Writing Successful Funding Proposals

Introduction

This guidance focuses on writing successful funding proposals for charitable trusts and foundations. Although many of the points covered will be relevant, this guidance is not focusing on government funders as they are now mainly using a commissioning process for funding the voluntary and community sector (apart from small grants).

Based on feedback from funders about the main weaknesses in applications, the guidance will concentrate on two areas in particular: how to develop a good realistic project and describe it clearly and how to provide good evidence of need.

Who are charitable trusts and foundations?

There are 8,800 charitable trusts and foundations in the UK.[1] They range from very large funders giving out millions of pounds each year to tiny trusts giving out a thousand pounds each year. There is no such thing as a 'typical grant funder', so it always important to find out as much information as possible about the specific funder you want to apply to.

Examples of different types of charitable trusts and foundations:
- Those with a long history of benefiting the 'poor' e.g. City Parochial Foundation and Trust for London, City Bridge Trust
- Those set up by rich people to benefit causes that they are particularly interested in e.g. Laura Ashley Foundation, Elton John AIDS Foundation
- Those set up to benefit people in a particular region or local area e.g. John Moores Foundation, Jack Petchey Foundation
- Those set up by banks e.g. Northern Rock Foundation, Lloyds TSB Foundation
- Those which fundraise from the public e.g. Comic Relief, BBC Children in Need
- Large trusts and foundations set up by rich people and/or their families e.g. Tudor Trust, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, LlankellyChase Foundation
- Faith based charitable trusts and foundations e.g. Church Urban Fund, The Muslim Community Fund

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[1] Grantmaking by UK Trusts and Charities, Association of Charitable Foundations, 2007

- Small family trusts e.g. The Kathleen Trust, The Park Hill Trust (there are hundreds of these trusts, usually giving out small amounts of money for very specific purposes)
- The Big Lottery gives out money raised through the National Lottery
- Community Foundations raise money from local donors to benefit local communities and often distribute small grants on behalf of government (e.g. Grassroots Grants) or other charitable funders.

Common features of charitable trusts and foundations:

- Funders want to create change, improve the quality of life for disadvantaged people (usually), find solutions to problems, and respond to new (often local) need
- As Michael Norton says, "People give to people to help people" [2] i.e. the funder is interested in giving you money in order for you to help people who are in need in some way. Also, although funders can seem like faceless bureaucrats, it is people who make the decisions about giving grants. It is possible to appeal to the humanity of these people. For example, personal stories or case studies and shocking statistics can have a powerful impact.
- It's about the people you are trying to help, NOT the needs of the organisation
- Funders get many more applications than they can fund
- They usually fund charities (and other not for profit organisations), and sometimes only registered charities
- They usually fund projects, i.e. a specific piece of work, a programme or a new initiative
- They often want to fund something new. Sometimes a development of existing work will be new enough or a new way of dealing with an ongoing problem could be considered new.
- Many funders have a two stage process: they will ask you to send in a brief summary of your project first and then, if they are interested, they will ask you to complete a full application.
- Many funders use application forms, particularly for second stage applications. Others will ask you to write a letter, and will usually ask you to cover specific points in your letter. This guidance will be relevant whether you are filling in an application form or writing a letter to apply for funding.

How do you find out about sources of grant funding?

A good place to start is to contact your local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) or Voluntary Action Centre who should be able to help you find sources of funding (see National Association of Voluntary Action Centres website to find your local CVS www.navca.org.uk)

They are likely to have resources such as:

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[2] Fundraising, by Michael Norton, 2007

- A Guide to the Major Trusts – Vols. 1 and 2. Annual directories which include the largest 2000 grant-making trusts published by the Directory of Social Change: www.dsc.org.uk
- The Directory of Grant Making Trusts. Directory (updated every 2 years) giving details of approximately 2500 grant-making trusts published by the Directory of Social Change: www.dsc.org.uk (Also available on CD)
- FunderFinder.org.uk computer software that helps voluntary organisations and individuals look for money from charitable trusts. FunderFinder also provides general information on different aspects of funding and fundraising: www.funderfinder.org.uk

Useful websites are:

Association of Charitable Funders (ACF)
ACF's website – www.acf.org.uk – includes downloadable copies of their advice leaflets, facts and figures about trusts and foundations, links to trust and foundation websites, UK and international umbrella bodies, and other useful resources for grant-seekers

