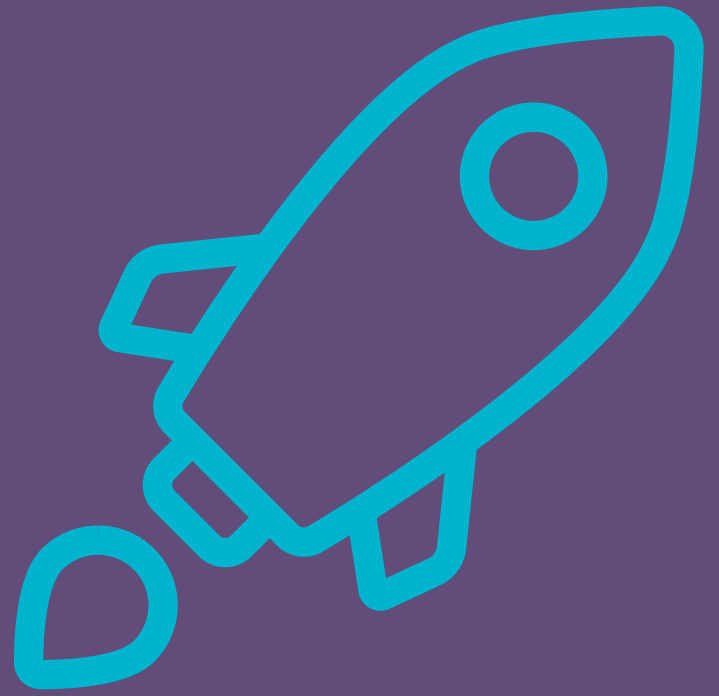

This *How to Guide* pulls together the key things applicants should think about when writing an application – along with helpful hints and tips.



launching a successful funding application

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As a funder, Inspiring Scotland understands how stressful the pressure of writing, submitting and securing grant funding for your organisation can be. You may be wondering where to start, what to write and how to communicate the importance of an idea that you passionately believe could significantly impact people's lives.

Inspiring Scotland is committed to strengthening the capacity of the charity sector to deliver the greatest possible social impact to improve the lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Our experience in funding – having managed nearly 30 funds and administering over £120million since launch – leaves us well placed to highlight what works in writing successful funding applications and the common pitfalls to avoid.



Top tip

As a collaborative partner we know there's a wealth of great information out there, so we'll share additional resources throughout this guide. Check out [Foundation Scotland's Top Tips for Applicants](#) – which has a list of reasons that applications are commonly rejected. Foundation Scotland strengthen local communities by providing a source of funding to community-led projects across Scotland.



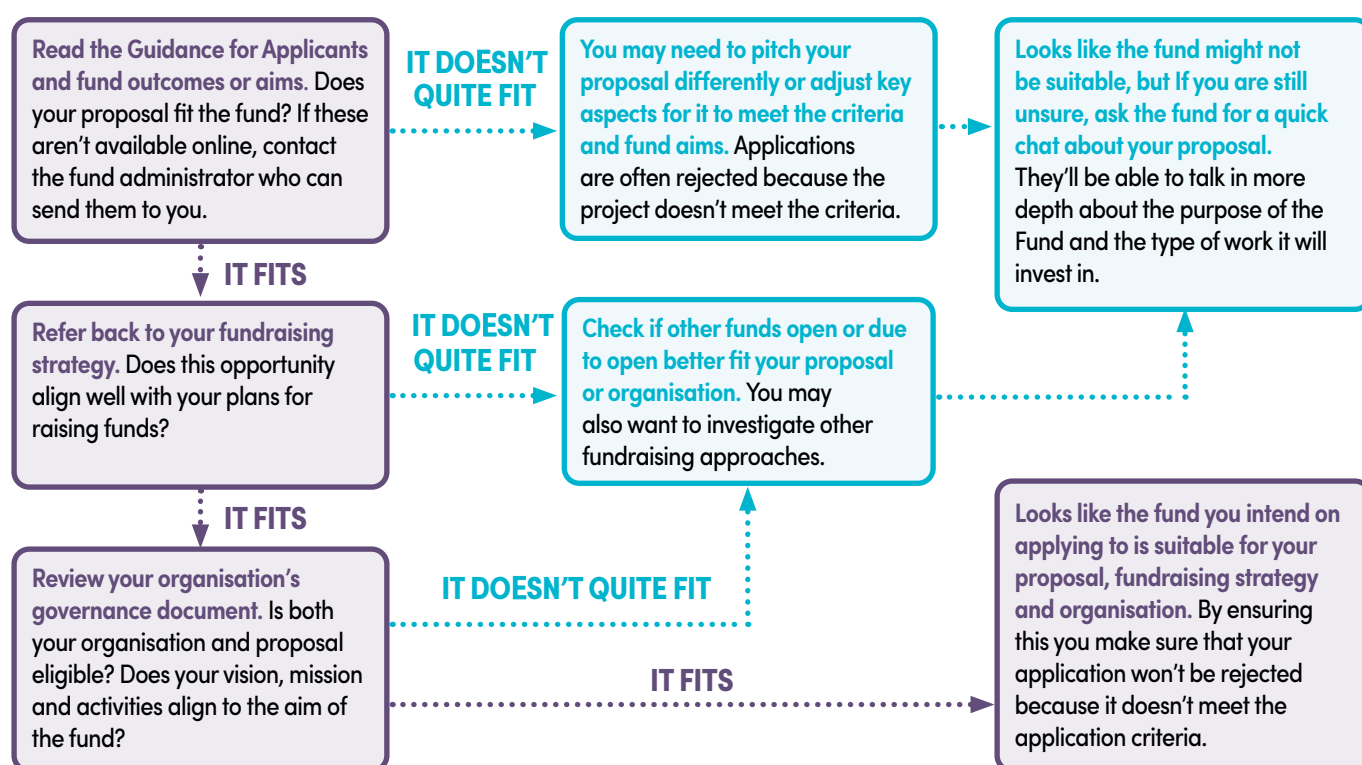
Is the fund the right fit?

