Factsheet

Questions to expect when completing grant applications

1. Your contact details
The first and usually the easiest part of the application asks for your group's name, address, and telephone/fax numbers. However, many applications will expect the most senior person or chairperson to be the designated contact for signing contracts etc if you are successful so be sure to have someone who can sign the application on the organisation's behalf listed as the key contact.

Top Tip: Why not print out your organisations registered charity number/company no/CHY number and sellotape it to your computer or inside your notebook? This way you always have it to hand and don't have to keep going back to look up those numbers you've forgotten… again.

2. Your organisation aims & objectives
Also referred to as your vision and mission, it is useful to have a standard set of aims and objectives that your organisation has agreed to that you can copy and paste into every grant application

Top Tip: Start a document full of the things that you add into grant applications regularly.

3. Background of your organisation
Most funders will want to know a little bit about your history. They will want to determine have you done similar work to that for which you are applying. If the funder gave you this money, would you have the capacity and previous experience to implement the project as you propose? You might also be asked to give a breakdown of who accesses your services for the same reason. For example, if you are applying for funding to work with people with mental health issues, the funder may require evidence that you have experience of working with this group of people.

Giving a good background of your organisation relevant to the grant that you are applying is what is required here.

4. Evidence of need
Increasingly funders will want to see that there is evidence to prove that what you are applying for is needed in the community or location where you are applying. How can you prove it? Have you looked at national statistics and seen if your area performs above or below the national average? Have you conducted quantitative or qualitative surveys or other forms of feedback in your community to see what the residents say? To demonstrate the extent of the 'need', it is often useful to cite statistics from a recognised source. So do some homework. Ask around. Find out what are the needs in your community and what is the evidence for it.

You can also answer this question using evidence from your own organisation such as feedback from evaluation forms or number of people currently on a waiting list for an activity.

5. What are you applying for?

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You may be applying for more staff or resources for your organisation. But many funders are not keen to fund organisations regardless of how worthy the cause. Most funders make funding available to tackle societal or social needs within communities. So, you need to articulate what you are applying for in terms that allows the funder to determine whether their funding contributes to successfully tackling the problem they seek to address. In reality that may amount to seeking more staff or resources but now, at least, it is written in terms that allows the funder to know that you are helping them solve their problems.

> Top Tip: Try and see things from the funders' point of view and write your application accordingly. As Atticus Finch in 'To Kill A Mockingbird' says: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view … until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

6. How does your project meet the criteria?
Talk to any funder and they will tell you how difficult it is to fund every worthy cause that applies. That's why they impose strict criteria. So, think of the criteria like when applying for a job. When you apply for a job the cover letter offers you the chance to tell your prospective employer why you are the best person for the job. The best cover letters respond to the criteria set out in the job description and demonstrate how the applicant meets all the criteria. Bad cover letters tell the employer why you are the best person for the job without referencing the job spec.

Equally you stand a greater chance of receiving funding if you can outline how your application for funding meets all the criteria set out. Then you move beyond being merely worthy. Now you are worthy and relevant.

7. How Will You Monitor and Evaluate the Project?
Most funders will want to know how successful (or not) their investment in a project has been. At a minimum they will ask for projects to be self-assessed. That is, the applicant will state up front how it plans to assess the project, collect the monitoring information, and conduct the evaluation of the project. If the monitoring and evaluation processes are included at the project planning stage, this becomes much easier to answer.

Project outcomes: these are often described as the difference or impact the project will make. It's helpful to think about outcomes as things that either improve, increase; decrease or reduce as these are all changes that can be measured. You will also need to think about how you will measure these changes i.e., "This project will reduce social isolation amongst older people living independently in Heywood through provision of weekly lunch club" This can be measured through attendance registers; wellbeing surveys etc

Project outputs: it can be helpful to think of these in terms of things that can be counted e.g., number of people the project will work with; number of sessions delivered; number of toolkits produced etc

For larger projects an external evaluator may be brought in to assist with the project's evaluation or to provide an independent eye.

8. How are service users/members involved in the project:
This can mean how people are involved in the design and delivery of a project. It can be useful to build in service user consultation as the first step of planning a project as you can then use this evidence both to show the need for the work, and to show how service users have shaped what the project will look like.
It can also be useful to think about how and when service users give feedback about the project, and whether this will be used to make any changes to what's delivered.

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This can also mean routes for service users/members to get involved in volunteering with the project, or how they can be involved more widely with the organisation such as joining other activities; volunteering or becoming a member of a Steering Group/Committee.

9. How will you promote/reach your intended audience?
There are a few things that can be included in this answer:
  •   Internal communications such as newsletters, social media, leaflets & posters etc
  •   Referral links with external organisations e.g., Jobcentres; GPs; schools etc
It's important to demonstrate that these methods don't exclude/discriminate against any groups i.e., do you have leaflets in more than one language; in large print; in easy read; paper as well as digital versions etc

10. Project Budget
Every funder will require a realistic and well costed budget to be submitted with the application. Regardless of what you ask the funder for - you will need to fully cost the project and include every possible expense.

Funders will not generally pay for items retrospectively, i.e., they will not back date a grant for items purchased or salaries already paid. You need to wait to hear if you have been successful before any expenditure for the items requested can be made.

When applying for funding to cover capital build and equipment, you will need realistic estimates and quotes. For salaries, you are recommended to choose a salary level from a recognized scale. You can check out the pay & benefits survey available through The Wheel and Community Foundation of Ireland. For overheads, it is necessary to detail how you have calculated the costs, for example from previous bills or costs in similar projects.

If you are budgeting for a project, which lasts for more than a year, you will have to take inflation and general cost of living increases into account. Staff salary increases, potential increases in electricity, telephone charges and even stationery must be budgeted for. Also, if you are applying for a project that is due to start several months away, will prices have increased during that period?

Some funding bodies may accept volunteer hours as a community contribution known as a contribution in-kind as match funding. Match funding is where a funder agrees to fund only a percentage of costs and expects funding to be 'matched' from other sources.

11. Is the Project Sustainable?
When a funder asks is the project sustainable, they want to know how you will fund the project beyond the amount of money they will provide. You have 3 options:

  a. that the project will finish at the end of the grant period
  b. that the project will secure funding from other sources
  c. that the project will generate its own revenue through services/contract delivery etc.

Don't rely on other organisations to sustain your project for you. It would be unrealistic to state that you expect a statutory body to take on the funding of your project unless you have very strong evidence and commitments to that effect. You are best advised to demonstrate what you can realistically do within your own resources to secure ongoing funding for the project and/or show how you can wind down the project in an orderly manner.
It's good to demonstrate your fundraising plans and to show that you have a range of income options, not just the grant that you're applying for. It can be helpful to talk about partnership working here, and initiatives such as volunteering and peer mentoring which can help ensure learning from projects is sustained beyond the end of the funding period.

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