Charities Information Bureau website provides help and advice for community groups and voluntary organisations who are seeking funding. CiB also publishes a subscription-based monthly e-bulletin on funding: www.cibfunding.org.uk

Funding Central: a new (free) online resource detailing over 4,000 grants, contracts and loans for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors. www.fundingcentral.org.uk

Grants on Line is a subscription-based online directory of trust, lottery, UK and European Government funding: www.grantsonline.org.uk

Trustfunding.org.uk is a subscription-based online directory of over 4400 grant-making trusts produced by Directory of Social Change: www.trustfunding.org.uk

Women's Resource Centre website provides a funding directory www.wrc.org.uk

Understanding funders' criteria and guidelines

Most funders will provide grants to benefit specific groups of people or address specific issues and problems. Their priorities will usually be explained on their website or in the funding directories listed above. Larger trusts and foundations will usually have a lot of information on their websites about their funding criteria and will provide guidelines on how to apply for their grants.

- It is very important to read the funding criteria and guidelines carefully, including any information about the types of projects they prioritise and the type of work they will not fund. Note: a common complaint by funders is that they receive many applications for work they clearly do not fund (according to their criteria).
- It is a good idea to look at the list of recent grants (if they one) to see what type of project they are interested in, the average size of grant and to check no similar projects have been funded recently

- Although it is important to emphasise the aspects of your work that meet a funder's criteria, there is no point in trying to squeeze your project into a funder's criteria if it doesn't really fit

Simple, practical points:
- <u>Make sure that the guidelines and criteria you have are up to date</u> – funders change their criteria frequently, so you must check you have the most recent information.
- You must <u>follow their instructions and meet their deadlines</u> e.g. if the deadline is 5pm on a specific date, 5.10pm is too late.
- <u>Don't forget signatures</u> if they are required
- If they ask for accounts or job descriptions, don't forget to enclose these; if they don't want anything else enclosed, don't add anything else – it will just go in the bin!
- Applications typically take 5 to 6 months to process, so <u>you must allow yourself enough time to apply</u>. Check the funder's guidelines.
- If the funder's guidelines are not clear to you, ring them and ask. This is also a good way to begin developing a relationship with them. Take every opportunity to develop this relationship – a Rape Crisis Centre that did this was contacted later when the funder had an underspend and they got a grant!
- If a funder says they will only fund 'new' projects, find out what they mean by 'new'. A new project for your organisation? A new project for the local area? A project that is similar to one that you are currently running but you want to develop a new aspect of it? If possible, call the funder to check.
- <u>Always get feedback</u> from funders on unsuccessful applications, if possible. Not all funders will provide feedback, but if they offer it, make sure to contact them. Feedback can be very useful for improving your next application. Sometimes good applications are rejected simply because there were too many applications and therefore resubmitting at a later date may result in success. It is important to check how soon you can apply again.
- Most organisations have many more rejections than successes. Although rejections feel bad, don't give up! Persevere.

Think before you apply!

In the end, you need to make a judgment about whether it is worth applying to a funder. Ask yourself some questions:
- Does your work fit their criteria well?
- Is the grant large enough to meet your needs?
- Is the grant for a long enough time period to meet your needs?
- Have you got enough time to fill in a longer, more detailed funding application?
- Are you more likely to be successful applying for smaller grants?

If your work meets a funder's criteria well and you could potentially get a substantial amount of money for your work (for at least 3 years), it is worth putting in the time and effort needed to do a good application. <u>Applications that are done at the last minute are rarely successful</u>.

Putting in lots of applications for small short-term grants can be very time-consuming and it can be difficult to keep your services going this way. However, for small scale projects or particular items of spending, a small grant might be suitable.

If you are a new organisation, you will usually have to start by applying for small grants, as most funders are unlikely to take the risk of giving large amounts of money to organizations that have not yet proved their ability to do good work. Once you have a track record of providing good services for your beneficiaries, you will be in a stronger position to apply for larger grants.

Key features of a good funding proposal

Most major funders get hundreds or even thousands of applications each year; to be successful, your application needs to stand out from the pile as something that is worth funding.

