

Applying for Grants

All groups need money at some point even if it's just a small amount to produce some publicity materials, hire a room for meetings or buy some tea and buns for your users and volunteers.

Applying for a small grant isn't rocket science – but it's easy to mess up if you haven't done it before. So here's a bit of advice for fundraising virgins.

READ THE GUIDELINES CAREFULLY - and make sure you understand them - and then make sure you use them when drawing up your application. You'd be surprised how many applications I see where the applicants have clearly not even bothered to read the guidelines - needless to say - these applications NEVER SUCCEED.

If there's anything in the guidelines you aren't sure about - contact the funder and see if they can clarify it for you. (You can expect different levels of support from different funders - some don't really have the capacity to offer a lot of support to applicants - but it's always worth a try). Funders should at the very least be able to answer technical queries about the application form.

Most funders want the following information

Who are you? – the name and purpose of your group - what you do – or if you're a new group – what you would like to do?

What do you want this particular bit of money for? – give a clear explanation of what you want to do, e.g. we want to run a series of 6 arts workshops for adults with mental health issues or we want to buy a computer, create a website and develop an e-newsletter for teenage parents - or whatever.

Do not use vague phrases like “We want to run some activities for young people from disadvantaged communities” – tell them what that really means – for example, we want to set up a peer mentoring program for young people aged 11 – 14 living in The Meadows. This will involve recruiting and training volunteer mentors, running confidential drop-in sessions after-school and at weekends, etc. etc.

Why is it needed? - This should be about NEED not WANT - ideally you should be able to demonstrate that you have talked to your target group - mental health service users, teenage parents or whatever and that you want to do this activity in response to the needs they have expressed.

Funders are less and less keen to support projects that someone has just dreamed up as a good idea without any reference to the potential users of the project.

You might think that older people attending a lunch club might like to stay on for a game of bingo or a bit of ballroom dancing – which seems like a reasonable idea - but unless you've actually asked them what they'd like to do you have no evidence that this sort of activity will meet their needs. They might surprise you with requests for white water rafting or bungee jumping.

Phrases like “urgent need” or “widespread disadvantage” don't tell the funder anything meaningful. Explain what you mean – XX% of residents in our area are over 60, we have the highest rate of exclusion from school in the city, the unemployment rate in our area/community is x% higher than the local/regional/national average etc. Have a look at www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/nomad/ - it has all sorts of information about the City – often broken down to ward or even sub-ward level. You can also find information that might help to support your case at www.eastmidlandsobservatory.org.uk and www.statistics.gov.uk/

Who is going to benefit? – Try and give a detailed description of the type of people who will benefit from the project – e.g. people over 50 living on a low fixed income with limited access to amenities and services in their local community – or whatever.

Explain how they are going to benefit – e.g. Our project will provide transport and learning buddies for older people wanting to access learning opportunities provided by local colleges or project users will develop self confidence, self esteem and improve their communication skills – or whatever it is you hope your project will achieve. Try and estimate how many people will benefit (this bit will also be easier if you've actually spoken to people about your project beforehand).

How are you going to monitor and evaluate your project? What's the difference between monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring is about recording what's happening as it happens – so, things like counting the number of sessions you run, counting the number of people attending each session, counting how many people complete the activity, counting how many progress to other activities or learning opportunities, how many volunteers are involved in running your project etc. These are what we call *hard outcomes*.

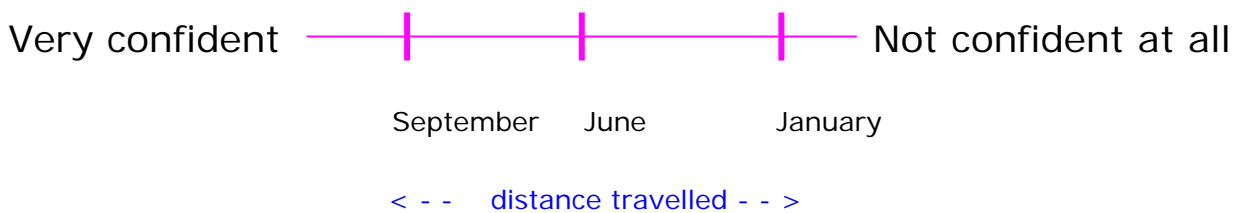
It can also be about looking (and recording) the impact the project is having on individual users. This can often be about *soft outcomes* – like increased confidence or better communication skills. These can be harder to measure. Two good ways of measuring soft outcomes are by self assessment and observation.

