

Grant writing techniques

Overview

- [The grant purpose](#)
- [Your proposal](#)
- [About your charity](#)
- [Describing the need](#)
- [Describing your project](#)
- [Setting budgets](#)
- [Use of language](#)
- [Case studies](#)
- [Standing out from the crowd](#)
- [Sustainability](#)
- [What are you contributing?](#)
- [Additional tips](#)
- [Glossary](#)

The grant purpose



Check the grant criteria and identify the key areas of interest that the funder wants to fund and check the wider mission and aims they have. Have a look at past awards to see if there is a particular type of project they like to fund. Pick out the key words they use and try to use these in your application. Also, think about the language they use—for example, if they talk about beneficiaries rather than service users, do the same in your application.

This is about helping you connect with the funder; understanding their motivation will help you tailor/focus the needs of your project to align with their interests.

Grant funding

Grants are very useful for funding pilot projects and one-off activities. Whilst longer term project can be grant funded, other sources of income should also be considered to help such long-term running costs.

Your proposal

From the outset, have a very clear idea of what you want to achieve/change and how the work will deliver this change. If you can write this in a few sentences before starting the application, it will help you keep a tight focus on your project's outcomes as you complete the proposal/application.

About your charity

You need to give a strong and positive impression of what you do and who you help, the chances are the funder will know nothing about your organisation or its work. It is tempting to start by saying, "Our charity was formed in [year] and delivers services for older people living in [town in Wales]." But it is more impactful—and remember the assessor will be reading many applications, so you want to stand out—to start by giving a fact about the impact you make:

"Last year, we reduced the levels of isolation for 200 elderly people living in rural communities in North Wales."

This immediately tells them something about you and what you have achieved. It is also worth including why you are applying to this particular funder—can say that your values/interests are aligned and why you selected them over others. In part, this is playing to their ego; to say we think you are great and have chosen you to support us. This is far more appealing than a standard letter that could apply to any funder.

You need to try and build trust; so you can do this by saying how long you have been running for, mention any quality marks you have, and what other funders have supported you, including how much you raise from individual donations. Demonstrating income derived from the local community is an especially good way to show that your community supports what you do.

You may also want to add something about why you are involved with the charity and why you feel it is important. This can help build a personal and more emotional connection to the work. If you have applied to them before, remind them of this. People are more likely to give to a cause if they have funded it before.

Describing the need

Most organisations address multiple needs within their community, and it is often easy to write a lot about the different needs and challenges it faces. Whilst you can give an overview of this, remember to focus the need on the project you are seeking funding for. The funder wants to understand that the need you are looking to address is the most important one and relevant to the project. Unemployment may be high in the community where you work, but if your project is about addressing loneliness, this is not that relevant;

so information on need should focus on what your project will change. For example, this could be people living alone, poor transport links, or lack of local services.

Where you make a claim about needs, try and back this up with statistics — this could be your own data or from other reliable data sets. However, try and keep statistics local.

It is more than likely that if a funder is interested in, say, mental health, they will be aware of national data and statistics on its prevalence. What you need to show is the local needs and how, for example, health issues are harder to address in your area, or why your client group has especially high/complex needs.

People are generally risk-averse, so it can be a good technique to describe the impact of something not happening as well as the positive effects of the work going ahead. However, be careful in describing negative consequences because you do not want to make the reader feel guilty.

Related to this is that whilst you need to demonstrate the need, you also want to show that there is a solution that you can address. If you present a challenge that seems too big for the funds you are seeking, the funder is likely to think their money will not make a meaningful impact on the work. So you should emphasise that while your project may not solve all of the challenges faced by the community, it will contribute meaningfully to improving the lives of those who live there.

Make it clear to the funder how the people/community who will benefit have been involved in the creation of the project. This will give more confidence to the funder that the project is meeting a genuine community need, rather than something that is a perceived need. Also, a project developed by the community is more likely to be successful and pick up on any specific local needs and opportunities.

A final point on the need, is to be guided by the need you have identified and not be tempted into grant chasing; that is finding a need to meet a funders requirement. This can lead you into delivering project and activities that take you away from your true purpose.

Describing your project



Ensure you tell the funder if you are asking for support for a specific project or ongoing/core costs.

Sometimes this can get confusing. Leaving the funder unclear where the money will be spent.

When describing what you will do and the impact it will have, remember to focus on the people it will benefit, not the organisation; for example, you are going to help improve people's mental wellbeing by providing 1:1 support – rather than we are going to employ a councillor.

As well as ensuring you have clearly described what you want to do, it is also important to ensure that your project is realistic in terms of the change/impact it will have. For example a £2,000 project around anti-social behaviour is unlikely to stop it, but may help reduce it.

Setting budgets

Be realistic in what you are going to achieve with the funding. Funders are experienced and see hundreds of applications and have a good idea of what projects cost. If you are very high/cheap it will ring alarm bells for them. If however there is a good reason why your costs are high/low explain the reason.

Ensure you have included all the costs you need to deliver it (checking that the funder will fund overheads as some will only fund direct project costs). Consider cost such as management, materials, marketing, translation and evaluation. If you are not including these the costs will have to be covered from elsewhere within your organisations' budget. This can result in actually costing you money to deliver the project. For more information on this please see the 'Full Cost Recovery' information sheet.