Ingredients of a good application or funding proposal:
1. A clearly defined problem or need – backed up by solid evidence
2. A clearly defined project proposal – providing a realistic and practical solution to the problem or way to meet the need, including achievable outcomes
3. Evidence of your organisation's effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, includes credibility, track record etc.
4. 'Added value', including user and volunteer involvement etc.

It is also important to begin a proposal with a strong project summary. You need to grab the funder's attention right away by describing the importance of your work in a few sentences. Often a powerful quote or fact can help you do this. If you are completing an application form, there may be a specific question asking for a project summary; if not, try to get them interested as soon as possible.

Defining and providing good evidence of need

Defining the problem or need

You are probably very passionate about your work and perhaps to you, the need for your work seems obvious - but you have to get this across to funders.

What is the problem you are tackling or the need for your work?

Questions to help you define the problem or need:

- What difficulties do the people you are working with face?
- Why do they have these difficulties?
- How widespread is the problem? How big is the need?
- What are the consequences of this problem or need, and what will happen in future if nothing is done about it? Are there any social, economic or environmental trends that might make the problem worse in future?

- If you are a local project, what are the key features of your area or community that make is especially important for you to do this work?
- Is there anyone else dealing with this problem or addressing this need?

"You must define the problem in words the funder can understand and in a way that makes them feel they want to do something about it. If you can't show why it is really important that your work continues and develops, you will not get the money."[3]

Try not to generalise – be as specific as possible – and do not assume that the funder knows about or understands the problem or need you are describing. It is important to spell out why it is important to deal with this problem soon.

Providing evidence

A clear and powerful explanation of the problem or need must also be backed up by evidence.

Why is it important to provide evidence of need?

- There is a lot of competition for grants – high demand for limited resources
- To prove that your project will make a difference to the community
- To prove that you have not just guessed what the community needs
- To prove that you are talking to the people involved
- To prove your project is the best way to address the need
- To prove that you know no one else is meeting this need (in the way you are)
- To prove that you understand your community and their needs
- To reassure the funder that they will not waste their money by giving it to your organisation.

What sources of evidence are there?

- Statistics based on monitoring and evaluation of your existing services
- Feedback from consultation events and community involvement (using surveys/questionnaires, focus groups/meetings, interviews)
- Local government statistics and local area or community profile
- Academic, government or other specialist research (reports, surveys)
- Government or third sector strategies and policies (general and specialist)
- Information about other existing services or lack of services
- Letters of support from service users, professionals working with your organisations, MPs, local councillors or other important decision-makers, other organisations that make referrals to your organisation (support from public sector agencies/staff often have a stronger influence on funders e.g. Primary Care Trust, social workers, police)
- Newspaper articles about your work or providing information which supports the level of need for your work
- Photos of your work

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[3] p.8, Writing Better Fundraising Applications, Mike Eastwood and Michael Norton, DSC, 2002

- Case studies
- Anecdotal evidence

What do you need to consider when collecting evidence?

- VERY IMPORTANT: As a minimum you must talk to the people involved in the work you are applying for. Who are they? What is the best way to consult with them? (If you work with young children, you could talk to their parents or guardians.)
- Avoid using individual pieces of evidence in isolation
- Make sure the research you use is from a reliable source and relates to your specific project (quote the sources)
- Try not to use research that is more than 3 years old. The census is an exception because the last census was in 2001.
- If you do your own research, make sure it is not biased e.g. be careful when writing questions for surveys and/or interpreting data, ensure that surveys and statistics are representative
- When consulting others, be clear about who are the main people who have an interest in your work, you need to think about practical ways to consult with them (including people who may be 'hard to reach')
- Funders will want to see that you have consulted all the relevant people about your project and that they agree there is a need for this specific project.
- You need to show that you have a good understanding of other services available locally and show why you will be filling a gap and/or complementing other services.
- You need to show that you are aware of relevant local, regional and sometimes, national plans and strategies – and can show how your project relates to these.
- Make sure the evidence you provide shows why your specific project is the best way to meet this need. If this is a new project for your organisation, refer to similar projects elsewhere or any small-scale 'pilot' projects you have done.
- Provide evidence that is specific to the project you are applying for, not to the organisation as a whole.

How much evidence do you need to provide?

This depends on the scale of the problem, the capacity you have and the size of grant you are applying for.   It is good to have a few different types of evidence which all support your case e.g. evidence based on your own monitoring and evaluation statistics, academic research backing up your analysis of the problem or supporting your approach to the problem, government statistics providing information about the people you are working with.

