

# Sligo Public Participation Network

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## Funding Application Guide 2021

Regardless of the type, scale and number of funding application that you need to make, there are often elements that will be replicable across all grant forms. If you familiarize yourself with these, plan with them in mind and follow the simple suggestions below then your grant seeking may become just that little bit easier.

### 1. Group Details

The first of any application usually asks for your group's name, address and telephone/email. However, some applications may expect a board member (often the chairperson) to be the designated contact for signing key documents if you are successful, so it is good practice to also list this key contact in any applications.

Funders will also ask for your bank details and usually 3 months bank statement. This is not to check up on you, if there is money in your account this does not mean they will not give you more – this is simply so they know your financial affairs are in order. If there is money in your account, you can take the time to explain what this is for and why it cannot be used for the project you are applying for – i.e., many groups need to keep money back for registrations, insurance, rent etc or you might already have that money allocated for a different project.

**PPN Tip:** Create a file on the main PC used by your organization (and don't forget to back it up!!). In this file, keep information such as your registered charity number/company no/CHY number, a copy of key email addresses and numbers, your group Eircode and add a copy of your bank statements to this as they come in. This way you always have it to hand and don't have to keep going back to look up those details you've forgotten... again. Think about also backing this up so it is never lost

## 2. Your Organisation Aims & Objectives

This can be called different things in different application forms, and you might also see requests to tell funders about your vision and mission. It is good practice to have a standard set of aims and objectives that your organisation has agreed to that you can copy and paste into every grant application. It is worth reading through these at the start of each year to make sure that they reflect how your organisations has changed or new priorities you might have, and adapt accordingly. Again, keep these in your group file so that they are always on hand.

**PPN Tip:** Add all this information into your grant file. This will save you time in the future having a single document will all of these pieces of the application to hand.

## 3. Background to your Organisation

Most funders will want to know a little bit about the history of your group, how it began and the types of experiences you have had. Funders want to make sure their money is in safe hands and is used to the achieve the most benefit in the community, so they will want to determine if you have you done similar work to that for which you are applying. While project details may vary, if you can detail the size/scale of projects that your organisation has worked to in the past then this helps demonstrate to the funder that you will have the capacity and previous experience to implement the project as you propose.

While the majority of your background information will stay the same regardless of the application that you are doing, it is also worthwhile amending slightly to make sure that you highlight those aspects that are most relevant to the grant that you are applying for.

**PPN Tip:** Don't forget to update this background information in your file each time you undertake a new initiative or programme as this all adds to your profile. You can also keep photos and media coverage here.

## 4. Evidence of Need

Increasingly funders will want to see that there is evidence to prove that what you are applying for is needed in the community or location where you are applying. How can you prove it? They will also want to know that other groups or organizations are not already doing the same thing. Where similar projects do exist, it is important to show the added value that this project will bring on top of what is already happening, rather than leave funders to see it as duplication.

Have you looked at national statistics and seen if your area performs above or below the national average? Check out the Sligo PPN funding data information on the Sligo PPN website <https://www.sligoppn.com/sligo-data-analysis/>

Have you conducted quantitative or qualitative surveys or other forms of feedback in your community to see what the residents say? If you want any help on carrying out something like this just get in touch with the PPN office.

In order to demonstrate the extent of the 'need', it is often useful to incorporate statistics from a recognised source. So do some homework. Ask around. Find out what are the needs in your community and what is the evidence for it.

**Quantitative data** is information about quantities, and therefore numbers, and qualitative data is descriptive, and regards phenomenon which can be observed but not measured, such as language.

**Qualitative research** involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research.

## 5. Aligning your project to key local strategies

If you are applying to local sources for funding then it is important that you look at their key priorities. Demonstrate how your project will actually help them to achieve their own outcomes and how it can be beneficial to their own reporting. For Sligo, you might look at things such as;

The Sligo Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is the overarching strategic plan for the county. The document is broken down in themes and actions and it is quite easy to align community projects to one or a number of these. The LECP is on the council website

<https://www.sligococo.ie/lcdc/LocalEconomicandCommunityPlan/> or you can find it in libraries or request a copy from Sligo County Council.

You might also consider strategies such as; Healthy Ireland, Age Friendly Sligo, Sligo Climate Mitigation Plan.

## **6. What are you applying for?**

In reality you may be applying for more staff or resources for your organisation. But many funders are not keen to fund organisations regardless of how worthy the cause. Most funders make funding available to tackle particular societal or social needs within communities. So you need to articulate what you are applying for in terms that allows the funder determine that funding you contributes to them successfully tackling the problem they have sought to address. In reality that may amount to seeking more staff or resources but now, at least, it is written in terms that allows the funder know that you are helping them solve their problems.