If you're reading this *How to Guide* because you're about to apply for funding – well done – you're off to a great start already!

Completing funding applications takes time and it is worth putting the effort in right at the start for the best chance of success. Researching the fund before applying to make sure it aligns with your proposal, organisation and fundraising strategy will ensure your application is eligible to apply to the fund. While this might seem a big ask for organisations

without staff capacity, it will save you time and energy in the long-run: one of the most common reasons applications are rejected is that they don't adhere to the fund criteria.

Use our flowchart to decide whether or not to apply to a particular fund:



Top tip

Don't have a fundraising strategy? Charity Fundraising Ltd provides a comprehensive range of fundraising consultancy and strategic services to charities, including this **step by step guide to writing a fundraising strategy**.

Need support developing a governance document? SCVO is the membership organisation for Scotland's charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises and they have provided a **model constitution** for each type of legal structure commonly found in the voluntary sector in Scotland.

Thinking about alternative funding? Grants Online provide the UK's most comprehensive and up-to-date **grant database** which makes it easy to find alternative sources of funding for your proposal. SCVO also manage **Funding Scotland**, a free online funding search tool, and have some great **ways to raise funds without writing a funding application**.

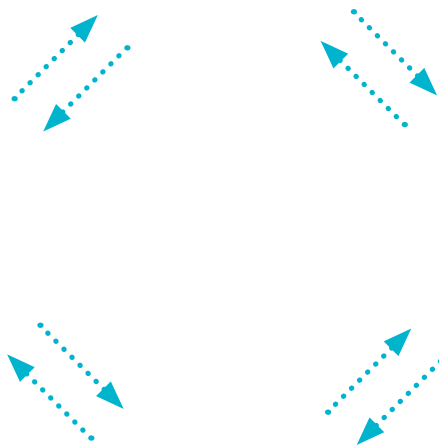
Writing the application



Once you've decided the fund you're applying to is the right fit, you can get your application underway. We suggest using the Diamond Model when writing funding applications – it's a quick and simple way to remember the key elements of a great application: clear and concise, costed, compelling, and complete.

Keeping these four themes in mind will help you write funding applications which have a better chance of being successful.

This section explains why each C is important and includes handy tips as well as common pitfalls to avoid.





Assessors reviewing your application want to visualise what your work will look like were it to be funded, so your answers and overall proposal must be clear. When an assessor clearly understands an application, they can confidently score it, write a summary and discuss it with their colleagues.

Assessors come from professional backgrounds, so may not be familiar with the specific area you are working in. Don't use overly complex, technical or jargon-laden language, as the assessor may have difficulty in assessing your application and it could reduce your chances of being successful. Not all funders will be able to reach out to applicants to clarify an answer and this lack of clarity could detract from your overall assessment.

If your application is successful, being clear at this stage will also help you and your Award Manager talk purposefully about the ongoing development of your project and its positive impact without crossed wires.

Top 5 tips for writing clearly

01 Be clear on technical information Always explain abbreviations and acronyms, and try not to use buzzwords or jargon. If you are using technical or complex language give a layman's explanation. When explained well, technical content can help demonstrate your knowledge and credibility on the subject, but don't assume the assessor is familiar with your organisation or field of work.

