

Grant application tips

Key things to consider before you apply

Work with others

Finding and applying for funding is a complex and lengthy process. Working with others will allow you to split the workload and keep the momentum going, to come up with ideas and have someone else's critical eye on the application. Unless the application form is very short and simple, take plenty of breaks and spread out the tasks over a reasonable period of time.

Read the guidance

There is no escaping it - break reading the guidance down into manageable chunks. If you are unsure on anything you can check with the funder but allow time for them to respond. Many funding bodies have FAQs and case studies on their websites to support applicants.

Webinars

Some of the larger funders will run webinars and these are very much worth the time and effort joining. You will get to hear the most up-to-date information from the policy makers. You will have the opportunity to ask questions and hear the questions of other potential applicants. If you miss a webinar the recording is often available to watch on the funder's website.

Some key things to check before applying

Deadlines

Is the fund open? Do you have time to apply? You can contact the funder to see if they will accept a late application, but it is unlikely. If the deadline has passed will there be another round of funding? If so, when? New funding rounds often have a slightly different remit/format/application form – keep a note to check back but don't assume everything is still the same.

Delivery timeframe

Consider whether your project can be delivered within the timeframe the funder has set. Do you need planning permission or any other statutory consents? Do you need to get designs done or time limited ecological surveys? Are there any constraints around when things can be done; for

example, your busiest times, Christmas or times when key people are not around, to align with other funding streams?

Legal structure

This is key to establishing eligibility. Some grants are only available to charities; others include Community Interest Companies (CICs) (some will fund CICs limited by guarantee (LBG) and not those limited by shares (LBS)). Other funders will state they will fund 'not-for-profit' organisations; however, this is a blanket term so it would be a good idea to contact the funder to check your organisation is eligible.

Revenue (core) / capital revenue grants

Revenue grants will be awarded to your organisation to support its ongoing running costs. Revenue can be restricted (for example to align an aim or deliver a certain service) or unrestricted (can be used to fund what the organisation decides). Capital is for spending on long-term investments, generally these will be physical assets.

Grants / finance

If you use a search engine to find funding you will get a number of results which may include grants, finance offers and match funding offers. Ensure you understand whether funding is repayable or requires you to raise money from alternative sources.

Existing projects / new projects

Some funders will support projects that are ongoing and already have a track record of delivering success. Others will only fund new projects.

Funding for research/design

Some funders will support feasibility studies, research or design to allow you to develop the necessary evidence to allow you to go on to apply for funding for a bigger more complex project.

Multi-stage applications

Some funders will have multi-stages to their application process. Often, they will start with an expression of interest (EOI) and follow up with an invitation to make a full application if the idea makes it through the first round. Others will begin with a project enquiry and give feedback before the expression of interest or application stage.

This is the case with the National Lottery Funds. Time between the stages tends to be relatively short so it is important to have a fully formed project idea from the beginning.

Should you apply?

Funding sources rarely fit your project exactly and you may need to tweak your objectives. There is no guarantee of success, so your time and effort could be for nothing. Consider whether it is worth potentially waiting a long time for the outcome or could your project be underway using alternative funding methods such as events and/or sponsorship.

Another thing to consider is that it is highly likely that you will need to provide some sort of feedback - this can range from a simple report or providing outcomes against a framework, to being part of a shared learning group.

Tips for when you are ready to apply

Timeline

Set a realistic timeline for producing your bid and build in contingency time. Try not to leave submitting your application until the last day.

Registration

Do you need to register for any access code or passwords to enable you to submit your application online? If so, register early and make a note of the necessary access details.

You may need to make the application in the name of your organisation's leader, and you may need to include their personal details; full name, home address and date of birth (this is to allow the funder to do due diligence). Consider how you will obtain this information and how the security of this personal data will be maintained in line with GDPR.

Project/idea

Before starting to enter anything on the form be clear in your mind what you are applying for; try to work out all the details of your project/idea and make sure it meets the objectives of the funder.

Answer the questions

Make sure you fully and clearly answer all the questions. Prepare your answers in a Word document. Use tracked changes if several people are involved. Provide evidence of the need and demand for what you are doing, explain what you will do to meet these needs, how this will make a difference and what you require from the funder to be able to do this.

