

APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDING



Introduction

This toolkit is designed to help you understand what a funder is looking for in your application and reveals the hidden things that they won't necessarily ask for but will want to see. It may initially seem like a 'dark art' but anticipating the hidden requirements as well as the requested ones in an application can be quite simple once you understand what makes for a good application. With this knowledge you will be able to develop a greater confidence in what you are sending and potentially succeed where you have previously failed in gaining the confidence of funders in supporting your work.

This Near Neighbours Toolkit has been developed in partnership with the St Philip's Centre and has been written by John McCallum, Near Neighbours East Midlands Coordinator.

John would like to acknowledge the many people and organisations that have provided information and advice that have contributed to the information in each toolkit.

INFORMATION

For more advice and support on any of the issues raised in the toolkit please contact Near Neighbours on:

w www.near-neighbours.org.uk

f www.facebook.com/nearneighbours

@ [@nearneighbours](https://www.instagram.com/nearneighbours)

t [@nearneighbours](https://twitter.com/nearneighbours)

Types of Application

How to apply to a funder, and in what format are the two most valuable things you can find out to help you make an application that will not end up in the fund administrators' rejection pile. The following are ways of making an application:

The 'cold' letter

This is when you have not had contact with the funder and are in fact blindly speculating that they will have an interest in the activity you want funding for. Not surprisingly you will receive a high failure rate from such an approach (although very occasionally someone from smaller local sources of money might take an interest). Many funders specifically say that they will not respond to such applications as in fact they have realised that they tend to be from less sustainable or less worthy causes. It is not surprising that this uninformed approach is ultimately very frustrating to both you and the funder. The best you can normally hope for from a 'cold' letter is to receive more information from the funder as to how you might make a better application in the future.

The 'warm' letter

The warm letter is where you have some information on the funder and are able to craft a letter to them to your advantage. Typically this would be as a result of researching the funder, possibly from their website or information from a trusted fundraising advisor from your own faith networks or a voluntary sector infrastructure support agency. Unless the funder specifies differently, you will use this information to compile a letter of 2 sides of A4 as you can't expect them to wade through pages of information. Therefore it is best to write in full the information the funder wants and then summarise this down to fit in the space you have. You should end up with a letter that provides adequate information on your organisation including what it does, what it is asking for and most importantly why the work you are asking funding for is needed (See end of this Toolkit for a good practice letter example).

The application myth

'One person in an organisation should be responsible for writing funding applications'.

Application reality

In every organisation someone will have the responsibility of writing applications to potential funders and inevitably all of the pressure of the future funding of the organisation is focussed on this individual. While you personally might be able to cope with such pressure this is certainly a risky strategy with potential inbuilt failure factors for the organisation you represent.

The best applications are likely to be the result of combined endeavour by a range of people who contribute their individual skills and knowledge. This is what most voluntary sector funders will want to see evidence of (even if they don't specifically ask for it), as they perceive multiple contributions as indicating community support, future sustainability and effective organisation management.

The 'hot' letter

The rarest of all opportunities, the funder makes contact with you and asks you to write to them with an application for funding. It does happen and more often than not to organisations that are networking in their communities and publicising themselves effectively. If there is a secret to writing this letter it is not to assume too much or be careless on the information you offer as you will still have to meet the funder's criteria so don't take things for 'granted'.

'Door-stepping'

If you have the opportunity 'door-stepping' is the act of walking up to a decision maker or officer from the funding organisation and asking them directly for help. It can be a risky strategy but it is a lot harder for them to say no when they are face to face with you. Rarely might you walk away with an immediate promise of help but it is more likely that, as long as you have made a good impression, they will take a special interest when you finally send in your application. Usually the best way of getting door-stepping opportunities is to attend the same networks and conferences that funders go to. Therefore joining faith and voluntary sector networks is important to find out about these opportunities.