For example, evidence of need for a women's project on a housing estate could be:

The women who will attend our project live on the Anywhere Estate – a community that is among the most deprived in the country and has been identified in the Anytown local authority's Community Strategy as the area with the most social

problems and highest levels of poverty in the city. We have good links and strong support from Council officers working on regeneration as our project will contribute to the Council's plans to improve living conditions for residents on the Estate.

According to research conducted by the Council in 2009, 63% of women on the Estate are living on welfare benefits, including female pensioners living alone (15% of all households) and female lone parents (53% of all households). The Estate has a total population of 11,300 people, it is 5 miles outside the city centre, has only two small shopping centres and a bus service that goes once every hour. There is a regular youth group but there are no activities for adults taking place on the estate.

In March 2010, we organised an International Women's Day event attended by 130 women on the estate. As part of the event, we did a survey of all participants about the main problems that they face. The key issues were:

- *Feeling stuck as they cannot afford to leave the estate very often*
- *Feeling isolated and depressed*
- *Most women had left school with few or no qualifications but lacked confidence or resources to join further education courses in the city. They also worried about the impact this was having on their children, whose aspirations and educational achievements are also low.*
- *Many women admitted that they resorted to alcohol or drugs to cope with the stress and this also had a very negative impact on their children.*
- *Many older women said they were afraid to go out and had little access to social activities.*

The feedback we received was striking: no events or activities for women had ever been held on the estate before and the majority of women said that no one had ever asked them for their views before. 74% of women were "very interested" in getting involved with at least one of the activities we plan to run on the estate, including exercise/relaxation classes, a weekly support group for women experiencing depression, IT classes combined with literacy and numeracy support.

Defining and Describing Projects

Your organisation exists to meet the needs of a group of people and/or deal with problems you have identified. We often think about fundraising as getting enough money to run our organisations. But most funders give money for specific pieces of work – or projects. So an essential part of writing successful funding proposals is to design clear, realistic and effective projects.

What is a project?
A project is a specific piece of work, a programme or a new initiative; it should be time-limited and have clear aims and outcomes and sometimes, targets.

Definitions of aims, objectives, outcomes and outputs

When you are applying for funding, it is likely that you will come across at least some of the words below, so it is important to understand what they mean.

Aims: The changes you are trying to achieve. They describe the difference you *plan* to make in the lives of the people you work   with.

Objectives: The *planned* activities which will enable you to achieve your aims.

Outcomes: The changes, benefits, learning or other effects that *actually* occur as a result of your activities.

Outputs: The detailed activities, services and products your organisation actually does or provides i.e. what is on the 'menu' for service users, what they're actually able to access

Examples of aims:
- To increase confidence and self-esteem
- To improve the mental health of women on Anyplace Housing Estate
- To enable women to find employment

Examples of objectives:
- To facilitate a support group for isolated women
- To provide training in job search skills
- To provide information and advice on local volunteering opportunities

Examples of outcomes:
- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Improved mental health
- Increased numbers of women taking up voluntary work

Examples of outputs:
- Befriending service for isolated women
- One to one counselling service
- Job search training

As you can see, aims and outcomes are linked. Aims describe what you *plan* to change and outcomes describe the change that *will happen* as a result of what you do.

Objectives and outputs are also linked. Objectives describe the activities you *plan* to run and outputs are the actual activities you *will run*.

Planning your project

The people you are working with may face several difficulties and have many needs, so it may be necessary to design different projects to deal with different kinds of needs. The evidence of need should specifically relate to the particular project you are requesting funding for.

Most funders will be interested in the outcomes of your projects, not just the activities you are going to provide. Sometimes, they state this clearly (e.g. Big Lottery, Comic Relief); sometimes they are not so clear. These days, they are likely to ask you about the difference your project will make to the people you are working with i.e. the outcomes of your project. (See section on 'Funders' Questions below)

