CHAPTER

12

COMPLETING APPLICATIONS

(SELLING YOUR PROJECT TO FUNDERS)

TEAM PRAYER

O Lord, giver of life and source of freedom, I know that all I have received is from your hand. You call us to be stewards of Your abundance, the caretakers of all you have entrusted to us. Help us to always use Your gifts wisely and teach us to share them generously. May our faithful stewardship bear witness to the love of Jesus Christ in our lives. Amen.

When you approach a funder you need to **explain clearly** what it is your project will achieve and how you will achieve it. You need to have all your facts and figures ready before you start making applications. **Funders will be able to see if you haven't done sufficient homework.**

Prepare each funding application on an individual basis, taking into account each funder's preferences and priorities. Not many funders will respond to a round-robin letter or general appeal.

Most funders will provide guidance on how to complete their application forms and describe what they are looking for, so make sure you read it. Answer questions fully and address all the criteria.

Larger funders may use an online application process and require you to submit documents electronically.

FIND YOUR BID WRITER

It's really important to find the right person/s to fill in the application form. Not only should this person/s have a passion for the project, they should also have a local understanding so that a 'local voice' can be heard throughout the application. It can sometimes be appropriate for multiple people to write sections of the application, and then have one person to collate the information to ensure continuity in style and language. Always have a group on hand to check the spelling, grammar, details and financials. The more people who can sense check the application, the better it will be!

Finally and most importantly, they should be used to filling in long and complex forms!

Public money in the form of grants is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. It is vital to be able to demonstrate your need for funding. Whether the funding is for a repairs project, or improving or installing new facilities, you must be able to justify your proposals and show how you are going to benefit the wider community. And you need to show that you are going to be fulfilling a real need and that you have done your research.

Sell yourself and highlight the value of your project. You must prove that you have the capacity and the capability to complete the project. Use specific examples to provide evidence for your claims. Provide facts, figures and specific details on who will benefit. Do not assume that funders are familiar with your church or are aware of your need.

You will need to provide evidence that:

- you have undertaken some form of community audit; and/or
- the need came out of the development of a local plan;
- you have local support and can supply letters of support especially from partners.

Your application must make clear:

- that you have a clear mission statement. Funders will want to understand what your project hopes to achieve and who will benefit. Explain the 'before' picture of your project transformation. What change are you going to bring about? What difference will their money make to your community?
- how you are going to achieve your aims? You will need to explain why you have chosen this option;
- that you have a fully worked out business plan;
- that you have assessed the risks and taken steps to minimalise them;
- how you will measure achievement/success;
- what will be in place to ensure future sustainability.

Always be clear about what you are asking money for. You can set up separate funds so that people can donate for a specific cause e.g. the roof or the organ. Or you may want to ensure you have flexibility on what funds can be spent on e.g. set up a Fabric Fund or Community Project.

If you have written a full business plan (see Chapter 8) then you will already have all of this information in place.

A shorthand guide to the language often used by Funders:

Need – the problems you are seeking to solve through the grant-funded project, back this up with evidence e.g. research, publications, consultations, factual information and letters of support.

Outputs – units, items, activities that are created as a result of the grant e.g. a guidebook, an exhibition running for 3 months, 12 open church Saturdays offering tours and trips up the tower, opening a community café. These are things that can be counted or simply described as something that has been produced.

Outcomes – changes that result from the project (and therefore the grant). Funders sometimes refer to the *difference* a project will make. Words such as *more, less, better, improved* can be useful in describing outcomes. A church project is likely to involve both physical changes (e.g. heritage better managed) and changes for people (e.g. they will have more understanding of the history of the church). All funders want to see positive change for people, so it is important to focus on this in describing the project's impact.

Monitoring and evaluation – checking that the project is achieving what it set out to do and then taking an overview of the results at the end. This should be both quantitative (e.g. counting the numbers of participants) and qualitative (assessing what has changed and how e.g. through feedback from people).

