

# Writing a Good Funding Application



## Useful Information and Top Tips

# Funding Language

When making a funding application it is helpful to understand the common terms or terms that funders use:

## Organisation Aims

All third sector organisations and groups will have an overall aim or aims. They are the reason why your organisation exists and what it wants to achieve. For your group or organisation the aims will usually be set out in your constitution.

Examples would be:

- to reduce the isolation of older people
- to promote the education, health and wellbeing of preschool school children
- to reduce unemployment

Aims will often be expressed as wishes, aspirations or using words that bring about change, such as increasing, decreasing or promoting.

## Project/Proposal

This is the specific piece (or pieces) of work which is the focus of the funding application you are submitting.

## Activities

Activities are the specific things you want to do with this funding application that will contribute to, or further your aims. Examples would be:

- The lunch club runs for 2 hours on a Monday, Tuesday and Friday in Shettleston Sheltered Housing
- Three x 6 week blocks of ICT classes will be offered to people aged 55+ in Parkhead

The language will be about doing, providing, running things or activities.

## Resources

Resources (sometimes referred to as inputs) are what you need to deliver on a project or activity. They will be the things that you have to work with; staff, volunteers, money, equipment, premises, partners, skills and experience.

In any application funders will want to see clearly what resources they are being asked to fund, they will want to know what their money will be spent on. A good application will clearly identify what a funder is being asked to fund; this will be partly done through the project budget but you must ensure that this can be tied back to the activities described in your application.

## **Outcomes**

Outcomes are the things that will change as a result of your activities. Outcomes are the change or difference that you make through your project activities. Outcomes should be measurable, demonstrable and definable through time.

A good outcome will include a **who, what and how**. **Who** is changing/benefiting (the volunteer, older person, carer, organisation)? **What** is changing (knowledge, skills, environment, attitudes)? **How** is it changing (increasing, improving etc as before)?

Examples of outcomes would be:

1. Childrens' confidence is increased through attendance at the art class
2. Carers' report they can cope better as a result of attending the course
3. Older persons' anxiety is reduced following attendance at the mindfulness programme

A good check that you have expressed an outcome and not an activity is to ask yourself the "so what" question e.g. 20 people attend the sewing class is not an outcome as it does not describe change.

With stiff competition for funding, applications that demonstrate concrete outcomes that are clearly achievable are more likely to be successful.

## **Costings**

It is important that you read all the information and guidance provided in relation to costings that you are applying for. Depending on the size of the fund and the number of applications received, the accuracy of costings can have a big impact on how your application will be assessed.

Consider the following when devising your budget:

- If you have provided costings that are inaccurate, unrealistic or don't match between the budget spreadsheet and application form, then your application will either be delayed or in many cases automatically rejected. This is one of the biggest pitfalls, where costings don't add up.

- Assessors have a wealth of experience and a good understanding about the costs of resources, staffing and overheads. They are able to tell quickly if the application is requesting too much or not requesting enough. If your proposal seems too expensive, or too cheap, they will assume you haven't planned it carefully and will doubt your ability to successfully deliver it.
- Use the space provided in the application form to provide clarity and a breakdown of costs if you are unable to do so on the budget spreadsheet. If the costs of any items are unclear to the assessor, then they may reduce your budget accordingly. In many cases they do not have the time to clarify with the applicant.
- Read all information provided on the webpage, guidance notes and frequently asked questions (FAQs) to get a full understanding of what you are able to request.
- Many funds have a limitation on capital costs and management costs etc. The fund information will state if there is a maximum percentage you can apply for such costs. In addition, capital costs may have a maximum cap for individual items. Please ensure you follow the budget criteria for such costs before submitting your application.
- Ensure you read the guidance and budget information and note the costings you are applying for in the correct section of the budget.
- Do not apply for less or more than the fund limits. This can in some cases lead to automatic rejection.

## Structure for a successful application

Funders receive a large number of applications and usually cannot fund them all. While a successful funding application cannot be guaranteed, the following tips will help ensure your application is fully considered and is in a strong position to be successful.

### Tell your story

#### About you

- Clearly describe who you are and what you do (your organisation). Demonstrate credibility, track record and that you are well run. Highlight that your organisation has the skills and experience to deliver projects.

### Your cause

- Give a clear overall aim of the project. Detail the issue or problem identified and provide the evidence of need, including facts and figures. Detail why your proposal is necessary.

### The plot

- Detail what you are going to do, the activities you will run, the resources you will need and provide a strong and detailed budget.

### The characters

- Detail the key staff and volunteers that will be involved in the project delivery, including skills and experience. Consider who else you need to work with to deliver the project and provide details on these partners. Note any community beneficiaries. For referees, make sure they are appropriate, available and aware of your proposal (and that they have been asked to be your referee!).