The first step is to design a project that addresses the problem or need you have identified.
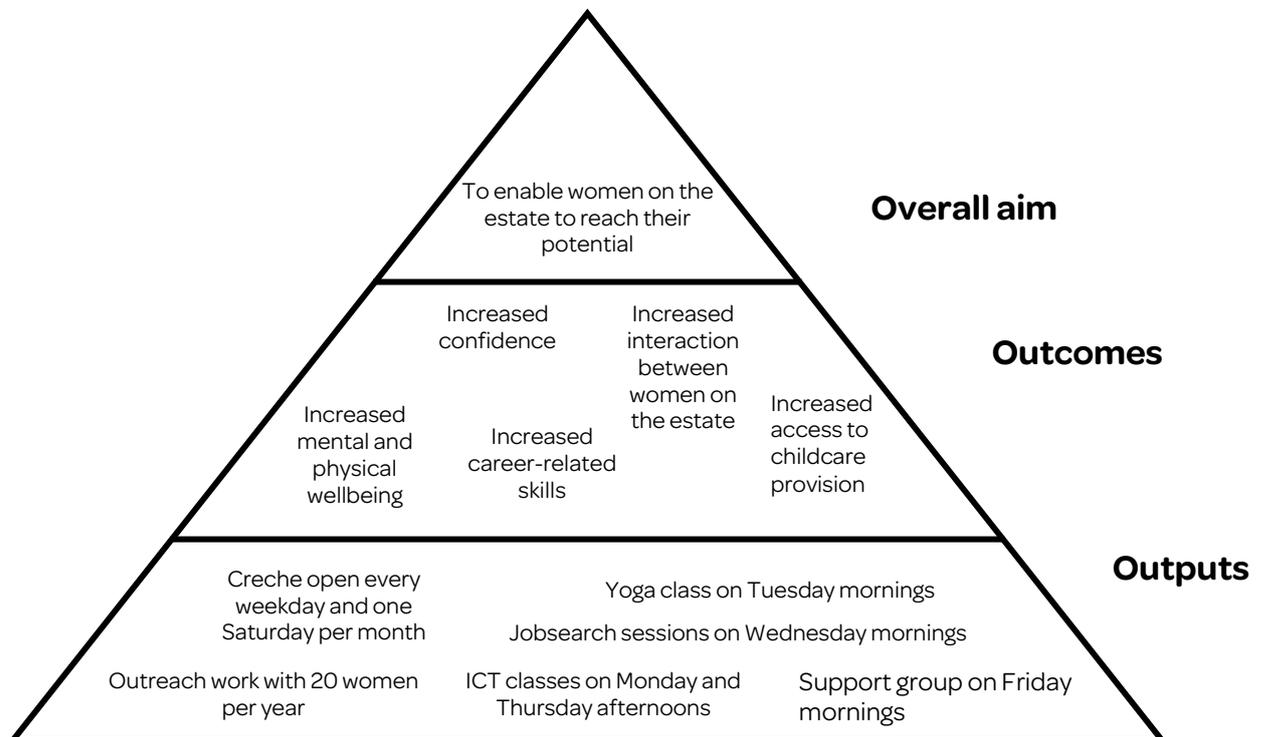
Often, when people start thinking about projects they think about the activities or services they want to run. Instead, it is very important to begin by thinking carefully about *why* you want to run a project – what do you want to achieve?
Consider the following questions:

- What needs to change in order to deal with the problem or difficulties faced by people in your community?
- What will people's lives be like when this change has happened?
- How can you bring about this change?
- Who (specifically) and how many people can realistically benefit from your project?
- How long will it realistically take for change to happen?

Most funders will want to know what the overall aim (or purpose) of your project is and will expect you to include this in your project summary. They will also want to know about the specific outcomes of your project, and the activities you will run in order to achieve these outcomes.

The planning triangle below is useful for visualising a project. This is an example for a women's centre on a housing estate.

To enable women on the estate to reach their potential — **Overall aim**

Increased confidence
Increased interaction between women on the estate
Increased mental and physical wellbeing
Increased career-related skills
Increased access to childcare provision — **Outcomes**

Creche open every weekday and one Saturday per month
Yoga class on Tuesday mornings
Jobsearch sessions on Wednesday mornings
Outreach work with 20 women per year
ICT classes on Monday and Thursday afternoons
Support group on Friday mornings — **Outputs**

It is also important to remember that you will have to be able to MEASURE whether or not outcomes have happened. For this reason, they need to be SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable

- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time-bound

It is a good idea to set (realistic) targets and often funders will require this.
For example:

- 25 women per year have increased confidence and self-esteem
- 40 women per year have improved mental health
- 15 women per year have participated in voluntary work

A note of caution: funders are not always clear themselves what is meant by 'outcomes'! it is useful to check their guidelines to see how they describe outcomes and check if they provide any examples.