A funding application should link these together, showing how the needs will be met by the project and produce the identified outcome, and how it will be known that these have been achieved.

Here is an example:

- **Need:** consultation showed that elderly people in the parish feel isolated (23% of population over 65, national average 16%). There are no community facilities where people can meet.
- **Project:** install a fully accessible toilet and kitchenette in the vestry, plus an informal seating area in the south aisle, plus programming of community activities.
- **Outputs:** Weekly coffee morning, monthly dementia café, 8-week talk programme designed for over 60s.
- **Outcome:** older people will feel less isolated and better supported. They will be more active and have improved social networks and well-being.
- **Evaluation methods:** numbers attending recorded, feedback forms for talks, interviews with a sample of attendees and carers.

(Taken from the Ambassadors' Training Notes supported and delivered by Historic England and the Diocese of Norwich).

FORM FILLING

Most funders will require an application form to be completed and nowadays, this is likely to be an online form. Most online forms are set up so you have to register. This allows you to start completing the form and then save it and return to it on another occasion.

Overall, funders are looking for the same information, they may just phrase their questions slightly differently. A basic application form asks for the following information:

1. Who You Are, Where Are You and What Do You Do?
2. Need?
3. People?
4. Project Details?
5. Budget?
6. What is your Fundraising Strategy?
7. On-going Benefit?

One very useful tip is to create a word document of all the questions on an application form and where appropriate word/character limits and then work on drafting your answers 'off line'. You will then be able to see the logical flow of the questions which will help you to ensure that the most relevant information is given in answer to a specific question and will lessen the amount of repetition. Some funders are aware of this and provide a downloadable set of questions separate from the application form. Keep the answers as they may provide the basis for filling in other application forms.

Read the questions carefully. This may be your only opportunity to explain your project. Give the answers to the questions the application form asks, not what you think you need to say! Remember:

- Funders have their own criteria – so explain how your project helps them to achieve their own aims and objectives.
- Think about what 'they' want to fund, not what 'you' need them to fund. Approach the application from their perspective.
- Clearly state what difference their funding will make to this project.
- Make sure your budget adds up! If your budget doesn't add up, the funders will wonder if your project will. Check and recheck the numbers before submission.
- Explain how much you have already raised, from your own efforts and from other funders. This will demonstrate that your community and at least one other funder have confidence in your project and your group to deliver the project.
- Set out how much you are asking for from other funders and how much you are asking for from them.
- Answer every question. Leaving any blanks delays the application process, further delaying when you can start your project. Never use the 'see above answer' in response to any questions. Funders don't want to have to trawl back through an application form to find the answer to a question – they want you to answer the question they have asked.
- Include quantitative and qualitative data – use your data to paint a picture.

- Be precise and succinct. Many application forms set a word limit for answers so you need to be able to summarise without losing clarity and important facts. However, bear in mind that if you have a word limit of say, 300 words, but only write 25, that is not going to provide the correct level of detail the funder is looking for.
- Assume funders know nothing about your project. When you come to complete application forms, you will know your project inside out, but the funders won't.
- Clearly answer the questions. Be readable and answer in a professional manner.
- Be aware of what supporting documents and obligations are required by each grant-giver you plan to approach.

Some funders don't have application forms and ask for a letter. Ensure you provide all the same information, possibly in an attached document. You can always present it under the same headings.

EVIDENCE

You may be asked to supply evidence to support your application. This is not the funder trying to catch you out, merely double-checking that the information you provide is accurate.

Provide baseline data to demonstrate need and measure future success. The results of surveys, visitor numbers and professional reports are all useful evidence. Ensure your accounts and cash-flow records are up-to-date. Reports such as your Statement of Need or conservation plans are also useful at this stage.

If you tell a funder that you have an Equal Opportunities policy, then you may be asked to supply it. If you've stated that your project will cost £20,000, some quotes will prove that your figures are robust. Photographic evidence can help too. If the walls are crumbling, provide a photograph to illustrate this.