For example you could ask each user to mark how confident they are on a scale like this in relation to different questions.

Very confident ————— Not confident at all

You might ask - How confident to you feel about using public transport on your own? Or How confident do you feel about filling in a job application form. Your questions will depend on your project.

If you ask them at the beginning of the project and then periodically during the life of the project – there should hopefully be a difference – this is called **the distance travelled**. For example:



Workers, sessional staff, volunteers and even other project users can also record their observations about progress they feel is being made – for example; “When X first came to the project she was quite withdrawn and would not take part in group activities. Now she is joining in group activities and discussions on a regular basis.

Evaluation is about reflecting on your project once it’s over – assessing how successful it’s been – and identifying weaknesses too. Looking at ways you might improve your project if you ran it again. (There is nothing wrong with making mistakes – the only thing wrong about mistakes is not learning from them – or worse still – pretending there have been no mistakes).

How much is it going to cost? – Draw up a clear, itemised budget (based on real prices - not your guesstimate of how much things might cost). I often see budgets with items like – Digital Camera £200 – there are no digital cameras on sale for £200 – so if it costs £199.99 – use that figure in your budget. Groups often underestimate things like volunteer expenses – I often see budgets with Volunteer expenses £100 – but when I ask them where the figure comes from – it’s generally out of thin air – it just sounds like a reasonable amount. It isn’t hard to work out something like this – if your project is planning to use three volunteers, once a week for six months and provide them with their bus fare – that isn’t a hard sum – $3 \times 26 \times £2.50 = £187.50$. In this case just putting £100 in the budget for volunteer travel expenses would leave you £87.50 short – with some disgruntled volunteers. Little things like this can seriously jeopardise your project – so sit down and do the sums.

Get written estimates (or download price information from the internet, or photocopy the relevant pages from the supplier’s catalogue) for equipment and materials you want to buy. If you plan to employ sessional workers get them to write a letter to you, outlining their experience and/or qualifications,

exactly what they are going to provide and exactly how much they are going to charge you, e.g. 26 hours of jobsearch support at £16 per hour.

Don't think that by asking for less money you are likely to be more successful. Don't cut corners. Funders do want good value – but they also want to support good quality, properly resourced projects. Underestimating on your budget is more likely to tell the funder that you don't really understand what it costs to deliver the project.

Advice and Support

Applicants who get help and support with their applications are – statistically – up to 8 times more successful than applicants who 'go it alone'. Check your local CVS or other umbrella organisation. If you're a branch of a bigger organisation, see if your regional or national office can help. See if your local authority has any development officers that can help. Best of all – see if you can find a funding buddy – someone who has already applied successfully to a fund you're interested in. Funders often publish (or might tell you) lists of projects they have funded in the past. See if one of these might help you – obviously not every organisation will have the capacity to help you – but even busy people can be surprisingly generous with their time.

Consultants – contrary to popular belief, hiring a consultant to write your funding bids for you is statistically likely to be less successful than writing the bid yourself. (Trust me – I'm a consultant). Someone parachuting in to write a bid can't always get to grips with the vision or ethos of your organisation and almost certainly won't be able to champion it as passionately as you. Plus you have the added disadvantages of it costing you a shed load of money and leaving your group with no new fundraising skills.

Resources

Nottingham CVs has an online funding search facility - www.open4community.info/nottingham1 - you can use it to look for sources of funding.

At www.funderfinder.org.uk you can download two free bits of software – *Apply Yourself* and *Budget Yourself* that can help you with writing applications and project budgets.

The Charities Information site at www.cibfunding.org.uk has a lot of useful information about applying for grants.

Good Luck!

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