

How to write a great grant application: a short guide

Writing a compelling grant application is both an art and a science. Funders receive many more applications than they can support, so success depends on clarity, alignment, evidence and a strong sense of purpose. A great application doesn't simply describe a project; it demonstrates why the work matters, who will benefit and how the funding will create meaningful, lasting impact. This guide outlines the essential components of a high-quality application and offers practical tips to help your proposal stand out.

1. Start with the funders' purpose

Strong applications begin long before any form is filled in. The most important early task is to understand the funder's mission, priorities and expectations. Read their strategy, eligibility criteria and any thematic focus areas. Many funders publish guidance or host events to introduce their programmes – the more you understand their aims, the more precisely you can frame your proposal.

Ask yourself

- Does our project clearly align with the funder's priorities?
- Can we articulate that alignment in the funder's own language?
- Is the timing right and do we meet all eligibility requirements?

A good application never forces a project to fit a call. Instead, it presents a natural, thoughtful match between your work and the funder's ambitions.

2. Clarify the problem you aim to address

Every grant application must start with a clear, well-defined problem. Funders want to support work that responds to a genuine need, not an abstract idea. Your problem statement should be concise, evidence-based and centred on the people or communities you aim to support.

Aim to

- Write good problem statements.
- Show why the issue matters now.
- Draw on credible data, lived experience, or community insight.
- Specify who is affected and how.

Avoid vague claims like 'there is a need for better support'; instead provide detail: who, where, how many and what the consequences are if nothing changes.



3. Articulate a strong and achievable vision

Once the problem is clear, describe the change you hope to create. This is not a list of activities but a statement of intended outcomes and impact.

Funders respond to

- A compelling vision that is also realistic.
- Clarity about short-term outcomes and long-term benefits.
- A strong link between the activities you propose and the change you expect to see.

Your vision should feel ambitious but grounded. The strongest applications show that you understand both the scale of the problem and your organisation's capacity to influence it.

4. Present a well-designed project plan

Your project plan should translate your vision into concrete, deliverable steps. A clear plan demonstrates competence, credibility and readiness for delivery.

Include

- Activities: What you will do and in what sequence.
- Timeline: When key stages will start and finish.
- Roles & responsibilities: Who will lead and who will contribute.
- Dependencies & risks: What could affect success and how you will mitigate this.

Funders appreciate projects that are proportionate to the size of the grant. If the grant is modest, keep the scope focused; if it is substantial, show an appropriate level of infrastructure, governance and partnership planning.

5. Demonstrate community or stakeholder involvement

Authentic engagement strengthens applications. Funders increasingly expect projects to be co-designed with, or at least informed by, the people most affected by the issue.

Think about

- How you have listened to beneficiaries or stakeholders.
- How their insights have shaped the design.
- How you will continue to involve them throughout the project.

This builds trust and demonstrates that your project reflects real needs, not assumptions.



6. Build a strong case for impact

Impact is the heart of every grant application. Funders want to know not only what you will do, but how the world will be better as a result.

Address

- Who will benefit and how many people you expect to reach.
- What will change for them during and after the project.
- How you will measure success, including methods and indicators.
- How the impact will endure, even after the grant ends.

Use both quantitative and qualitative measures where appropriate. Funders value thoughtful evaluation, not overly complicated frameworks.

7. Explain why your organisation is best placed to deliver the work

A strong application conveys confidence in your organisation. Briefly describe your mission, experience, expertise and track record of delivering similar work.

Highlight

- Relevant skills or specialist knowledge.
- Previous project outcomes or testimonials.
- Partnerships that enhance your credibility.

Make this section concise: funders want reassurance of capability, not pages of organisational history.

8. Provide a transparent, well-constructed budget

Budgeting is a critical part of the application. It needs to be:

- Clear
- Realistic
- Fully aligned with your plan
- Proportionate to the scale of work
- A good budget:
 - Breaks down costs in a logical way.
 - Shows good value for money.
 - Explains any unusual or high-cost lines.
 - Includes appropriate overheads, if permitted.

Funders often scrutinise budgets closely; transparency and professionalism here build trust.



9. Make the application accessible, clear and compelling

Funders read many applications. Clarity is a competitive advantage.

Tips

- Write in plain, direct language.
- Avoid jargon, unless you define it clearly.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs concise.
- Use headings to guide the reader.
- Stay within word limits.
- Focus on the essentials - don't bury key messages.

Many excellent projects lose out simply because the proposal is hard to follow.

10. Strengthen the application through partnerships

When relevant, partnerships can significantly enhance a proposal's credibility and impact. They can demonstrate reach, collaboration, added value and improved sustainability.

If you work in partnership

- Describe the partner roles clearly.
- Explain why each partner is involved.
- Demonstrate how the partnership increases the project's effectiveness.

Choose partners who share your values and bring genuine strengths to the project, not merely names for a proposal.

11. Address equity, inclusion and accessibility

All contemporary funders prioritise equity, diversity and inclusion.

Make clear how your project

- Reaches groups who might otherwise be overlooked.
- Removes barriers to access.
- Understands the needs of specific communities.
- Ensures inclusive communication and engagement.

This isn't a box-ticking exercise it should be evident throughout your design and delivery plan.



12. Show sustainability and longer-term thinking

Funders want to understand what happens after their grant ends.

Even if ongoing work will require future funding, describe

- How the project will continue or evolve.
- How learning will be embedded.
- How the project might influence wider systems, policy or practice.
- What your exit or handover strategy will be.

Sustainability strengthens confidence in the value of the investment.

13. Review, refine and test your application

Before submitting

- Ask a colleague to review the draft for clarity and logic.
- Check that the narrative, plan and budget are fully aligned.
- Ensure that every question is answered directly.
- Remove duplication or irrelevant detail.
- Proofread carefully.

Submitting early, not at the last minute, reduces errors, stress and gives time for improvements.

14. Be authentic

Perhaps the most overlooked ingredient of a great application is authenticity. Write with honesty and conviction. Funders can tell when an organisation deeply understands its work and cares about the people it serves. Genuine passion, presented clearly and professionally, makes a lasting impression.