

An introduction to...

Grant development



This course is a 5min read
with additional time required
for exercises

Look at what you need – don't just chase the money

Grant opportunities are posted regularly throughout the year. From small local pots to massive international opportunities, there's lots of different funding available for a whole raft of different initiatives. Which is why it's not surprising that you can spend a huge amount of time searching, scoping, writing and refining applications. But is it worth it?

Before you engage with a grant opportunity, it's important to consider what your drivers are for applying. There is always an 'opportunity cost' to any application – it will take time away from other things, often more time than you think – so the trade-offs need to be worth it!

Mission drift is one of the biggest issues for organisations – taking on a funding opportunity because the money looks appealing but requires you to deliver something tangential to core business.

When considering a new funding opportunity, ask yourself the following questions:

- Will this money help you do what you want to do or is it a distraction?
- Check eligibility – do you fit the criteria?
- What is the funder actually looking for?
- Do you have strengths in what they want?
- How big is the application, i.e. how long will it take to put together?

If after these reflections, you feel you're a good fit for the grant, go for it!

Remember

Core funding should be your first priority

Project funding is not a sustainable alternative. Unrestricted funds for core activities will keep your organisation afloat. Project funding should be considered second. Don't be afraid to ask for core funding!

More information about the importance of core funding to help achieve outcomes can be found on the [Esmée Fairbairn Foundation website](#)

Terms or skills to define

Impact

The social economic benefits. This is about the beneficiaries of the grant, as well as the grant-holder, i.e. your organisation. Funders want to ensure your organisation is sustainable as well as the investment making a change for end-users. What change will it make?

Knowledge exchange

Two-way exchange or dialogue between delivery partners to improve impact of grant outcomes.

Outcomes

The change you will make through your initiative.

Outputs

The concrete deliverables of your project, e.g. # new users who engaged with a service.

Delivery partners

People you work with to deliver results of the grant.

Outcomes vs Outputs

It is likely you will be asked about these in the application, so it's important to get the distinction right.

- **Goals and objectives are statements of intent** which are differentiated by their time frames (long term and medium term, respectively). They describe what you are trying to achieve, and what you intend to do.
- **Outcomes are the results you intend to achieve.** They describe the change your funder will see for their money. For example, 20% increase in community engagement.
- **Outputs are the measurable results of individual activities.** Outputs are headcounts, engagement statistics, or number of units your funded activities will result in.

Donors want to hear about outcomes because they want to see a direct relationship between what they put into your initiative and the changes evidenced in the community.

Mindset prep for grant development

1. Size matters

How much time is this going to take?

The scale of the grant will often have an impact on the expectation of submission. Large sums typically require large and lengthy submissions, whereas smaller grants may require anything from a short application form up to a reasonable case for support. It all depends on the scheme.

It's important to rationalise any application before you apply to ensure it won't cause 'mission drift' and that it explicitly aligns to your strengths. Applying to a 'mission distraction' will result in wasted time on the application as well as longer-term implications.

If you wish to apply for a larger grant, it might be worth getting an external involved to help. Some may operate on a no-win-no-fee basis, but do check their track record with a scheme and any associated costs.

Rationalise any time spent on applying as resource expenditure. Is it worth the time?

2. It is worth the cost

Every grant has a cost, both in applying and winning. The application may be straightforward but if reporting requirements would require a massive

restructuring of your reporting processes, it might not be possible to fulfill the grant expectations. On the other hand, these changes might be desirable and so it would be worth the additional costs. It's important to think about the bigger picture of the grant impact on your organisation.

Look at the reporting requirements upfront, rather than waiting until it's too late! Are the costs associated worth the price of the funds?

3. It's a competition

Always keep in mind that grant bidding is a competition. Winning is important. Only the best submissions will win. Don't waste your time if you don't feel your strengths best align to the funder's ask. You might have a great idea but it might not be this grant that will support it.

4. Set realistic expectations

Like all competitions, not every participant can win. Grant applications are no different. You will not have a 100% success rate. Plan resources based on winning only 30% of grants you apply to. Don't pin all resources on getting this grant. Being good at writing bids doesn't always guarantee success.

Top tip

Prioritise the best fit

Don't just apply to lots of funders because their application forms look straightforward! Aiming for funds that align with your organisation mission, rather than deviate, is key to long-term sustainability.

Writing prep

Write a story that speaks to the funder

Grant writing is predominantly creating a good narrative, viewed from the funder's perspective.

Before you start typing, spend a bit of time understanding who the target audience is. Look at the funder's website and what/who they've funded before. Find out what makes them tick and write a story that speaks directly to them.

- If the funder doesn't have a website, they should have an account on the [Charities Commission Register](#). CCR profiles contain information boxes that communicate the charity's status and, often in the case of funders, what they want. If it says they don't want applications, they don't want applications, so don't submit something as it will not be looked at.

Next, think about what makes you stand out. Why should you win this competition? What edge do you have to help the funder meet their objectives?

Finally, address the grant criteria directly. Make sure your submission addresses every point they are looking for clearly and concisely. Make it easy for them to award you full marks!

Top tip

Make a judgement call

Developing relationships with funders can be useful but it's not always appropriate. If the initiative or pitch is less defined, you could contact the funder directly. This is less appropriate if it's a small family fund, who might not have a dedicated office. Many have a website so look there first for answers – don't waste the funder's time if it's already been said. It's not a good start!

... also, don't use acronyms. Ask someone external to read it, like a friend or family member. If they understand it, you're on to a good start.



The two activities take 20min

Activity 1: Walk the walk – prioritise current grants

A bit like applying for a job, grant development is a practical subject. It needs to be practiced to be mastered. Your confidence will build each time you apply:

- Have a search online for some funding opportunities. Find a couple that might be suitable.
- Start small and practice the reflection process, working through the points below:
 - Will this money help you do what you want to do or is it a distraction?
 - Check eligibility – do you fit the criteria?
 - What is the funder actually looking for?
 - Do you have strengths in what they want?
 - How big is the application, i.e. how long will it take to put together?
- Look at what they have funded before. Do you fit?
- Rank the different opportunities – do any fit better than others?
- Repeat until you find something that aligns with your organisation's mission

Activity 2: Take a look at your accounts

Grant writers need to know how to read accounts. Without accurate financial information submitted, your application may be at risk of rejection before the funder reads why you're applying.

Financial accounts are pretty standardised, so once you get your head around the structure and where to look for different bits of information, all future engagements should feel more straightforward.

There's lots of information out there on reading accounts. As a starting point, take a look at this PDF from Sayer Vincent: "[Reading Charity Accounts - Made Simple](#)" and the issues raised in this course overview: "[Financial Skills for Fundraisers](#)"

Further resources

[Fundraising Regulator guide to grant-making bodies](#)