



## Funding Fact Sheet – How to write the perfect bid

### **Top tips and techniques for funding applications from Emma Jaques, author of Bid Management**

It's not surprising that funding bodies are reporting unprecedented volumes of funding applications at the moment. Those in the voluntary sector responsible for income generation are having to look further afield for pots of funding, needing to submit more and more bids in order to keep the money coming in. As a result, funders are rejecting proposals that they might well have accepted in the past, and it's hard to envisage this situation easing any time soon.

So, how do bidders make sure that their efforts are fruitful and proposal-writing time well spent?

Well, it's all down to planning and preparation – and sound, unemotional decision-making. There are many techniques that can be adopted by funding bid writers to help boost chances of success; here are just a few to consider.

#### **Qualify your decision**

As tempting as it is to adopt an approach whereby you submit lots of bids in a hope that you'll get lucky eventually, think carefully before applying for anything. There are three key questions you should always ask yourself before preparing a project proposal.

- Is it deliverable? (That is, can you do what needs to be done without having to significantly change your operating model or deviate from your core work?)
- Is it winnable? (That is, do you meet the funder's criteria in the first instance, and do you have a strong case that elevates your proposal above others?)
- Is it financially viable? (That is, can you do all that needs to be done with the funds available?)

#### **View every application as a competition**

Many bids fail simply because they're not as compelling as others submitted during the same round. Make no mistake – this is a sales pitch! Your evidence of research needs to be complete and compelling; your engagement with your target audience well documented, showing clear demand for your work. Your outcomes must be clear and measurable; your management and financial models shown to be robust. In short, you must show your organisation to be capable, credible and visionary, with definite aims and objectives.

#### **Plan your requirements well in advance**

You'll need to be fully aware of the timings of each round of funding, bearing in mind just how long decisions can take to arrive. You might also need to juggle multiple applications so that they each arrive at the right time.

#### **Build relationships for the future**



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As in every walk of life, it's the relationships that you cultivate with potential funders that will bear fruit in the future. Talk to them to understand what's important to them, what a successful application will need to include. If you've been turned down, ask how you can improve for next time. (Many funders offer either formal or informal advice to guide you through their process – take it and learn.)

***Which brings us to possibly the most important aspect of all:***

### **See things from the funder's perspective**

Funders will have a key set of guiding principles, an overall vision that they are trying to achieve. Your bid's outcomes need to be in step with those of the funder's. You'll need to show how you've identified the need for your service, engagement with the intended audience, and most importantly, the measurable outcomes you are aiming to achieve. Soft outcomes seem to be out of favour in the current climate; successful bidders are identifying hard, tangible outcomes in order to win funding. Of much less importance is how your organisation goes about achieving these outcomes. Where, in the past, descriptions of your service and implied benefits may have been enough, this is no longer the case.

There's an element of luck involved in any funding application, of course. But viewing your application as an all-or-nothing process, only applying for opportunities that closely align to your own strategy, and by asking for – and learning from – advice and feedback (whether your bid is successful or not), you can start to stack the odds in your favour. Good luck.

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