

Introduction

So, you have a great idea and need some money...

Funding applications can be off-putting, and sometimes completely baffling. This booklet is designed to demystify the funding process by providing a step-by-step guide to successfully completing an application.

By following a series of straightforward suggestions, you will be able to confidently apply for funding for your community organisation, and be secure in the knowledge that you have presented your organisation in the best possible way.

Competition for funding is huge, and with more and more organisations forming, the standard of applications is extremely high. Only the best applications and projects are likely to get funding, and knowing the difference between a good and bad application is a useful attribute for the continued funding of your organisation.

What exactly is funding all about?

Funding is a general term that covers anything that helps boost your organisation's finances. From car boot sales to Government grants, if the purpose of the money raised is to help your organisation and your community achieve its aims, then this is considered funding.

A funding application is the way in which money is formally asked for. The people giving out the money – the funding body – will ask you to apply in a certain way, usually by application form or letter, and often at a certain time – usually to meet a deadline.

Once you have sent your application to the funding body, it will be assessed along with any other applications from groups or organisations. This means that getting the right information across is extremely important. What will make your application stand out from the others? Why should they give your group the money and not another one?

Having a good idea is sometimes not enough. Having a good idea and being able to show how it can be achieved, the impact that it will have on your community and the steps you have put in place to make sure that the money is spent how it should be, are all things to consider when applying for funding.

Questions to consider before applying

What do we need the money for?

Different funding bodies can meet different needs, so what you need the money for will determine who you apply to. If you are clear about what you want to achieve we think you will find it easier to invite the right funders and the right groups looking for funding.

E.g. Want a drop-in centre? Consider applying to a fund that promotes community activity.

Have you done research?

Are you able to show the funder that what you are proposing is wanted and needed by the community? It's a good idea to show any research, pilot schemes or questionnaires that will prove you have done some research.

How much money do we need?

Again, depending on how much money you want might determine who you apply to. Some funders have a maximum (and minimum!) limit you can apply for, so you need to know this up-front.

Does our application meet the funder's policy and criteria?

Sometimes funders will have a specific purpose in mind for the money that they give out, or the funding may only be available if you live in a certain area. Make sure that you meet the guidelines.

Deadlines - Are you applying at the right time?

Most funding has a set deadline with applications being assessed on a regular basis. However, some funds are only considered yearly, or twice yearly, so make sure that you consider the deadline prior to applying.

Once you've established the deadline, give yourself plenty of time to complete the application and get it to the funder. If it says mid-day on the 31st, it's not a good idea to be rushing it in by hand at two minutes to twelve on the appointed day.

Have you got the most up-to-date funder details?

Funder details can change as quickly as anyone else's can. Before writing an impassioned plea to the named contact, make sure it's still the same person.

Before sending it off, make sure that the organisation or company you're writing to is still at the same address. A quick phone call is a way of finding out. Address any letter to a named individual if you can, this is much better than 'Dear Sir'.

What about your contact details?

Of course, you will be applying for funding on behalf of your organisation, but you will still need to put down a specific contact name in case the funder needs to get in touch. As such, make sure that the named contact is someone who is readily available and very familiar with the application details.

What will happen after you get the money?

Before applying for funding, consider what you will do once you receive the money. Your application will be strengthened if the funder can see evidence that you have previous experience, or access to support and advice.

“When is a computer not a computer?...”

Or, explaining the need ...

One of the most common reasons why a funding application fails is because the reason behind it is not as detailed as it could be.

Remember that the funding body you are applying to only has the information that you have supplied, so if you don't put enough information on there, then you could be selling your organisation short.

You	Funder
Our organisation needs funding for a computer please...	Why???
To organise things. We're running this fantastic course you see...	Why???
Because there's an issue that people should know about	Why???
Because we're a pro-active community, and we feel passionately about changing things	Ah... so why didn't you say that in the first place?

A computer is just a computer. A passionate cause on the other hand is something that people can get fired up about.

Think beyond the immediate request. You may only need a computer, but explaining the reasons behind wanting one can be a huge bonus to your application.

Planning ahead ...