The next step is to plan the activities or services you will run in more detail i.e. your outputs. It is very important that the funder can get a clear picture of how the project will work in practice.

Your project description needs to explain:
- What you are going to do
- How you are going to do it (including the resources you will need)
- When you will do each thing you need to do
- Who will be responsible - both for individual activities and for the overall management of the project
- How you will know you have done it[4]

For example, a more detailed description of the women's centre's outreach service would be:

We plan to provide an outreach service for isolated women on the Anywhere estate, including older women, new mothers, those with mental health issues, etc. We will support 20 women per year.
The service will include five home visits each week and a drop-in session at the community centre on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.
The home visits and drop-in sessions will be run by a part-time support worker (16 hours p.w.) and the overall project will be co-ordinated by a part-time project manager (21 hours p.w.)
The support worker will keep records re: the women who access the service, including demographic information, case notes and feedback from 6-monthly reviews. The project manager will evaluate the service each year and write a report for the Management Committee.

Understanding funder's questions

We've talked about need, outcomes, project descriptions, and a bit about monitoring and evaluation. Funders' application forms will ask questions about all of

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[4] See 'Six Steps to a Good Application', available on the Big Lottery website:
http://www2.biglotteryfund.org.uk/downloads/pub_six_steps_application.pdf

these aspects of your project, but the questions vary. It is important to understand their questions – here are some examples:

1. What difference do you want to make, and how will your organisation achieve this? [The difference you want to make refers to outcomes, and how you will achieve it refers to outputs]

2. What do you want to achieve as a result of the funding? [This question refers to your outcomes.]

3. How will your project address the need? [An answer to this question would involve describing your project outputs and possibly, outcomes.]

4. Why is your project the best way of meeting the need? [An answer to this question would involve providing evidence of your previous success, outcomes you'd achieved before and perhaps other external evidence such as research, quotes from referral agencies supporting your work etc. – this evidence should show the funder why the specific project you have designed will provide a solution to the problem you have identified.]

5. How do you intend to monitor the work, measure its success and ensure its quality. [This question is about monitoring and evaluation, but in order to evaluate your project effectively, you must have clear, measurable outcomes.]

Further issues to consider:
- Can you realistically address the problem you have identified? It is important to design realistic projects – clearly related to the need you are trying to meet and the capacity of your organisation to meet this need. Funders will have a sense of what is realistic or not (usually).
- Consider how this project will impact on other areas of your work (staff time taken away from working on other things etc)...
- If there is anyone else locally providing similar services (who may also be applying to the same funder)? If so, highlight how you are different and focus on what you do well (talk about any successes and awards you have achieved). Acknowledge that other services exist and focus on how good you are, instead of being negative about others.
- Give your project a catchy title! Or at the very least not a long, long one...

Budgets

It is now quite rare for funders to simply provide 'core' funding for organisations i.e. money to pay for all the main costs of an organisation, to be used as the organisation thinks best. As discussed above, funders generally like to fund projects.

However, it is important to aim for 'full cost recovery'.

Full cost recovery means ensuring that the total costs of your project or activity, including a proportion of all core (or overhead) costs, are covered.

Organisations generally have two types of costs: direct and indirect (or overhead) costs.

- Anything your organisation spends as a direct result of delivering a project or activity would be your 'direct costs'.
- Anything your organisation spends in order to support and administer projects, activities, and the organisation itself would be your 'indirect costs'.

These indirect costs are sometimes called core, overhead, central, or management and administration costs and are shared between various activities within an organisation. Examples of these costs are: senior management salaries, rent, heating and lighting bills, cleaning, bookkeeping, holding AGMs, insurance, fundraising etc.
Usually you can and should include a portion of these costs in applications for project funding.

It is a good idea to work out the budget for a project before starting to filling an application form so that you know how much you will need for the project and whether it is worth applying to particular funders.

How do you know how much to ask for?

