If you want to develop your service or start up a much needed project then here is some advice which we hope will help. When planning to write a funding application bear in mind that you will have to spend a lot of time and put in a great deal of effort to produce a strong application to send to a potential funder. This guidance covers many of the areas and main points that need to be addressed when writing a funding application. Good luck!
Thorough planning and preparation are vital to writing a winning bid so start by having an absolutely detailed and focussed idea of the project you want funding for.

**Focus on your project proposal**
- Have a really clear idea of what it is you want funding for – can you sum up your idea and aims in a few lines?
- Why is your project needed? Have you done research - have you asked your existing and potential customers if they think there is a need?
- What resources/equipment will your project need ? – be realistic with costs
- Is anyone else doing what you plan to do? – study the competition
- Make a detailed project/business plan
- What are the outcomes you want to achieve with your project?

**Have the basics ready & prepared**
If you are a VCS organisation you will almost certainly need:
- A governing document or constitution and a management committee, trustee board or steering group (including a chairperson, treasurer, secretary)
- A bank account with two cheque signatories
- Latest accounts
- Annual report

All applicants will need:
- Insurance documents (probably public and employers liability)
- Often funders require key policies and procedures such as CRB checks, Equality & Diversity, Health &Safety, Safeguarding. Ensure these are current and dated.

**Search for possible funders**
There are many funding databases and publications. Here are some really useful ones – plus they are free!
- **Suffolk Funding** – www.suffolkfunding.org.uk
  Go to Who’s Who tab at the top and click on Funders for a list of national and local funders. Click on a name for details.
- **Community Action Suffolk** - www.communityactionsuffolk.org.uk
  Gives news on funding and has link to Suffolk Community Foundation
• **Suffolk Community Foundation** – www.suffolkfoundation.org.uk
  Manages a grants programme and number of charitable funds. Their Grants Officers can be phoned for advice.

• **Funding Central** – www.fundingcentral.org.uk
  Free website for VCS organisations. Guide to grants and social investment

• **Grants and Trusts directories** found in the Reference section of local libraries

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**Select your potential funders**

Once you have identified possible funders you will need to obtain their application guidelines, application forms and any other information they supply. You may need to phone up for these or download forms from their website, alternatively you may need to write in.

**It is crucially important that you read closely all information from the funder.**

**Read all the information - including the guidelines and questions on the application form - and check the following points to make sure the funder is right for your particular organisation and application:**

- Is your organisation eligible to apply for a grant from the funder? E.g. do you have to be a charity?
- Are you sure your project is eligible – does it meet the funder’s criteria?
- What type of projects do they fund? Find out what they are already funding
- Do you have a strong case that lifts your proposal above others?
- Can you deliver your project without deviating too much from your core work?
- Note key words or phrases used by the funder – these can give you a ‘feel’ for what the funder wants from you
- Is the funding sufficient? Can you do all you need to do with the money available?
- Check the application submission dates – do you have time to put in a bid?
**Contact the funder**

Many funders are happy to speak to you and will offer advice to guide you through their process. They will also clarify any points you are unsure about so do not hesitate to phone them up. Make sure you speak to a key decision maker and put in the effort to establish a rapport with them. Cultivating a good relationship with the funder makes sense. Ask them what’s important to them and what a successful application will need to include. You may even be able to ask them to evaluate sections of your draft application.

**Writing your application**

**Preparing to write**

- Don’t assume the funder knows all about you. You will need to describe your organisation clearly – you must explain who you are, what you do, the context you work in and ensure you link your current work to the project you are seeking funding for.
- Be prepared to make lots of drafts and versions of your application before the final one is ready so allow time for this.
- Read through all the questions carefully and thoroughly and plan and prepare strong and full answers that address the key information asked for. One of the main reasons for applications being rejected is that questions are just not properly answered.
- If a question does not apply then write ‘Not Applicable’, never leave a blank.

**Write your application: this is your chance to ‘sell’ your organisation and your project – make this your sales pitch!**

- Show that you have read the funder’s guidelines and make a strong case for why your project meets their objectives.
- Be positive about your organisation’s successes and achievements.
- Clearly state the aims of your project and how these will be achieved.
- Tailor your application to your funder’s aims and priorities – you need to offer a benefit or service that the funder also needs and values.
- Show that you have established a need for your project and that it is what your local community/customers want.
- Give examples of the benefits of your project and explain the impact it will have on your community/customers.
- Explain how you will evaluate the outcomes you are planning to achieve.
• Speak the same language as your funder – use the key words and phrases that they use
• Be realistic in your budgeting, don’t cut corners and under-cost or look greedy by asking for more than you need
• Don’t be vague, be business-like and give specific facts and figures

Consider your writing style
• Avoid jargon and buzz words, use natural language
• Use shorter words and short clear sentences
• Use bullet points
• Avoid the ‘wall of words’ effect i.e. long sentences and very dense, dry text. Funders have to read through hundreds of applications – make sure yours is ‘readable’ and that it grabs the attention
• Put some passion into it! Show that you really believe in your project
• State facts, not unsubstantiated opinions
• Never exceed the word limit or provide lots of irrelevant information
• Ask colleagues and others not connected to your organisation to read through your application to make sure it makes sense and to check the spelling and grammar.

