



How to write a successful application

Funders receive hundreds of applications each week so you need to write an application that stands out from the crowd. You know what is special about your organisation and work, so here we aim to help you get it right in communicating this clearly and effectively to the funder. You will find that writing a good funding application is like telling a good story. Good stories have structure, and take the reader on a journey. Think about your grant application the same way.

Planning

In our '[Researching funders](#)' guide you can find out how to identify suitable funders that are likely to support the sort of work you do. Carefully read the guidance and criteria for your selected funder, and think through your project plan.



Before you start, check the funders' criteria and make sure that your needs match theirs:

- Does the amount of money you want fall into the size of grants offered, including minimum and maximum awards?
- Is match funding required?
- What type of area is funded? For example: social inclusion, particular audiences, skills, heritage.
- Does the funder fund your geographic area?
- Are you the right type of organisation?
- Are your project goals similar to their organisational goals?
- Does the timing work for application submission and project completion?

Not taking these into account will waste your time writing an application with little chance of success. Always look at the number and kind of previous awards made by the funder. How does the impact of your project compare with these?

Make sure that:

- Relevant people in your organisation know you are making the application. Your committee may have a funding strategy in place and you will have to work to this. You may have to work to the timing of your committee meetings and you will need to make sure these align with the funder's timescale.
- You have made partner organisations working on the project aware that you are applying to this funder and will mention them in the application. They may be able to write letters of support or there may be a good reason why they don't want to be included in the application.
- You have all the information about your organisation to hand such as governance documents (such as a constitution, Trust Deed or Conveyance) and accounts. You will need to explain how your organisation works to the funder.



Funders ask for applications in a range of ways:

- Paper based form sent by mail (not common these days).
- Word document or PDF either sent by email or downloadable from a website.
- Computerised system that you will need to log on to.
- Letter of Application with no form.
- Most also require some kind of covering letter.

Completing a funder's application form

- Read the blank application right through before starting to complete it. This will help you frame your answers correctly for each question. Application forms are usually set out logically to help you tell a fluent story.
- Analyse each question in depth.
- Understand what the funder is actually trying to find out from the question. Read and read again. If it is not clear check any guidance again.
- Answer questions fully. Answer all aspects of any question with multiple parts. Make sure information is in the relevant section and, preferably, don't repeat information.
- Stick to the word limit if there is one. Using bullet points is a good way to write concise answers but be aware that some computer based applications don't allow for this style of formatting.
- If you feel that a question is not relevant to your project then explain why; do not leave a box empty or write 'n/a'.
- Be as specific as possible. For example, instead of 'We will run sports activities for children', state 'We will run two weekly football sessions and two weekly netball sessions for 10-15 year olds over a six month period. Each session will be two hours long and will be attended by 10 children'. Tables are an easy understandable format and can help you keep to word limits.

Budgets

- There are not many funders who provide core funding for organisations i.e. money to pay for all the main on-going costs of an organisation. Funders prefer to fund projects and defined work.
- In order to understand if the project is affordable it is important that it is fully costed and takes into consideration the proportion of the core or overhead costs, i.e. rent, rates, electricity, that will have to be covered to deliver it. Funders will sometimes fund the core aspect of the project only. This is called 'full cost recovery'.
- Funders want to feel that they are getting as much as possible from their money. If you can show that a grant from them will result in extra benefits (or added value), this improves your case.
- Always make your budget as specific as possible. And if possible get quotes for everything you will need to pay for, so that it is accurate. Funders are used to seeing budgets and they have a good understanding of how much things cost.



Provide an exit strategy

Even if a funder doesn't ask what will happen at the end of their funding period, it is always good to provide them with that information. This shows that you have fully thought the project through and that the project is sustainable beyond their funding.

Project management and delivery

State clearly how you are going to manage your project and the staff you have in place, or will recruit, to deliver services. Show what experience staff have and their level of qualification. Engaging service users in management groups or steering groups to help co-delivery is often attractive to funders. Tables and flow charts are good for showing staffing structures.

Writing a letter of application

- Tailor your letter to the funder's guidelines.
- Keep to the funder's recommended length or if not stated, up to two pages.
- If you are seeking only part-cost funding for your project (e.g. for a piece of equipment) say so, and prepare a full budget so it is clear.
- Get straight to the point in your opening paragraph explaining how much money you need and what you want it for.
- Use headings for the remaining paragraphs. This makes the letter easier to scan read.

In your letter, make sure you include:

- Background - structure, beneficiaries, area of operation
- What is the project, why this Trust? Show how your project matches with the funders' aims.
- How do you know there is need?
- Show your planning – for example summarise in a small embedded table your evidence/activities/timescale/outcomes.
- What happens when the funders' contribution ends?
- Who is the key contact for queries?

Final preparations

Ask a critical friend to read the final draft

Ask someone, preferably someone who is not very familiar with your project, to read the application. They will be able to see if it is clear, concise and legible.



Provide everything funders ask for

Funders may ask for supporting documents such as your Annual Report and Accounts or cash flow forecasts, so make sure you enclose everything with the application. Some funders have a checklist which you can check off as you send it. Be aware that funders may not return these so if sending hard copies, don't send originals. Missing things out might mean your application gets rejected automatically.

Do not include anything extra unless it really adds value to your application. **Before you submit your application form, check again and make sure:**

- All pages/sections are included.
- All permissions and approvals are in place.
- The form is signed by the right people from your organisation.
- The form is dated appropriately.
- You have included letters of support.
- You have referenced all enclosures.
- You have made a copy of everything submitted for yourself and key people involved in the project (including referees).

Submit Your Application

Ensure you return the application before the deadline. If emailing, always ask for a receipt of delivery.

Ten reasons why funders reject applications

1. The applicant is not eligible. Always check your legal form, charity status, geographical remit, or beneficiaries against the funder's criteria.
2. The applicant fails to clearly say how they meet the funders' own criteria.
3. Projects are poorly planned.
4. Applications are not clear and concise.
5. Lack of clear and demonstrable outcomes.
6. The budget is not costed well or not realistic.
7. Funding is asked for work that has already started or been completed.
8. Applications are made without monitoring and evaluation processes in place.
9. The application is incomplete or illegible.
10. The applicant misses the deadline.

Successful fundraising is getting harder as the competition for funding increases. Success rates for applications do vary but research shows they are typically 1:4. As a fundraiser it is important that you learn to manage rejection as it will happen at some stage. Ask for feedback, learn from the experience and move on to the next application.

Additional Support

Community First Yorkshire can help you choose the funding that is right for you. We can support you on a one to one or group training basis by helping you to develop your project, research the right funder, plan a funding strategy, and give you advice about any funding applications you would like to submit. Simply fill in an [enquiry form](#) and we'll get back to you.

You can sign up for our news bulletins [here](#):

- Our monthly Funding Bulletin lists updated funding opportunities.
- Our weekly newsletter has information about the volunteer and charity sector, including training courses about funding.