VoluntaryAction Rotherham

Bitesize... information matters

Most common mistakes – Application for funding

This bitesize resource identifies some of the most common mistakes made on funding applications and how to avoid common errors.

- Not reading guidance

Funders usually provide guidance notes for applicants to read through when deciding to write a bid. The guidance will typically show information such as background information, funding priorities, which type of organisation is eligible, if unsolicited applications are accepted, any geographical considerations, eligible expenditure items, restrictions, any match funding requirements, funding amount available, application deadline and anything else specific to the fund.
It is common for guidance to be overlooked by some applicants. When guidance is not read and understood it becomes more likely that your project will be ineligible to the specific funding pot.
One example of not fully reading the guidance has been when a funder requires a collaborative approach. Mistakes can be made where a lead organisation is not the required type of structure or there is a misunderstanding of the word collaborative, for example, when a group includes subcontractors on the bid who are not actually providing the project delivery, this would not be seen as collaboration and result in ineligibility.

- Starting applications too late

Before you begin; it is important to consider time required to write a funding bid, the deadline for applications, time taken by the funder to make a decision, if you will be successful and when awards are likely to reach your bank account.
Remember, grant funders are not likely to fund retrospective costs and so you need to have the award in place before the project start date.
When starting to apply for funds late it is more likely that mistakes happen in structure or content and this could involve ineligible criteria. If mistakes happen this may result in none funding or rejection. This can happen following a rush and not having time to read the full guidance.

When considering the funders decision, time needed will increase with the complexity and size of the fund.

So what are the time frames?

For national funding pots of under £10,000, the turnover time is usually around three months' after the closing date, or application date if this is a rolling fund. Larger bids may take six months or longer to receive a decision.

Also, when waiting to hear if your application has been successful, depending on the funder there are some typical time frames you may expect:

- State – up to 6 months
- Foundation – up to 12 months (earlier confirmation of proposal review may be received)
- Corporation – up to 6 months

Ensure you leave enough time to plan and apply to meet your own start date.
It is a common mistake for funding to be sought to late. Avoid this type of error by doing a full risk assessment for your project.

- Recycling old proposals

Some organisations will recycle old proposals in an aim to 'quick fix' a situation, there are implications to consider:

- Was the old proposal successful?
  It is a common mistake for a rejected proposal to be submitted again without making changes. If a funder has rejected a proposal, it is not likely the exact same proposal would be accepted next time around.

- Does the old proposal meet the current guidance of the fund you are applying for?
  You may have a copy of an old successful bid. It is a common mistake to think the same bid would be successful again, it is important to investigate if this project aim is still the priority of the funder.
- Has your project changed since the old proposal or are there contact changes to consider?
  Where key contacts or project delivery methods are changed it is important to ensure this is updated on the current bid. If overlooked these outdated pieces of information may lead to none funding.

If you are going to recycle old proposals, ensure that information is current / accurate to the project and that strategic aims are shown in perspective with the funders priority aims.

- Too many abbreviations / jargon

Some project proposals are written by people who are expert in a field and may presume that the funder is also equally as informed. This is not always the case, people deliberating a funding proposal will have some understanding around funding priorities, although may not be familiar with the specific technicalities of your projects approach to reach the same priority aims. Ensure when you write a bid this is in a well thought out way that makes easy sense to those reading. It can be easy to lose others in long paragraphs, technical jargon and abbreviations that may not be understood. Funders are not likely to take the time to make sense of a proposal they do not understand and this can result in none funding.

- Lack of understanding the background

When applying for a charitable fund it is important to remember, the funder has a social or environmental priority in mind they wish to support, look for these priorities in their use of key words and ensure to understand the meaning. When making your application it is important to remember this is a competition and the funder is going to award those projects with the clearest and most important impact in the area they are wanting to support. If your proposal does not show a clear path with the funders social or environmental direction, then this is likely to result in rejection or non-funding.

- Preliminary research and fundraising efforts

The funder will wish to see that there is an essential need of the fund and that this need is not going to be achievable without their help. It is a common mistake to forget to involve the proof of an identified gap in service through consultation and forget to show a social outcome desired is not currently being achieved / will not be able to continue. Lack of this information will reduce the funders ability to find just cause to award to your project. It is a common mistake to not show the reason why the funds are otherwise unachievable; you may have already tried to fundraise through donations, charitable events or sponsorship. It is important to show what you have already achieved and what gap in funding remains. Projects who have exhausted other methods of fundraising are likely to be favoured for the award, those not showing this type of work are less likely to be successful.

- Technical issues

Funders have their own application criteria, although some of the information types requested will be standard across other funding bodies. The most common pieces of information requested will be:

- Key contacts such as Chair / Treasurer
- Date of birth and contact information for key contacts
- Registered address (if applicable)
- Bank account information of the group as it appears on the bank statement

It is a common mistake for applicants to forget to update records. When there is a change to any technical information for your organisation it is important to update any relevant registered bodies as well as your application. The funder will have need of every piece of information they request and will be sure to check details as shown in the public domain, for example, details registered with the Charity Commission or Companies House. Any contradiction of information you provide will lead to none funding or rejection. Depending on the nature of the contradiction the funder could find there to be fraud involved and may report concerns.
Remember to resubmit an application with updated information, should you be rejected on the basis of providing old information.

Support

If you are a voluntary or community sector organisation based in Rotherham and need support to write a funding application you may contact Voluntary Action Rotherham on 01709 829821 or email triage@varotherham.org.uk