Funding toolkit

for the voluntary sector in Nottinghamshire

A guide to help secure funding

Nottinghamshire County Council

This toolkit is designed for charities, community groups, voluntary organisations, and social enterprises that are new to grant funding, as well as those that have faced challenges in securing funding in the past.

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Introduction

Purpose

This toolkit is designed for charities, community groups, voluntary organisations, and social enterprises that are new to grant funding, as well as those that have faced challenges in securing funding in the past. Applying for grants can be a time-consuming process, making it especially discouraging when applications are unsuccessful. The goal of this toolkit is to help you find the grant most suited to your needs, providing advice about the best funding opportunities for your organisations, and to provide insights into common mistakes and pitfalls. It also offers tips for answering grant application questions, strategies for finding and sourcing funding, and useful contacts for ongoing support.

What is grant funding?

Grant funding is financial support provided by governments, grant bodies, foundations, trusts, corporations, or other organisations for specific projects or initiatives.

Unlike loans, grants do not need to be repaid but they do need to achieve the aims for which the money was provided for.

Grants are typically awarded based on an organisation's ability to meet certain criteria, such as addressing community needs, creating new ideas, or working towards improving people's lives, protecting the environment, or boosting the local economy.

When is grant funding not an option?

Typically, grant funding cannot be used for expenses that fall outside the scope of project-related costs. Common restrictions include the repayment of historic debt, as grants are generally not permitted to cover past liabilities or debts incurred before the application. Fundraising activities are also excluded, as grants rarely support campaigns or events aimed at raising additional funds. Similarly, grants cannot be used for political or religious activities intended to influence legislation or promote specific religious beliefs. These restrictions ensure that funding is directed toward future-oriented, actionable projects rather than resolving past financial issues. Always check the specific funder's guidelines for detailed exclusions.

What are the key benefits of grants?

For small organisations, applying for grants can provide significant benefits, offering a critical source of financial support to help launch or sustain projects.

- Grants can fund essential resources such as staff, equipment, or programme development, which might otherwise be out of reach due to limited budgets.

- Securing a grant can enhance an organisation's credibility, making it easier to attract future funding, partners, or volunteers.

- Grants also encourage small organisations to focus on planning, improving their ability to define goals, measure impact, and operate more efficiently.

- For many small organisations, grants represent an opportunity to grow and make a greater impact in their communities.

Things to think about before you start your funding application.

Planning

It's crucial for organisations to align grant funding with their existing vision and action plan, rather than reshaping their goals to fit a particular grant.

- *Staying true to the organisation's core mission* ensures that the funding supports meaningful, sustainable work that aligns with long-term objectives. When organisations modify their focus solely to secure a grant, they risk losing direction, diluting their impact, and straying from their community's needs.

- *Seeking grants that complement existing strategies* help organisations maintain integrity, foster deeper trust with stakeholders, and ensure that the work they're funding contributes to the broader vision they've set out to achieve. This approach also increases the likelihood of long-term success and sustainability.

Have a funding strategy

A funding strategy for a small organisation is a plan that outlines how the organisation will secure financial resources to support its goals and activities. It involves identifying a range of funding sources, such as grants, donations and partnerships, as well as developing a clear approach for pursuing them.

The strategy helps ensure financial sustainability by setting priorities, timelines, and methods for reaching potential funders, while also aligning with the organisation's vision and long-term objectives.

Having a solid funding strategy allows small organisations to focus their efforts efficiently and increase their chances of securing the right financial support.

Without a funding strategy, small organisations:

- Risk operating in a reactive, disorganised manner, which can lead to financial instability.

- May miss out on critical funding opportunities, chase grants that don't align with their mission, or spread themselves too thin trying to secure inconsistent sources of income.

- Can waste valuable time and resources, making it difficult to plan long-term projects or achieve sustainable growth.

- Can weaken relationships with funders and stakeholders, as the organisation may appear unfocused or unreliable in its approach to securing funding.

