a dedicated treasurer,



it may be a good idea to seek financial advice. Your figures and cost breakdowns must be as accurate as possible (e.g. if it is for larger sums over a period of two to three years you should allow for inflation).

Monitoring & Evaluation

The funder will need to feel confident that your organisation can competently manage the project and the funds. You will have to prove this in your application or letter. One way of doing this is by setting up a clear monitoring and evaluation system.

Describe in detail how the project will be evaluated when it comes to an end. Some projects will be easier to evaluate than others. How will you show what you have accomplished? For example, if your goal is a renewed sense of well-being in a community, try using anecdotal evidence, such as case studies.

Exit Strategy

Most funders will want to see a clear exit strategy as they will not want to continue funding you indefinitely and will want to know that you can survive once their funding has ended. State clearly what you will do once the initial project and funding comes to an end (i.e. will you look for funding elsewhere or is it definitely a one-off project that will not be repeated or continued?).



General rules to remember:

#1 Avoid jargon

Most applications are read by people who have no idea about your organisation, so make it sound attractive but not convoluted. Use plain language and keep your answers concise and to the point. Never use acronyms and abbreviations unless they are explained.

#2 Do as you're told

Be sure to follow the instructions carefully and give them exactly what they want. If the form states that you should only type within the boxes or that they want the application posted not emailed, then do what they ask!

#3 Assume nothing

Work on the basis that the funder has no prior knowledge of your group, organisation or local area. What may be obvious to you may not be obvious to the person assessing your application.

#4 Ask someone to read it

Get somebody who is not associated with your project to look over the application or letter once it's finished. This will give you a good idea of how it reads.

#5 Type it

Unless it's not possible, type your application rather than hand-writing it – it will look more professional. It's also easier to send to other people for checking, and you may want to re-use relevant parts in other funding applications.

#6 Don't rush

A successful funding application takes time and effort, so don't rush it. Make sure everything is exactly how you want it to be. If some of your answers look weak, or you need more statistical information, take the time to get it right as this will maximise your chance of success in the long run.

#7 Documents

Send all the supporting documentation required in the right format - i.e. accounts, budget, reference (arrange your reference in advance!).

Funding applications can be immediately rejected if supporting documents are missing or incomplete. If you're sending a copy of your annual accounts or your constitution, make sure they are signed and dated. Most funders will ask for your most recent bank statement, and that it be the original.

Always make sure to affix correct postage if you are posting the application. Also ensure that your application is signed by you and a referee if required.

Action step #2: Starting your application**Read the questions, twice!**

Make sure you've read and understood all the questions. If you don't, ask the funder.

Answer all the questions

Never leave a question blank on the form. If it does not apply to your organisation, write 'N/A'.

Use the funder's language

Use key 'buzzwords' from the guidelines in the application, where you can.

Be positive

Use confident, active words like: 'increase', 'maximise', 'save', 'assist', 'decrease' and avoid using words like: 'would', 'could', 'should' and 'may'

Keep focused

Stay focussed on your vision, aims and objectives and keep what you say clear, concise and convincing.

Other ways of applying

Not all funders have straightforward application forms. Some may ask you to apply in other ways, such as:

Two stage application processes

Many of the larger trusts, foundations and public funders now use a two-stage application process. You will often be asked to complete a preliminary application to help the funder ascertain the suitability of your project.

This will look for basic information – your project plan is likely to contain everything you need at this stage. The trust will then ask you for a second round, full application if they are interested in funding your project. Make sure you take the 1st round response time into consideration in your plan.

Meeting with a Grants Officer

Some larger trusts may ask you to meet with one of their Grant Officers after your application has been accepted. Use this opportunity to tell them as much as you can about the project. This person will normally then need to represent your project at a Grants Assessors meeting, so the more they know about your project, the better it will fare when they are grilled by the other officers!

Letters of application

Many Trusts and Foundations have no standard application form and request a letter of application instead. They will usually have guidelines you need to follow, so take the time to get a copy of them for reference.