The 'plan'

Certain funders will ask you to send them a 'plan' of what you want to do and others will ask for a project/business plan. In the first instance they probably mean a summary of your project/business plan and not the whole document (as this may be too big for them to wade through). If they don't make it clear then contact them to ask advice on what they specifically want. While many funders won't ask you for a plan, they will all require information from you that you will have worked up in a project/business plan. If you haven't got a project/business plan it is likely that the information you offer will be less well thought out and potentially hamper your opportunity to gain funds. (See *Toolkit on Business Planning*).



The application form

Usually larger funders will have an application form (and often guidelines to help you fill it in). The reason they use a form is to ensure they get the right information for their needs and to treat everyone equally and ensure they are not swamped with unnecessary information. You may find they have word limits in the application boxes and it makes sense to keep to them as a good discipline in getting your message across in short and effective ways. If you can't cut and paste typed answers into the form and have to use handwriting instead make sure it is clear and legible as this will encourage the funder to give it better attention if they can easily read it.

The online application

Potentially, online application forms should make it easier for everyone but even the best have potential glitches for the applicant. For instance some will not allow you to save info or copy it before sending the final version. Therefore it is wise to develop your bid in a Word document before cutting and pasting the final agreed text into the online form you are to submit. Whatever the online form allows you to do, ensure, as in all good applications, that you save a hard copy of what you sent so that if there is a virus in your own or the funder's IT system, you will not have lost all your hard work.

The 2 stage application

An increasing number of funders have a 2 stage process that involves an initial submission from your organisation either by letter, telephone, online or application form. This in effect is designed to weed out organisations at an early stage that do not qualify or are not of the funder's interest. If you submit information that does gain the funder's interest you may then be interviewed on the telephone or visited in person or asked to submit a more detailed application for the final decision making process.

Unique process

In general every funder will have their own unique way in which they want you to apply and as a consequence it is vitally important to read their guidelines and or talk to them about exactly what they want. Some may just want a 2 page letter, others will want an application form and others will want a combination of a letter, a plan, an application form plus a whole range of supporting documents. Local fundraising advisors in Voluntary Sector infrastructure organisations or your faiths network often have knowledge on the needs of a wide range of funders and can help you to compile winning applications.

How will your application be assessed?

A Story of the Clerk to the Trustees of Grant Making Trust (compiled from the collective experience of grant administrators and trustees of both faith and secular funders).

Receiving applications

I work for a firm of Solicitors that is employed as the Clerk to the Trustees of a Grant Making Trust. On average I receive 40 applications each week from Charities far and wide, most of which involve pages and pages of intense information that you have to wade through. Not surprisingly those that are incomplete or hard to read are immediately rejected by me as I don't have time to chase the organisations up and I will just send them a simple letter saying 'Sorry we can't fund you at this time'. I do however have a greater interest in applications where the personnel from the organisation have rung me and asked sensible questions on how to apply, I also appreciate applications that are easy to read and give me what we have asked for in the Trust's published guidelines.

Applying criteria

My aim is then to check that the remaining applications meet the criteria of the Trust (45% will fail this test because they haven't bothered to read the guidelines we publish on the Trust's website). I have a checklist and score sheet to fill in on each remaining application that summarises the information to the Trustees quarterly grant making meeting. I might also photocopy selected pieces of information from the applications to accompany the information I give to the Trustees. If I have enough time and resources I might contact applicants to gain additional information in time for me to assess before the meeting deadline.



Presenting to the Trustees

I have to present all qualifying applications to the Trustees who will use my advice and expertise to help them filter through these. There will be some applications that will ask for more money than the Trust is likely to be able to offer in a single application. Many funders will reject these out of hand but occasionally if the Trustees are particularly motivated about an application they might give them a proportion of what they ask for and reserve payment of this until they have raised the balance of what they need from elsewhere. I am instructed to write to the applicant organisation that will be given twelve months to achieve this.

