

How to write a funding application

This guide provides a range of information and advice on how to write the very best application form for potential funders. It is not a guarantee of success however.

There are over 180,000 registered charities across England, all of whom are applying for funding from an ever limited financial resource.

Basic principles

- Always keep your project plan in mind. Never overestimate and commit yourself to a project you will not be able to complete, even if it sounds better in the application.
- Write in plain English. Use short sentences and avoid acronyms and jargon. There is no need to use formal or flowery language. Remember that you are describing your work to someone who has never met you or seen what you do.
- Be specific about what you plan to do. Attempt to give accurate forecasts.
- Focus your application on the funder's priorities. You can research the funder's priorities in advance of applying. Make sure you adhere to their priorities.
- Provide evidence that your work is needed. Support Cambridgeshire can assist you with this process. Please contact info@supportcambridgeshire.org.uk.
- Include all the information the funder has asked for and any additional information or documents they require. If you fail to return the correct documentation there is every chance that your application will be rejected.

- Take extra care to meet the deadline. Late applications will generally not be considered. Make your budget as specific as possible. Get quotes for everything you will need to pay for. Check and check again to make sure all costs are included.
- Do not apply to more than one funder for the same costs at the same time. If you are successful in both applications you will have to reject one of the applications, which could damage your chances of obtaining funding from them in future. The only exception to this is applications to very small trusts. It sometimes makes sense to write to several trusts for funding for the same costs, as each one may only be able to make a small contribution towards these costs.

Writing a letter of application

If a funder has a standard application form then use it. If not, you will need to write a letter.

Focus your letter on the aims and criteria of the organisation you are applying to, and how your project or activities fit into these. Do not send standard letters. Your letter should be:

- on headed paper
- addressed personally to the named contact for the funding body
- short and concise. Keep your letter to two sides of A4 and focus on providing relevant information about your group, what you want to do, and why it fits into the priorities of the funder
- always written in plain English, and
- signed by a member of your group who can be contacted for further information.

Some funders will tell you what to include in your letter. If they do not, you must include the following.

- Your project title if you have one.
- A summary of the project, and how much money you are applying for.
- An introduction to your group including your aims, key achievements to date and support from other bodies.
- A clear description of the project or activities you are planning.
- Why the project is important and how it will benefit its users.
- A summary of how you will monitor and evaluate the project.

Finish the letter with an offer for them to contact you for more information.

You should attach the following documents to your letter.

- The Project budget, including the elements you are requesting funding for.
- The bank details for your organisation.
- A governing document (such as a constitution or a trust deed).
- The most recent set of audited accounts.

Completing an application form

When you complete an application form follow these basic guidelines.

- Take care to read each question carefully and make sure your answers include specific information that is relevant to the question. Use the jargon buster at the end of this sheet to help you understand the questions.
- Give yourself enough time to research the funder to ensure that you can answer all of the questions fully.
- Be clear, precise, and positive about your group and your proposed project.
- Keep in mind the funder's guidelines and criteria when you are answering the questions.
- Do not include any attachments that are not specifically requested by the funder.
- If the form is online, write your answers in a Word document or similar, so that you can save them as you go along and share them with other people in your group.
- Ask somebody else to check your form thoroughly before you send it off.
- Keep a copy of your completed form.

Jargon busting

Beneficiaries

People who will benefit from your project.

Capital costs

Items or equipment you need to buy, build or repair. These might include items for your group to use, such as bicycles or computers, or repairing or renovating a building.

Evaluation

Everything you do to consider how your project is going.

You can do it on an ongoing basis or at the end of a project but make sure you do and record your findings. It is important to remember what you were aiming to do at the beginning of the project when you are doing an evaluation, so that you can check to see whether you are doing what you set out to do. You can use information you gather as you are running your project, (monitoring), to help you to do your evaluation. This is why the two are often referred to together as monitoring and evaluation. They mean gathering information about how your project is going, and then looking at it critically and assessing what is going well and what could be improved.

Evidence

Facts and proof that back up your claims.

When applying for funding, evidence will be needed that the people your project is for are facing particular needs or problems which your project will help overcome. When reporting to a funder, you may need to provide evidence that you have done what you said you would do. This could include survey responses, registers of attendance, photographs and receipts.

Indicators

The things you will measure to find out whether you are achieving your outcomes and outputs.

Match funding

Funding from more than one source for the same project. Some funders will require this.

Monitoring

The methods you use to find out how your project is going. They might include taking a register of participants, or doing a survey of your members.

Outcomes

The benefits that happen as a result of your work.

Outputs

What you actually need to do in order to deliver your project.

Qualitative data

Information about what people think, feel and experience about your project.

Quantitative data

Information that you gather through your monitoring process relating to the number of people assisted, or the number of people you have seen as a result of your work..

Revenue costs

Items that you need to pay for that are not physical objects or buildings. They include salary costs, refreshments, volunteer expenses, venue hire and publicity.

About Support Cambridgeshire

Support Cambridgeshire is a trusted partnership of three community based Infrastructure organisations, Hunts Forum, Cambridgeshire ACRE and Cambridge CVS. Support Cambridgeshire can provide you with information, advice and guidance on aspect of applying for funding, and can assist with application forms and the correct documentation you will need to be successful. Simply contact info@supportcambridgeshire.org.uk.