

Writing a high quality funding bid

To assist the process of writing a funding application

Before you start

- **Gain a full understanding** of the project, its partnership arrangements, and its costings; and the funder's requirements (Stop 5.4)
- **Be aware of the strengths and weaknesses.** Intend to emphasise the strengths of your project in relation to the aims of the call.
- **Fill in the application form.** Read through or listen carefully to the 'Hints and Tips' below and follow the advice when you are addressing each question of the application form.
- **Ensure coherence and alignment.** Coordinate your writing team well, consult frequently with the project design and costing teams to ensure coherence and consistency across all application sections.
- **Final draft review.** Commission a pre-appraisal of your final draft application (if required also an English language check) (Stop 5.7). Arrange for sufficient time to address the issues noted by the pre-appraisal.

The writing of a high quality funding application requires a thorough understanding of the project and the funding requirements.

This task is a list of universal hints & tips helps you to draw out some of the common weaknesses in application writing and how to avoid some of the pitfalls.

The tool consists of a basic spreadsheet template that presents all the main budget headings of a project costing exercise.

What for?

- To gain an insight into some of the most common weaknesses of unsuccessful applications and how to avoid them.

How to use it?

Step 1 Each of the writers should read the content of this Stop and study the 'Hints and Tips'.

Step 2 The writers' team discusses how they can avoid the common weaknesses. If major changes are required the project design team needs to be involved.

Half way through the writing of the funding application:

Step 3 At half stage, each writer re-reads the guide and reflects on their own writing and how to improve their sections of the application form.

Step 4 The team seeks support from other colleagues or external service providers if any of the weaknesses cannot be addressed adequately by the writers.

At final draft completion stage:

Step 1 An external colleague or provider checks the quality of the draft application (if needed also a language check is done). The team reconvenes and addresses the changes recommended by the quality review.

