Club Guide:

How to Apply for Grant Funding

Sometimes organisations need additional financial help to support the development of ideas which may help them to survive or grow. There are different ways of raising additional funds including organising fundraising activities, accessing loans, accessing grant funding and many more.

What is grant funding?

Grants are financial awards. They are usually non-repayable but often come with terms and conditions that restrict their use to a specific purpose. Grants may also be provided to help organisations recover from unforeseen events or emergencies or to help cover every-day running costs, but these are increasingly rare.

When should we apply for grant funding?

Grant funding is a tempting first port of call when you are considering developing a new idea. Except for responding to emergencies, lots of grant funders consider themselves to be the 'funders of last resort'. This means they expect you to exhaust all other options before applying to them so be sure to check this before you apply and be prepared to tell them about how you have tried to raise funds from elsewhere.

The process of applying for grant funding

Applying for funding can often be daunting, especially if you haven't done it before. There are lots of different grant giving bodies. Most have a formal application process. While some may personally invite organisations to apply, most will have an open application process which enables eligible organisations to apply. Eligibility, priorities, and processes vary between funders so be sure to familiarise yourself with these before you decide to apply.

While every funder is different, a few of the common stages associated with applying for funding to a lottery distributor or charitable foundation are detailed below.

1. **Determining Need and Developing an Idea**
2. **Develop a Working Group and Plan**
3. **Find Potential Funding Sources**
4. **Prepare For Your Grant Application**
5. **Drafting Your Application**
6. **Submitting Your Application**

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1. **Determining Need and Developing an Idea**

- It is important to prove that there's a need for your idea and that any grant funding will have an impact. When developing your idea, it is recommended that you:
- Identify why your idea is needed and have evidence to back this up.
- Establish the benefits your idea will achieve and list out how its objectives will complement the long-term vision and aims of your organisation.
- Establish who you are looking to target and define the impact that your idea will have on your local community.
- Check and challenge your idea with others who will benefit from it and take onboard their feedback.
- Carefully research how much your idea will cost and any financial implications for your organisation. Obtain quotes, where possible. Also think about any associated short and longer-term costs such as maintaining and replacing any equipment or facilities.
- Determine all the ways you can raise the money you need. Can you achieve it without grant funding? If so, how? If you need grant funding, what is the minimum you need?
- Depending on the funder, you may need to provide match funding (partnership funding) either in cash, via other partners or through in-kind contributions (such as time or professional services given for free or at a discounted rate). Identify how you intend to raise as much match funding as possible, setting realistic targets and timescales.
- Establish any professional advice requirements. For example, if you are developing a facilities project, will planning permission be required or will professional drawings and cost estimates need to be produced? Consider the impact these may have on your costs and timescales.
- Develop a clear project plan explaining your idea, the need for it, what you hope to achieve, how it aligns to the vision and aims of your organisation, who will benefit, how much it will cost and how much you can contribute towards it. This plan will strengthen your position and help you demonstrate that you have fully thought through your idea.

2. **Develop a Working Group and Plan**

Applying for funding can take a lot of work and time. It is beneficial to create a working group to plan and share out the tasks and responsibilities. It is good to involve several people in the planning and drafting of your application and brief your committee so that they are bought into the idea.

Your members and volunteers will have different skills and experiences which may be useful to support the process. Involving them can help to encourage further buy-in and support. Plan appropriately and allow sufficient time, as applying for funding often takes longer than expected.

3. **Find Potential Funding Sources**

Research what funding is available, who the funders are and if there are any timescales to be aware of. Funders usually have specified priorities or outcomes they want to fund so only select those with a close alignment with your project. The following websites can help you explore what is available:

- Sport England

- National Governing Bodies (NGB)
- Active Partnerships
- Local Authority
- Grant Finder
- Funding Central
- The Directory of Social Change

Consider funders outside of the sport and physical activity sector too if your idea will achieve wider impacts like reducing anti-social behaviour, improving your local area, or improving physical and mental health.

Check that you are eligible. Some funds are only open to certain types of organisations or will only fund specific types of projects. Carefully read all the information provided such as funding prospectuses, FAQ documents and case studies and watch any videos to get a good understanding of what will be supported and what information is required at a later stage of the application process (such as partnership funding, security of tenure, planning permission etc).

Once you have found any funds that you are eligible for and that closely align with your idea's aims and objectives, you should register your interest or have an early discussion with the funder if possible. Remember that eligibility does not equal success, as most funds are competitive, and you will need to carefully prove your need and impact.

