GET FUNDING READY 2019

Writing Grant Applications - Helpful Hints

Following are some tips to keep in mind during the grant-writing process:

Know what you want to do and what kind of grant you require. This is the most important place to start. Before anything else, make sure you are clear in your own mind what type of project you want to do, what kind of grant you require and why you want it. Go for funds that will support you to achieve this vision, do not change this vision to fit certain funding criteria.

Read the grant guidelines and application form. Many funders have detailed guidelines available to grant-writers. These guidelines are made available so that proposals submitted to them will meet their funding initiatives. Applications that carefully follow the published guidelines and are on the correct form allow funders to easily determine if your project is one that matches their interests. Don't submit a proposal to any funding body without first verifying that your project fits within the funder's guidelines.

Don't start from the point of view 'We need money.' That may be true but it's not what will be important to the funder. Instead, start from the proposition, "We need to do this work which will provide immense benefit to the community, and we need money to do that." It is the community benefit that will be of the most interest to the funder.

Be clear and concise. Put yourself in the place of the funder's grant assessors. They receive and review lots of applications. The more easily and quickly they can determine if your project meets their objectives, the happier they are going to be. Write your proposal as if you are communicating with someone who knows nothing about your organisation or project. Keep in mind that acronyms and terms specific to your profession may mean nothing - or may mean something different - to the funder.

Proofreading is imperative. Have someone who was not involved in the writing process proofread your proposal before it is submitted. Typos, poor grammar, and other errors that may be quickly identified by a separate set of eyes are easy to overlook in your own work. Submitting a proposal with such errors, however, gives the impression that you either don't know better or are willing to submit shoddy work.

Try using a catchy project name. A catchy name, like "Reach for the Sky" which is also descriptive of the project, can make a big difference. First impressions are important! Remember funders want to promote your project proudly as one of their great projects.

Collaboration is vital. Funders often prefer to fund projects that have the greatest impact for the community and that don't duplicate others. Partnerships between organisations are encouraged, to share resources and information.

A budget is a must. Research your budget needs carefully before submitting your proposal. Do not ask for more - or less - than you feasibly need to ensure your project's success. Prepare a detailed budget that takes into account all the spending you'll have to do on the project. Make sure to include the in-kind contribution in volunteer hours etc to demonstrate your contribution to the project.

Evaluation. Many applications now ask you to describe how you're going to work out whether your project is a success. Evaluation should be part of planning a project and preparing a grant application. It will boost your application if you can indicate what your goals are and how you plan to measure your success in meeting them.

Recycle proposal text. Although each proposal should be customised, paragraphs from previous grant applications should provide the building blocks for future submissions.

OUR TIP

➢ Create a file on the device you use for the administration for your organisation that is dedicated to FUNDING.
➢ Within this file create a document (Lets Call it Essential Funding Information)
➢ Add to this document all the core information about your organisation that you know you will need for most grants; description of organisation, description of project, key contact person including role within the group and contact details, PPN number, links to Social Media Platforms, Bank Account details. You can then use this file to cut and paste information into any application form instead of wasting time seeking it out each time
➢ Add to this file any extra documents funders may look for ie copy of Tax Clearance Certificate, that can then easily be included as an attachment. Also save to this file your most recent bank statements as they come through.

Address project sustainability. Funders want to know that, if your project is successful, it will have a legacy even after their financial support has ended.

Measurable outcomes. Once the grant-funded project is complete, exactly what was produced, how will it be disseminated and how many people will have benefited? How do you intend to measure tangible outcomes to prove the projected benefit actually occurred?

COMMON PITFALLS IN SEEKING FUNDING AND WRITING GRANT APPLICATIONS

Failing to understand it's a competitive process. Unless funding is a sure bet, always assume demand is higher than supply.

Downloading the wrong grant application. Similar-sounding grant applications could be issued simultaneously by the same funder. Or an out-of-date application might also still be on the Web site.

Not reading the grant application thoroughly. Highlight the most important parts (like due dates and required documents). Mark anything you don't understand or where you need to find answers.

