# Effective Grant Applications

An Independent Charity No. 1075060

Competition for funding has never been more fierce. It's important that your application fits the criteria of the funder, answers all of their questions and also stands out from the crowd. Here are some top hints for writing effective grant applications, both for filling in application forms and when making an application in writing (when there is no specific form).

## General advice:

- Understand your grant funder - make sure you do your research and really get a feel for what types of projects they're looking to fund. What are their priorities? If you don't fit, don't bother.
- The length of your letter/application form should be dictated to you be the guidance given by the funder – if they say two sides of A4 or 250 words that's all they want so don't go over.

## Get the grant officer's attention:

- Summarise a clear aim which encompasses everything you want to achieve, for example 'we aim to improve the life chances of the disadvantaged young people on our estate, by providing them with inspiring role models, employment related training and education programmes on the effects of drugs and alcohol.'
- Keep it precise, real and don't waffle.
- Use plain English, don't use complicated terminology, jargon or abbreviations that don't mean anything.

## Use real life examples:

- If space permits, use a case study or figures which will give the reader a real feel for what it is you do.

## Be specific:

- Use bullet points to keep points concise.
- Keep referring back to the question (if you're completing an application form) asking yourself what else you can say that will answer the point.
- Use numbers, facts and figures that give the grant officer an indication of how many people your project/organisation reaches (see Information Sheet 4.4 Evidencing Need and Defining Outcomes)
- Make a strong, specific case for your work.

## Rewrite and revise:

- Proofread your application a day or two after you've completed it as you can sometimes get bogged down and can't always "see the wood for the trees."
- Get feedback on a draft application from VODA's Funding Adviser before your submit your application - this is a free and highly valuable service.
- Don't make assumptions the grant officer knows anything about your organisation or the area from which you operate or the people who benefit from your service - be clear on every point.

# Effective Grant Applications

## Filling in an application form

The following advice is specific to a situation where the funder you are applying to has an application form. It is becoming increasingly common for these to be completed and submitted electronically or online so ensure that you make drafts, save and keep copies of everything you do.

**Download or request the guidelines as well as the application form:** Ensure you are clear about how to complete the form and that you have read and fully understand the guidelines, before deciding whether to apply.

**Read through the whole application form before starting to complete it:** That way you won't end up repeating yourself and you can keep your answers more concise. If you don't understand any part, ask the funder or VODA's Development Team for advice and support.

**Answer the questions they ask you:** This may sound obvious, but ensure your answer relates directly to the question. Avoid going off on tangents or including any information that is not directly relevant.

**Do a trial run:** Don't submit the first form you complete. Print off copies and practice on them, remembering to save or make copies of your draft. Always proofread your forms and ask VODA's Funding Adviser to check your completed application before you submit it.

**Do not exceed the space given:** Use the amount of space given as a guide to how much detail is required for each answer. Do not continue on extra paper unless specifically asked to do.

**Be clear and concise:** Use bullet points where appropriate and don't waffle. If you are completing the form by hand ensure your handwriting is completely legible, and if you are printing a version, ensure the print quality is good.

**Include any extra information asked for:** Make sure that you send documents, details or information that the funder asks for such as copies of accounts, constitution or business plan. If the application has a checklist, make sure you tick the things asked for off one by one.

**Final checks:** Make sure you have included a contact name and details. Keep a copy of your final version and record the date you sent it. Finally, respond promptly if you care asked for more information after sending the form. Remember any delay in you replying will hold up your application and could appear negatively to the funder.

## Writing a letter of application

Some smaller sum funders don't have an official application form, so they ask you to send in a covering letter instead. In this case, it is absolutely vital that you provide them with all the information they need using no more words or pages than they specify (usually no more than two sides of A4). If a trust or foundation tells you what they would like you to say in your letter, then make sure you cover all the points they raise. For those who don't specify, you should include the following information:

# Effective Grant Applications

**Trust Correspondent's name and full trust address:** Never send anything generic.

**Project title and summary:** This is what the money asked for will fund (its NOT the name of your group) and describes what you want to do. Briefly introduce what you want to do, why and how much it will cost (use exact figures).

**Background information:** Very brief description and background of your organisation. You may want to mention past achievements; give evidence of track record, where you operate, what you do, why you do it and so on. Describe the problem or need and back this up with hard evidence (see Information Sheet 4.4 Evidencing Need and Defining Outcomes).

**Your proposals:** Answer the following questions: What do you want to do? How will it work? Who will benefit? What will the money be spent on? How will you measure how effective you have been?

**Why are you the people to do it?** Try and establish your credibility. Ask yourself: Why should the funder trust you? Do you have any links with other established and well-regarded organisations? Tell them which Trusts or Foundations have funded you in the past. This shows you have a good track record.

**Why have you approached this particular fund?** Show that you have read their guidelines and explain how your application fits their priorities. Ensure you have done your research on the funder.

**Tell them the total cost and how much you want from them:** It's a good idea to let them know where the rest of the money is coming from, if you are only asking them for a contribution. If so, tell them which other funders you have applied to (this wont affect your application adversely but lets the funders talk to each other to see who's interested in funding your application.) Reassure them that you will let them know immediately if other funders stump up the cash in the meantime.

**The signature:** Whoever signs must be reasonably senior, be able to answer any questions the funder may ask and be easily contactable. Make sure that their status within your organisation is clear.

**Enclosures:** If they have guidelines, they will tell you what to enclose. If not, you should enclose a detailed budget for the project, a copy of your latest accounts and signed and dated constitution (or other governing document), and if you have one, a project plan.

## For more information:

VODA's Funding Adviser can help you in all aspects of funding applications. Contact the Development Team on 0191 643 2635 or email development@voda.org.uk.

**North Tyneside VODA**
Queen Alexandra Campus
Hawkeys Lane, North Shields
NE29 9BZ

THE BRITISH ASSESSMENT BUREAU
ISO9001

0191 643 2626
www.voda.org.uk
Charity number 1075060