



Grants 4 Schools

A Guide to Writing Successful Grant Applications

A short guide outlining the best practice principals in writing funding applications to grant making organisations

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Introduction

So you've done your research. You've identified relevant funders and you have a brilliant project that needs financial support. Writing a successful grant application is not so much about having a good idea for a project but more about understanding what it is that the Funding organisation is looking to support, who it is willing to support and communicating your project idea clearly and succinctly.

This guide has been developed using the authors own wealth of experience in writing grant applications as well as research into numerous articles on this subject area and outlines what constitutes good practice in terms of applying for funds from a range of different funding sources. These include

- Charitable trusts;
- Local and national Government sources;
- The European Union;
- The Lottery

The overall aim of this guide is to provide an easy-to-follow process on how schools might best approach the task of bidding for funds and resources. This guide primarily covers good practice in applying for revenue (running costs) funding, although many aspects will also be relevant for applications for funding to purchase equipment, buildings, and refurbishment works.

This guide has been structured as follows:

1. Establishing the credibility of your organisation
2. Understanding the Grant Makers Funding Criteria
3. Establishing the need for your project
4. Clearly communicating your case for funding
5. Developing an effective exit strategy
6. Key Documents required

Establishing the credibility of your organisation

Funders want to know who they are giving their money to. Before putting pen to paper, consideration needs to be given to the following:

Make sure that you have all the relevant details about your school. This should include:

- The size of the school in terms of staff, pupils and budget.
- The School's key aims and objectives, in particular, can they be matched with the funders' own aims and objectives. It is important to show how the proposed activity will fit with your own aims and objectives.
- Information on the area that your school serves (characteristics, issues, problems, opportunities)

Top Tip

Many funders target their grants at projects that serve communities and populations that are economically and socially excluded and / or disadvantaged. If your school has a high proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, or serves an area of need, make sure that you include information on this in your application. Even if it is not a prerequisite of the Grant maker, this can only strengthen your case.

If the funding is for a project rather than just equipment, highlight any recent achievements of your school. You will need to convince the Grant Maker that your school has the capacity, not only to write a successful application, but also the capacity to successfully manage and complete the project once it is funded.

Top Tip

Think about whether you need to highlight relevant skills and experience of individuals involved in the project and / or any similar projects that your school has successfully completed in the past.

Funders don't just give grants for the sake of it. Funders want to provide grants to projects and activities that further their own aims and objectives. Think about how your projects furthers and enhances the funders' aims and objectives.

Understanding the Grant Makers' Funding Criteria

Do you clearly understand what the Funder is prepared to support? It is essential that the funding criteria are carefully read before deciding whether to apply. The criteria will cover:

- a. The types of activities the funder will support. Make sure that your project fits in with the Grant Makers' criteria. For example, it is no use requesting funding for a new computer suite if the funder will only provide revenue (running costs) funding.
- b. The type of organisation that the Funder will support. Many funders will only support registered charities. If your school does not have registered charity status then there really is no point in spending hours completing an application that will fall at the first hurdle.
- c. The size of grants available. It is important that you establish the level of funding provided by the Grant Maker and whether this is sufficient to meet your financial requirements.
- d. When to apply. The criteria will specify whether there is a continuous application process or whether applications will need to be submitted in response to specific calls for proposals with specific application deadlines. If there are specific deadlines, make sure that you meet these as any late applications will be rejected.
- e. How to apply. The criteria will specify how applications will need to be submitted, whether this has to be by application form, online or by letter.

The funders' criteria are often found in a key document called "Application Guidelines"

Top Tip

If you are unsure about any aspect speak to the funder. They are only human and will be quite happy to talk to you about your project and give you appropriate advice.

Establishing the need for your project

Any application will need to clearly spell out what issues / problems it is trying to address and, just as importantly, what evidence you have gathered to justify the need for your project. Funders will look for hard data which justifies the need your project will address.

This can include:

- Official Statistics
- Research Studies
- Surveys undertaken (including by your school)
- Case Studies
- Links with the Local Authority Area Strategies
- Links with the Regional Economic Strategy

Top Tip

Although there is no real substitute for hard facts and figures, try also to paint a picture, using case studies of real people or activities if possible.

