

Funding Applications – Useful Pointers

Community groups will find that many potential funders use application forms, which they ask you to complete and submit to apply for funding. Forms have a number of benefits from the funder's point of view – information is presented to them in a standard format and it is easier for them to compare applications more easily and judge which organisations best meet their priorities. However, for the applicant, forms can often quite daunting and appear to be asking for lots of information. So what is the best way to approach completing application forms from funders?

When you receive the application form:

- Carefully read the notes/guidelines that have been sent with the application form and make sure you understand them. Most importantly, check that you meet the funder's priorities. There is no point in spending a lot of time on an application if you are not actually eligible to apply.
- Read the form through completely and draw up a schedule and timetable of all the information you will need to pull together and provide for the application. Even if one member of your group will take overall responsibility for completing the form, do discuss your ideas with the rest of the committee to make sure that you are all in agreement with the proposals. Identify any areas where information needs to be obtained from other sources or other members of the committee or volunteers and give people sufficient warning.
- Break the overall application down into smaller sections and prioritise these sections.
- Make a number of photocopies of the form that you can practice your answers and explanations on. Only fill in the original form once you have completed the draft version in full and are satisfied with it.
- Do your homework. Make sure that you are approaching the right funder for the right amount of money. Why be given £250 from a funder for a photocopier when you could actually have approached them for £10,000 for a new kitchen?

Preparing the application:

- Imagine you're the funder, look at the form from their point of view and anticipate what they want to know when they ask a particular question. Key questions they will want answers to are: **who** is applying, **how much** you want, and **what** you want it for. Remember that funders need you to demonstrate that your project and organisation are well-planned and appropriately managed.
- It is essential that you show that there is a **need** for the project you are asking for funding for and many funders expect to see that you have consulted with potential users as part of the application process. Funders need convincing that there is a **problem** that should concern or interest them and then need to be told what can be done and what will be achieved.

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- Make sure that you consider how you will review your project and measure and record its results. Funders want to see that they are getting value for money from the projects they support. You will need to show how you will check on the progress of your work and assess its usefulness, the ways in which you will measure activity, how you will use this information to develop future activity etc.
- Check that the words about the project and the budget figures actually make sense in relation to each other. Budget costings should be specific and realistic and quotations from suppliers will probably be required when you are looking for funding for equipment. Make sure that the figures add up and that the budget shows in-kind support if appropriate. Make sure that budgets for staffing costs include additional employment costs such as National Insurance, pensions, annual pay increases, salary increments and recruitment costs.
- Funders are more likely to support a group that has shown that the project will continue after its funding ends. Funders also want evidence that you can handle money effectively and that you have relevant practical systems in place.
- If your organisation has never employed staff before and you are looking to employ a worker, your application should show that you have considered the range of issues involved e.g. job description (duties and responsibilities), person specification (skills, experience and knowledge required to do the job), recruitment procedure, how the worker will be managed etc.
- Handwritten application forms should be completed in legible black print – ideally block capitals. Some funders require application forms to be submitted in typewritten form – many application forms are now available on disc or in downloadable versions from the Internet and it is worth checking this out before you start.
- Many of the larger funders have advice lines for potential applicants so if you have queries about your application then don't be afraid to pick up the phone and ask for advice.
- Make sure that you answer all the questions – write N/A (not applicable) against any answers that do not apply to your project.
- Be realistic about the timescale of your project when preparing the application. Remember that it could be 3-4 months before you hear whether you have been successful or not.

Before you send off the application:

- Ask someone unfamiliar with your group to read the application for you and give their comments on it. It is difficult at times to stand back and be detached when you are so actively involved in your group and the area of work. There are bound to be certain issues that you take for granted and fail to explain satisfactorily in your application.
- Make sure that you take a number of photocopies of the completed form before you send it off. This is particularly important when follow-up calls will

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be made by potential funders to discuss the application. It is also a good idea to keep the details of how you worked out your project costings.

- Explain the funding application to other committee members and volunteers in your organisation. Sometimes one person is given the responsibility for putting ideas onto the form, which can create difficulties if they then leave the committee and are unable to deal with the necessary follow-up to the application.
- Make sure that you include all the supporting documentation that has been requested by the funder (e.g. audited accounts, annual report, copy of your group's constitution) and that the form has been signed by the relevant people in the necessary places. You might also want to include other important information that might be of interest to the funder e.g. plans and photographs, or facts/figures/reports that support your case. However, don't send additional information if you're specifically told not to on the application form.
- Ensure that it arrives in good time before the closing date.
- Many funders ask you to provide details of an independent referee on your application. Ideally, this should be someone who knows your group and work well and can talk (or write) about it from an informed perspective and with enthusiasm. Provide your referee with a photocopy of the completed form and take the time to talk through your project ideas before the funder approaches them.

*For further advice on **Funding Applications** contact:
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