

A Guide to Successful Grant Applications



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DISCLAIMER

This document has been produced as a general guide only, and does not guarantee a successful grant outcome. While all attempts have been made to ensure its accuracy, the organisations who have participated in the publishing of this guide (and their respective servants/agents), to the maximum extent permitted by law, accept no liability for any loss, injury, claim or damage resulting from the use or application of the information in this guide. The above organisations strongly recommend that potential applicants discuss their project with the relevant grant provider before preparing their application.

Before you fill out the application.....

Planning is the major component of any successful application for grant funding.

With appropriate planning and preparation, the written application should take only a relatively short time to complete. The application usually represents only 10% to 20% of the overall time allocation towards the development of the project and it's ability to deliver outcomes.

As has been said by many a person, "*Failing to Plan is Planning to Fail*"

Step 1 - The 'Plan of Attack'

1. Identify projects

- Start by asking yourself “what problems do we want to solve”
- You will need to ensure that the organisation and members are capable of implementing the identified projects.

2. Prioritise the projects

- You will need to prioritise the identified projects in order of preference. Your priorities will depend on what the organisation wants to achieve and the project timeframes.

3. Brainstorm

- Discuss the identified projects in a group. Brainstorming can assist organisations to come up with some sort of order of preference/need. You may consider contacting other community groups about combining similar projects.

4. Outline the projects

- Develop a basic outline of each identified project. It is useful to consider the why, what, how, who, where and when in developing the outline.

Why

- Why does the organisation need this project?
- Is the project a want or a need?
- Is there community support?
- What is the challenge the organisation is trying to overcome?
- Why is the organisation trying to overcome this challenge?
- What benefits are to be achieved?
- Why is it important in the context of the area? (eg. economic dependency, population decline, insufficient employment opportunity and difficult socio-economic conditions, etc).

What

- What is the project?
- What will the project contribute to our community?
- What is the project about?
- What is the purpose of the project, e.g. community benefit, tourism development, business development, employment creation, social or environmental benefit?
- What are the risks associated with the project? Is there anything that will prevent the project from coming to fruition?
- What are the mitigation strategies for overcoming these risks?

- How**
- How will we start and how will we finish the project?
 - How much will the project cost?
 - How much funding is needed?
 - How much cash and in-kind resources are available?
 - How will it be implemented and/or operated (e.g. steering committees and management structures)?
 - Are there any special skills or resources needed?
- Who**
- Who will be the key driver/s?
 - Who is the project for and who are the beneficiaries?
 - Who are the major stakeholders and what is their capacity to help with the project.
 - Do we need to establish partnerships with other organizations (who else can you work with)?
 - Is anyone else doing something similar in your community or even elsewhere?
- Where**
- Where will the project be located? Include local municipality, town and site, and be reasonably exact.
 - Will the project's impact extend nationally, statewide, regionally or remain within the municipality and local area.
- When**
- When will the project start?
 - When will the project finish?
 - How long will the project take to complete?

Step 2 - Plan the Project

This step is one of the most critical in presenting your project. A well planned project is much more likely to gain funding than a project without well documented and thought out planning.

What does planning include?

- Definable, measurable project outcomes that relate to the organisation's goals
- Project outputs (required for the attainment of the project outcomes) produced by a project team
- A start and end date
- A balance between time, cost and quality
- A governance structure
- Well defined and appropriately skilled project team
- Involvement of stakeholders/partner organisations
- Criteria to measure project performance (what is your measure of success)

(Source: <http://www.projectmanagement.tas.gov.au>)

If project management is new to you, then we strongly suggest that you use the resources on the Tasmanian Government Project Management Website:

www.projectmanagement.tas.gov.au

Step 3 - Identify Appropriate Funding Sources

This relates to the ‘**what**’ and ‘**how**’ in the previous step.

You should consider:

- How much can be provided by local government?
- Are there any businesses in the area that can contribute to project?
- Is the funding body you are applying to, the only funding body that can help?
- Does the project fit in with their funding deadlines?
- Is there more than one potential funding body?

At this point it may be worth contacting the Economic Development Officer and/or the Community Development Officer at your local council. There are also a number of Business Enterprise Centres (BEC) throughout Tasmania that can provide information about funding programmes.

Your local council may also be able to:

- Assist you in the preparation of your funding applications.
- Provide you with quality information on the local council by-laws.
- Advise you whether the project aligns with the strategic direction of the council.

Funding bodies will not fund projects that contravene planning laws or that do not fit into the regional strategic direction.