Limits of funding

Because the Trust makes grants in the current financial year from the interest on its investments from the previous year, the Grants meeting has an agreed budget for each of its quarterly meetings that can't normally be exceeded. The Trustees are generally guided by the application scoring system I operate and only applications that meet all the Trust's criteria and have received a high score from me on the information applicants have sent will be successful in that quarter (The rare exceptions to this might be an application that provides information in a particularly motivating way or is of a personal interest to one or more of the Trustees, this then overrides my advice and normal budget limits). This process inevitably means that otherwise good applications may not succeed because the Trust just doesn't have enough money to fund everyone, so I have to send some a rejection letter that says 'Sorry but we have so many worthy causes applying to us that we can't fund them all'.

Repeat applications

The Trustees are often quite interested in supporting new applications from organisations they have funded before if they can see good progress in the work from that original funding. They are though reluctant to be a core funder for more than 2 successive applications for the same activity. They therefore ask me as Clerk to contact such organisations and ask them for a report on the original work before they will consider the latest application.



Time delays

On occasion the Trustees might ask for more information on an application and defer a decision to the next quarterly meeting. While this is fine with me, it may put the applicant into difficulties if they had made the application too close to the time they actually needed the money (perhaps to avoid making staff redundant). This underlines my view that projects that read our guidelines thoroughly, ring me in advance for advice, have a responsive business plan and apply well ahead are more likely to cope with such a delay.



"We have already got some money"

After sending out the letters to the successful applicants some might reply, 'We have already received some or all of the money we need from another source, may we divert the money you have offered for a slightly different use?' As Clerk I am given discretion by the Trustees to handle such an event and I might be willing to agree to this as long as the money still achieves the final aim of the original application and doesn't conflict with the criteria of the Trust. If it is a very large amount I may have to defer this to the next quarterly meeting of the Trustees for their view.

Complying with an award

With the grant offer letter sent out to the successful applicants I will include an agreement form that requires using the money appropriately and also a monitoring form that as a condition of the grant the successful applicant will have to fill in and return. A prompt return in the timescales I set are expected and an applicant that doesn't comply is less likely in the future to gain funding from us.

My pet hates!

I am only human and like everybody else I can get out of bed on the wrong side on occasion. Therefore while I generally try to be fair it is perhaps not surprising that on some days I feel less happy to support applications I receive who obviously haven't looked at our Trust's criteria on our website or haven't bothered to fill in all of the information asked for in the application form.

I can cope with the odd misspelt word, but I do get frustrated if people are asking me for money and they haven't got their sums right on their budget. This doesn't give me confidence that they will be able to effectively manage any money we give them. My absolute worst frustration is when a successful applicant doesn't bother to say thank you to the Trust for their award, I consequently often file future applications from them in the circular file below my desk marked 'Bin!'

Writing the application

Project Managers

It is often the case that the Project Manager is responsible for the fundraising in a project. If they are the sole worker in a new project there is great justification for them to be the person who practically does the application writing. For projects with other paid staff, volunteers and Management Committees, the Project Manager's role should change from application writer to application editor. This is simply because the average Project Manager has too many other responsibilities to be able to devote enough time to fundraising. It is far better for them to support others who do the practical development of applications and become the final editor of what is sent. This also builds in some sustainability to the organisation's fundraising ability if the Project Manager should be off work for any reason in that more than one person is aware and involved in an application. Depending on the work you do, most funders like to see evidence of the people who will benefit from your work involved in developing your application which is a further reason for having more than one person involved.



Beating deadlines

Too many applications are done at the last minute right up to the deadline. The result of this is that you will be working under pressure and may not make the most effective application. You risk missing a deadline through delays in the post and will certainly be putting yourself and colleagues under critique from others for not planning this activity effectively. Sending your application well in advance of the deadline may also mean that it has a more sympathetic review by the assessor who will have more time available before they are swamped with all the last minute submissions.