Not reading the grant application early enough. Don't delay - leaving yourself too little time to make important contacts, gather important data, calculate costs accurately, and write your application can be disastrous!

Assuming the funder knows your organisation. Even if you are a prolific grant seeker, don't assume application readers will mentally fill in the missing information. Don't depend on prior knowledge or past relationships.

Disregarding the funder's questions. If it's important to the funder, it's important to you.

Reorganising the proposal. Don't get creative with you application **-** Follow the format instructions and place items where the funder has requested them.

Being incomplete (including signatures if required). This could cost you points in scoring, or it could mean being considered nonresponsive and therefore disqualified.

Using a former proposal without updating it. If you're going to use it, at least update key information.

Using a proposal previously submitted to another funder. By all means "recycle" proposals, just be sure to change key details

Not doing the math correctly. Use a calculator or Excel but make sure the numbers add up! Funders lose confidence when budgets or estimates aren't accurate.

Poorly estimating real costs. Be realistic about what you need. Don't create a budget that reflects the maximum allowed just because the money's there.

Starting your project before getting the grant. If the ink isn't dry on the contract, don't assume it's a done deal and don't lock yourself into commitments.

Good Preparation

There are questions that you'll be asked pretty much every time you write a grant application. Get good at answering those questions and you'll get more successful at applications.

The following provides a brief description of the sorts of information most funders ask for, but be aware that the questions may be different or differently expressed for each and every one.

Organisation Description

Here, the funder wants your organisation to establish its credibility and qualifications for funding, and get a feel for how your programmes have been developed to meet identified needs.

They may ask you to include short, relevant descriptions of the qualifications and experience that your organisation (and its key staff) have in the area for which program funds are being sought. Develop varied versions of standard grant components – mission statement, service description, organisational history – in two-sentence, one paragraph, and one page formats. Store this in your Funding file to cut and paste from. This pre-approved text will make the preparation of applications much easier, because less time will be required for basic organisational descriptions.

Project Description

Most funders require you to provide a detailed project description. This should include:

Purpose of the project. What will the project accomplish?

Why you are doing this project. Why is the project needed? How does it fit in with your organisation's mission?

How will you make it happen. What resources are needed to carry out the project? What steps will you take to prepare for and execute the project?

Who will do what. Who will run the project?

How will you know you've done well. What results are expected from the project? What are its goals and objectives? How will the project be evaluated?

Summing it all up. Can you sum up the proposal in two or three sentences to leave them with a simple picture they can really remember?

It's vital to establish a specific problem or issue in a geographically (or interest-based – e.g. youth homelessness, rural depression, community building) identifiable area.

The problem needs to be one that you can prove your organisation can realistically address (or contribute to addressing). Look to your Local Economic and Community Plan. If you can demonstrate your project is in line with the bigger vision for the county then this would be a positive for local decision makers.

http://www.sligococo.ie/lcdc/LocalEconomicandCommunityPlan/

Produce evidence:

Use up-to-date and accurate data based on objective research. Go to http://www.sligoppn.com/sligo-data-analysis/ for signposting to local data and statistics that might help your applications

Tell the story:

An evocative case study illustrating the issue will drive your points home better than descriptions might.

Project Budget

A budget is an integral part of a grant application.

Many funders will look at the budget to see how it fits with your proposal. Grants officers and others working for funders can usually spot an inconsistency pretty quickly, so don't take your budget too casually.

Try to label expenses as clearly as possible. Large amounts listed as "miscellaneous" will send up red flags, so try to avoid these terms.

If an organisation is donating supplies or labour, you should still include these items in your budget. You may want to separate out the "in-kind" expenses so the funder can easily see your non financial contributions to the project. It is important that you show how your group is going to support the project through volunteer hours and "in-kind" donations.

