

How to apply for funding

Applying for funding is one of the most effective ways to make your group more sustainable but it can be time-consuming. There are often some hoops to jump through to meet your funder's requirements and maybe even some reporting to do afterwards to explain how the money was spent.

This section offers some advice on approaching grant applications and the process of applying. It will be useful if you have already looked through the previous sections on funding, taken time to establish your group's needs and aims, and identified the most relevant sources of funding. The clearer you are about these, the more likely you are not only to find relevant sources of funding, but to apply successfully.

Eligibility

Once you have made a list of potential funders, you need to find out if you are eligible to apply for their grants. Funders often stipulate specific eligibility requirements. For example, they may only fund groups of a particular size, in a specific geographical area, or supporting certain issues – such as women, mental health, young people. Alternatively, they may only offer funding for specific resources, such as equipment for activities. Application forms often come with guidance notes: read through these carefully and consider the ways in which your group might or might not meet the eligibility requirements.

It is also worth considering how you could make the group eligible. For example, if a constitution is a requirement, you could look into creating one (see the previous section). Often, once your group meets the eligibility requirements for one fund, you find that there are other, similar grants that your group is also eligible to apply for.

Approaching funders

Funders often provide accessible information about how to apply for their funding; they may offer events for applicants to find out more and opportunities to ask questions. It is a good idea to take advantage of any such opportunity, and/or to contact them in advance.



Writing an Application

We suggest reading the whole application form through before you begin. Read what the funder's priorities are in terms of what impact they would like the money to have. As outlined in the previous two sections, it is important to be clear about what your group needs, what this will cost, and how the money would benefit the group. You can be creative with this: for example, if your group already pays costs such as venue hire through a subscription, you could apply for funding to 'block book' the venue for a year, freeing up income that the group can use in other ways. It is also important to remember those extra 'hidden' costs that sometimes don't become evident until they are needed: e.g. translation costs, childcare costs.

It can be worth including some extra material with funding requests or applications to give the funders a 'feel' for your group in terms of who you are and what you do. Even if this is not explicitly requested, it can help your application to stand out to funders. For example, you could include:

- Results of a survey that your members have filled in, as evidence that you are applying for what they need.
- How the funding would help ensure that your group keeps running.
- Evidence of how your group benefits its members.
- Your aims and goals for the group.
- A personal story or case study, in which a group member shares their experience of participating in the group.
- A photograph of any creative work done by the group.
- A letter of support, signed by group members.
- Evidence of engagement with marginalised communities.

Getting support for your application

One of the most common ways an application fails is for not being written in the way a funder requires. If you have never done this before, see if you can get support from a group or organisation who has been successful; get someone to read it for you; see if you can see examples of previously successful applications. The more support you can provide with your application, the better chance it will have.

An Example Funding Application Process

Alex runs a music-based peer support group. They meet weekly and everyone brings their own instruments. They play together, have refreshments, chat, and listen to music. The group has been growing, with lots of new members, and not everyone who joins has their own instrument.

Alex decides to have a chat with the rest of the group about getting some instruments so that people who do not have their own can fully participate in the group. One of the group members suggests that she check the local authority (city council) website to see if they have any funding available. She finds that there is a small Community Groups Fund which is open to applications.

Alex downloads the application form and guidance notes and brings these to the next group meeting. The group realise that the grant will only support infrastructure costs and not equipment. They discuss this together and decide to apply for funding for the existing cost of their venue hire, in order to free up money for the purchase of new instruments.

They complete the application form with this in mind and include a photograph and case study of their group with the application. The group recognises the money will not fund enough instruments on its own, so Alex also writes a letter to the local second-hand music shop who donate some instruments to the group.

Reporting to funders

If your funding application or request is successful, you will probably be required to report to the funder afterwards about how the money was spent and how this benefitted the group. Usually, this just means filling in a short form, but it can be more. Funders should let you know whether a report is required when they send you an acceptance letter, as well as what information you will need to keep and include (such as receipts or photographs).

Unsuccessful applications

If your application is not successful, try not to be disheartened! Ask for feedback from the funder so that you can learn from this experience and keep the information for when you are ready to start another application. Get the group together and review the experience.