Is your organisation ready for grant funding?

The majority of grant funders provide funding support to organisations rather than individuals. Typically, these include community groups, clubs, associations, charities, trusts, and community interest companies, which are usually non-profit organisations with at least three members, a governing document, and a bank account in the organisation's name.

These requirements are often part of the funder's eligibility criteria, and they may ask for proof. If your organisation does not meet these criteria, it's best not to start the application, as it is unlikely to be successful without these essential elements in place.

Research conducted by the Directory of

Social Change reveals that 36 per cent of unsuccessful applications were ineligible. Therefore, checking the eligibility criteria and reading the guidance before starting your application can save you significant time and effort.

Identifying suitable grant opportunities

Every grant funder operates differently, with varying requirements and eligibility criteria.

- Some offer rolling grant programmes with no deadlines, while others have specific application periods that open and close at different times of the year or in cycles.

- Some funders only provide grants based on specific regions.

- The timescales involved differ between funders.

As part of your funding strategy, it can be helpful to create a spreadsheet to track potential funders that align with your needs, noting grant opening dates and deadlines.

In addition to conducting online searches, you may want to subscribe to voluntary sector bulletins or contact your local Community and Voluntary Service (CVS) for valuable information, support, and guidance on setting up and running a group, as well as identifying suitable funding opportunities.

It's also highly recommended to subscribe to a funding search platform (see page 9 for examples), which can help charities, community groups, voluntary organisations, and social enterprises find relevant funding opportunities.

Crafting a strong application

Components of a grant application

A typical grant application includes several essential components that collectively convey the project's significance and feasibility.

- **Evidence of need -** illustrating the specific issues the project aims to address within the community.

- **The project description** - outlining the objectives, methodology, location, and timeline, ensuring clarity about how the project will be executed.

- **Anticipated impact** – the application should articulate the expected benefits and outcomes for the target population.
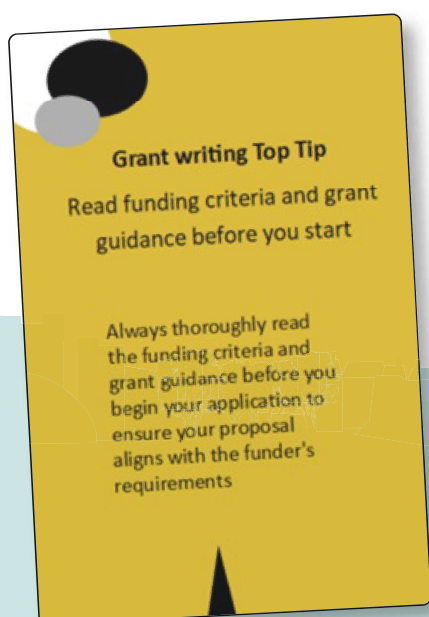
- **A budget** is also crucial, itemising expenses and justifying how funds will be allocated.

- **Capacity to manage the project -** organisations may include information how they plan to manage the project and any relevant partnerships, reinforcing their ability to deliver on the proposed initiative.

All of the above components work together to create a compelling case for funding.

Reading the grant guidance

Reading the grant guidance before applying for funding is crucial for ensuring a successful application.

Each grant funder has specific requirements, eligibility criteria, and expectations that are outlined in their guidance documents.

Grant writing Top Tip

Read funding criteria and grant guidance before you start

Always thoroughly read the funding criteria and grant guidance before you begin your application to ensure your proposal aligns with the funder's requirements

By thoroughly reviewing these guidelines, applicants will:

- **Better understand the funder's priorities, the types of projects they support, and any limitations or restrictions on funding**. This knowledge helps organisations tailor their applications to align with the funder's objectives, increasing the chances of approval.

- **Understand the application process, required documentation, and deadlines**. This can prevent costly mistakes and save valuable time. Ultimately, taking the time to read and comprehend the grant guidance can significantly enhance the quality of the application and improve the likelihood of securing funding.

