

Grant Cycle Basics

1. Preparation

Tell Funders what you need

Have you ever wondered how funders decide what to fund? Larger funders, including many Public and National Lottery funders, undertake research and consultations to inform their grant programmes, such as the 'Big Thinking' consultation. You can also have informal conversations about the types of funding you need and how these are changing. Which is why..

Find out about funders

Funders do their research but you need to research them too! Keeping up to date about what your current and potential funders are supporting and how their priorities and processes are changing is very important.

Once you have identified potential funders, you will need to find out more about their specific grant/ fund and how it works. Funding Central contains information about the range of grants, types of activities funded, deadlines and contact details of over 4,000 funders and is a good place to start your search of a range of finance and funding opportunities.

The new Cheshire East website ASK (Answers, Support, Knowledge) launched late March 2013, brings together the expertise of local community and voluntary organisations to support local groups. As well as providing information there will also be a search function for groups to look for their own grant funding.

Public, National Lottery and larger trusts are usually quite open about their priorities, personnel and processes and will publish this on their websites. Many will also list their previous grants so you can get a sense of the types of activity and organisation that fit in with the grants they offer.

Contacting potential funders

Making contact with funders so they are aware of your organisation before you apply can be helpful, although it is not always possible with smaller trusts and foundations who might not have the capacity to deal with that type of enquiry.

Attending a funding fair or seminar where they are speaking might be a better way to make contact. This is also a good way to learn about new, unexplored or under-utilised funds.

2. Apply

Pre- Application support

You'd be amazed how many applications are rejected due to them being ineligible or incomplete. To avoid wasting your time, make sure you access the pre-application advice, information and support that funder's offer. Don't be afraid to contact them to discuss an element of the application if you are not sure.

Assessment

Assessment can take many forms and invariably takes longer that you would like. On average it can be anything from 2 to 6 months, although bigger grants can take even longer to assess.

Make sure that you know how your application will be assessed, from the guidance and pre-application support, so that you will be prepared for a visit or to provide further information if needed.

Rejection

Everybody gets rejected at some stage and it can be very disappointing. To help reduce your chances of being rejected make sure you have done your research properly and followed the guidance.

Use rejection as an opportunity to get feedback from funders about how to improve your application in future. Not all funders can or will provide feedback. Many good applications are rejected because demand far outstrips supply. Asking why your application was rejected and how you can improve your chances next time can be helpful.

3. Accept

Meeting terms and conditions of funding

Terms and conditions vary from funder to funder. Funders such as the Lottery can have very comprehensive terms and conditions. You may need to adapt or change some of your systems or procedures to ensure that you comply with their standards.

Ensure that you fully understand what is required from your funder, and that you can satisfy the terms of your grant before you accept – as failure to meet these rules could result in you having to pay back all or part of your grant. You might not feel that your organisation can accept the terms, in which case you need to negotiate or even decline

the grant. Many funders will publish these as part of the guidance, ensure you read these before you apply to avoid this situation arising.

Acknowledgement

Most funders will require their logo and name to be used in any publicity or activities which the grant has funded. Most will supply guidelines as to how their logo can and must be used, make sure you adhere to these.

Building Capacity

Some larger funders offer organisations they fund support and information as well as grants – this is often referred to as ‘capacity building’. For example if a funder finds that many applicants need support managing budgets it might arrange a training course on financial management. Attendance can be a condition of the grant or optional. If you are offered capacity building, it can be a good way to meet other funded organisations and get to know your funder better – as well as an opportunity to develop your organisation.

4. Deliver

Having the right funding in place to deliver your charitable activities is what the process is about. Now is the perfect time to build on your success and plan for the future.

Monitoring and reporting

For many grants you may simply be asked for a short report summarising what you did and how you spent the money. Most funders, especially the larger funders will require periodic and detailed reporting, often linked to a payment schedule.

If you have a more demanding funder, you might have to submit an evaluation framework as part of the application or as a condition of the grant. Ensure you know exactly what’s required and when. Monitoring your impact can be extremely useful for your organisation and further funding bids. Increasingly outcomes and impact are the preferred way of measuring by many funders.

What if the project goes wrong?

If things don’t go to plan let your funder know sooner rather than later. Call your funder to notify them of any deviations from the plan and seek their approval if you need to change any aspect of how you spend the grant.

Promoting success

Take any opportunity to promote the activity which is being funded, think about inviting your funder along and send them copies of evaluation reports and other materials. Remember to use all logos and publicity requirements outlined by your funder.

What next?

Ensure your project has a realistic exit strategy and make your organisation more financially sustainable in the long term.

Useful websites:

www.fundingcentral.org.uk

www.just-ask.org.uk (from end March 2013)

www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

www.awardsforall.org.uk

http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/community_and_living/community_grants.aspx