Try and see things from the funders point of view and write your application accordingly. Imagine that the funder has never heard of you and you cannot rely on your reputation to get you through. Take the funder step by step through what you have identified, how your project will solve it and the difference it will make.

## **7. How does your project meet the criteria?**

Talk to any funder and they will tell you how difficult it is to fund every worthy cause that applies. That's why they impose strict criteria. So think of the criteria like when applying for a job. When you apply for a job the cover letter offers you the chance to tell your prospective employer why you are the best person for the job. The best cover letters respond to the criteria set out in the job description and demonstrate how the applicant meets all of the criteria. Bad cover letters tell the employer why you are the best person for the job without referencing the job spec.

Equally you stand a greater chance of receiving funding if you can outline how your application for funding meets all of the criteria set out.

Do not simply throw in the same application to every grant – funders can spot this a mile off. While the core information may be the same, take the time to tweak it slightly to best suit the specific requirements and to stress specific elements that correspond to what the funder is looking for.

Let's say your general project is the development of a community gym to enhance community health and wellbeing, then your focus in applying to a funder such as community enhancement might focus on the creation of the space, the equipment needed, how it will be managed and in general who it will be available to. If you sent this same application to a funder who prioritises social inclusion, then you would stress the local make up of the community, how this is a space to bring community together, how you intend to make it accessible, what other benefits this shared space may have in terms of addressing isolation etc.

## **8. How Will You Monitor and Evaluate the Project?**

Most funders will want to know how successful (or not) their investment in a project has been. At a minimum they will ask for projects to be self-assessed. That is, the applicant will state up front how it plans to assess the project, collect the monitoring information and conduct the evaluation of the project. If the monitoring and evaluation processes are included at the project planning stage, this becomes much easier to answer.

For larger projects an external evaluator may be brought in to assist with the project's evaluation or to provide an independent eye.

## **9. Project Budget**

Every funder will require a realistic and well costed budget to be submitted with the application. Regardless of what you ask the funder for - you will need to fully cost the project and include every possible expense.

Funders will not generally pay for items retrospectively, i.e. they will not back date a grant for items purchased or salaries already paid. You need to wait to hear

if you have been successful before any expenditure for the items requested can be made.

When applying for funding to cover capital build and equipment, you will need realistic estimates and quotes. For salaries, you are recommended to choose a salary level from a recognized scale. You can check out the pay & benefits survey available through The Wheel and Community Foundation of Ireland. For overheads, it is necessary to detail how you have calculated the costs, for example from previous bills or costs in similar projects.

If you are budgeting for a project, which lasts for more than a year, you will have to take inflation and general cost of living increases into account. Staff salary increases, potential increases in electricity, telephone charges and even stationery all have to be budgeted for. Also, if you are applying for a project that is due to start several months away, will prices have increased during that ten-month period?

Some funding bodies may accept volunteer hours as a community contribution known as a contribution in-kind as match funding. Match funding is where a funder agrees to fund only a percentage of costs and expects funding to be 'matched' from other sources.

## **10. Is the Project Sustainable?**

When a funder asks is the project sustainable they want to know how you will fund the project beyond the amount of money they will provide. You have 3 options:

1. that the project will finish at the end of the grant period
2. that the project will secure funding from other sources
3. that the project will generate its own revenue through services/contract delivery etc.

Don't rely on other organisations to sustain your project for you. It would be unrealistic to state that you expect a statutory body to take on the funding of your project unless you have very strong evidence and commitments to that effect. You are best advised to demonstrate what you can realistically do within

your own resources to secure ongoing funding for the project and/or show how you can wind down the project in an orderly manner.

## 10. After Completing an Application

What happens after you put your application in the post-box? Once you have submitted an application there are still some steps you should take:

1. **Know What Happens to It:** where is it going? Who is assessing it? Follow up if necessary
2. **Know How it is Progressing:** When will assessment be complete? When and how will you be notified?
3. **Keep Records of Correspondence:** Ask for feedback, especially if unsuccessful so that you can learn and improve.
4. **Make other Applications:** Good grant writers can enjoy a 1 in 4 success rate with applications. So that means 3 out of 4 rejections. So you will need a thick skin and you will need to stay resilient and keep submitting regardless of the outcomes. With each rejection make sure to get feedback so you can continuously improve.