4. Prepare For Your Grant Application

Before writing an application, gather what you need to support your application and evidence its need. This may vary depending on the grant amount and/or the funder. It's useful to:

- Understand your membership and volunteer base and your wider local community. Demonstrating an understanding of your local area, its demographic make-up, any localised issues (such as deprivation levels) and the impact your idea could have on these can be beneficial.
- Be able to prove the need for your idea. Regularly communicate and consult with prospective beneficiaries to ensure your idea meets their needs and responds to any feedback. You could do this via open days, focus groups, interviews, surveys and asking for feedback through your organisation's social media or channels etc. Consulting beyond your existing users is likely to add extra weight to the need for your idea. Be sure to record the outcomes of any consultation.
- Gather support for your project from your local community, existing members, volunteers, and strategic partners like your Local Authority, National Governing Body, Active Partnership, schools or local voluntary and community organisations and charities that already work with in your area or with the specific audiences that you are looking to target. It is good to alert your National Governing Body(s), Active Partnership and Local Authority, especially for larger projects, but they may not always have the resources to respond.

Demonstrating you have done your research and understand your audiences will provide funders with confidence that your idea will have a true and sustained impact.

5. Drafting Your Application

It is now time to write your application. We recommend circulating the application form, any guidance notes and FAQs around your team. You may wish to allocate different sections to different people, depending on their skill set.

Common questions you may be asked when completing a funding application include :

- Project Description – Provide a description of what you need funding for and what any funding will contribute towards.
- Need – This is your opportunity to demonstrate and explain the need for your idea. Identify any issues it will address, who will benefit and why it is important. Reference the research you have done to strengthen your case and explain how your idea will help meet your vision and aims plus locally relevant strategic priorities.
- Impact – Set out the impact your idea will have and how it will benefit the local community, such as increased activity levels, improved mental wellbeing and social, community or individual development. Specify any audiences you particularly want to engage with, like inactive people, people with a disability, people on low incomes or people from diverse ethnic communities. Explain how you have worked out your impact and how you will measure your success.
- Project Delivery – Summarise how you will manage the delivery of your idea and ensure your objectives are achievable. Consider any possible risks and how you plan to mitigate against these. Identify any partners that will support the delivery of your idea and their roles and responsibilities. Back this up with quotes from them to verify this.
- Financial Planning - Be as accurate as you can with your costs to demonstrate you have set a realistic budget. Outline any partnership funding (cash or in-kind) that will be contributed and provide evidence to back this up. Careful financial planning will give confidence that your idea is financially viable.
- Sustainability – Explain the expected timescales of your idea, including how long people will take part in it and your plans to raise additional funding (if required) so it is sustainable in the long term. If your project is for an investment into facilities or equipment, explain how you will maintain and then replace them at the end of their useful life.
- Additional Information – To support your application, you may want to include relevant additional documents such as your; research findings, delivery plans, budgets, business plans, development plans, risk registers, quotes/letters of support and evidence of partnership funding.

It's worthwhile completing a draft of your application and asking someone, who has not been involved in writing it, to review it against the funders' priorities and any criteria and provide feedback. They are more likely to pick up on whether you have missed any obvious information or need to provide any more detail.

6. Submitting Your Application

Once you have completed your application and gathered any supporting documents, you should submit your application. Only submit what is requested and avoid the temptation of sending additional information on things that aren't relevant to the assessment, like the history of your organisation and its past members.

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Your application will be reviewed by an assessor or a grants panel. You may be asked to provide additional information, if you are be sure to do so in a timely manner so that your application can continue to be assessed within any decision timescales given.

Notification of decision

You are most likely to be notified about the decision via email or telephone.

If Unsuccessful:

Unfortunately, you are unlikely to be successful with all grant funding applications that you submit. Most funds are significantly oversubscribed and a success rate of one in five is considered a good average.

If the decision is not to support your project, try and request feedback on the reasons behind the decision to help you with any future funding applications.

If Successful:

You might need to submit evidence of your eligibility (if you haven't already) and to complete any conditions that may come with your award.

You are likely to be allocated a point of contact from the funding body who you can liaise with and ask any questions to.

Most grants will come with a 'grant agreement' that sets out how much you have been awarded, what the grant must be used for and any associated terms and conditions. These documents are usually legally binding, so read them carefully before signing them.

The process for claiming your grant will differ between funders. Be sure to discuss exactly when and how you can draw down any payment(s) and the evidence you need to provide.

Some funders may ask you to collect and return data to help monitor and evaluate the impact of their investment.

Source: 'Applying for Grant Funding' published by Club Matters.

Club Matters is a Sport England Lottery funded programme that provides free resources, support, guidance and workshops.

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