General points:

- It is essential that the amount you are requesting from a funder does not go above the maximum grant available from that funder. If the total project costs are more than the amount you are requesting from the funder you are applying to, then it is a good idea to provide both a total budget for the project and a clear budget for the amount you want from this funder.
- Look at funders' guidelines re: costs they will fund. Sometimes they state they support full cost recovery; others will say they only fund up to 15% management costs; and some will say they do not fund capital costs or other specific items.
- If possible, check the funders' list of recent grants – to get an idea of the average grant they award. Although the maximum may be £40,000 per year, they may rarely fund projects for this amount.
- If your organisation currently has an income of £5,000, it is not likely that a funder is going to give you a grant of £70,000.
- A common mistake is to be unrealistic – promising to do a huge amount for very little money. Funders are likely to have a sense of appropriate salary scales and numbers of beneficiaries (for example), so this could be a reason for rejecting your application. If you do promise too much and get a grant, this will only create problems for the project and the organisation. It could also have a negative impact on your relationship with the funder (and any partner organisations).

  Note: if you do have problems with running a project, it is best to talk to the funder about this as soon as possible and try to negotiate changes.

Setting the budget:

1.   Calculate the direct costs of your project e.g. project worker (s) salary, equipment/materials, volunteer expenses etc. This should be fairly straightforward.

2.   Calculate the relevant portion of indirect costs for your project.

First, you need to decide how you are going to do this. There are different ways to do this but the most important thing is to be able to justify your method. Here are some possibilities:

- Split the total indirect costs for your organisation between projects according to the number and hours of staff working on each project e.g. if a new worker will share the office and use resources equally with 3 other workers, allocate a ¼ of all overhead costs (rent, bills, post, telephone, stationery etc.) to this project.
  Management and supervision costs could be based on dividing the Manager's salary and National Insurance costs by the total number of staff and allocate according to the number of staff working on this specific project.
- Allocate indirect costs according to actual use of the resources: if your project is going to require a greater portion of some of the indirect costs e.g. admin worker's time, telephone, space in your premises, etc. account for this in your budget and explain why.
- Allocate indirect costs by 'top-slicing': add a percentage of the organisation's total indirect costs onto each project budget; this could be 20% for example. [Note: some funders are no longer willing to accept this, so you need to check their guidelines.]

3. Once you've calculated these costs, make sure to explain how you've arrived at these amounts in notes to the budget. By explaining your reasoning, you show that you've thought about the costs in detail and you are able to manage your finances.

4. Check you are happy with the total – is it realistic?

Further points re: full cost recovery
- When you have only a few funders, allocating indirect costs is more difficult – once your organisation has a greater number and range of funders, you can show that the cost of a new project is less because you are a successful organisation with several different sources of funding.
- It is important not to forget costs! e.g. recruitment costs, staff and volunteer training, audit and AGM costs, pension costs, publications you may need, etc.
- If you are applying for a grant over a period of more than one year, don't forget inflation increases and salary increases or costs you no longer need (staff recruitment) etc.
- Be consistent! A common problem is that applications are not consistent – so for example, the items in the budget do not match the activities described in the project description; the annual report shows that the project you are applying for exists already although you say it is new; the annual accounts provide different information to that given in the form; different numbers of service users or volunteers are given in answer to different questions in the

form; in one question, the area you are working in is not the same as in another question etc. So – check your application for these issues!

Presentation Style and Writing Well

Presentation style

Although it may seem unimportant, the look of your application does make a difference. Which would you prefer to read: a page of dense text with no headings and only two paragraphs or a page of text broken up with several paragraphs, headings in bold, bullet points, etc.?

Use:
- Bullet points and headings, highlighted in bold or underlined
- Shorter paragraphs
- Larger size of print (some funders will specify – follow their instructions!)
- If writing a letter of application, use a clear and logical structure

Writing style

- A case study, a quote from a service user or a shocking statistic may be a good way to catch the funder's attention. Funders get hundreds of applications, so you want to grab their attention in the first few lines of your application. If you are completing a form – this can be a good way to introduce your project description (additional evidence of need can then be added to the question on need)
- It is important to get the passion for your work into the application!
- Use plain English (See the Plain English Campaign website: www.plainenglish.co.uk)
- Don't use three words when one is enough (people often think they need to use very complicated English – but this is not necessary. For those where English is not your first language, don't worry if it's not perfect – so long as the information is clear and understandable.
- Don't use jargon
- Don't use acronyms (e.g. NCVO, EVAW, WRC) unless you need to repeat them several times. In this case write the words out in full the first time you use them, followed by the acronym in brackets.
- Write for the reader – don't assume that the person assessing your application knows anything about your work but try not to be patronising either
- Be clear and specific
- Use facts more than opinions
- Keep it short and simple – a longer description or explanation does not usually make your application better
- Vary the length of sentences but generally, break up longer sentences into smaller ones
- Try not to put more than 3 ideas or points in one paragraph. It is well-known in sales that 3 is the magic number when trying to make your point; people can't usually take in much more.