As mentioned earlier, it's a good idea to show evidence that you've already thought about what's going to happen once you have the money, but it might be an idea to really plan ahead for all eventualities.

That way, a funder will know you've thought about everything.

So, you need a computer for your organisation, and you've explained to the funder that it's not just about the computer, but rather about what having a computer will allow your community to achieve. A few practical points might help though ...

- Can someone use the computer proficiently?
- Will tutoring be required?
- Where's the computer going to be kept?
- Is it being kept somewhere secure?
- Will it be insured?

Being able to show a funder that you've thought about things in this much detail can strengthen your application.

Of course, each project – or idea – will require it's own specific forward planning. Some projects may be larger than others and will require much more thought up front.

Is the funding enough for the life of the project

If you are considering setting up a drop-in centre for your community to use indefinitely, what happens when this particular funding runs out? Is there a next funding step to take that will ensure the centre stays open... or will it be self-sustaining by then.

If you think this is the case then make sure that you have a business plan to back it up, not just wishful thinking.

Do you have access to the right skills?

If you are considering providing a taught course, how will this be delivered? Have you been able to draw together the different trainers and accommodation that will be required for the course to go ahead. Showing that you have put all this in place when you apply for funding is vital for your application to be successful.

If in doubt, ask an expert

There are local organisations (see www.learnEAST.org.uk) that can help guide you through the minefield. If you're not sure whether or not you've considered everything, give someone a ring.

Getting started...

OK, you have the application details and guidelines, a pen, and a first class stamp. Suddenly it seems to be the perfect opportunity to defrost the freezer... or maybe clear out the loft – anything to put off sitting down and facing the application head on. Don't worry. There are some simple steps you can take to make sure the task is less overwhelming and more manageable.

1. **Divide the application up into manageable sections** - Remember, you only have to deal with one question at a time. So if that's all you prefer to do at one sitting, then that's all you need to do. Don't pressurise yourself by thinking you have to tackle it all in one go.
2. **Set a clock** - Give yourself a set time of, say, 30 minutes to concentrate on the application at a time when you are least likely to be disturbed. Switch off the TV, find a quiet space, and stick to the time. It's far less stressful to think of concentrating for several lots of 30 minutes than it is for 1 chunk of several hours.
3. **Fill out a practice application first** - Instead of writing directly onto the application form, either photocopy (if you can) or use a blank sheet of paper to write your answers first. This minimises the risk of making a mess of the original application form.
4. **Keep a dictionary handy** - In a world of electronic communication, with bleeps and buzzes to tell us when something is spelt wrong, it's easy to forget how handy a dictionary can be. If you have any reservations at all about the correct spelling of a word, then check it out. Incorrect spellings will make your application look sloppy.
5. **Pick up a phone** - There are specialists that can offer funding advice (see www.learnEAST.org.uk). If you need help with any part of your application don't be worried about ringing and asking - what might seem like a daft question to you is perfectly valid when you're dealing with an area you know little about. However, if you're going to ask questions, make sure you ask someone who knows the answer, such as a funding adviser.

Tackling the application ...

Every funder has their own application process. Some require a lengthy form to be completed, while others may prefer a letter.

Some will require more specific information than others, which means carefully reading through each set of guidelines. Outlined below are some general thoughts to consider when approaching an application form.

Name of your group or organisation	Make sure that the name of your organisation remains the same throughout. If it says West Side Community Group on your application and West Side Community Organisation on your bank details then your application might be knocked back.
The contact details	Make sure that the person completing the form is the one best placed to answer any queries.
The work of your group or organisation	State clearly what your organisation does, and how long it's been running. Often your experiences can help support an application. Be careful not to waffle though, they only need straight facts. Establish that your group has the ability, skills and enthusiasm to carry out the work.
What is the money for?	Try and explain your project in terms of being a problem that needs addressing. Funders are familiar with the type of issues you have, and putting your organisation forward as the solution will strengthen your case.
Who will benefit, and how?	This is a chance to really build up your case. Be sure to explain how much your community will benefit from this particular funding. The message to get across is <u>'this is something that really matters to our community'</u> .
How much?	Some smaller funders have an upper limit of how much you can apply for, so make sure you know the limit. Also, make sure that you apply for enough funding to cover your project. Be realistic - don't say that you can do something for an amount that won't stretch that far.
How much?	Be sure to take into account any unseen costs, or overheads. This may be wages for someone to manage the project, or office costs.
How much?	Your request for funds may need to be supported by a budget, or other relevant material. Make sure you enclose everything they ask for, however irrelevant it seems. It's a good idea to keep a copy for yourself of how you have worked it all out. You may need to refer back later to how you arrived at a particular figure.
Budget	Funders may ask to see a separate budget. Make sure this is laid out neatly, is to the point and accurate. Make sure all the figures have been double-checked and that nothing has been missed off.