Writing a clear and persuasive grant application

Crafting a clear and persuasive grant application involves several key elements that can help you stand out.

- Begin by thoroughly understanding the funder's goals and tailoring your proposal to align with their priorities.

- Adhere closely to the application guidelines, using straightforward language to clearly articulate your project's purpose, objectives, and methods.

- Stay focused on the questions asked; if necessary, read them multiple times to grasp what the funder seeks from your response.

- Adhere to any word count limits, and if there are none, aim for concise and impactful writing, less is often more.

- Provide compelling evidence of the need for your project, backed by data and personal stories that highlight its significance.

- Include a realistic budget that justifies each expense and showcases your organisation's capacity to implement the project successfully.

- Set aside time for thorough revisions and proofreading to eliminate any errors, ensuring that your final submission reflects professionalism and dedication.

- Try not to use jargon and only use acronyms if their full meaning is explained when first used.

Can Artificial Intelligence (AI) help or hinder your grant application?

Using AI in grant applications offers several advantages, including speeding up research by quickly identifying relevant funding opportunities, automating repetitive tasks like filling out basic forms, and providing insights to enhance clarity and structure in proposals.
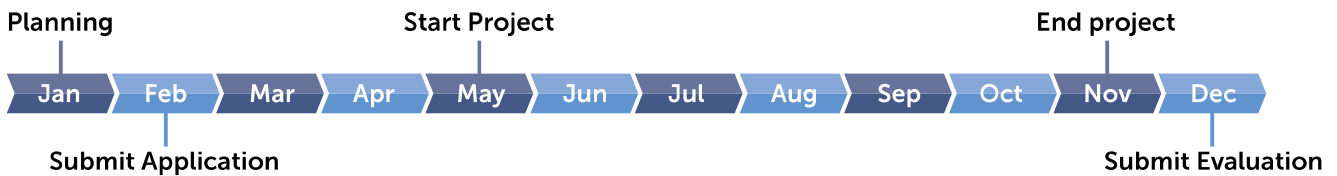
AI can help streamline the application process and ensure consistency, saving time and reducing human error. However, there are notable **disadvantages**, such as the risk of producing generic applications that lack the personal touch or deep understanding of an organisation's mission.

AI can also struggle with complex grant guidelines or fail to grasp the nuance required to tailor responses effectively, potentially leading to missed opportunities or poorly aligned applications.

Financial management after receiving grant funds

Effective financial management after receiving grant funds is essential to ensure the project's success and maintain accountability to the funder.

Planning   **Start Project**   **End project**

| Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |

Submit Application   **Submit Evaluation**

This involves carefully tracking all expenses, ensuring they align with the approved budget, and maintaining accurate records for auditing purposes.

Regularly reviewing the budget allows you to monitor spending and make adjustments as needed to avoid overspending or under-utilising funds.

It's also important to submit financial reports according to the funder's requirements, detailing how the funds were used and demonstrating progress toward the project's goals.

Proper financial management not only ensures compliance but also builds trust with funders, increasing the likelihood of future support.

The benefits of maintaining good communication with your funders

Maintaining good communication with grant funders is vital for building strong, lasting relationships.

Regular communication, such as sending progress reports or sharing project successes, helps keep funders informed and engaged.

Best practices include:

- Providing timely updates on project progress
- Adhering to reporting deadlines
- Being transparent about any challenges or changes that arise.
- Responding promptly to any inquiries from the funder
- To expressing appreciation for their support

Establishing open, professional, and consistent communication fosters trust and demonstrates your organisation's reliability and accountability, which can positively influence future funding opportunities.

Common mistakes
When managing grant funding, several pitfalls can jeopardise the success of your application or project.

Common mistakes include:

- **Not allowing enough time or missing deadlines**, whether for the initial application or progress reports, which can lead to disqualification or hinder future funding opportunities.

