HOW TO WRITE A FUNDING APPLICATION

Introduction:
Many community organisations apply for funding on a regular basis. Applying for funds can seem a thankless task when you are fully occupied running your organisation and it can also be a time consuming or even stressful job.

Many of these tips below are also to be found in "The Grant Seeker's Guide to successful funding applications" produced by Trust Waikato. This publication can be downloaded for free at: http://www.versite.co.nz/~2011/15671/

Myths	Tips
Funders are always fair	Funders are human
Funders are only looking for reasons not to fund	Funders are looking to give money away - wisely
The more you write, the better	Use plain language – be concise
Ask for more, you'll get more	Avoid inflated budgets – funders compare
Funders don't talk to each other	Some have awesome networks
Funders read everything you send	If they do, its only a quick skim
If you don't fit the criteria, apply anyway	Don't risk annoying the funder or wasting your time, you'll probably be turned down
Funders are good at mind reading	Tell them everything they need to know
Funders will follow up on missing information	Some do – most don't

1.   Know your project:
- Before you consider applying for funding for your project you need to have a good understanding of what the project is all about.
- By the time you are ready to seek funding the project must be already developed and ready to go. Obtaining funding should be the **last step** in the process.
- In a lot of cases it is the chicken and egg situation. For example how can you get a project up off the ground without the funding yet how can you get funding without a well-developed project and in many cases how can you get funding without having 'proved the benefit of the project'?
- Make sure the contact person on your funding application knows the project too. If you are asked to provide the names of two contact people make sure they both know about the project.

2.   Know your group's achievements:
- Many funders want to see some evidence that your group has the skills and know-how necessary to carry out the project you are seeking funding for. So without some 'history' of achievements funding is very difficult to obtain.

- These achievements can be anything from work your group has done in developing the particular project and the effort that has already gone into that, to past activities and projects that you have run.

3.   A Budget:
- The importance of a detailed budget – not only for the project you are seeking funding for but also for your group's activities for the next 12 months – cannot be underestimated.
- Just the fact that your group has attempted a budget shows your ability to forward plan. It also allows you to direct funding applications more successfully as you have already identified which aspects of your budget require funding and you can then match these up with the funders 'priorities'.

4.   A Business Plan:
- An even more effective tool to show your groups ability to forward plan is to produce a Business Plan. This allows funders to see that your group has direction, has thought about your priorities for the following year and that you are well organised and efficient.

5.   Proving Benefit:
- Obtaining letters of support from other groups in the community who have had some involvement with your group or who are aware of the particular project you are seeking funding for. This shows any prospective funder that your project is 'needed' can provide community 'benefit' and/or that your group has the necessary skills to effectively carry out the project.
- Any letters of support should be signed, dated and recent.

6.   Know the Funder:
- Make some contact with the funder, preferably before the application closing date. This will allow you to find out exactly what the priorities of the funder are and enable you to tailor your application accordingly. It also may assist in the long run with the success of your application.
- Just like applying for a job really – a first step in the door.
- However, be cautious. You should not use this as an opportunity to 'sell' your project as this can put people off and in some cases even rule out your application for funding. If a funder feels that they have been 'lobbied' then this will not enhance your chances.

7.   The value of volunteers:
- Include any volunteer contributions in your budget. Remember that many funders look at the % of funds you are requesting against the total cost of your project so the greater the contribution the group, the more chance of success.

8.   Making a Contribution:
- Having some funds of your own to put towards the project will also improve your chances of success. If a funder can see that your group is willing to contribute towards the costs of the project then its value will be highlighted.

- If your group does not have any funds available then undertake some sort of fundraising event to generate some capital. This also has the added benefit of showing any funder that your group is willing to put some effort into your project instead of just sitting back and waiting for funding to arrive.

9.   Those attachments:
- Yes – attachments can be the one of the real headaches of completing funding applications. Many groups get to this section and just give up. But if you have done all the preliminary work then they shouldn't be a stumbling block.
- If a funding application asks for additional information to be attached, then you **must** attach it. There is nothing worse than receiving an application for funding that is incomplete. And, receiving an application that is complete on the closing date is an added 'merit point' for your group.
- If you are finding difficulty in providing some information that the funder is requesting, then clarify this with the funder. It may very well be that something else will do instead.

10.   Adding Extra:
- Adding extra attachments to your application can do no harm; make sure they are relevant to the project you are seeking funding for.
- For example if you are applying for funding to undertake animal pest control providing the results of a previous trapping programme can enhance your application.
- A word or warning here though! Don't attach additional information just for the sake of it. Applications for funding that are bulky and don't include relevant information are off-putting.