# Some Strategies that might help your grant application be more successful

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## **Sell! Sell! Sell!**

Grant applications are more successful if funders have confidence in your group, not just your project. If you can, spend a bit of time investing in your 'brand' – who is your group, why you make a difference etc. Tell the stories of your group and its members – don't just rely on words and text, use photos, case studies and use technology to bring these stories to life. Covid-19 has accelerated the move for traditional community groups to operate in the online world – it is now just a matter of time that groups will have to use, to some extent, effective technology and social media to get attention and success for their group. More and more, grant makers will refer to websites and social media to look into proposals and your work must catch their eye.

There is no illusion that this will be easy for you all – there are several groups who have little or no knowledge of social media and the daunting world it can open – however, used well, it also has huge potential for how you work and there is help available. Certain organizations around Sligo can develop programmes that directly respond to these needs – you just have to ask for help. For example Sligo Volunteer Centre often have volunteers listed with them that have extensive skills who can act either as mentors to your group or take on some of the work in terms of getting your group set up and active online.

The PPN can also try and connect you with other groups in Sligo who are already using technology to their advantage – they may be able to offer you some help or advice.



## **Try and Clearly State What You Do In One Sentence**

There are so many times that organizations and groups are so busy focusing on the project that they want money for that they forget to tell funders what they actually do, presuming that funders will automatically know who they are. This is especially true for grants administered through local authorities – where groups apply again and again and rely on the grant administrator to just know what they are about. This is not good practice, local authority staff change regularly and somebody new to a role will need you to tell them what your group is about. In addition, this type of approach will not work if you ever look for grants outside your own county.

Having your organizations work spelt out clearly might determine the outcome of your grant just as much as the proposal you are putting together because it lets funders know you have experience, it demonstrates that you have a level of sustainability, it gives them confidence that the money will not be wasted. countless times where, after many minutes of scrolling a charity's website, I still can't articulate what it does. Too often, charities coat their activities in jargon using words such as "catalyze" and "empower". Mission and vision statements are important, but they must be supported with a very clear, short explanation that outlines how they help.

## **Be Specific About Where You Work**

Articulate if your work is across the whole county or country, if your focus is urban or rural, how you geographically organize your work.

## **Acknowledge Local Partnership and Existing Work**

Many applications fail to mention other services that operate in their local area. This may be because they are not aware of them or that they think their funding

application will not be successful if others are doing a similar thing. Funders can easily look up organizations and groups operating in your local area and the types of services and programmes they offer. If you have not mentioned these, then funders may think that your application is a duplication of service and therefore a waste of resources. Be sure to let funders know that you are not replicating the other services on offer, that you are aware of them and believe your specific project adds value to these. Even more impressive is if you can demonstrate that you have spoken to these other service providers, that you intend to work alongside them and share ideas to even further enhance positive community impact and to learn from them.

## **Show Your Impact**

Funders want to know just how far their money will go and the type of impact it will have: It may be impossible to know exactly, but try to figure out how many people you have reached in total since you started, how many people you have reached in the past year and how many people you plan to reach in the next year. If your work is not easily quantifiable, do so in whatever way is most appropriate. Where numbers appear low, be sure to detail the qualitative impact that you have had – ie how you have positively changed lives – where participants are willing get their story/quotes directly.

In 2021 this type of information will change dramatically – funders will be looking to see how your group is planning to adapt to the changes that this health crisis has brought about, how you as a group have identified what needs to be done in your community, what, if any, changes Covid-19 has meant for the aims and core operations of your group.

## **Make sure what you're asking for can be easily summarised**

In grant rounds where there are a large number of applicants, funders may often go straight to the project summary to try and shortlist. Your groups must make it as easy as possible for the people who are first going to look at your application to be able to justify it deserving a closer look. Think of your key; who, what, where, when and why and have a few sentences that can be easily fit to these.

## **A Picture Paints a Thousand Words**

Image and pictures really stand out because they illustrate what success looks like, they show in one glance what you have achieved and they allow funders an insight into the real and personal impact of your programme. The pictures don't have to be fancy, you don't need top of the range equipment, they should simply try and capture the positive impact your group has made.

In addition, projects that have strong associated images / video are more likely to be picked up across social media as well as featuring in a funders annual report – and thus they are likely to remember you.

## **Always publicly acknowledge your funders**

In some cases funders or sponsors may prefer to remain anonymous but, unless this is stated, it is important that you find the space to publicly acknowledge where your funding has come from. Where your group has a website, this is an ideal location, but also your social media channels, your newsletter, in local media or even in your annual reports and minutes.

As well as being courteous to existing funders, this can also actually increase your likelihood of getting funding from other sources, because funders always like to

give to causes that already have support behind them because it's a less risky investment and closing a gap is fantastic fundraising leverage. Clearly listing supporters is especially important with corporate funders.