Many funders want to see clear evidence that the need has come from the community/end users so being able to cite comments from a survey or feedback given at an event would be an ideal way to provide this. Plus have the additional bonus of knowing the project will be well received at the point of delivery. Use data if it is relevant, adds to your cause and from a trustworthy source such as the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Be succinct, use plain language and don't use grandiose statements, such as, 'Never has there been a more worthy project!'

Match funding

This does not necessarily mean that the funding you are applying for needs to be matched £1 for £1. Some funders will specify a percentage of required match funding. Others will say they want to see some match funding or describe the need for a 'diverse income stream'.

You may have a beneficiary who can provide this, have time to hold a fundraising event, acquire sponsorship from a local business or contribute from your organisation's reserves. Some funders will allow you to count your employee's time, or if you have people who will commit to volunteering you may be able to include their volunteer hours at minimum wage rate. But it is important to check if this is permissible.

Other elements

You may need to include your organisation's safeguarding policy. This is highly likely if your application involves providing services for children, young people or vulnerable adults. You may need to answer questions or provide a statement relating to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and how you are meeting the needs of the whole of the community. You may need to provide information on your approach to protecting the environment, mitigating climate change or preserving biodiversity whilst delivering your project.

Budget

Carefully prepare your budget in an Excel spreadsheet and use auto-sum to calculate the totals. It is sensible to get at least three different prices/quotes even if you don't need to submit this level of detail it will allow you to create a mid-range figure. Allow for inflation between the date you are applying and the date you expect to start the project.

On larger projects you may be allowed to include a small contingency for unforeseen expenses. Once you have submitted your application you will not be able to adjust the amount applied for. This will mean any shortfall will need to be found from other sources.

Legacy

In most circumstances the funder will want to see that the project is sustainable beyond the funding period. This could be evidenced by referring to other funding streams or saying that once the project has been demonstrated to be successful it will attract/inspire other types of support or that it will be self-sustaining.

Supporting documents

Be aware of what supporting documents are required and give these as much effort as you do the main application form. A significant proportion of funding applications do not allow hyperlinks to be included. Many forms will not allow any type of formatting such as bullet points, larger font, highlighted, bold or underlined text.

Word restrictions

Be aware of word counts or character counts. Sometimes these are 'fixed' in the application form or may just appear in the guidance. It is important to be aware of these as funders' panel members are very busy, and sometimes volunteers, so these limits are designed to make best use of their time. Also, be aware that when pasting into the application form, 500 words can inexplicably become 501, so you need to allow time to make last minute adjustments.

Finalising your application

Produce a final 'clean' copy in a new document without the tracked changes – be careful not to copy these over. Check you have answered all the questions and every part of each question. Try to put yourself in the shoes of the funder – what are they looking for? Make sure you put these elements at the beginning of your answers. Ask someone who does not know about the project to read through the application – do they have any questions?

When you are happy with your answers and ready to submit, share with other stakeholders so they can check everything – a second/third pair of eyes is always useful. Use read aloud software to check for incorrect words or tenses.

Submission

Allow at least 24 hours to submit before the deadline – to allow for illness, power cuts, internet disruption or the funder's website freezing due to last minute entries overloading the server.

Post-submission

Once submitted, make sure you save a copy of your application. Keep a note of whose name the application has been made in (individual or generic email address). Put an entry in your diary when you should receive the outcome.

The result

A positive outcome

You are likely to receive a Grant Offer Letter (GOL), which needs to be signed, agreeing to the terms before money can be released. Ensure you read this carefully, understand the content and are able to abide by the terms. Is your project at the same point as when you applied? If not, you may need to submit a Project Adjustment Request.

The funding needs to be ringfenced and accounted for separately to other expenditure. Track the purpose of all expenditure and evaluate the outcomes according to the funder's criteria. The National Lottery website provides [detailed guidance on evaluation](#) which could be relevant to funders.

An unsuccessful bid

If your bid is unsuccessful, it is helpful to obtain feedback, but many funders will not provide this as it takes up their time and often panels will be made up of volunteer trustees. Frequently it is just a case that funding pots are hugely oversubscribed. It is important to move on; learn from the experience and make use of the information you have drawn together in the application for future bids.