Word limit	Some funders impose word limits to answers on the application form; ie “Your answer should be no more than 200 words”. If this is the case, do not exceed the word limit.
Supporting material	Make sure that it’s okay to include supporting material (some funders may only want a completed form – if this is the case it usually says so in the guidelines) and then enclose things that may strengthen your application, such as leaflets, press cuttings or references.
KEEP A COPY OF EVERYTHING YOU SEND.	Keep everything to do with the application together so that it can be referred to if necessary. If you don’t have access to a photocopier, write down an itemised and detailed list of everything you’ve sent, particularly outlining any facts of figures you may need to recall. A list like this may help jog your memory a couple of months down the line.

Of course, while some funding bodies have application forms, others may prefer you to send an individual letter. This might seem a little off-putting to start with – after all, an application form is a matter of putting the right information into the right space – but they’re not actually that different. You need to get the same information across in whatever format. These are some simple guidelines on applying for funds by letter.

Start Small	You don’t have to launch straight into the letter that you’re going to send. Make a list of all the issues you want to cover on scrap paper first. Single words will do.
Build it up	Once you have a list of single words, make them into readable sentences. Tackle each one individually; it doesn’t matter at this stage that you might be writing too much. It’s easier to get it all down on paper first – you can always take some out later.
Cut and paste	Imagine that you are the funder. Does the letter flow easily from one subject to another? Is it readable? Does it make sense? Has it covered everything? Make sure that your sentences are all laid out in a way that makes sense.
Edit	Now is the time to cut out anything that’s too much. You might find that a couple of your sentences cover the same thing. Is this necessary? Have you kept to your point? A good rule of thumb is keeping your letter to no more than 2 sides of A4 paper, unless the funder asks for a specific length.
Show it	Find someone who’s opinion you value, and who you can trust to be honest with you. What do they think of the letter? If they have any useful advice then use it. It’s not criticism, and it doesn’t mean that you’ve failed. It simply means that sometimes two heads are better than one.

On the next page we give a typical example of an application letter.

Example – Application Letter

Your organisation details go at the top

The name of the contact and the funding body address goes next

Followed by the date

Dear (Don't forget to use the person's name if you can)

You may want to start your letter off with an **introduction** outlining your organisation, how long you have been running and what you do – you might also like to say what kind of impact your organisation has on the wider community.

Next, explain **why you need the money** - it's a good idea to illustrate how receiving this money, and therefore being able to go ahead with your project, will benefit your community. Be clear about **how much money** you want and also mention any other financial contributors to the project (You may decide to fund the project from more than one source).

Explain why you are applying to this particular fund and how this project will meet their criteria. Tell them about any **supporting material** you have enclosed, and any other details about the project – such as how the idea came about – that might strengthen your application.

Attach a budget if you have one. Being able to show the funder that you have covered all financial aspects will let them know you have thought things through to the last detail.

Sign off positively.

- Make sure your letter is neat and readable.
- Enclose any supporting material.
- Keep a copy of everything.

Budgets ... a closer look

The word budget often conjures up a mental image of rows of figures beyond comprehension, and a cold sweat to go with them.

However, a budget can be as straightforward as a shopping list. It is simply a way of showing the funder how the money is going to be spent.

Again, it comes down to being able to show the funder that you have thought about every eventuality. From accommodation to drawing pins – it all needs to be budgeted for.

