

# Funding Advice Bureau

**SYFAB** guide to...

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**Making a good  
application**

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# Making a good application

When you apply for funding, essentially, you are selling your project idea to the funder. You can improve your chances of getting a grant by taking the time to write a good application. It is important to assume that the funder doesn't know anything about your group or your community so you need to explain why funding your project would be a good use of their money. There are lots of groups who are competing for the same funding so it is important that you:

- apply to appropriate funders
- argue a good case
- present your application well.

Funders often want to fund specific pieces of work rather than core costs or general donations. Projects are discrete pieces of work with clear aims and outcomes that can be measured. In many cases, you can make your work much more attractive to funders by packaging up your work into specific projects.

## Step 1 – Identifying potential funders

Many groups try to get grants by sending a general appeal letter to lots of funders. It's a waste of time – most of those letters end up in the bin without being read. Instead, you should take the time to identify funders whose priorities fit with the type of work you are doing. Then you can tailor your application so that your description of your work fits with the funder's priorities.

SYFAB provide free online funding information services to help you find sources of funding for your organisation easily and quickly. You can keep up to date with the latest funding opportunities using our Funding News website and email service, and you can find possible funders for your activities with our funding search website. Go to [www.syfab.org.uk](http://www.syfab.org.uk) for more information and to sign up.

If you don't use the Internet, then our Funding News is available monthly by post and our Information Service can help you identify appropriate sources of funding by doing a free funding search for your group. Contact SYFAB for more details.

Once you know who you're going to apply to, find out:

- If the funder has guidelines for applicants. If so, read the guidelines carefully, pay special attention to any information about the criteria the funder uses to make decisions.
- How the funder wants you to apply. Is it by letter or application form? If there is a form then get a copy as soon as possible. And do you submit your application by post or email, or online?
- If there are any deadlines for returning the application. If so, you need to allow yourself enough time to write the application.

## Step 2 – Preparing to make your case

A good application is targeted, concise and presented well. It should include:

- Your selling points – the importance of the work you do
- Facts and figures to support your proposal
- Evidence of a good track record for your group
- A well thought out project plan and budget
- Evidence that you can carry out the proposed work
- Back up literature/statistics.

Your group should consider what is important and special about the work that you do and why a funder would support you. Once you have done this, you can write a summary of your main selling points.

## Gathering information

The more information you have prepared in advance, the easier it is when it comes to writing your application. Good preparation will mean that writing your application will be a matter of choosing the right information and presenting it in the right format for each funder. You can gather and prepare the following details:

- Information about your group
- Information about the problems and needs you want to address
- Information about your group's competence and credibility.

## Information about your group

You will need to provide some, or all of the following information:

- A summary about what your group does; its main purpose and aims. This could be based on your 'mission' statement.
- Your legal status. Do you have a constitution? Are you a registered charity? Are you a limited company?
- The people involved in your group – numbers of paid staff, volunteers and your members.
- Your committee structure.
- How long you have been going. What other work you have done? Where are you based?
- Evidence of your management and financial skills and experience.
- A statement about why your work is important; why funders should want to support you; why your group is best placed to do what it does.
- What funding your group has received (now and in the past) and who funded you.
- Any recent growth in your organisation or in the demand for your services.
- Copies of your last annual report, accounts, and any other relevant material such as press cuttings, photographs, leaflets, survey results, quotes from users.

## Information about the problems and needs you want to address

You may think the answers to this are obvious, but you have to be able to prove that there is a need for your service. Funders will want to know what the problem is and what their money can do to help. So for example, rather than just asking for money to buy a minibus for your group, explain the problems that a minibus would help to overcome.

Funders want to know that the problems are real and solvable, and that their money will make a difference. You need to provide facts and figures or quote research documents to support your case. Think about what you need to know about the area or people you serve to help you make your case. You may need to conduct your own survey to demonstrate need and lack of provision.

You can find lots of statistics and research on the internet. Your local library is also a useful source.

## Some sources of information:

**The Office for National Statistics (ONS)** is the Government's survey organisation and its main producer of official statistics. They compile data on their website from various sources such as the National Census. You can search for statistics within specific geographical areas.  
[www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk)

Some local authorities produce 'social inclusion' or 'community cohesion' plans that include lots of useful information on the groups of people and the areas of most acute poverty within their borough.

Health Authorities all do research and have information about health care needs and provision within their area.

Most council departments will have research findings or evidence about their particular area of service provision (such as Social Services, Housing, Environmental Health) that might be helpful to you.

Any national charity or organisation working in your field is likely to have information that you could use.

## Information about your group's competence and credibility

Your reputation and track record is very important to any potential funders. As well as looking at the particular project you want funding for, they will also want to know that they are giving money to a competent organisation with the ability to manage the money, people and project. You need to provide evidence that your project will be a good use of the funder's money. Here are some ways to prove your competence and show your credibility:

- Show evidence of your recent successful projects. Your past projects are the best proof of your competence. If you already receive support from other funders this will give new funders an indication that you are worth supporting.
- Show evidence of recent successes and achievements. Impartial comments from users or any press or media coverage will show support for your group and your work.
- Provide statements or quotes from your supporters to show that they value your work. Can you provide references? (Some funders ask for these.)
- If you are a member of, or affiliated to a larger organisation like a national charity, include details.

### Step 3 – Putting together an application

When you apply for funding you will either write a letter or use the funder's application form. In both cases you will have to write clearly and concisely to convey all the information the funder needs without making your application too long. The details of the information that you have to provide is the same but the format will be different.

