

Information Sheet: Writing a funding application

Starting to complete an application form can seem very daunting – especially if you have never done anything like it before. There are, however, some simple guidelines which can help:

DO:

- Be clear about what you need the money for – if you are unsure about your project yourself you won't be able to convince funders that they should support you
- Read the questions carefully on the application form and make sure you answer them clearly and without using jargon
- A little local context can be very useful – don't assume that the Assessing Officer who will read your application will know anything about your organisation or the area in which you work. For example, if your organisation is rural it's important to tell the assessor that
- Read the guidelines carefully to make sure you have included all the additional material you require – this may include your constitution, your audited accounts and other background material
- Check out the guidelines for the fund to which you are applying *before you begin*. There is no point spending hours on an application for which your project is not eligible
- Be realistic about your budget. This means that once you have worked out how much money your project actually **requires** you should stick to it! Don't embellish and ask for more, but even more importantly don't cut it to try to make it look like you can deliver the same outcomes for less
- Be realistic about what you can achieve – don't set your targets or outputs too high just because you think this is what the funder wishes to see
- Read your completed application through carefully and get somebody who is not involved to check a draft. Sometimes an objective eye can spot areas which are woolly or contradictory. Make sure you have checked for spelling errors and typos. Make sure you are showing nothing in the budget that isn't explained in the ext, and nothing in the text that doesn't have an appropriate cost in the budget
- Be ready to provide additional material on request – this may include showing how you have reached budgetary projections or proving that you have support from your community. Keep all your workings out!
- Funders are likely to ask for lots of evidence, including proof that there is a need for your project. Anecdotal evidence can be useful, but it is particularly helpful to have hard evidence such as questionnaires, parish plans and so on. Letters of support can also be useful. If you are asked how you know a need exists, be sure to answer this question as fully as you can – your own internal reflections should form only a small part of your answer
- You will probably be asked how you plan to evaluate the effectiveness of what you deliver. There is a separate guidance sheet available to help you with this, but the important thing to remember is that this should not be something to which you merely pay lip service. Funders will want your evaluation to be clear and honest and this will include learning lessons from areas of work which have not gone as you had imagined they would. There may be an additional cost for the evaluation, so remember to include that in the budget
- You may be asked about "value for money" and when you consider this you should try to think in broader terms than just cost per head or per session. This question is also about quality and there are lots of issues to think about – providing a service in a rural area can often be costlier than in an urban area for example
- Increasingly you will be asked to fill in an application form on line but read the guidelines carefully to ensure that an additional signed copy is not required. If you do need to complete a form by hand make sure your handwriting is legible – get someone else to check!
- Take careful note of deadlines and give yourself enough time to do a couple of drafts. If your application is submitted in a hurry you are more likely to make mistakes or put together a poorly reasoned application
- Get as much advice and support as you need. Many funders are very pleased to discuss applications at an early stage – in fact some insist on it – and this will give you a clear idea about the usefulness, or otherwise, of pursuing a particular project with a particular funder
- Always keep a copy of your application, even if you are unsuccessful

DON'T:

- Be tempted to be anything less than entirely truthful – Grants Officers read hundreds of applications and they are skilled at spotting prevarication
- Try to double guess what you think the funder wants to hear – just be clear and honest about what you want to achieve and how
- Don't try to force your project in to funding criteria that just don't fit. It can be tempting to chase the money, but it's miserable to try to deliver a project which has the wrong kind of funding for what you set out to do. Don't let the funding drive the project
- Be tempted to use "buzz words" just for the sake of it. Despite rumours to the contrary Grants Officers don't look for specific phrases and give points for using them! It is much more important to use language which is clear, simple and direct. Aim for passion about your project, clarity and concreteness
- Forget that funders talk to each other and share information about organisations they are funding. If you have applied to more than one funder for the same project be very clear about this on the form
- Forget to explain your project fully – Grants Officers sometimes receive application forms which are very thin on detail, so it's almost impossible to work out exactly what the organisation plans to achieve
- Be disheartened if your application is unsuccessful. Ask for feedback if this is available and then learn from what you are told. Remember that most funds are over-subscribed many-fold and an unsuccessful application does not mean your project is not worthwhile
- Work in isolation. Funders are increasingly interested in partnerships and will always want to be sure that effort is not being duplicated. Do your research and make sure you are in touch with anyone working on similar projects – you can learn from each other and perhaps work in tandem
- *Ever* begin work on a project before funding is in place. Very few funders will even consider supporting a project which has begun
- Send standardised letters without checking that they are relevant to the funder you are approaching. Round robins just make it look like you can't really be bothered to write a personal letter
- Accept criteria placed on you by funders until you have considered the effect they will have on the project. Be clear about any compromises such criteria may cause you to make

Remember that investors support projects which deliver on their *own* objectives.

There are a variety of low-cost training courses available on how to complete a funding application. These short course (often a half-day or a day) can often be very helpful and will also give you the opportunity to talk to others who are in the same position. There is also additional support and advice available to you – make contact at an early stage in your planning.

Useful contacts for support, advice and training:

Community First Yorkshire:

info@communityfirstyorkshire.org.uk

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