- **Not fully reviewing the funder's requirements or eligibility criteria**. This can result in investing significant time and effort only to discover that your project isn't eligible.

- **Failing to align your project with the funder's priorities can weaken your application**. For example, submitting a project focused on reducing anti-social behaviour to a funder whose priority is climate change would likely rule out your proposal. Incomplete or inaccurate documentation, such as incorrect budgets or missing information, can also diminish your chances.

- **Not using the funds as agreed or failing to provide timely, transparent reports on spending can damage your reputation with funders**. Avoiding these mistakes helps ensure smoother project execution and fosters strong relationships with funders.

Final tips for a successful grant application

- It's important to start early to give yourself ample time to research the funder, gather necessary documents, and refine your proposal without rushing.

- Don't hesitate to ask for help—reach out to the funder, colleagues, mentors, or experts in your field for guidance, and consult your local Community and Voluntary Service (CVS) for support if needed.

- Thoroughly proofread your application to eliminate errors and ensure clarity and consider having someone else review it for fresh insights.

- Make sure you've followed all guidelines, met eligibility criteria, and aligned your project with the funder's priorities.

- By being prepared and paying attention to detail, you can significantly improve your chances of securing grant funding.

Final word - stay persistent: Every application is a step forward

Even if your first attempt at securing grant funding isn't successful, don't be discouraged, persistence is key!

Each application is a learning opportunity, and with each effort, you'll improve your chances of success.

Keep refining your approach and continue seeking out opportunities that align with your project's goals.

Remember, Nottinghamshire County Council offers the Local Communities Fund, which could be a great source of support for your project.

Our **Communities team** also offers bi-monthly funding workshops for Nottinghamshire residents, covering many of the topics featured in this toolkit. If you're interested in learning more or attending a workshop, please send an email to **communities.team@nottscc.gov.uk** Keep going—you're one step closer to making a positive impact!

Grant funding resources and useful links

Get in touch for any of the following:

1. Strategy template (VMOSA)
2. Action plan template
3. Funding strategy spreadsheet
4. Budget/cashflow forecast

Useful Links

Grant finding platforms
Here is a list of UK-based grant finding platforms that can help you identify funding opportunities for charities, community groups, and social enterprises:

1. Directory of Social Change (DSC)
Provides access to funding databases and offers extensive resources on grant-making trusts and funding opportunities for charities. **Website:** Directory of Social Change

2. The National Lottery Community Fund
Offers a range of funding programs for community projects across the UK, from small local initiatives to larger national ventures. **Website:** National Lottery Community Fund

3. Charity Excellence Framework
Provides a free fundraising platform with a grant search engine, helping charities find funding and improve financial sustainability. **Website:** Charity Excellence Framework

4. Nottinghamshire Insight
As assessment of the current and future health and social care needs of Nottinghamshire. **Website:** https://www.nottinghamshireinsight.org.uk/research-areas/jsna/

5. Nottinghamshire Observatory
A new, free resource to help find the most up-to-date local data, stats and trends has been unveiled by Nottinghamshire County Council. **Website:** https://observatory.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/

6. Nottinghamshire Association of Local Councils
Offers support, advise and training to local councils. **Website:** https://www.nottsalc.com/

7. Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire
Supporting community action in our rural neighbourhoods. **Website:** https://www.ruralcommunityactionnottinghamshire.co.uk/

Additional platforms for discovering grants tailored to your organisation's needs:

GrantFinder
A comprehensive database of funding opportunities for both public and private sectors in the UK, covering grants, loans, and awards. **Website:** GrantFinder

My Funding Central
Designed specifically for charities, voluntary organisations, and social enterprises to find relevant funding opportunities. **Website:** My Funding Central

Turn2us Grants Search
Offers a free search tool for finding financial support from a range of charitable funds and grants for individuals and organisations. **Website:** Turn2us Grants Search

GrantNav
A free, open-source tool that allows users to explore UK grant data, offering insights into who is funding what, where, and when. **Website:** GrantNav