Clearly communicating your case for funding

Funders receive many hundreds of applications per year and, in some cases, thousands. It is therefore important that the people reading the application can easily understand what you are asking for. You should also check your application for grammar and spelling as badly written applications can be seen to reflect on the Applicant Organisation.

If you are asked to complete an application form, make sure you answer the question that the funder is actually asking, and answer all the questions clearly, directly and succinctly. It is surprising how many application forms are submitted which are incomplete, or where irrelevant information is provided. On the application form, it's worth taking some time to think about what the funder is really getting at when asking the questions. If you are inexperienced in applying for funding, it is worth seeking advice.

Make sure that you clearly identify who you are trying to help with your project (target groups and beneficiaries)

Make sure that you clearly show what the outcomes of the project will be. Are these hard outcomes such as the number of pupils assisted or soft outcome such as, for example, raising confidence levels.

Clearly show any partners who are involved in the project and what expertise and skills they bring to the party. It is important to show their specific responsibility in delivering the project.

If other funders are involved, you should clearly state who they are, what level of funding they will contribute, and for which aspect of the project. This needs to be absolutely clear as any confusion on this point may lead the funder to reject your application.

Where possible or appropriate you should set out project delivery milestones: it is important that you demonstrate to the sponsor that you are closely monitoring and evaluating the progress of your project. It is therefore important to establish a number of key milestones, and to provide reassuring feedback to your sponsor that you are achieving the targets you have set yourself at each of these milestones.

The financial details you provide must be complete and correct. Make sure you enclose all supporting information and documentation which is required, such as audited accounts.

Top Tip

Always make sure that the outcomes of your project relate to and help meet the objectives of the funding organisation.

If the Application is by letter, you should consider employing the following structure:

Project Summary

A brief paragraph that gives a clear and concise picture of the proposal.

Introduction and Background

This section should give the background to your organisation and should include:

- Mission
- Aims
- Structure
- Track record.

The problems and issues you want to address

- What is the problem?
- How has it arisen?
- Why and where is it occurring?
- Who is affected by it?

How will your project address the problems and issues identified?

This is where you should show the outcomes of the project and the specific, measurable objectives you expect to achieve.

Measuring achievement and success

Describe the measures you will employ to show how you know if the project is achieving its goals. For example, will the project have a Steering Group?; will regular monitoring reports be produced for the project leader? Will regular reports be produced for the funding organisation?

Budget

- How much will it cost?
- When do you need the money?
- Who else is involved in funding or delivering the project?

Future Funding / Exit Strategy

- Is this a pilot project, a one-off piece of work, or an ongoing activity?
- How will you continue to fund the project?

Developing an effective exit strategy

It is absolutely essential to have a credible exit or succession strategy for the project. Funding is short-term, and is usually provided for between one and three years. Funders are increasingly reluctant to renew funding agreements, so you should not rely on re-applying to the same funder.

Key questions that you will need to answer as part of the application are:

- Will the project stop once the funding ceases?
- Are there any credible / realistic alternative funding sources?
- Will one of your partners take over the project?

Top Tip

Sustainability has become the Holy Grail of Funders. Make sure that you clearly show how the project will continue after the funding has stopped

Key Documents required

In almost all cases, applications to Grant Makers need to be accompanied by key documents. These can include:

Constitution: make sure you provide copies of your organisation's constitution or other documentation explaining how your organisation is legally structured.

Bank accounts: decide what bank accounts you should open to run the proposed venture.

Budgeting: make sure you go through a procedure of setting budgets and are able to control expenditure against the various budget categories.

Quotations: make sure you have a proper procedure in place for obtaining quotations for suppliers working on the project and a definite procedure for awarding contracts.

Management structure: make sure you can produce regular management accounts and have someone, or preferably a finance or management committee, who will receive them.

Cashflow forecasts: ensure you have a way of looking at when money is coming into the project, in relation to when funds are going out.