MAKE SURE YOUR BUDGET ADDS UP!
When you've finished your costings, go back over them and see that all the line items add up and that the final total is right.
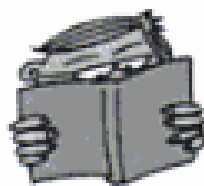
Proofreading

The most important part of any application is READING THE GUIDELINES, following them to the letter, and ensuring that you do actually meet the criteria for the grant – some grantmakers receive up to 30% of applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria.

Follow the application format that the funder asks for, answer the questions that they ask and demonstrate how you are meeting their criteria.

At the end, have someone who hasn't been involved in the application process check it over to see that it meets the guidelines, nothing's been left out, and there are no typos. Ask them to provide feedback on whether they think you've made a compelling case for funding.

Get someone with an eagle eye to check the numbers in your budget.

Aim to get it in well before the due date – the vast majority of applications arrive in the two days closest to the closing date. That leaves nothing up your sleeve for last-minute delays, either at your end or theirs.

Grant Talk

Goals and objectives are often spoken about as if they are the same thing, but they actually are quite different. Goals represent what we want to have achieved at the end of a program. Objectives are the measurable steps we will need to take to get there. Goals are about the outcome; objectives are about the process.

Project Final Evaluation Report

The final report to program funders will probably be the most comprehensive report you prepare. Often program funders will use your report to demonstrate the effectiveness of their grant initiatives and to provide useful information to external interested parties. A report that is useful for this purpose will need to include detailed information about the project, the project evaluation design and methods, and the types of data analyses conducted.

Funders generally require a report that includes:

- an executive summary (this is a summary of findings and recommendations, not a listing of what sections of information are in the report -that's a table of contents)

- a description of the organisation and the project being evaluated (you will now have this on file)

- an explanation of the overall project goals (what the project was trying to achieve), methods used to collect data and information, and project outcomes

- a listing of conclusions (findings) and recommendations

- any relevant attachments, e.g. inclusion of any promotional materials, questionnaires, photos, guides, social media coverage etc.

Promoting Sustainability : Sharing Your Project Results

In addition to producing your Final Project evaluation report for your Funder, you may want to take advantage of other opportunities to share what you have learned with others in your community or with the field in general. You might want to consider drafting letters to community agencies or other organisations that may be interested in the activities and results of your work.

Other ways to let people know what you have done include the following:

- Producing press releases and articles for circulation through Sligo PPN.

- Making presentations on the results of your project at relevant launches, or other settings

- Listing your evaluation report or other evaluation-related publications on relevant websites

- Getting in touch with organisations that have managed similar projects to share your experience and results

Feeling Rejected?

The letter or email giving you "unhappy" news about your application will probably be a standard letter. However, many funders try to provide at least some individual feedback for those who are unsuccessful.

If the feedback supplied isn't quite enough, you may choose to contact the funder and ask, "Can you tell me anything more that will help us another time?" You may learn something encouraging. Perhaps they liked your proposal but just ran out of money; perhaps there was some tiny point of confusion that could be resolved easily.

Please don't make such a call if you are feeling angry or confrontational. Remember, you are trying to get useful information, to support your group in the future

If you are rejected, use the feedback to help improve your project application. Funders are usually happy to accept an amended application in another round, as long as their advice has been taken on board

FINAL CHECKLIST

Are you ready to apply for a grant?

Check your readiness by reviewing the questions below

Can you answer these questions?

1. **Who are you?**
   Yes – proceed to next question
   No – do some more thinking
2. **What do you want to do?**
   Yes – proceed to next question
   No – do some more thinking
3. **Why do you want to do it?**
   Yes – proceed to next question
   No – do some more thinking
4. **What do you expect to achieve?**
   Yes – proceed to next question
   No – do some more thinking
5. **How much will it cost?**
   Yes – proceed to next question
   No – do some more thinking
6. **How much do you want from whom?**
   Yes – proceed to next question
   No – do some more thinking
7. **How much (and what) will you contribute yourself?**
   Yes – proceed to next question
   No – do some more thinking
8. **How long will it take and when will you need to start?**
   Yes – **APPLY**
   No – do some more thinking