You may need to look at what funding your organisation can, or will need to, contribute to the project. Can you borrow money? Are the organisation’s reserves sufficient enough to contribute? Will the organisation need to look for sponsorship or to raise money through other means eg. “chook raffles”, etc.

When seeking funding support, grantors may look to see who is carrying the risk. If your organisation is carrying the greater risk, the more comfortable the funding program is likely to be when assessing.

Tip

Some funding sources are listed at attachment 1.

Step 4 - Doing the Application

Before You Write Anything!

Read all the material sent to you –

Read all the guidelines and all the questions on the application form (if there is an application form.) Most guidelines will give you an idea of what can or can't be funded by a particular organisation. Although the guidelines provide some information, they can also be vague in terms of specifics and also in terms in what is currently in "favour" within a funding organisation. This type of "specific" information about what is in "favour" can only be obtained by contacting people who have had recent experience with the funding body or by contacting the funding body directly.

Ring up the contact person and ask questions about:

- What type of projects they are looking for (it can be useful to get a list of those already funded)?
- Whether they think your project fits (if they do not, then ask them whether they know of any other funding sources that may assist)?
- What the selection/assessment process is?
- Who is involved in the selection process (think about any potential influencers)?
- Find out if the person you are talking to is a key decision maker. They usually will not be so ask them to be frank about describing the assessment process.
- Whether they can come to your environment and seek first hand knowledge of the project. This may create a better understanding of the challenge/project by the people you will be dealing with, and will give them a better idea of your capacity to deliver.
- What elements of the project will appeal to the funding body (what will they want to put a plaque to which says "they funded this part of the project")

If you can establish a rapport with the contact person, try to commit them to evaluating/critiquing sections of your 'draft' application (understand that when verbal advice is given there can also be misunderstandings of terminology. Clear this up straight away.) Avoid any sort of jargon.

Tip

Remember the funding body is usually buying a service which will generally result in some form of community or industry benefit, so you need to consider your application in those terms.

Step 5 - Writing the Application

Write the application as if you were writing it to someone that does not know your project, your area, town, your municipality and your capacity to deliver. Do not assume that the funding body knows what you are trying to achieve or have a prior knowledge of your organisation or community. If possible include photos, maps, and diagrams in the application to explain how everything fits together. Try to keep all information to the application unless there is a strict word or page limit. If word or page limits are imposed, stick to them (find out if you can include relevant extra information as attachments).

Read all the questions CAREFULLY AND IN FULL, and answer all of them. Have a person you trust but who is unaware of the project or just unaware of its complexity proofread for you. If they do not understand what it is you are trying to say, there is a good chance the funding body will not understand either. *Why not read it out aloud to yourself as well!*

Use short sentences, followed by dot points to identify the key areas of your project (dot points are often easier to read than paragraphs). These can then be expanded upon and developed to emphasise your main points.

Where practical, use EXACTLY the same key words as in the guidelines but first make sure you know what they mean. As mentioned earlier, contact the funding body to ask them to define those key terms/words. Then and only then, link your application to the key words and phrases contained in the material.

When quoting numbers, especially demographics, it is critical to state the reference material whence it came.

If attachments are permitted in the application, put additional relevant information in the attachments and make a statement at the appropriate point which links to it – e.g. for further information see Appendix 1.

Tip

Remember that funding bodies receive a large volume of applications. Therefore, present a neat and tidy application and keep sentences short and to the point.

The Body of the Application

While each funding body will have a different application form, you can expect that each will require comments on a needs assessment, project goals and objectives, methodology and evaluation.

Remember to address the questions that are asked. Do not add anything that is not asked for or required. Remember - Quality not Quantity

Needs Assessment

Objectively address what your project will address e.g. opportunity, problem, issue and need of the community/region. Support your statements with qualified third-party research/evidence to justify the need or problem. Clearly and concisely, demonstrate that a relevant, compelling problem or need exists.

Include the following:

- Description of target population.
- Definition of community problem to be addressed and service area needs. For example low school retention, high unemployment, low community participation in sport, low income, aged residential population, etc.

Program Goals and Objectives

Describe the outcomes of the project in MEASURABLE TERMS. Provide a succinct description of the proposed project outcomes and accomplishments, including your overall goals, specific objectives or ways in which you will meet the needs of the community/region.

Program Goals and Objectives should include:

- Goal (or goals) for each problem or need that has been identified.
- Description of the benefiting population/community/region.
- How will each goal be addressed within a specific time frame, with outcomes detailed within that timeframe?
- How will these outcomes or goals occur?
- What are the results from how will these outcomes or goals will occur.
- How will they be measured, who will measure them, and how often will they be measured?