Before sending in your application
• Try to get as many letters of support as you can particularly from key groups and individuals relevant to your application.
• Make sure you send any additional information that the funder asks for. Your bid will probably be rejected if you fail to do this. Funders often ask for: your Constitution, a budget, some form of accounts
• Where additional information is included state you are linking your answers to the attachments e.g. ‘for further information see Attachment 1’
• Check the presentation of your application. The more professional it looks the more credible you appear and this may well raise your chances of success. Make sure it is word processed with an eye catching cover if appropriate. Formal applications will need to be bound. Check how many copies the funder wants you to send.
• Complete your application well before the deadline and put it to one side for a few days. Then go back to it and you will almost certainly see it with ‘fresh eyes’ and notice errors and improvements you can make.
• Keep a copy for yourselves
• Send (or take) your application to the right person at the correct address and get it in before the deadline
If you are asked to apply by letter

If funders ask you to apply by letter instead of an application form, check whether they give any guidance as to what the letter should contain and how long it should be. If they do not give any guidance then structure your letter in the following way:

• **Project Title** – think of a good name for your project

• **Introduction to your organisation** – explain what you do, what your objectives are, who your customers are, how long you have been going, how many staff you have, your successes and achievements

• **Project proposal summary** – summarise the project you are applying for funding for in a few clear, straightforward sentences.

• **Why you want funding** – explain the needs or issues you have identified, show that you have carried out research and give some facts and statistics. Say who will benefit from your project.

• **Describe your proposed project** – what you want do to meet the needs identified, how you will do it, what it will achieve, your timescale and how you will evaluate your project’s success. Say here how your project fits well with the funder’s aims and priorities and emphasise this point.

• **Your proposed costs** - give a breakdown of the project costs. If your finances are simple and straightforward you could include them within your letter. If they are more complex then put your budget on a separate piece of paper. Make it clear exactly how much money you are asking for.

• **Other funders** – say who they are and what aspect of your organisation they fund

• **Attach your latest accounts** – you need to show that you are financially stable and viable

Your letter should

• Be neatly typed on your organisation’s headed paper (if you have it)

• Have short clear sentences and paragraphs to make it easily readable

• Be written in clear understandable language – avoid jargon and acronyms

• Contain facts not vague phrases e.g. say ‘250 customers used our service last year’ instead of ‘lots of customers used our service last year’

• Not contain lots of unnecessary detail – keep it succinct and specific

• Stick to the length stipulated by the funder – if no length is set then 2 sides of A4 is generally enough

• Be addressed to the right ‘named person’ – if unsure phone the funder to find out who this
You hear that your application is successful!
When you get the good news the first thing you need to do is thank your funder – either by phone, letter or both. Then you must read the funder’s letter of agreement and/or contract very carefully and note the following points:
• Any targets or milestones you have to meet
• Dates you must send in reports and data to the funder
• The payment schedule so you know when you will receive money from your funder
• Any requirements regarding using your funder’s logo on publicity and marketing materials

While your project is running
• Put data monitoring systems in place and keep them up to date so you can evidence the impact and success of your project.
• Keep in touch with your funder. Regularly inform them of how your project is progressing. Involve them - invite them to your events, send them your press cuttings, good news stories and newsletters.
• Find out when you can apply again for more funding.
• If you have major problems achieving your targets or doing whatever you have been funded to do then you must let your funder know sooner rather than later. They may be able to renegotiate your targets or give you some advice and support. If you get to the end of the grant period and then have to admit you have not achieved your goals your funder will not be pleased – they may even ask for their money back.

Not successful? Ask for feedback
If your application is unfortunately not successful then ask if you can have some feedback to find out why. Feedback may help you improve your future applications. Don’t give up. Keep trying, there are plenty of funding opportunities out there – Good luck!

Links to useful articles and websites
• www.thirdsector.co.uk/Fundraising/article/1143212/the-top-10-funding-application-errors
• www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/funding-finance
• www.suffolkobservatory.info
• www.guardian.co.uk/voluntary-sector-network/2011/mar/21/perfect-funding-bids
• www.vawcvs.org/online-advice/write-a-good-funding-application