

# Easy Mistakes to Make in Funding Applications



This factsheet is intended for people involved in voluntary and community groups who are new to fundraising. You will find this information helpful if your group is very small and/or very new, and has not had any grants yet, or if you are new as a committee member, volunteer or employee and want some tips and advice when fundraising.

We look at four areas that you need to consider when completing your funding applications:

- The worthy cause that speaks for itself
- Not defining 'The Need' well enough
- Filling in the form without reading the guidelines
- Giving up when you get a rejection

helping you make a difference

## The worthy cause that speaks for itself

Innumerable groups who have their grant application turned down react with astonishment. “Isn’t it crucial to give our kids the best chance?” they might say, or “life is so difficult for people on our deprived estate, you’d think that’s what they’re there to help with!”

Well, there are two things to bear in mind. Firstly, gone are the days when philanthropic benefactors doled out cash on the basis of an emotional response. And good riddance – that’s why it was generally thought easier to attract money to help children and animals, while less attractive causes like adults with mental health problems or young offenders, for instance, didn’t get a look in.

Secondly, there are millions of worthy causes. Funders will always want to do something about them, but they also want to make sure their money is put to best use, and so they choose projects that are well thought out and well managed, that are likely to make the most positive difference.

**So never assume that the worthiness of the cause all by itself is going to attract funds. Instead, concentrate on careful planning and making sure your organisation is up to managing your project well. Make sure you explain all this in your application.**

## Not defining ‘The Need’ well enough

Well, this can be a little confusing, because there are actually *two* needs that groups can describe. The mistake is to start explaining the *group’s* need for a worker/ computer/ office/minibus or whatever, rather than explaining *The Needs* of the people the group is trying to help.

*Start with the needs of the people you work with (i.e. poverty; health problems; disadvantage), then show how you could help meet their needs if you had a worker/computer/office/minibus etc.*

It is also a mistake to load your application with pages of official statistics about the social or economic circumstance of people living in a deprived city. Funders know that anybody can lay hands on this kind of information. They want to see what life is like for the people *you* work with. Official statistics are helpful to back up your own local knowledge. But the best applications describe *real* people and the *real* lives of the people you help.

*Do your own research, provide your own statistics alongside the official ones. Give a full and colourful picture of the lives of the people you work with. Never underestimate the power of your own local knowledge.*



## Filling in the form without reading the guidelines

It's tempting, especially when you're in a hurry or when you have more than one application to prepare. But *always* read the funder's guidelines and instructions *thoroughly* first. Put the form away in a drawer, and go through the guidance in detail, with a highlighter pen if necessary. Also watch out for any items of expenditure that this funder won't allow.

Preferably, get a few people together to look through and discuss the guidance. Together you can pool information about how your group and your project will meet this funder's guidelines and priorities. If there is anything in the guidance that you don't think you can meet, or that you don't understand, *don't ignore it - check it*.

Ring the funder, or contact us at CVS to see if we can help. *Then* get the form out and write that information into the relevant questions. Ultimately if the funder is emphasising something that your project just doesn't meet, you have to ask yourself whether this funder is the right one for you to apply to.

*Careful and detailed consideration of the funder's guidance will help you give them the information they need to enable them to give you money. Or it will save you the wasted effort in making an application that stands little chance of success*

## Giving up when you get a rejection

Many groups write off a funder when they get their application turned down. They'll say things like; "Oh yes, we tried Awards for All, and they won't fund us" or "Such and such a Charitable Trust aren't interested".

Some funders do indeed have rules about re-applying so you do need to check whether there are any restrictions on making another application. But if not, *try again*.

Some funders will give you reasons why your application was turned down. They might say things like "There was insufficient evidence of the need for this project" or "The planning was not well enough worked out" or "This project did not meet our priorities". These are clues that can help you make a better application. If you cannot see why they thought this about your application, discuss it with someone outside your organisation who can be objective.

Hull CVS can have a look at applications you've made and offer constructive comments. If the funder is one that is approachable, and you have a contact you can ring, *do ring!* If you can develop a constructive dialogue with any funder, your chances of making a successful application are much better.

Unless there are restrictions on submitting applications for the same project, you can work on your application, make it better and try again. Don't *assume* you cannot re-apply check.

Don't just change the date and post it back though, you will have to do some more work thinking about how you planned the application and maybe make some changes. You might also be able to appeal against an adverse decision if you think your application wasn't give fair consideration. Find out if that funder has a complaints procedure or appeals procedure.



## Other factsheets you may find useful:

Fundraising - The First Steps  
Writing a Letter of Application to Funders  
Community Fundraising  
Lotteries and the Law



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