#### What to include

- A project title. Try to think of a snappy title for your proposal.
  - An introduction to your group. What you do; what your goals and objectives are; how long you have been going; why you are a good use of the funder's money; any significant achievements; what support you have received from other bodies.
  - A summary of the project proposal. In a few clear sentences, spell out what you are applying for and how much it will cost in total.
  - The reason(s) why you want the money. Give specific information about the nature and size of the needs or problems you have identified, supported with some key statistics or other factual evidence. Say who will benefit from you tackling these needs.
  - A description of your proposal. What you intend to do to meet the needs you have identified; how you will go about it (your methods); what it will achieve (your objectives). Outline the timescale and how you will measure its success – your evaluation methods.
- For example, if you have identified a high level of housebound, isolated elderly people on your estate, then your objective will be to overcome their isolation and the method could be the purchase of a wheelchair accessible minibus so that they can be taken to the lunch club on a neighbouring estate. Success will be measured in terms of the numbers of people making use of the service.
- Your project budget -a breakdown of the costs involved. It is important that you ask for a specific amount of money. If you are only asking for part of the costs tell them where the rest is coming from.
  - The reason(s) why they should fund you. How does your proposal fit with their funding policies? You will need to emphasise different aspects of the work for different funders. For example, some may be interested in you because you are working in their geographical area, others, because the project falls within their area of interest, such as young people.
  - A demonstration of your financial stability. Make sure you enclose a copy of your latest accounts.
  - Information about which other funders support your work. If other funders have supported your work, it reassures potential new funders that you will spend their money wisely.
  - The details of someone in your group who will be able to answer questions about the application.

## Make sure your application is:

- Short and to the point. Don't go into unnecessary detail but do make sure you give enough information to allow the reader to understand your area of work, what you want to do and why it's worth funding.
- Attractively presented. You should word process your application to make it easier to read. Handwriting is not really acceptable.
- Divided into short paragraphs to make it easier to read. Don't make your application look too flash or it will seem like you waste money. Also, make sure it doesn't look like a circular or it won't be read.
- Free of jargon and abbreviations. Use straightforward, plain language to avoid misunderstandings. You know your own field of work very well but the funder does not.
- Factual and specific. Don't use general phrases such as 'We are the busiest advice centre in the town' – everyone will try to claim that. Instead, give numbers: '470 new clients attended our weekly open advice sessions during the first six months of this year.'

Here is an example of a short letter of application. It should give you an idea of how a letter can be written containing all the information you need to give.

Southdown Conservation Volunteers  
7 Newtree Road  
Southdown  
SU1 1AT  
Tel: 01999 830200

Ms B Greene  
Smith and Jones Charitable Trust  
Snodgrass Accountants  
2 High Street  
Southdown SU1 3XZ

3 January 2010

Dear Ms Greene,

I am writing on behalf of the Southdown Conservation Volunteers to ask for the support of the Smith and Jones Charitable Trust for our work.

The Conservation Volunteers have been operating now for about 8 years. We are run by a voluntary management committee and are a registered charity no. 654789.

We aim to involve a wide range of local people in practical conservation projects. We work closely with the youth club and community centre in recruiting volunteers. We have been involved in many local projects, most recently, last summer's dredging of the canal with the help of young people from the Southdown Youth Club.

We have received funding in the past from the local authority for basic equipment and to pay volunteers' expenses, but these are only one-off grants and we can't go back to the council.

We have got to the point where we need to replace our stock of tools. They were bought 8 years ago and have been very well used and they are now no longer fit for purpose. A new set of tools would enable us to continue our conservation projects. I am attaching a breakdown of costs involved. The total amount we need is £460.00

I hope you will support the work of the Southdown Conservation Volunteers and look forward to hearing from you. Please let me know if you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,  
Janet Muddey  
Chair, Southdown Conservation Volunteers

Enclosed: costing for project

Rather than trying to put lots of financial detail in your letter, attach a separate sheet with a clear breakdown of all the costs involved:

Southdown Conservation Volunteers  
7 Newtree Road  
Southdown  
SU1 1AT

#### Costing for new tools (April 2010)

|                                      |                |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| 5 spades at £18.84 each              | £94.20         |
| 5 forks at £20.26 each               | £101.80        |
| 2 rakes at £14.96 each               | £29.92         |
| 1 bill hook at                       | £21.74         |
| 1 wheelbarrow at                     | £23.80         |
| 1 mallet at                          | £4.95          |
| 1 pair loppers at                    | £23.79         |
| 2 tarpaulins at £11.45 each          | £22.90         |
| 5 bowsaws at £14.18 each             | £70.90         |
| 20 pairs work gloves at £2.40 a pair | £48.00         |
| 1 pair waders at £18.00              |                |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>£460.00</b> |

#### Some points about applying by letter:

- Letters should be on your headed paper (if you have any).
- Keep your letter to two sides of A4 and attach relevant supporting evidence,
- Make sure it is addressed personally to the named correspondent of the funding body. Never write Dear Sir/Madam. Always find a name and check the spelling.

#### Some points about applying by application form:

- Answer every question on the form. Don't leave a question blank.
- Don't answer by saying 'see attached' and appending lots of extra documents. By making it more difficult for the people assessing your application to find the information they need, they might decide not to read your application at all.

- The application form is all that will be considered. Don't send a letter when there is an application form, and be careful too about sending a covering letter, which contains information that should be in the form.

## Step 4 – Sending your application

Before you send off your application take a copy for your own records.

Get someone, preferably from outside your group, to read it through and check it is clear and that you haven't missed out any obvious points.

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The Workstation  
15 Paternoster Row  
Sheffield S1 2BX

Tel: 0114 249 4343  
Email: [enquiries@syfab.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@syfab.org.uk)  
Website: [www.syfab.org.uk](http://www.syfab.org.uk)

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