### Happy ending

- This is about describing the outcomes you are proposing to achieve. For funders, outcomes are key. They want to know what is going to be the result of their funding and what will the funding achieve. Be clear that your proposal will fit with the outcomes that the funder has identified.

## Top tips for making a successful application

### **Make sure you are eligible for the available funding**

- Be sure that you are able to meet the aims of the fund and meet the funder's criteria. It can be a recipe for disaster if you try to change your organisation/ project criteria and outcomes to fit those that the funder is looking for.

### **Follow all available guidance**

- Make sure you read all available guidance. This will be found on the fund promotional information, on the webpage (including links to additional information) as well as additional guidance note at certain questions on the application form.

### **Clearly address the funder's criteria**

- Have a copy of the funder's criteria next to you when completing your application so that you can refer to it. They have set their criteria for a reason, so don't deviate from it.

### **Read the Frequently asked questions (FAQs)**

- FAQs contain a lot of information. If you have a query about something, there is a chance that somebody has had the same query, so the answer will be provided for everybody. FAQs also provide detail about eligibility, criteria and the aims of the fund. They can also contain detailed information on what you can and cannot request in your proposed budget – this will include caps and limitations for certain items.

### **Answer all the questions properly**

- Even if you think you have answered a question elsewhere in the application form, ensure you answer it again where specifically asked. Assessors will not be able to read the whole application form looking for your answers in other parts, or read between the lines trying to work out your answer.
- A common mistake is to miss out answering a question, forgetting to tick a box or not upload/submit requested documents. Ensure that you answer all questions on the application form. If anything is missing or not answered, it can lead to an automatic rejection.
- Read through the whole application form to get an understanding of the whole process. This will allow you to see what is being asked for and where, which may save you time by duplicating your answers.

### **Be clear and concise**

- Keep your answers clear and understandable. Remember that assessors are required to assess numerous applications, so help to make it easier for them. Use short paragraphs and bullet points, so that your information is clear and that it stands out.
- If lengthy and wordy paragraphs are used, your points can get lost within it, and it can also be very off putting and challenging to read and understand.

### **Avoid jargon, buzz words or Acronyms**

- It is important that you answer the questions clearly. Do not use language or jargon that could be unfamiliar to others. It can be tempting to use language and buzz words that you are familiar with, but consider whether it is widely used or not and avoid the use of acronyms unless you state fully what they stand for.

### **Assume the assessor doesn't know your organisation or project**

- Many funders will use external assessors. Assessors may not be from your area and may not know your organisation. Therefore it is crucial that you clearly answer questions and assume the assessor doesn't know the background to your organisation and activities.
- If you are applying to a rolling fund, assume that it will be a different assessor who is assessing your application from your previous one. Do not put in statements such as "We will deliver the same project as we did before" and then not explain what you did before.

### **Don't oversell your proposal**

- There is nothing to be gained by putting in unnecessary outcomes or large numbers. Funders prefer you to be realistic. They have extensive experience knowing what can be achieved within a certain budget and with what resources you have.
- Don't overstretch yourself. It can be tempting to put in your application that you will achieve many outcomes and meet plenty of targets, in order to make your application seem more appealing to funders. However, you should consider that quality is often better than quantity. Remember that if your application is approved, you have to deliver what you said you would in your proposal, so consider carefully what you can achieve within the time and resources you have.

### **Measuring outcomes**

- It is equally important to demonstrate to funders how you will measure the change that is achieved. You should use a range of methods. Some quantitative methods (statistical, registers, questionnaires, tools) and some qualitative methods (photos, case studies, quotes).

### **Only enclose requested information and documents**

- Do not be tempted to upload documents that have not been requested, even if you refer to them within your application. Assessors will not use it in their assessment, they will only look at requested information.
- If you don't upload or submit documents that have been requested, don't assume that an assessor will chase you up for it. Depending on the volume of applications, this could be an automatic rejection.

### **Proof read your application before submission**

- Read through your application to be sure it is clear, that you have answered all questions and to check for any typing or grammatical errors.

- Get someone who doesn't know your project (or even better, your organisation) to read through your application. Get them to see if they understand what you are proposing to do. They will be able to pick up on anything they don't think is clear or something that doesn't make sense to them.

### **If unsure about anything, contact the funder**

- It is always good to speak with the funder for guidance if you are unsure about anything. They will be able to support your query. However, ensure you have read the guidance and FAQs beforehand as many questions can be answered within.
- Don't be afraid to contact the funder. Funder's are more than happy to help as they want everybody to have the best chance of submitting a successful application.
- It is always beneficial to develop a good relationship with the funder.

### **Unsuccessful applications**

- Should you be unsuccessful in your application, you should always look to get feedback. You can use this feedback to develop and inform future applications that you submit for other funds.