Grant Writing:

Common Mistakes & Top Tips

Yes we know that most of these are common sense, but….

* Not answering the question.  
  One of the most common mistakes, many answers don’t actually tell the funder what they want to know. If they are asking for the need then explain the need, not what you think they want to hear.

TOP TIP: Get a second opinion if unsure what they are asking and use CVS to help you. Don’t forget many funders are approachable and will welcome you asking for clarification.

* Missing or not paying attention to deadlines.  
  Funders are strict about deadlines, they need to be fair and transparent in their deadlines and can’t give special treatment.

TOP TIP: Create a trust diary or spreadsheet. Note down important dates and deadlines and book plenty of time in your diary to write and review applications (including time for someone to proof read).

* Writing negatively or underselling.  
  You are trying to sell your organisation. Why write negatively, don’t focus on your weaknesses!

TOP TIP: Write down five positive statements about your organisation before starting to put yourself in a positive mind set. Try not to write after a stressful day.

* Making an application difficult to read.  
  Easy traps to fall into are jargon, long sentences/paragraphs, acronyms and being repetitive.

TOP TIP: Once written leave for at least 24 hours before submission to re-read it with fresh eyes. Have a ‘critical friend’ read it for you. Don’t be afraid to use bullet points if it makes an application easier to read.

* Making unsubstantiated claims or vague claims.

You are selling your organisation and the work you do.

TOP TIP: Have an example for every claim you make. E.g. instead of; ‘We are making a huge difference to people’s lives’ say ‘Our work is empowering users to make a positive difference to their lives, for example 25% of our service users are now in full-time employment.

* Over exaggeration.

Don’t make huge claims about the number of people you support, the service you deliver or the people you involve. This will catch up with you.

TOP TIP: Get a manager/ delivery team to review. Does the claim make sense and is it achievable? Think SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable , Realistic and Time bound).

* Grammar and spelling.

Fairly self-explanatory, but funders need to have faith in your organisation. A messy, misspelt application could reflect poorly.

TOP TIP: Use spell check, read it out loud to yourself. Does it flow? Does it make sense? Get your ‘critical friend’ to read through.