Methodology

Describe the process to be used to achieve the outcomes. Identify a rational and direct description of the proposed project. Detail the time it will take to accomplish your objectives. Also detail what impact your proposed activities will have, how they will benefit the community/region and who will carry out the activities. It may be necessary to place time frames on your project/program, including long-term strategies for maintaining the on-going project/program.

Methodology could include:

- Statement of problems and objectives.
- Clear description and explanation of the impact of the project and its activities.
- Sequence and time line of activities.

Evaluation

Project Evaluation provides information to improve the project as it develops and progresses. Information is collected to help find out whether the project is proceeding as planned and whether it is meeting its stated goals and objectives according to a proposed timeline. Frequently, the information contained in this question is used to assess whether the particular project is keeping abreast with its stated outcomes and objectives thereby meriting the funding it is asking for or if the project needs further development to meet the guidelines.

Ideally, in a Project Evaluation, evaluation design and data collection begin soon after the project is funded. Data collection occurs on a planned schedule, e.g., every month or quarter year and may lead to and support recommendations to continue, modify, and/or delete project activities and strategies. Frequently, although not universally, the Project Evaluator is a member of the organisation proposing the project.

Project Evaluations may also include examination of specific components. A component of a project may be a specific goal or objective as well as the time frame that the goal was to be accomplished in. An evaluation of a goal could look at the extent to which its may have been met and to clarify the extent to which the goal contributes to the success or failure of the overall project.

Determine the plan that is needed to meet the project goals and objectives and justify how you will measure the effectiveness of your activities. This will include who is be involved in evaluation and how they will judge that the project is on track and on time. How will the people evaluating your project measure each criterion that is needed to find out if the project is producing successful outcomes/achievements at the end of milestone.

Evaluations should include:

- Were the appropriate participants selected and involved in the planned activities?
- Do the activities and strategies match those described in the plan? If not, are the changes in activities justified and described?
- Were the appropriate resources (including people) used, and are the resources working in accordance with the proposed plan? Were the appropriate materials and equipment obtained?
- Were activities conducted according to the proposed timeline? Did the most appropriate personnel conduct them?
- Was a management plan developed and followed?
- To what extent did the project or program meet each overall goal?
- What was the benefit of each goal or objective? In what ways?
- What components were the most effective?
- Were the results worth the project's cost?
- Is this project sustainable?

Remember, project evaluation should not fall into the "autopsy" category. Many project coordinators wait until a project is completed before they consider doing an evaluation, when it is often too late to change some of the activities that could have improved the program.

Some Pointers for the Body of the Application

- Where application guidelines are published, carefully follow the instructions. If outlines or a series of questions are provided, follow the indicated order, answer each section and avoid evasive language.
- Do not send the same generic proposal to a random list of funding bodies. Always tailor the proposal and the specific budget request based on extensive research into the funding body's priorities.
- Use declarative rather than conditional verbs. Avoid the words *if*, *could*, *may* and *might*. Instead, boldly declare that the grant **will** create a positive outcome.
- Shorter is better. Keep your proposal tight and the details concise. Never exceed the recommended page length or fiddle with margins and formatting to squeeze in more words. Make your proposal an easy read.
- Document the “need” or “problem” on multiple levels. If space allows, provide recent statistic information with the source identified by name or title and date. Be specific – provide statistical information that is of direct relevance to the geographic region the project will affect. Finally, summarise internal data to show how many communities, people and organisations will be benefited.
- When submitting a proposal try to use language describing an investment, rather than a gift. Be more explicit on the benefits for the grant provider, such as visibility through press releases and media coverage, as well as recognition on brochures or on signage.
- Avoid dwelling on problems. Although proposals traditionally document the “need” for funding, make sure that the challenges do not sound insurmountable. Focus on opportunities that result from the challenges your organisation faces and the problems that the project, through adequate funding will counter.
- Provide a realistic assessment of the urgency that drives your proposal submission. Is the unemployment rate dramatically increasing in your community because of recent events? Remember that funding bodies commonly require considerable time to wade through mountains of paperwork to process grant applications. Your proposed timeline must reflect both the need for urgent action and the realities of anticipated funding cycles.
- Make sure the outcomes of your proposal are aligned with the objectives of the funding program

The Budget

Would a template be useful as an attachment?

Clearly delineate costs that are to be met by the funding body and all other funding sources. Outline both administrative and program costs. For specific projects, include separate budgets for the general operating and the special project.

