

## What Makes a Good Application?

There is no magic formula. What you say will depend on who *you* are (household name? new group?), who *they* are (local funder? miles away? a body you've had support from before? a specialist in the field?), how much you want (£50? £5 million?) and what you want the money for (obvious good cause? something totally innovative? revenue? capital?) But a good way of working out what to say is to **put yourself in their shoes**.

Imagine you're the funder - one of the trustees, a member of the grants panel, whoever. What would *you* want to know?

You'd be reading a lot of applications, probably in a short space of time, so for a start you'd favour those that were **clear** and **concise**. Fairly early on you'd want to know **who** was applying, **how much** they wanted and **what** they wanted it **for**.

***A clear summary early on gives the impression you know what you're doing, you're business-like and will be able to achieve what you set out to do.***

Imagine you're the funder again. You probably want to know something about the group - how long they've been going, what (briefly) they've managed to do so far, what kind of legal structure they've got, how many members of staff, if any, they have. If they're quite far away, you might want to know something about the area they work in - what kind of problems it has - and you would want to see evidence that the group was getting support locally, from the local authority or local trusts.

***Funders need to have confidence in the group, to feel that the group has credibility - with users of the service they provide, with other funders, perhaps with other agencies in the area..***

Continue being a funder. You're going to want to know **what the problem is**. What is it that your money can help solve. You're going to be particularly keen to know that there's a problem 'out there' in the real world - not that the group would like a minibus or a computer (who wouldn't?) but that the minibus or the computer would be used by the group to help solve some real problem. People 'out there' in the community can't get around and this significantly diminishes the quality of their lives; the service they're getting is suffering because the group's administration isn't effective, or whatever the reason is.

As a funder you'll want to feel that the problem is:

- the result of a demand by 'real people', not invented to suit the money available
- concrete, not abstract
- to do with people's needs, not just lack of something (so what if there isn't a something-or-other?)
- urgent
- solvable

As a funder you'll also want to be convinced that the group applying to you is the best organisation to tackle this particular problem.

***Funders need to be convinced that there's a problem which should concern or interest them.***

As a funder, you've been convinced that there's a problem and it falls within your remit. Now you will want to know **how** the group is going to tackle the problem. There are two parts to this: the group's **objectives** and its **methods**. Take the example of the group wanting a minibus. The group has described a real problem 'out there' - let's say elderly, housebound people becoming isolated and depressed. They are going to tackle the problem by reducing the old peoples' isolation (that's their *objective*) and the *method* in this case is to get a minibus to carry them to a day centre. The minibus is the means to an end, not the end itself. As a funder you will want to know:

- **who** will do
- **what** to
- **by whom**
- **when**

***Funders need telling what can be done and what will be achieved.***

All funding bodies get more applications than they can respond to. If you can't fund everything you'd like to, you may be particularly interested in schemes which make your money go further. So if the group shows that a small grant from you will lever out a big grant from somewhere else, or the lessons drawn from their demonstration project will be learnt by many other agencies, you may be more likely to support their project.

***Funders like to see a 'multiplier effect' - the effect of their grant is greater than the actual sum of money suggests.***

Wearing your funder's hat again, you will want to know how the group will be able to tell whether they've achieved their objective. How will you know that your money has been well spent? How can you tell that the group has made effective use of your money? You will want to see some evidence that the group has thought about evaluation and monitoring.

***Funders need convincing that you care about the problem and about spending the money to best effect.***

As a funder you also care about the *efficient* use of money. You will wonder whether the group will waste your money. Can they handle money? Are they well-meaning but woolly? You will want to see a budget. And you will be reassured if

- it's clear
- it's comprehensive
- it adds up
- it's realistic
- it's not over-inflated
- it shows any other funders involved
- if appropriate, it shows other non-money support.

***Funders want evidence that you can handle money effectively.***

Finally, you'll want to know what happens when your grant to the group runs out. Will the group come

back, over and over again? Will the project come to an end? Will anyone else pick up the tab?

***Funders don't want to be bothered forever.***

### **Useful books**

There are a wide range of fundraising publications available in the Community Involvement Unit's Library but if you wish to purchase your own, two of the best are:

*Avoiding the Wastepaper Basket: A Practical Guide for Applying to Grant-Making Trusts*, by Tim Cook, pub. LVSC, 2nd ed., 1998, £5.50, ISBN 1 872582 61 3.

*Writing Better Fundraising Applications*, by Michael Norton & Mike Eastwood, pub. DSC, 3rd ed., 2002, £14.95, ISBN 1 903991 09 9.