

10 questions to ask before applying

1. Are we eligible to apply?

It sounds obvious, but you'd be amazed how many applications are rejected because they:

- miss the deadline
- ask for costs that fall outside the scope of the grant programme
- fail to provide information required on the application form
- are from types of organisations that the funder can't support

Make sure you read any guidelines carefully and give the funder a quick phone call if in doubt.

2. Do we meet the criteria and/or priorities?

If a funder says they are only interested in supporting the elderly, don't waste your time and theirs by applying for a project for the under 5s. Again, if in doubt try and contact the funder in advance – a quick phone call usually clarifies things.

Take a look at the organisations they have supported before as this often helps build a picture of the types of projects they support.

3. What is this funder really looking for?

Beyond the basics of criteria and eligibility, what do you know about this funder from your research? Have you made a clear case for support? Have you tailored your approach to the individual funder? Think about who else might apply (the competition) - how will your application appear in comparison? What's your application's main selling points?

4. Have we got enough time to apply for this grant and do the funded work properly?

Just because a funding opportunity exists, doesn't mean that you have to apply. It takes time to apply for funding and you need to consider carefully whether you have the resources to submit an application with a reasonable chance of success. If there are time constraints about when funded activity must happen, you also need to consider whether you can set up and deliver your activity properly – and be prepared to walk away from opportunities if the timing isn't right.

5. Would this project be the best use of this funding opportunity?

Perhaps you only need funding for one project, in which case – lucky you! In reality many organisations need funding for several projects, overheads and capital items all at once. How do you decide what you apply for grants for, what might be suitable for a loan, what you might need to pay for from reserves (if you have any) and what activity you might fund through income from trading or bidding for contracts?

Grants can be extremely valuable in funding types of activity which is impossible to support through other channels. To make sure you make best use of any opportunities, you need to be aware of your wider funding needs and options and consider each opportunity in this wider context.

6. What terms and conditions might be attached to any offer?

Some funders will ask for very little other than acknowledgement of their support (some prefer to remain anonymous). But those funders who expect funded organisations to meet certain standards will often be happy to explain in advance what these are – often on their website. It's unlikely to cause any major problems but it's important to check in advance – because there could be implications for how you manage your project and worst case scenario, it would be a waste of everyone's time (and create a bad impression) if you applied for a grant which you then couldn't accept.

7. Have we included the full costs of this project in our application?

There are two elements to this reply – first do you know what your full costs are, and second have you asked the funder to meet them?

It's easy to forget the amount of management and administration that underpins the project for which you are applying. Not knowing your full costs from the outset puts your whole organisation at risk. There are still funders who will only consider direct project costs, but increasingly funders recognise that sustainable organisations need to cover their full costs. Make sure you know and understand from the outset.

8. Aside from this grant, are there any other ways we could fund this activity?

Grants can be incredibly useful but can also be very limited in terms of what they support, how long they take to apply for and when they are available. Sometimes a loan can help you respond to a need or opportunity more quickly (although you'll need to be able to repay it over time), or a contract may exist for similar activities.

It's worth considering all your options before applying for a grant. Knowing your other options means you have a head start if you are rejected, and also when thinking about your 'exit strategy'.

9. If we get this grant, what will happen when the grant ends?

If you've used grant funding to meet a one-off need, then you might not need to think about this. But many organisations use grants either to fund ongoing activity or to set up new activity which they would like to continue in some shape or form.

The earlier you start thinking about what happens next, the more chance you have to make it a reality. Many grant funders are concerned about the sustainability of the activity (and organisations) they support and will be open to applications which include the costs of preparing a project for life after the grant ends.

10. If we are successful, could we meet the terms and conditions of the grant?

Some funders – particularly public or Lottery – may have conditions about how you account for your grant and manage activity they are funded. This may have additional costs, or staffing, implications for your organisation which you need to consider in advance. Don't wait until you are offered a grant to find out what standard conditions might be attached – most larger funders publish this information on their websites.

Source: Funding Central <http://www.fundingcentral.org.uk>