**A guide to writing effective funding applications**

Applications can be confusing, but this straightforward guide will help you navigate even the most complicated funding forms

Despite their simple layout and straightforward questions, funding applications can still be daunting. Every application will be different depending on what type of funding body you approach and the kind of funding you are applying for.

**Making a start**

Talk through the funding application with your colleagues to make sure they have input into the proposal. Once you've pulled together an initial proposition, designate one person to collate all the information together, making sure any further contributions are passed directly to this individual to avoid confusion.

Read the application several times, breaking down each question into mini-questions. This will help you stick to specifics and avoid penning vague, generic statements. Applications often have limited word-counts, so be succinct and use simple language. If your application becomes too convoluted funders will lose interest.

**Let it take shape**

Build a checklist:

• Question what you want to do and why it's important

• Chose a title for the project that is accessible and self-explanatory

• Are you responding to a problem? If so, outline why it needs to be solved

• Make time for expansive research around your subject - collate statistics, facts and quotations that prove the need for your proposed activity

• Detail how you will go about achieving your ultimate aims, referencing short, medium and long-term objectives

• Understand what you will create or provide

• Decide who you will be working with to implement these plans and why

• Outline what progress you have made to date

• Build a timeline to detail what is required to take the idea further: outline any roles that you would like to recruit for, the next steps you want to take and the time this will take you.

**Budget breakdown**

Advertisement

Create clear costings, outlining the costs for pilots, the development phase or an investment-ready proposal. Be realistic when breaking down costs; budgets should accurately reflect the planning, research, project delivery and evaluation. Grant and funding assessors will always look out for over and under-estimated costings. If you don't have a financial officer in your organisation it is well worth seeking external financial advice to enable you to be precise about how you will achieve your aims.

Most funding bodies will want to know if you have approached any other funders or secured any other funding, and on what terms you have done so. Make sure you have researched whether the funding body you are applying to prefers to be the sole funder or understands that there may be other investors. Give details of any potential institutional investors, charitable foundations and funding bodies that you have approached or are already working with, and in what capacity.

**Measuring stick**

More and more voluntary and community sector projects are becoming harder to evaluate due to the nature of work they carry out, especially those that focus on social change and outcomes. It is important that you carefully consider the expected returns of the project, be they financial or social. Question whether you have a robust way of identifying your impact and prove your organisation has the capacity to manage, deliver and evaluate your proposed activity.

If you are capitalising on pre-existing models, don't be afraid to make references to similar projects that have been successful. Offering a selection of case studies can reassure the funder that you have carried out relevant research and understand where your proposal would fit in the related sector and economic climate.

**"I know nothing…"**

Assume your funder isn't familiar with your organisation. Often the text, which seems clear to the person writing the application, may not be transparent to fresh eyes. Where appropriate mimic the language funders use in their guidelines. Be assertive, choosing confident words and remind yourself of the funders' objective at every stage. Think about what will set your application apart from others. Is the proposal imaginative? Will it capture the funder's attention?

Depending on the type of funding you are applying for you may be asked to submit an exit strategy or risk mitigation analysis. Most funders will want to know what will happen when the funding comes to an end, therefore it is essential to carefully consider how you will promote and protect the sustainability or legacy of the project.

**Thinking ahead**

Even if the application is just an expression of interest and there is no requirement to detail timelines, building the rest of the package will enable you to have clearer vision of the whole. Fully understanding your proposal will better equip you to break down, outline and respond to individual parts of the process or project delivery. Question whether your vision, aims and objectives are achievable. Having a mental picture of the project coming to fruition could help you identify where will you need assistance; will you require legal advice, marketing and public relations support separate to your organisation's current strategy?

If your application is successful you will be required to supply key information about your organisation; data, accounts, memorandum of articles etc, to prove you meet the eligibility criteria. Ensure you have assembled this prior to possible consultation dates with your funders.

**Before submission**

Get someone impartial to proof your final draft. Requesting a trusted individual's opinions and perspectives on your approach is vitally important. Be open to criticism and constructive feedback as it will encourage you to refine your answers and project plans. And finally, don't make any errors at the final hurdle - be sure to complete all sections and submit everything requested.

*Mary Jane Edwards is an associate at* [*The Big Society Network*](http://www.thebigsociety.co.uk/)

**This content is brought to you by Guardian Professional.**