List actual committed and pending sources of income only. Include fees for service, government funds, corporate/private grants, individual donations, etc. Prepare a detailed budget consistent with the proposal narrative:

- Include project costs to be incurred at the time of the program's implementation.
- Include no miscellaneous or contingency categories. Include all items requested for funding and all items to be paid by other sources - eg consultants.
- List separately all donated services, including volunteers, indirect costs where appropriate.
- Ensure evidence of costs can be included with the funding submission

Remember to Include 'In-Kind'

Project costs can be something other than the immediate cash outlay for the project. These non-cash contributions, referred to as in-kind contributions, may consist of contributions such as equipment, services and personnel time. Contributions of cash by a third party are not considered in-kind contributions but rather make up part or all of the project cash contribution.

To qualify as in-kind, some funding bodies apply conditions. These conditions could encompass the following:

- The contribution must be necessary and reasonable for accomplishment of the project goals and objectives.
- The contribution must be an allowable cost; i.e., the costs would be allowable if the project were to pay for them.
- The contribution must be applicable to the project time frame or period to which the cost applies.
- In-kind contributions must be documented and verifiable in the project's records.
- Records are sometimes required to be maintained to support the valuation placed on the in-kind contribution.

Donations of labour and materials, venue use, expert advice etc should all be valued at normal purchase rates. These “in-kind” contributions will add value to your project and, perhaps, make it look more appealing to a funding body. **Most funding bodies do not wish to be the sole contributor to the project and look more favourably on partnership approaches to funding projects.**

They wish to fund projects that have the support of other bodies or organisations. In-kind funding is a way of showing this support, but make sure the organisation that is providing in-kind support provides you with some documentation that indicates the value of their contribution.

Volunteers - Unpaid services provided to a project by an individual are valued at the pay for similar work in field of work being volunteered.

Employees of other organisations - When another organisation furnishes, free of charge, the services of an employee in that employee's line of work, the services are valued at the employee's regular rate of pay exclusive of fringe benefits and overhead costs. However, if the employee that is furnished is performing a job that would ordinarily be seen as a part of their normal duties, then it may not be regarded as an in-kind contribution. It is best to seek advice from the funding body about this type of valuation.

Equipment or space – If ownership is not transferred then equipment or space may be valued at its fair rental rate in the market. If ownership is transferred then the fair market value of equipment at the time of donation may be used for in-kind contribution.

Supplies - Supplies are valued at their market value at the time of donation.

Some Pointers for the Budget

- Focus on the cost-benefit ratio. Clarify how grant dollars will be maximised through a frugal budget, how the grant will leverage other funding and how the benefits will be long-term.
- Budget line items should reflect the values of your organisation.
- Check for consistency of figures between the project description, budget narration and budget line items.
- Aim for management efficiency. If your Executive Director position is already funded through another body, then some individual's time can be allocated for project oversight at no additional cost. Recruit a board member or local expert to donate training services or fiscal management services and then show this in-kind contribution in the budget.
- If major pieces of equipment drive up total budget costs, investigate whether the equipment can reasonably be shared with other non-profit organisations or whether second-hand equipment would provide a reasonable substitute.
- Include an inflation factor and projected salary increases when applying for multi-year grants.
- Beware of including minimal costs for letterhead, postage, photocopying and utilities, if not essential to project operations. The funding body might perceive these expenses as part of normal operating costs and view relatively trivial line items as artificial budget inflation.
- Be cautious about including non-essential travel in the budget for a project that only has local impact.
- Use only whole numbers (no cents) with proper formatting: \$1,270 (not 1270).
- Do not include a "miscellaneous" budget category. Small expenses should properly be allocated for supplies, transportation, photocopying or a similarly appropriate category.
- Identify any time restrictions for the funding program eg. is the timeline of the project consistent with the expectations of the funding program to expend the grant?
- Are there restrictions over what is eligible expenditure within the funding guidelines?

Attachments

Get Letters of Support

As many ‘relevant’ letters as possible – the more the better is **NOT** the maxim that best describes this point. You need to target key groups that are of relevance to the application. Individual community members can also be relevant as long as they are seen as a beneficiary of the end product of the project. It is no point asking the Mayor of Launceston for support of a project that will only benefit Hobart, even if they are proactive in the field the project will be in.

Avoid compromising the application by using people who are ‘too close to the assessment process’ for letters of support or as referees.

Avoid politicians, unless they can directly influence the project through commitment of resources. Most politicians will support applications from their constituents – it is what they do. What is needed is more than “I believe it is a good idea” letter of support.

Always brief prospective supporters (briefly) - people are busy and are not necessarily informed of your projects. This will ensure that the letter of support contains relevant statements about your application.