- Don't use generalisations or bland statements e.g. 'extremely busy', 'huge increase', 'well-attended' – be specific
- Don't use words or phrases like: 'unique', 'desperate need', 'a major new initiative' – unless you are sure you can provide evidence to back them up
- Over emotional appeals or cries for help in crisis situations don't usually work
- Be positive: 'This project will…' instead of 'This project aims to…'; 'This project plans to…' instead of 'This project hopes to…'
- Use 'active' sentences: 'We helped young women to…' instead of 'Young women were helped by our organisation to…'; 'We work closely with…' instead of 'A partnership was formed between us and…'

Always try to ask someone who knows nothing about your work to read the application to see whether they understand your project and whether your answers to the questions make sense.

How to show your organisation's effectiveness and credibility

You may have a very good project and clearly identified need, but you also have to show funders that you have the ability to carry out the project. They want to be reassured that your organisation is well-run, professional, with evidence of good financial management, qualified and committed staff and volunteers, and that you have wider support in the community and a good reputation.

How can you show this in an application?
- Usually funders will ask for background information about the organisation – if you've been around a long time, this can strengthen your credibility. (Unfortunately, this may work against you if your organisation has existed for many years but has not changed or moved forward in all that time.)
- Mention previous achievements and successes – perhaps the new project has developed out of previous work?
- Mention who has funded you previously – this helps to build a new funder's trust
- Quote feedback from service users (if allowed, enclose copies of articles or letters from service users, latest annual report)
- Quote key people who have worked with you and praised your work
- Usually funders will ask about the management of the organisation and/or the project you are applying for. It is good to mention the expertise and skills of the Management Committee and staff, mention the frequency of Management Committee meetings, number and diversity of trustees. It is good to mention key policies and procedures that you have in place and show awareness of legal responsibilities. In questions about management of the organisation and/or monitoring and evaluation, it is important to explain the reporting system between staff and Management Committee (re: financial reports, staff reports etc.), and mention strategic planning sessions you've done.
- There may also be a question about your networks or partnership working – mention key organisations that you work with in the statutory sector, voluntary and community sector, local businesses, support/training agencies, forums and networks you are members of, etc.

- There will be a question about monitoring and evaluation – show that you have good systems in place; they don't have to complex, they just need to be effective
- If requested or allowed, include copies of your annual report, annual accounts, strategic or business plan with your application.
- Keep a credibility file! This will also help you when funders come to visit. This is a file where you keep relevant research, case studies, quotes, letters of support, copies of the annual accounts, annual reports, photos, newspaper articles etc.

Ways to show 'added value'

Funders want to feel that they are getting as much as possible out of their money. So if you can demonstrate that a grant from them will result in extra benefits (or 'added value'), this improves your case. For example:

Extra benefits that may result from a grant:
- By investing in equipment or technology a funder may enable you to be more effective and/or efficient, reach more people etc.
- By investing in staff or volunteer training and skills development a funder will improve the quality and effectiveness of your work
- By investing in your sustainability a grant may enable you to generate further income through matched grants or by enabling you to negotiate a contract with a statutory agency

Extra benefits that you can offer a funder:
- Volunteer involvement – by supporting your work with volunteers, you can provide a good quality service to more people, develop skills and employability of volunteers, perhaps involve volunteers who have specific needs, benefits for community participation and cohesion
- User involvement – by involving users in the running of your organisation (something most funders like to see) you are developing their skills and confidence, empowering them, enabling them to have a voice, enhances community participation and cohesion
- Your project may have potential for being copied by others – if you are developing a new approach etc.
- You may be getting discounts or contributions in kind which make your project even more cost effective e.g. free venues, free training or health awareness presentations, etc.
- When filling in application forms, highlight how your work will contribute to saving costs elsewhere, particularly in the public sector (i.e. NHS, mental health, criminal justice system etc.)