	Hints	Description	Key Tips
1	Know your project well	It might seem obvious advice: 'know your project', but it is not rare that appraisers of funding applications find that the design of projects lack coherence or consistency. At the time a funding application is written, the project needs to be fully elaborated. This is sometimes challenging as projects have to remain flexible so that they are able to react and accommodate certain aspects that funders seek to achieve. This might require last minute changes to the original idea of the project. However, once the project application is written, the project has to present as a complete and coherent proposition across all sections of the application.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Ensure that you and your team understand what the project is about and how it is structured and operationalised. * Communicate all changes made to the project design to all team members in charge of writing the funding application, so that they can adjust their sections to the new aspects. * Ensure that you and your team have time to cross-check the coherence of your project, each detail must fit across all sections. * And ensure that your application is pre-appraised by an external member of staff or partner.
2	Understand what the funder wants to achieve	Funds (grants, loans, vision statements of philanthropic donors) are all set up for a purpose. They have particular aims and objectives that their funding is designed to achieve. A successful funding application demonstrates clearly how the project will contribute to these aims and objectives of the funder. This not only relates to the general strategic context, but goes down to the detailed targets and performance indicators of a fund. Successful funding applications demonstrate clearly that they will contribute to these performance targets and how they are going to achieve this.",	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Ensure you and your team understand exactly what the funder is looking to achieve through the fund. * Carefully read the call for applications, the funding programme, and the specific performance targets of the fund. * Note them down and identify how and to what extent your project is able to fit the aims and objectives and targets of the fund. * Also note the areas, where the project does not fit the ambitions of the fund and consider how to overcome these.
3	Each question has a purpose	Funding applications, particularly EU funding applications, are detailed and can be at times complex. This is to ensure that projects are in line with the various ambitions and strategic aims of the funding programme and to ensure that the quality of the projects, their implementation and project management are of the highest standards. Each question in a funding application is looking for an explanation of a specific aspect of your project. There is usually no duplication of questions; each question is looking for different information. Ensure you understand the purpose of each question in an application form correctly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Ensure that you and your team understand the nuances of the questions in the application form. * Consider carefully what each question is looking for. Consult all guidance material that is available. * Never assume that an application form is asking for the same information twice. * Consult with a colleague experienced in writing the same type of applications. * If in doubt, contact the funder and ask for clarification.
4	The selection criteria are very important!	All funding applications are appraised either by the team of the funding organisation, or by an independent team of evaluators. Funding applications are appraised to ensure a fair process in the selection of the best applications and of allocating often highly competitive funds to the most fitting and convincing project. The evaluators are guided by a set of selection criteria which are usually accessible to applicants during the application writing stage. In addition to the aims and objectives of a call or funding programme, the selection criteria should give a good indication of what the funder is looking for and which projects the fund seeks to support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Ensure that you and your team are fully aware of the selection criteria. * Be clear what each of the selection criteria is looking for and how your project will demonstrate compliance. * If not readily accessible in the application pack, contact the funder and request the selection criteria. (However, at times the funder might decide not to publicise the selection criteria).
5	Never assume	The evaluators of your funding application need to stay objective and neutral. They usually have to declare if they know your organisation, your staff, or your project and are then excluded from appraising your application. This means evaluators do not know about your project, your knowledge, and apart from what you tell them in the application form, they do not have much insight into your track record of past or current achievements. It is therefore imperative for applicants not to assume that the funder and their evaluators know anything about them and their project. Provide your answers in an application form as if you are speaking to somebody who does not know your organisation, your staff or your track record of projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Describe your project as if you would describe it to a complete stranger. * Explain clearly all aspects of your project and your understanding in line with the questions in the funding application. * Don't 'cut corners' because you think something is 'self-evident' or 'obvious'. * Remain conscious of the fact that the information requested in the application form is necessary to inform the decision-making process of the funding organisation - even if you might not fully understand why the funder seeks this information.
6	Explain How! Think it Through!	Funding applications are a means of demonstrating that an applicant has an excellent grasp of what a project seeks to do, how the project fits into the strategic and local context, how it will be managed and how the proposed project activities will be operationalised. Funding applications shall instil confidence that the applicant will deliver what is promised. Therefore, it is not enough to assert simply that something will be attended to. Instead a funding application needs to explain succinctly but in detail how it will achieve what it promises. This detail is necessary for the funder to assess whether the project costs and funding requests are realistic and whether the applicant has the know-how to implement the project successfully, in time, on budget, and in line with the aims and objectives of the funding programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * For each question of a funding application, it is important to explain how the project will address the relevant issue. * Go beyond a mere statement, assertion or a promise that the project will for example, contribute to a particular strategic aim, collaborate with other existing projects; etc. but instead expand on how the project will accomplish this. * Think the project through in its practicalities and always ask the question 'how will my project do this?' There are many good examples for this, including reaching target groups. Don't just state 'we will work with target group A', but explain briefly how you will work target group A, how will you manage to reach and engage with this target group, how many will be engaged in the project, etc etc. * Be practical! Demonstrate that you have thought the project through. This shows confidence in your expertise and experience of implementing projects.
7	Project management structures need to be proportionate	The larger and more complex a project is, the more important it is to demonstrate excellence in project management. For any project, a robust governance structure should be designed in proportion to the size of the project (in terms of partnership as well as project activities). Roles and responsibilities of key position holders or management structures (such as Project Manager, Finance Officer, Coordinator, Project Steering Group, Advisory Council, Monitoring Group, etc.) should be identified and outlined briefly. Other important processes include communication between the various posts and entities, frequency of their meetings, decision making processes, conflict management, monitoring of progress and risk assessment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Depending on the type of funding programme, the application form will request information about a number of levels of project management, including project administration (compliance with the funder's financial and progress reporting requirements); coordination of project phases and activities; management of the project partnership; monitoring progress and management/mitigation of risks. * Be mindful that with larger partnership projects internal communication becomes an important factor to ensure that project implementation remains coherent and well coordinated. * At the same time, every funder is looking for efficient project management with a focus on implementing the project effectively and up to target. * Usually, the application form and its guidance provide an indication how much detailed explanation is required. If in doubt, contact the funder and enquire about their expectations.
8	Show that your project works in context	"Most funders seek new solutions to existing problems or issues. A successful application demonstrates how it will build on what already exists, how it will complement current project activity and build synergies with other projects so that existing problems are addressed with new ideas, joint effort and to maximum effect. This is usually described as 'adding value' and can also relate directly to innovative project design and implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Ensure that your project is set in context to recent and current project activity in the same field of operation, and geographically and identify clearly how your project will relate, interact, and contribute within this environment. * The work with stakeholders will inform this task. * Show clearly how your project is different to what already exists and how it will utilise the work of other projects to enhance its positive effect on the problem it seeks to address.
9	Be realistic in your ambitions	Every funder wants to support ambitious projects where the value for money ratio is high and much is achieved for a reasonable amount of money spent. However, being over-ambitious can potentially jeopardise the entire project by running out of funds too early, or by failing to achieve essential milestones. Being realistic is therefore important to demonstrate that the anticipated project activities and performance targets are feasible and achievable within the time span and financial limitations of the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Compare your project plans with similar projects that your or your partners' organisations have implemented in the past. * If you do not have the experience yourself or within your team, ensure that you consult with an experienced colleague so that an ambitious, yet realistic project proposition is made. * You should aim to demonstrate good value for money while ensuring realistic and reliable project achievement within the confines of the project timing and budget.
10	Outline your exit strategy	Most funders are interested in supporting projects that can be sustained or have a positive longer-term impact. A project application can impress by having a clear vision of what will happen after funding has come to an end. A 'road map' or 'exit strategy', briefly outlined in an application form (if possible), will add confidence that the likelihood of positive impact created by the project is high. This might include your ideas of how the project results will be disseminated to a wider audience to increase awareness and support learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * This task should not be done as a last port of call. Thinking about what will happen after project completion stage and when project funding has come to an end, often provides useful insights for the overall design of the project and might influence its overall conceptual approach and partnership arrangements. * Successful applications outline what the applicant envisages in terms of project sustainability, continuation, or after-care following project completion - provided the funding application form allows space for such comment."