Using information from your project/business plan

Every project needs a plan, even if it is only a couple of pages of information it can make your funding application so much more informed. A plan that is owned by all the stakeholders to a project will also mean that the applications resulting from the information in the plan will also be owned by everyone. This gives confidence to the fundraiser in what they write and they will probably have two thirds of the information required already written in the plan for them to cut and paste into an application form *(See Near Neighbours Toolkit 'Sample business plan' as a model on which to base your plan).*

Positive language

Project Support Toolkit 'Telling Your Story' has helpful advice on using positive language in your applications and the process of using successive drafts as you pull the information together. Using words like 'we will' rather than 'we hope to' conveys a more dynamic message to the funder about your determination to succeed for people you are working with.

Inclusive applications

Remember to use the words of the people who benefit from and participate in your project in your application as they will be talking from the heart about their own issues. This is particularly important when working with young people, children and the elderly as such inclusiveness is often a hidden criterion of a funder.

Verbification - avoid complicated words and sentences

It is always a good idea to write at least the introduction to your story in a style that a 12 year old might easily understand, for the likelihood is that it will then be understandable by all. This is a good discipline as it should really ensure that what you write is inclusive of everyone and allows them to feel interested and involved. Have a look at the way magazines and newspapers use words and construct sentences for inspiration on packing information into a short piece of writing. Always get someone else to read your work, and give them a brief to help you simplify it - why not involve the beneficiaries of your work on this too?

Hidden criteria

The majority of funders will try to have clear criteria of who and what they want to fund but most will still have hidden criteria that they may not even realise is there. So what are potential hidden criteria? The first is the ever present human foibles of the individuals you are dealing with and their likes and dislikes about spelling or grammar or even have a prejudice against your sort of work from a previous experience elsewhere. Some funds have hidden geographical preferences that you can only reveal by looking at where they have funded in the past.

If you are a new organisation a funder may be less keen to risk money on you but they won't always tell you that. Some funds may have all sorts of criteria but because they are so secretive no one knows what it is they really want in an application. You can do some things to avoid this like having your spelling and sums checked by a competent person but whatever you do you won't always succeed in every application because of the hidden criteria factor. This can be frustrating but if you are at least aware that this might happen you can then cope with the inevitable rejections that every fundraiser faces and then bravely soldier on to write the next application.

To ensure your application meets both your needs and those of the funder, you might consider the following points of good practice.

Draft stages before your application is complete

Most people write a number of drafts before they are happy with their story and funding application, below are suggested stages to help you understand and structure this:

1. Collate your information in the rough order you require it, and source information specific to the funders' requirements.
2. Refine the information into the story format e.g. a letter, application form, project plan and supporting documents (use photocopies of an application form for your drafts).
3. Ask one or more people who are numerate and literate to proof read your written story for accuracy, and check that it makes sense.
4. Use a check list from the funder and/or draw up a detailed contents list for yourself of what you are sending.
5. Have a senior manager/chair of committee/faith leader read, approve and sign before sending the application to the funder.

Key elements of the letter



Address

If you are an established group you should use your letterhead and if you are a registered charity or limited company put your registration number on this. If you are a new group without a more formal identity just put the contact details of a lead person down. You will ensure that whoever is writing has their name and full address on the right-hand side of the first page and include your direct telephone number and email address.

The person you identify as your point of contact should be able to talk with some knowledge about the application if the funder eventually makes contact. You may put the date of sending below these details and your reference number if you have one. On the left hand side at the top of the page it is a good idea to put the name and title of the person you are writing to and/or the name of the organisation i.e. followed by the full postal address of where you are sending the letter. This has the added benefit when you keep a copy of confirming for your files where your letter was sent and to whom.

Salutation!