02 Avoid vague language Be specific and do not leave room for the assessor to guess or make assumptions. For example, rather than saying "we will run sports activities for children", say "we will run weekly dance sessions and weekly gymnastics sessions for 10-year olds over a 6-month period. Each session will be 2 hours long and will be attended by 10 children".

03 Be clear on costs Clarity is particularly important when detailing your budget. The assessor should understand your total project costs, how much of this you are asking for and which elements of the budget the fund will pay for.

04 Ask someone else to review before submission Assessors are not checking your spelling or grammar but do consider having someone read your application over before submitting, in case mistakes have caused a lack of clarity.

05 Implement your elevator pitch Some applications will ask for a summary of your organisation and/or proposal. A good technique is to use an 'elevator pitch', a clear, 60-second pitch of what your organisation does, why it matters and how it makes a difference.



To really sell your work you'll want to go into depth about your organisation and proposal, but sometimes this can lead to answers being overly long, not clearly linked to your proposal and intangible for the assessor.

Funders want to know how the money they allocate will be spent, your proposed solution, how the project or idea will be implemented and what happens if plans go wrong. Your application must clearly explain this to the funder in a way that is coherent, easy to follow and which can be measured and translated into a measurable project plan to evaluate success.

Top 3 tips for writing concisely

Being concise does not mean a lack of detail, description, or illustration – these are all key to making your application understandable and compelling but use them in moderation for when you want to communicate something with impact.

01 Don't overwrite A word-limit is not a target, you do not have to use all the space. If you begin to filibuster – padding out your responses to take up space – you run the risk of submitting a less articulate application. If you want to give supplementary information, such as a case study, to further support an answer, attach it separately so the assessor can review it if time permits.

02 Avoid repeating yourself Try not to repeat the same information throughout the application. If you find this happening, consider whether your answers could be split differently across the questions.

03 Graphics can add value If the application allows it, graphics are a great way of sharing complex or technical information in a clear and concise way. This also applies to formatting; making things bold, underlined or giving them their own line or paragraph can help clearly indicate key information to the assessor.



Top tip

Remember that you will need to provide evidence through monitoring and evaluation on the elements you include in your application. **Evaluation Support Scotland has a wealth of resources available online** to support you to evaluate your proposal.



In almost all cases you will be asked to submit a budget which sets out how much you need and what it will be spent on. If you followed the steps in part 1 to decide whether the fund is the right fit, you will already know what the fund will and will not provide funding towards, and your budget should reflect this.

Some funds will have a set amount available and access is usually dependent on meeting defined criteria. These types of funds are not very common; the application process is typically minimal and the amount awarded is small in comparison to competitive-funding.

- ✓ **Make your budget as specific as possible by breaking spend up using headings and include descriptions.** For example, instead of saying 'staff costs' say '1x0.5FTE Project Manager' and add a new line for each role to be funded. Do not include any non-specific items in your budget, such as "contingency costs" or "miscellaneous" without checking with the Fund Administrator that these are a permissible spend.
- ✓ **Always make sure your budget reflects your application** – if you ask for money to buy goods or services which are not clearly articulated in your application this will detract from your assessment.
- ✓ **Pay attention to the budget figures and number of beneficiaries.** It is clear to assessors when you are over claiming beneficiaries while only seeking a proportion of overall project costs.
- ✓ **Show if staff costs include on-costs such as pension, National Insurance, and tax** – this will help the assessor understand if costs are for more than the roles' salary.
- ✓ **Be as accurate as you can** by getting quotes or using past-spend as a benchmark for everything you will need to pay for.
- ✓ **Be realistic,** include costs that are essential to the success of the proposal.
- ✓ **Do not ask for more than the fund limit.** Check if there is a minimum amount and do not go below it.
- ✓ **Be honest about your income and reserves.** Assessors can check this against your accounts. Holding 6 months running costs in reserve or having a reserves policy which aims to achieve this, gives confidence that you will be able to deliver the proposal if successful, if something were to impact your finances (e.g., a global pandemic). However, if you have very high unrestricted reserves (12 months +), this could suggest support from the fund is not needed.



Top tip

Are the costs eligible?

Certain costs may be outside the scope of the fund you are applying for. Management costs, overheads, capital expenditure and retrospective funding (i.e., costs incurred before the award date) are common costs that may not be eligible for funding, so be sure to check before submitting your budget.



All funds will have a bespoke assessment framework with a template for scoring, which guides assessors through the application. These frameworks make the process as objective as possible to ensure fairness and consistency across all applications. That said, the framework is designed in such a way as to reward applications which have managed to articulate their proposal in a compelling way.