Never send a standard letter; always write a personal letter to each funder, and consider the following:

- Find out who the correct contact is and address the letter accordingly;
- Send your letter on headed paper, with details of your charity or company no. (if applicable);
- Use factual information, and remember to back this up with statistics if you can;
- Keep your letter of application short - ideally no more than 2 sides of A4 plus budget (unless they ask for otherwise).

Typical headings for your proposal could be:

- project title
- introduction and brief history/background of your group or organisation
- summary of the project proposal - a concise statement detailing who you are, what you would like to do, how much it will cost in total, and what you are asking them to contribute
- project description - the aims / objectives of your project, why it's important and how it will directly benefit users. How it will be run, when it will happen, how it will be monitored and evaluated, and the results you expect to achieve (outputs and outcomes).
- a summary of any other funders

Be sure to include your email address / phone number / postal address for them to contact you for more information. Attach the following documents to your letter (unless asked not to):

- project budget
- governing document (e.g. your constitution)
- the most recent annual accounts (or projected accounts if you are a newly formed organisation).

NB: Some funders welcome additional information, such as examples of past work (project DVDs, publications, etc.) so find out if they would like to see them.

Keep a copy of the final application form or letter. You can use this application as a reference when making future funding applications to similar funders. Remember to thank the funder and keep them informed of all progress.

Unsuccessful funding bids can be hard to accept and disappointing, especially after all the work you put into the application process. If you are unsuccessful, you could contact the funder for feedback to help you with your next application. Sometimes, however, it is simply a case of too little money and too many applications.

Further information and resources

Creative Lives

Visit our dedicated funding page for nation-specific information and useful links
www.creative-lives.org/funding

Sign up to the Creative Lives enews to stay in touch and receive regular funding updates -
www.creative-lives.org/newsletter

Other sources of funding and support

- **Directory of Social Change** produces a wide range of fundraising guides. Order online at: www.dsc.org.uk/publications

- Search for **local and national government funding**, view the latest funding news and browse training opportunities at:
www.governmentfunding.org.uk

- **UK Fundraising** is a fundraising consultancy that supports organisations to use digital tools to enhance their fundraising: www.fundraising.co.uk

- **The Wheel (Ireland)** provides fundraising news, guidance and support for non-profit organisations and voluntary-led groups -
www.wheel.ie/funding

- Visit **Fit For Funding** for fundraising training and support: www.fit4funding.org.uk
- National Lottery Money is given out by 12 independent organisations, each with specialist knowledge of their sectors. Use the **National Lottery Good Causes Funder Finder** to find the right match for your project - www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/funding-finder
- Visit the **Big Lottery Fund UK** website to search for funding and access practical guidance on how to secure funding and plan a successful project: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/funding
- **Institute of Fundraising** is the professional membership body for fundraisers in the UK, so worth joining if this is a big part of your job. But you can also access useful, basic information about fundraising best practice for free: www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk
- **National Council for Voluntary Organisations (England)** offers a range of tools, training, consultancy and resources to support voluntary and community organisations to develop and implement sustainable income strategies - www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/funding
- **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations** maintains a funding search engine and holds regular training events on all aspects of fundraising, more details here - www.scvo.org.uk/running-your-organisation/funding
- **Wales Council for Voluntary Action** provides funding updates, advice and training to voluntary arts community groups - www.wcva.org.uk/funding
- **Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action** has a dedicated Fundraising Advice Officer and offers fundraising training, information and advice - www.nicva.org/services/fundraising

Local options:

Local Authorities often have Grants Officers or an external fundraising department which may have a newsletter and can offer groups advice, or provide access to free funder finder databases. You should be able to find out about this on your local council website.

Your **local Councils for Voluntary Service** (CVSs) or **Third Sector Partnerships** (TSIs) usually offer similar help to Local Authorities so check out the one in your area.

Fundraising sites that charge subscriptions:

www.trustfinding.org.uk
www.grantsforindividuals.org.uk
www.companygiving.org.uk
www.grantfinder.co.uk
www.grantsonline.org.uk
www.fundinginformation.org

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