11.   Financial Stuff:
- Now don't run away here. If there is one thing alone that puts groups off making funding applications – it is the financial requirements of any funder. However knowing the purpose of the requests for financial information can often make it all seem so easy.
- This may surprise you to know but one of the main reasons funders ask for financial information is to just prove that your group actually exists! A set of accounts, an income and expenditure statement and/or a photocopy of a bank statement can prove this.
- In many instances it is not even necessary to have anything more than a bank statement. However some funders do require more but if your group has appropriate management systems in place then this should be easy. For example if you meet monthly then there already exists a treasurers report. Many funders will accept just a treasurer's report for your last couple of meetings.
- If you are applying for large amounts of funding then the financial requirements will become more rigorous and annual accounts or even 'audited' annual accounts are a must.
- Annual accounts, if completed properly, provide an excellent picture of a group's situation at a glance. They show how active you have been, how financially viable your group is, and if they have been audited, how well the financial management

structure of your group operates. They also provide an indication of your group's ability to see the project to completion.

- With any financial information provided it is important to ensure that it is signed.
- If your accounts do raise any concerns then address them in your application. E.g. if your income has increased markedly from the previous year then acknowledge this and explain why and what you have used the extra money for.

12.   Salary Funding:

- If your application includes funding for salaries then attach a job description. Also let the funder know that you have an employment contract in place and in some instances you may be required to attach this too.
- If you have a person in the position, or if you are intending to appoint a particular person, then some information on the caliber of this person can be useful. For example a letter of support from an outside organisation that is aware of the work of this person. Attaching the CV of the person is not necessary in many instances. Funders are being asked to provide a salary for a position; they are not employing the incumbent.

13.   Presenting your application:

- The trick here is not to present your application. Fancy binding and presentation are not required. Not only does this make it difficult for the funder to photocopy and distribute to any assessment committee members, but it can also put some funders off. If your group has the money to put into fancy presentations then why are you applying for a grant!

14.   Put yourself in the shoes of the assessment committee:

- Once completed step outside your application and look at again with a different set of eyes. Ask your self what would you make of this application if you were assessing it for funding. Do you understand the project you are being asked to fund at a glance (i.e. is the purpose of the application is stated clearly and concisely in one or two sentences), are there any obvious gaps? Is it readable and can it still be read after it has been photocopied? How does it meeting the funding criteria of the scheme? Is it providing benefit? Is there are need for it? Is the group contributing? What is their track record like? Are they asking for the earth? If they get less funding than they have requested will they still be able to do something useful with the money? Do they have appropriate financial and management systems in place?

15.   Some final tips:

- Once you have a good understanding of the funder requirements and have decided what you will apply to them for funding – then **ring them**, or visit them. This will clarify for you that you are on the right track and it might also give you some useful tips to include in your application. It can also save you and the funder a lot of time.
- Don't go to a lot of trouble to present your application – but use **black pen** and write clearly – and avoid saying, "see attached". If it is necessary to attach more detail then at least **summarise** it in the space provided on the application form.

- Be realistic (and **honest**) in the amount of funding you ask for and if possible don't rely on only one funding source to get your project off the ground.

15.   Planning for Funding

- As mentioned earlier planning for funding – at least 6 months but preferably further out if you can, is extremely important. You should create a funding calendar for your organisation and keep it in a prominent place to remind you when funding applications are due.
- To assist you in producing a funding calendar you need to have a detailed budget for your organisation. This budget should be planned in advance of the end of your financial year. Once you have your budget you are then able to 'match' your requirements against suitable funders.
- Develop a funding portfolio which should include the following:
  - annual report
  - financial information
  - history of your organisation
  - aims and objectives
  - business plan – if you have one
  - current management structure, staff, volunteer and membership numbers
  - the services or activities you offer
  - legal status
  - media clippings about your organisation
  - references and letters of support

  Having this information on hand will save you a lot of time. You can then mix and match the information about your group according to what information is being asked for in a funding application.

16.   When it's all over
- Don't stop.
- Remember to acknowledge the funder.
- Complete their accountability requirements.
- Keep them informed – especially if there are any changes to your project or the budget you provided them with in your application.
- Monitor and evaluate your project.

Successful funding applicants are well organised, knowledgeable about the funders they apply to and persuasive about the merits of their project.