It is helpful to remember that all funds want to invest in solutions – your job is to convince them your proposal is part of the solution.

To do that, you need to explain what the problem is and the evidence you are basing this on. Funders want to ensure their money is being spent wisely, so you need to prove there is a need and that your proposal will meet it.

- Have you explained the rationale behind the way you work and why you do the things you do?** Do you have a theory of change or logic model that could be conveyed in a way which allows the assessor to see the logic behind how your activities will achieve your and the fund's outcomes?
- Your application should build confidence that you will be able to deliver your proposal.** Avoid phrases like 'we could deliver' or 'we might support 5 families' and instead use more affirmative language such as 'we plan to deliver this level of support to 5 families'.
- A really great application will capture the heart and mind of an assessor,** they should read your answer and not only be able to score it highly against the criteria, but also, believe in the value of your proposal and feel confident you can deliver it well.
- Don't copy and paste large amounts of text from other applications without updating it,** this is a sign the application was rushed and not well thought through in advance.

A theory of change will help you to:

01 Establish the problem – what is the need you would address and what evidence can you use to show how you know this? This can be secondary evidence such as available data and reports produced by a 3rd party, but it's just as persuasive where you can describe and demonstrate first-hand evidence (surveys, questionnaires, etc) of the need for your project or idea. If your proposal is community or place-based, you should provide local data on the problem.

02 Show why your organisation is relevant to the problem. Have you been working to address the need already or will this be a new area of work? What achievements have you had in the past and what makes your organisation the right one to work on this problem? What makes you a credible organisation in this space? Who else is working on this problem and have you considered a joint-proposal? Do you have local people or those with lived experience of the problem on your Board?

03 Establish urgency around the problem – why must the fund take action to address the need, now? Is the need worsening? Is it resistant to change and needs more investment? Is this an opportune moment to work on this need, e.g., high political or social interest?

04 Establish the solution – what will you do to address the need and why have you decided this is the best action to take? This is often a good time to detail how beneficiaries (those affected by the issue) have been involved in the design or development of the solution, or show that their input was considered at some stage during the application process.

Complete



Fund application forms are designed so the questions link back to the aims and outcomes of the fund and your responses tell the assessor what they need to know to assess your application. All questions will have a corresponding section within the assessment framework, so it is vital that all application questions are answered and in full.

- Do not refer to websites, or other documents by way of an answer.** Funds are typically over-subscribed and assessors might not have time to go looking for the answer. You should only do this when you wish to provide supplementary information to expand on what you have already said in the application.
- Make sure you send in all documents asked for in the Fund Guidance when you submit your application.** It is not always possible for a fund to request this retrospectively and your application could be automatically rejected or lose valuable points if you do not. A handy tip is to save all commonly requested files together in one folder on your drive e.g., governance documents, recent bank statement, audited accounts etc. This reduces the risk of sending in an out-dated version or missing one altogether.
- In most cases, late applications will not be considered** so always give yourself plenty of time to complete ahead of the submission date.
- Before submitting, check over your application** and ask someone else to read through it to make sure it is complete and adheres to the Diamond Model.
- Never submit an incomplete form.** This is a very common mistake that can slow down or even stop your application. If you are unsure about a question, reread the Guidance for Applicants or contact the Fund Administrator for help.
- A complete application extends to the attachments you send,** for instance, make sure your accounts have been signed and they are the most recent version. One key way to avoid an incomplete application is don't leave your planning until the last minute, it will come across in the application.



Top tip

Want more support with Theory of Change or Logic Models?

NCVO Knowhow offers advice and support for voluntary organisations, including a useful [guide on how to develop a Theory of Change](#). NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy and they too have created an [in-depth guide to creating a Theory of Change](#).

The UK Government provides a useful Introduction to [Logic Models](#).

After applying



It is important to remember funds are often over-subscribed and there will be a competitive element to applying. Assessors want applicants to convey their proposal in the best possible light, as they want to fund great work just as much as great work wants to be funded. This makes it crucial to demonstrate your case for support. A clear, compelling, concise, and complete application with a well thought-through budget that explains why the fund should support your proposal will put you in the best possible position for being successful.

It is important to remember that others will be doing the same and despite your best efforts, you may not be successful. BBC Children in Need, for example, receive on average 5x more applications than they can fund and this is the case for many awarding bodies. When this happens, and you feel you were selective in applying to the fund (see page 3), you are encouraged to seek feedback.

Feedback should help you understand whether your proposal and concept needs more refinement or if your application itself could have been stronger. The fund will be able to provide you with valuable information on where you can make improvements on your next application.