Use of language

In studies, just including "because" in a sentence for wanting to do something has elicited a significantly higher response than where people just asked for something.

As mentioned above, try to use the same language as the funder for how they describe people and challenges.

Be careful to avoid jargon and acronyms (if used, ensure you explain them); also avoid technical language that the reader may not understand. If they cannot fully understand or be clear about what you mean, they are far less likely to fund you.

Try and keep language positive and use persuasive language; some of the most persuasive words in the English language are: You, Because, Free, Instantly, and New. "You" and "Because" are particularly good words to use; "You" connects with the reader, and "Because" gives a reason for an action or need. In studies, just including "because" in a sentence for wanting to do something has elicited a significantly higher response than where people just asked for something.

Each new paragraph should add something new or reinforce a key point. Avoid adding unnecessary background facts or information, these only serve to cloud the key purpose of your application. One useful approach is to start the paragraph with the key point you want to make, and then support this in the rest of the paragraph. In theory the first line of each paragraph would be enough for the reader to understand what the project is about.

Psychological studies have shown that people are more likely to comply with a request if you simply give them a reason why... even if that reason makes no sense. An American study of people using a photocopying machine found that someone who wanted to queue jump for the simple reason of “because I want to go first” was successful 93% of the time, compared to 64% when no reason was given.

If you have a key message or point that you want to make, repeat it and give it additional emphasis. You do not necessarily want to repeat the exact phrase, but make a point in a case study, quote, and again in your summary. You want to leave the reader clearly knowing and remembering what difference you will make. Other ways you can do this include grouping two or three adjectives together, or through alliteration: repeating the sound of the first consonant, e.g.:

“Charities can create compelling cases by clearly communicating their cause.”

Case studies

Case studies are a nice way to show the human impact of your work. Studies show that encountering a single “victim” provokes a stronger emotional response than encountering a group of “victims.” You can take this a step further when you introduce the person, giving their name and providing details about them. Including a photo further reinforces this personal and emotional connection to the work you are delivering.

If using photos, studies show that a photo of someone making eye contact with the viewer is likely to elicit a stronger response than someone who does not.

Standing out in the crowd

Funders will see many applications with worthy causes; you need to make your application stand out in the crowd. Ways you can do this include:

- Ensuring that there is a sense of urgency—why does it need to happen now? How much worse will the situation become if not acted upon now?
- Explaining what makes your project/cause more worthy than one from a similar organisation. You are competing for the same pot of money against often similar organisations and projects. Therefore, think carefully about what makes you unique or special. Are you trying a new innovative approach? Does the project help support other activities you offer? Is the need especially acute and urgent?
- Considering the format of your application. Are you using a standard letter? Can you present it in a different way, using colour and images, text boxes, to draw the reader to the important facts and information? This will make you more visually appealing and memorable to the reader.

Sustainability



If you are asking for a project/activity that you expect to continue after the grant funding has ended, make sure you present a clear proposal for how you expect this to happen. Have you other funders to apply to? Will you be seeking to generate an income? Or perhaps asking a statutory body to fund using the evidence from your work to demonstrate how it would save them money? Whatever plan you have, ensure that it is realistic and viable.

What are you contributing?

Whilst funders expect to be asked to fund the project, it is also good to show that you are also investing in the work and not just reliant upon others to fund it. This need not be financial and can include your use of volunteers, time given to help manage the project, or resources that you/the community are contributing. If you have high reserves, funders may expect you to be contributing financially; if there is a reason why you are not, tell the funder why this is.

If you do have any match funding, let them know about this. A funder is more likely to support you if they know their money is going to be the thing that finally makes it happen.

Note: Some funders want to fund an entire project themselves (or be the substantial funder) and do not want other funders' money contributing.

Additional tips

- Attend any events and webinars that the funder offers. These will give valuable insights into what they're looking for and a chance to ask questions.
- Ask for feedback—even if unsuccessful, it helps improve future applications. Many smaller trusts will not have time/resources for this. Only ask if they invite contact prior to making an application, which is a good indication of their willingness to engage in conversations and feedback.
- Contact the funder (where encouraged) and maintain good relationships. Remember they want good quality projects and applications as much as you want the funding. Not all funders will be open to discussion, but if they are try to find out any particular priorities. After funding is secured keep funders updated on progress, successes and if there are any problems.

- Some funders will have word or character counts so make sure you read the guidance carefully and be concise in your application, focusing on what you are applying for and why.

Glossary

- **Revenue** – Money provided to cover the **day-to-day running costs** of an organisation or project. It funds ongoing activities rather than one-off purchases or long-term investments.
- **Capital** – Funds used for long-term investments, such as purchasing property, equipment, or infrastructure.
- **Restricted funds** – Money given for a specific purpose, which **must** be spent according to funder requirements.
- **Unrestricted funds** – Money that can be used for **any** purpose within the organisation's aims, including operational costs
- **Full Cost Recovery** – method to include all organisational costs related to the delivery of a project.