

Completing funding applications

You are most likely to get funding if your aims closely match those of the funding agency, i.e. you are going to put their money to what they see as good use. Funders have variable criteria and the closer you are a good match the more likely you are to be successful in your application. For these reasons you should:

- Read all the information you have very carefully – highlight any phrases or words that hint at or overtly state what the funder is aiming at or looking for in a service. Look through covering letters, funding descriptions, guidelines, application form, websites and any general information.

Most funding agencies are now outcomes based. This means they are interested not so much in what you will do but in the changes that will bring about. They want to know what difference your services will make to the people you are supporting. The clearer you make this in your application the better. So:

- Your application should fit in with your overall funding strategy. Although a little bit of creativity is ok, don't be tempted to go after money that doesn't fit with your strategy and/or doesn't really fit with what you offer as a service.
- Be very clear about what outcomes you will achieve. State how long it will take you to achieve changes and how many people will be affected, e.g. '100 young people will gain employment as a result of the service provided over a one year period'.

Trustees are responsible for the governance of an organisation, particularly its expenditure. It is important, therefore, to have their backing in any applications you make. In addition, the skills, experiences and ideas that trustees can contribute will help with the application and with running the project once funding is secured. Trustees, along with other members of staff, can also help to establish the outcomes discussed above; you are advised to meet with trustees and staff as early as possible and to involve them throughout the application process.

Before starting to complete the form read through all the questions to ensure you give the right information in the right place. You may have established this in your initial read-through but it will pay you to do it again before you start to fill in the form. Making notes in draft is usually a good idea.

Although the emphasis is on outcomes you will need to say what you will do to achieve the changes you expect. This information is sometimes known as outputs. Again, it needs to be stated clearly and succinctly:

- For example, 'We will run a youth club for two hours on two nights per week. Each session 30 young people attending will have access to sports, arts and crafts and music-making. 10 will be recruited to a formal course, Alternatives to Aggression'.

You may need to demonstrate how you will know you are successful. Funders don't just take your word for it and you should never assume that it is obvious that, for example, young people having their music recorded in studio conditions will gain confidence.

- Include any measures or indicators of success in making the changes you say you will make. These may include:
 - Formal measurements, e.g. psychological tests of self esteem
 - Observable change, e.g. continued attendance, willingness to join in (demonstrating increased confidence), success in getting interviews (demonstrating readiness for employment).
 - Feedback from beneficiaries – comments, suggestions, written questionnaires, feedback from forums.
 - Consultation – questionnaires completed by the public, referrers, partners, other stakeholders.
 - Research – any studies that indicate positive change as a result of the sorts of services you will provide.

You will want the funder to give your organisation their money, not another organisation. They will therefore need to feel confident that your organisation is the right one:

- Find opportunities to state your strengths – sometimes known as your Unique Selling Points (USP)
- Show that you know what you are doing – you have previous successes and a history of achievement
- Demonstrate positive feedback from beneficiaries and other stakeholders
- Avoid mistakes in filling out the form – look professional, confident and caring. Always get it proofread several times.

Money

Some funders state how much you should apply for, but other don't. If it is unclear, have a look at previous annual reports or accounts to see the pattern of giving – try the Charity Commission website if the agency doesn't have the information on their own website or elsewhere.



Make sure you keep within any guidelines about what the funder will and won't pay for.

Make sure your figures add up.

Funders know that salaries are the biggest payment – they should usually include a percentage for pension. They also know you need to pay for overheads. There is no point in skimping on costs – you need to be realistic.

Summary

1. Read through information so you know exactly what is being asked of you and how you should approach the application
 2. Meet with others from your organisation and establish what you will apply for, using your funding strategy as a guide
 3. Read through the form and make notes on what you will put in each section. Work through each question establishing what it means, what information you should provide and any supporting material you need to produce
 4. Fill in the form in draft
 5. Have the form read by someone involved to ensure it matches what was determined at 2 and for general checking
 6. Have the form proof-read by someone not directly involved but good at spelling, grammar and error-spotting. Ask them also to check that the answers address the questions asked – is what you say easily understandable? Repeat this process each time you make any significant amendments
 7. Have the costings checked by someone good with figures and (the same or another person) someone directly involved – preferably a trustee. Make sure costings are re-checked if you make any significant amendments anywhere in the form
 8. Send the form with any necessary accompanying documentation
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For further support contact Wigan Borough Community Partnership:

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