As well as being for the funder, a precise budget is a way of enabling your organisation to keep track of where the money is going – and to make sure you don't overspend in any one particular area.

+	Make sure your budget covers everything you can possibly think of. It's better to budget slightly over than find out you haven't covered everything. It might be an idea to have a group meeting and throw it open to suggestions. The different experiences people can bring often turn up things that you may not have thought of alone.	
+	Allow a contingency. This means budgeting in a small amount to cover the unknown. Something that might crop up down the line which could not possibly have been seen before hand. It is usually better to add a little more to each budget heading than putting a sum of money under the heading of "Contingency".	
-	Don't guess. This may take a little research, but make sure the amounts you put down are accurate. Guessing the costs may find you short of cash somewhere down the line.	
+	Detail your information as well as you can. If you already know where you are going to get a computer from and how much it will cost, it's perfectly feasible to put this information into the budget.	
=	Give your budget a title and a date	
	ITEM	COST
1	List all your items individually in this column	Put the cost of each item individually in this column
2		
3	Once all the items are down, add them up accurately	PUT THE TOTAL AMOUNT HERE

Check it over...

Have you got an idea that is both practical and feasible to fund?	
Has the planning been done to make sure that the project will work?	
Have you researched different funders and decided who to apply to?	
Do you meet the funder's criteria?	
Have you checked out the deadline?	
Has everything been costed into a budget?	
Are the funder contact details the most up to date?	
Are you asking for enough money? – recheck the budget	
Have you thought about the long term planning. What happens to the project once the money you have been given runs out?	
Have you answered everything on the application form?	
Have you attached any supporting material that may strengthen your application?	

... And finally

The application has been sent and a copy of all documentation is in front of you.

Put it away! Depending on the funding body, it may take quite some time to get back to you, they may send an acknowledgement to say that they have received your application, but after that it's a matter of waiting.

One good way to deal with this waiting time is to apply to other places, there's no reason why you cannot apply to more than one funding body at a time. Just make sure that your letter / application form, is tailor written for each funder. They are all individual, and their criteria differ slightly. Read through each set of application guidelines, no matter how many times you've done it before, adapt each application accordingly.

Keep a record of all the applications you send, and whether or not you are successful. The more records you start to keep, the easier the application process becomes.

You will learn which funders are unlikely to fund you time after time, and which funders have taken more of an interest, or given you money. Keeping a record base like this also allows other members of your organisation to benefit from the knowledge you have built up – there may be a time when you are unavailable.

If you are unsuccessful in your application don't take it personally, the competition for funding is very high. Try again, often there is something to be learned from a failed application – perhaps there are things you could do differently next time.

If you are successful – congratulations!

Things you may want to find out more about ...

What will be expected of you if your application is successful?

Once you have received money from a funding body, your organisation will be accountable for the way that money is spent. This is a condition of receiving the money, and you may have to keep the funder up to date with a progress report from time to time.

The funder will let you know what is expected, but if you want to know in advance of applying a polite phone call to the funder should clear things up. If this is not possible perhaps there is another group who has received funding from that particular funder – they may be able to advise you of what to expect.

Submitting a constitution

Some organisations will ask you to submit a copy of your constitution with your application. This is a document that outlines your group's work and how your organisation runs and must cover a number of points to be valid. Your local CVS (Council for Voluntary Service) or your local infrastructure organisation can advise you about how to draw up a constitution.

A financial plan

If your group is applying for a lot of money for a large, long term project then you may be asked to submit a financial plan – or business plan – with your application. This is a long-term plan of how you see the finances working. It is definitely something you should take expert advice on. Again, your CVS / local infrastructure group can signpost you in the right direction.

A child protection policy

If your project is to benefit children – such as a crèche – then the funder will want to know that you have a child protection policy already in place. Ask an expert about this before applying for any funding for children.

Other policies

Other policies you may be asked for include:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Health and Safety Policy.

Document History

This booklet was originally produced by Humberside Learning Consortium in partnership with Hull CVS, Community Investment Fund and VOLCOM, with funding from the Learning and Skills Council.

This updated issue was produced by learnEAST for the Third Sector in East Anglia.