Letters confirming financial support – these will strengthen your application, as they demonstrate the organisation’s commitment to the project and that other funding bodies consider it a worthwhile venture as well.

Some Pointers for Attachments

Some funding bodies are increasingly limiting the number of allowed attachments. Check the guidelines for restrictions and do not include unnecessary material.

For complex proposals without attachment restrictions, a careful selection of the following material might be appropriate:

- Proof of non-profit status;
- Organisational brochure;
- Newsletter;
- Annual reports and audited financial statements;
- Relevant journal article or press clippings;
- Statistical report that documents need;
- Letters of support;

- Subcontractor agreements, partnership statements from cooperating agencies, pledge of financial support from co-funders giving showing financial or in-kind commitment;
- Budget narrative, organisation operating budget;
- Business plans, project plans, feasibility plans, needs analysis, etc are becoming increasingly important, and can benefit your project in the assessment process immensely. They demonstrate that you have done your homework.

If the number of attachments is not limited within the funding guidelines, consider attaching resumes for key personnel, job descriptions for new project staff and/or biographical statements for project consultants.

Where a number of attachments are provided, a Table of contents for the attachments along with a 3 – 4 line summary of each attachment would provide useful to the Funding Body. Do not simply list “Appendix A” in the table of contents, but rather specify “Appendix 1: Timeline for Outreach Project Implementation” or Appendix 2: New York Times article entitled “Angel’s Unlimited Food Program Expands.”

Good Presentation

Check the quality of presentation required – usually, the better and more professional the presentation the more credible you appear and the greater the chance of success of the application.

Ensure the application is:

- Typed using a word processor - (handy for alterations especially if draft applications will be critiqued prior to the final copy being lodged)
- Spell-checked – poor spelling is always off putting
- Grammar checked – poor grammar is just as bad as poor spelling.
- Completed with the correct number of copies – how many copies are needed by the organisation.
- Choose fonts and font sizes that make for easier reading. Usually a font size of 11pt or greater is preferred, and while a sans-serif style of font is great for headlines, a serif style is better for large amounts of copy.

Timeliness and Quality

Always get the application to the relevant place *before* the deadline, or at the very least on the deadline – better to be safe than sorry. Some agencies will give you leeway if you ring first and fax or email a copy. Some will not accept faxed or emailed copies.

NEVER send a half finished or a ‘botched job’ – this will severely undermine your credibility and future success in that program or even other programs administered by that agency. Better to delay and get it right for a subsequent ‘round’.

Attachment 1

Some sources of funding and websites to help you find out about funding opportunities

(This is not an exhaustive list, but can be a useful starting point)

- Grantslink - www.grantslink.gov.au
- Department of Transport & Regional Services (Regional Partnerships Program) - www.regionalpartnerships.gov.au or www.acct.org.au (Area Consultative Committee - Tasmania)
- Tasmanian Government Office - www.tgo.tas.gov.au
- Tasmanian Community Fund - www.tascomfund.org
- Women Tasmania - www.women.tas.gov.au/grants/grants.html
- Our Community - www.ourcommunity.com.au
- Sport and Recreation Tasmania- www.development.tas.gov.au/sportrec
- Tourism Tasmania - www.tourismtasmania.com.au
- Arts Tasmania - www.arts.tas.gov.au
- Screen Tasmania - www.screen.tas.gov.au
- Ausindustry - www.ausindustry.gov.au
- Department of Economic Development - <http://www.development.tas.gov.au/innovation/grants.html>
- Tasmania Online - www.tas.gov.au/tasmaniaonline/
- Events Tasmania - www.eventstasmania.com
- Landcare Australia - www.landcareaustralia.com.au
- Telstra Community Development Fund - www.telstrafoundation.com
- Tasmanian Regional Arts Fund - www.tasregionalarts.org.au

Philanthropic Organisations - www.philanthropy.org.au

If you seeking funding from Australian philanthropic trusts and foundations the following steps may make it easier to access funding:

1. Ascertain the charitable status of your organisation. The Australian Taxation Office's website has information to assist non-profit organisations.
2. Using The Australian Directory of Philanthropy, make a shortlist of foundations that may be able to fund your project.
3. Contact each of these organisations, individually, to obtain their most current set of guidelines.
4. Apply to each organisation, individually, being sure to follow their guidelines. Ensure that you include all the information the grant maker requests, that you frame your application in the manner they request, and that you do not apply to them if you do not fit their guidelines.

The Australian Directory of Philanthropy lists over 350 Australian trusts and foundations with their contact details and funding preferences. The Directory is intended to assist you to locate foundations that may be able to fund your organisation.