If you are asked to write to the correspondent and you know the name and their title a simple 'Dear' followed by the individual's name is fine, if you don't know their name you might say:

'Dear *(Name of the Organisation)*,

If you don't have the name of a correspondent and are sure it is a Grantmaking Trust, Charity or Foundation you might say:

'Dear Trustees of the *(Name of the Organisation)*,

Opening statement and 'ask'

Name your group/project, its location and what you are writing to the funder for, giving a planned outcome and an amount of money you have researched that they are likely to give which meets your needs. Immediately they know in one or two sentences what your project is about, where it will be and what you are asking from them. This will then frame the rest of the letter for them e.g. 'I am writing to the Biggsworth Trust to seek a grant of £10,000, or an amount of your choosing, to enable Anyshire Action Project to support the young people of Uptown with accredited volunteer mentors that will help them avoid criminal offending'.

Who we are

Brief info on the group and the activity, including how long it's operated and what it does overall.

Group aims

This should be either the aims of your group detailed in a written plan, or a specific aim for an element of your work that you are asking funding for. Try and make it short but detailed by giving ages and numbers if possible. 'To support young people in Uptown aged 13-16 to make healthy lifestyle choices and avoid crime and anti-social behaviour'.

Or

'To recruit, train and support 20 volunteer mentors to gain accreditation and work with 150 young people of Uptown who are most at risk of offending'.

Project summary

This is where you highlight what you are planning to do and what work the money you are asking for will achieve, probably detailing personnel who will deliver it and include such things as participation by beneficiaries in guiding the work. You might also give a short indicative case study.

The need

Most funders will have criteria which might include faith, gender, location, category of social need and possibly age and background. In the need section you will work to firmly assure them that you qualify for their help and will establish how you identified the needs of your beneficiaries, any corroborating evidence from other agencies and information directly from the people you are helping.

People and practice

This is where you say what a competent group you are, that has the right people, practices and policies to effectively manage any money you are given and achieve outstanding results for your beneficiaries.

Funding

Many grant makers will want to know if their money is complementing funding from elsewhere and here you will state who else has given money and/or who else you are applying to. You will also provide your budget total for the project, you might also offer information on materials and volunteer time given 'in kind' that adds value to your project.

The conclusion

Normally you will extend an invitation to visit the project and detail any supporting information enclosed with your application. Some funders will specifically say not to send anything in support and if they are interested they will contact you, others give a checklist of information they want but some won't and you have to guess what might be of help. You might then include such things as Annual Report & Accounts, a project budget specifically written for the funder, promotional leaflets and evaluation reports and sometimes pictures of activity subject to appropriate permissions being given by those featured. It is usual to offer to send any more info that might be required by the funder and then thank them for their consideration of the application as you sign off with a handwritten signature and typewritten name and role underneath.

All that in 2 pages?

It might seem an impossible task to get all this info on 2 pages plus the address etc. but it can be done with a little care and practice. It is probably not a cardinal sin if you were to expand onto another page but don't lose the KISS principle – Keep it Short and Simple. You are dealing with the frailties of humans and if they have had a bad day in the funder's office, the letter that is easy to read and gives all the info needed is more likely to receive their interest than the lengthy rambling essay.

An application letter example

Names and addresses are fictitious but the letter is based on successful applications with similar content:

Mr J McDougal
Clerk to the Trustees
**The Barrey
Sunrise Charitable
Foundation**
20 Bland Square
London
W41J 6LO

18.09.17

Our Ref OP/MJ/1234

Dear Mr McDougal

I am writing to ask the Trustees of The Barrey Sunrise Charitable Foundation to consider supporting The Omega Project as it works with the most disadvantaged community in Brogshire. We would ask you to consider a grant of £5,000 towards a part time youth inclusion worker salary for the year beginning 01.04.18. This would enable us to provide life changing after school sessions for 150 young people aged 8 to 16 who are otherwise failing at school and becoming involved in criminal activity.

Mick Jagger
Project Coordinator
The Omega Project
The Community Centre
Eastfield Road
Brogton
BN03 1MJ
Tel: 0123456789
Email: mjagger@
omega.org
Reg. Charity No.

APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDING

Who we are – The Omega Project charity began in 2010 and we now work with communities across Brogshire to devise and deliver life changing opportunities for over 1,000 children, young people and families every year. The Omega Project has worked successfully in Brogton for 6 years providing youth work activities, holiday play-schemes, and parent support.