In some cases, the fund may offer you a partial award and will call you to discuss this. When this happens, your application has been successful, but the fund is not able to cover all the costs in your application and it is at your discretion whether to accept.



As a rule of thumb, many assessment frameworks will ask the Assessor to consider common themes which can be considered as signs of a quality proposal. These are normally indicative that you work in a way which is advancing equality, tackling social injustice, building capacity, and empowering those affected by the problem you are addressing. There may be specific questions within the application which will ask you to describe your approach to some of the areas noted below. If this isn't the case, it is always worthwhile considering how to show your commitment to the following, as doing so will strengthen your application.

Diversity and Inclusion – how will you reach seldom heard and marginalised populations? What measures have you put in place to ensure you engage with them meaningfully and meet their specific needs?

Targeted vs Universal Provision – is your project restricted to a specific demographic e.g., young mothers living in Glasgow, or is it open to all mothers living in Glasgow but with a focus on young mothers? Showing who you will work with and in what way will strengthen your application.

Participation and Voice – what involvement have your beneficiaries had in the development of your proposal and what will their role be if you are successful in gaining an award? How do you value their ideas, and do you give them opportunities to generate solutions? Do you support them to influence change?

Best Value – is your proposal delivering impact comparable to the investment you are looking for? Is there a way you could improve the effectiveness or efficiency of your proposal to increase value for money?

Partnership and Collaboration – how do you work with others to tackle the problem your proposal addresses? Are you well connected with others locally or nationally and are you sharing learning and resources? Does your proposal help other partners achieve their goals? Genuine partnerships and collaborations would be mutually-beneficial, and should be a key element of making your proposal work – is this clearly shown in your application?

Build a Legacy – what is the impact or change that will be left behind after the Fund's investment ends? It could be that you have helped redesign ways of working in a particular place or setting, or you have developed an asset which will go on to exist after the activity within your proposal ends.

Plans for Sustainability – if your theory of change is correct and you are contributing towards the reduction or end of your identified problem, how will you keep this going beyond the lifespan of your award? Will you help others to adapt their own practice to take this learning or new way of working on board? How might your proposal (and evidence of success) help to inform local or national policy or practice changes which will help tackle the problem?



We have sign-posted resources throughout this *How to Guide* to help you explore other sources of useful fundraising hints and tips and these are included again in a fuller list below, but this is not exhaustive. It is a good idea to speak to colleagues, partners and any funders you already have to get their advice and recommendations on other useful sources to help you improve your fundraising skills. YouTube is another great open-resource with lots of tutorials and videos that cover almost any fundraising subject!

- Foundation Scotland strengthen local communities by providing a source of funding to community led projects across Scotland and have created a **Top Tips for Applicants** which includes a list of Top Reasons Applications Get Rejected
- Charity Fundraising Ltd provides a comprehensive range of fundraising consultancy and strategic services to Charities, including this **step by step guide** to writing a Fundraising Strategy
- SCVO is the membership organisation for Scotland's charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises and they have provided a **model constitution** for each type of legal structure commonly found in the voluntary sector in Scotland
- SCVO also manage **Funding Scotland**, a free online funding search tool and have provided tips on more than **10 ways to raise funds without writing Fund application**
- Grants Online provide the UK's most comprehensive and up to date **grant database** which makes it easy to find alternative sources of funding for your proposal
- The **TSI Scotland Network** is a body of charities that support the third sector across Scotland. There are 32 TSIs – or Third Sector Interfaces in Scotland, one for each local authority area. They are invaluable sources of local information, fundraising support and other matters relating to the third sector in Scotland
- Evaluation Support Scotland have a wealth of **resources available online to support you to evaluate your proposal**
- NCVO Knowhow offers advice and support for voluntary organisations, including a **useful guide on how to develop a Theory of Change**
- NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy and they too have created an **in-depth guide to creating a Theory of Change**
- UK Government provide a useful **Introduction to Logic Models**
- Think NPC has produced an **in-depth Guide** and **10 Step Guide to creating a Theory of Change**
- MyCommunity has produced a **Guide to creating a logic model**
- Inspiring Impact has produced a '**measuring up**' tool which helps you to review your monitoring and evaluation
- Robertson Trust has produced a **handy short guide to monitoring and evaluation tools and techniques**
- NCVO has provided a **guide on Effective impact and evaluation practices**
- NPC has created a **4 Pillar Approach to Evaluation**

Registered Office:

**Riverside House, 502 Gorgie Road,
Edinburgh EH11 3AF**

T. 0131 442 8760

E. enquiries@inspiringscotland.org.uk

www.inspiringscotland.org.uk

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