The Omega Project's aim – To help young people at greatest risk of failing to achieve in education and relationships, to reduce their social isolation and improve family relationships, mental health and wellbeing. Most of all we want to help them build their resilience to have a happy and loving adolescence that leads to a healthy and prosperous future.

Project summary – Omega provides one to one support and informal group work to inspire change in young people of diverse faith and ethnicity referred to us by schools, youth offending and social services. The full time Project Manager and part time Youth Inclusion Worker visit the young person in their home and school, gaining their agreement to join our after-school activity groups. Staff and trained volunteers use a minibus to take them away from their regular haunts, providing respite, mentoring, outdoor activity and opportunities to make healthy lifestyle choices. This provides space to simply be active young people rather than live up to the labels of 'drug user', 'shoplifter' or 'anti-social troublemaker' that they are locally associated with. The young participants choose what activities the group does and also agree the boundaries for their conduct and that of their peers. Their input is key to ensuring that our services are relevant and sympathetic to their faith and ethnic culture.

Young people cannot attend unless they make active decisions to change their behaviours. In our evaluated pilot project with 150 young people we have seen that their eagerness to participate has resulted in 95% avoiding exclusion from school, 92% improving attendance at school and 89% going on to have a better reference for future employers. **Mary, now aged 17, attended the project for 2 years and said:**

"Omega helped me to believe in myself and led me to improve relationships with my mum and my teachers who had barred me from school. I was self-harming and getting into drugs but now avoid this and feel much better. The project really helped me cope as I struggled at school and encouraged me to try college and this has been so great I have now passed my first year certificate for a diploma in computer administration."

The need for the Omega Project – In 2015 we identified 124 families from social housing in the BN03 postcode that had significant needs not being met by other agencies, 87 of whom were prioritised by the Brogton Children and Families Agency as being 'at extreme risk'. Young people from these families are all identified as having poor educational achievement, poor family/social relationships, poor health & well-being and are at risk of offending. The communities they live in are in the top 10% of indices of multiple deprivation in England meaning that family poverty and consequent lack of hope and aspiration is severe and debilitating.

Our work will target young people with the following needs as highlighted in evidence from the 150 young people we currently work with:

- 30 young people are experiencing self-harm/suicide attempt/clinical depression;
- 16 young people are suffering bereavement or significant loss;
- 74 young people are excluded or are truanting from school;
- 102 young people are living in households entirely dependent on state benefits;
- 43 young people are currently involved in the criminal justice system.

Our people and practice – The Omega Project has a high standard of management of its employees, volunteers and activities as part of our Brogshire Hub directly overseen by Mrs Edith Caring our Trustee for Children's work supervision and our youth service users council. We work to the Government's Child and Youth outcomes standards and our own comprehensive policies and procedures that ensure the Child and their safeguarding are at the forefront of activity. The Omega Project is proud that it has an outstanding track record of enabling the young people we work with to volunteer in the project when they reach the age of 16 to give back to their community.

Our funding – We are currently funded by grants from Near Neighbours £5,000; The Tool Shop Foundation £4,000; Brogton Council £1,000; Brogshire Community Foundation £2,500, The Omega Trust £1,196 and donations from local faith groups and the community. We are reapplying to all of the above and to an additional 20 relevant local and regional funders and are awaiting results. Our total budget of £30,895 for 2017/18 is excellent value for the significant impacts in young lives that we achieve, this equates to £206 per year for each young person we work with.

I do hope the information enclosed which comprises an independent evaluation, budget, annual report/accounts and supporting information on our work, will be of interest to you. If you require more information please do not hesitate to contact me and I extend a welcome to you if you would like to visit the project.

I would like to thank you and the Trustees of The Barrey Sunrise Charitable Foundation for your time in consideration of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Mick Jagger

Mick Jagger

Coordinator for The Omega Project

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