OFFERING OUTPUTS

Every funder who offers you money wants something in return – outputs. What they mean by this is a **result** that can be quantified in some way. For example, if you were to create a community meeting space in your local church, this may allow six community groups to meet in the church every week. So, the result of their grant money is that six community groups have been helped.

Because some funders have clear aims and objectives, they may even list the sort of outputs, or results, that they are looking for. Scrutinise this list and include everything that your project will achieve. And if you can think of other results that aren't on their list, include them too. The funder may still wish to consider them.

CASE STUDY

ASHBURTON QUAKERS, DEVON AREA MEETING

www.swquakers.org.uk/meetings/devon/ashburton

Population: 4,170 (2011 Census)

It took far longer than expected for a group of Friends in Ashburton, originally part of the Quakers' Totnes Meeting, to spot a suitable dilapidated building in their town, purchase it and renovate it, but during the prolonged process they forged their own new Meeting.

In 2009, following a bequest from a Newton Abbot Friend, Rachel (Jill) Crossman, an old hall in the centre of town, which had been a Plymouth Brethren Chapel 150 years earlier and was most recently used as a wood store for the local ironmongers, was purchased. The project took time for many reasons not least because of the extent of work that had to be done to the building. The electrics had to be overhauled, water and connection to the mains drainage, a gas supply connected followed by significant structural repairs.

A Steering Group of Friends from Ashburton and Totnes ran the project from 2010 to 2013 overcoming further problems that included an asymmetric roof and an unsafe part-cob wall.

It opened in September 2013 as a venue for the wider community. The timing couldn't have been better as since its opening, three buildings in Ashburton that were available for public hire – the Methodist Church, St John's Ambulance Hall and a private rented space – had all been lost to the community. The Meeting venue has seen an increase in hirings and a cleaner is being employed for two hours a week.

It's an easily accessible building with the first floor Meeting Room, which has tea and coffee making facilities, reachable by stairs and a lift. Used by yoga and meditation groups, it can also accommodate meetings of between 30-to- 40 people. Downstairs there is a lobby, two toilets (one fully accessible) and the Jill Crossman room which has a fully equipped kitchen with some seating and tables. Some larger groups hire the entire building for their events.

The project took longer than expected, that meant that the fledgling meeting formed and members bonded while overcoming obstacles. On 1 January 2015, Ashburton became an independent Local Meeting within Devon Area Meeting – with a regular attendance of between 10 – 12 adults on Sundays and a children's meeting once a month.

OFFERING OUTCOMES

Some funders are more interested in **outcomes** than outputs. Whereas outputs can be measured fairly easily, (1 new community space created, 5 local community groups supported, 1 crèche facility created), outcomes are more difficult to measure. They look at the wider picture. For example, installing a kitchen facility may enable 'home cooking' lessons to be taught to the local community, using local home-grown produce. The **outcome** of this is that more people may consume a healthier diet and adopt a healthier lifestyle. Similarly, establishing a youth project, giving young people somewhere to go and something to do may stop them from hanging about in groups. An outcome of this could be that other people in the community feel safer and less intimidated when they go out.

Outcomes are closely linked with a funder's aims, so look for ways in which your project may achieve some of the outcomes that funders are looking for.

What sort of information may a funder require you to collect?

You will need to think about how you will show that you have achieved the outcomes and some funders will want to see this. Your project should result in more people using the church building than before. So, is there a system for collecting existing user numbers? (Don't worry if worshippers are the only people who use the church now – this means that nobody else does, so you'll only need to keep records of the number of **new** users of your refurbished building.) Some churches have a visitor book for tourists to sign. This is an excellent source of tourist visitor data, although not every tourist signs it, so real visitor numbers are often much higher. Having this baseline data will allow you to create 'before' and 'after' pictures, when it is time to measure the success of your project. So think about what information you'll need to collect and how you will obtain it.

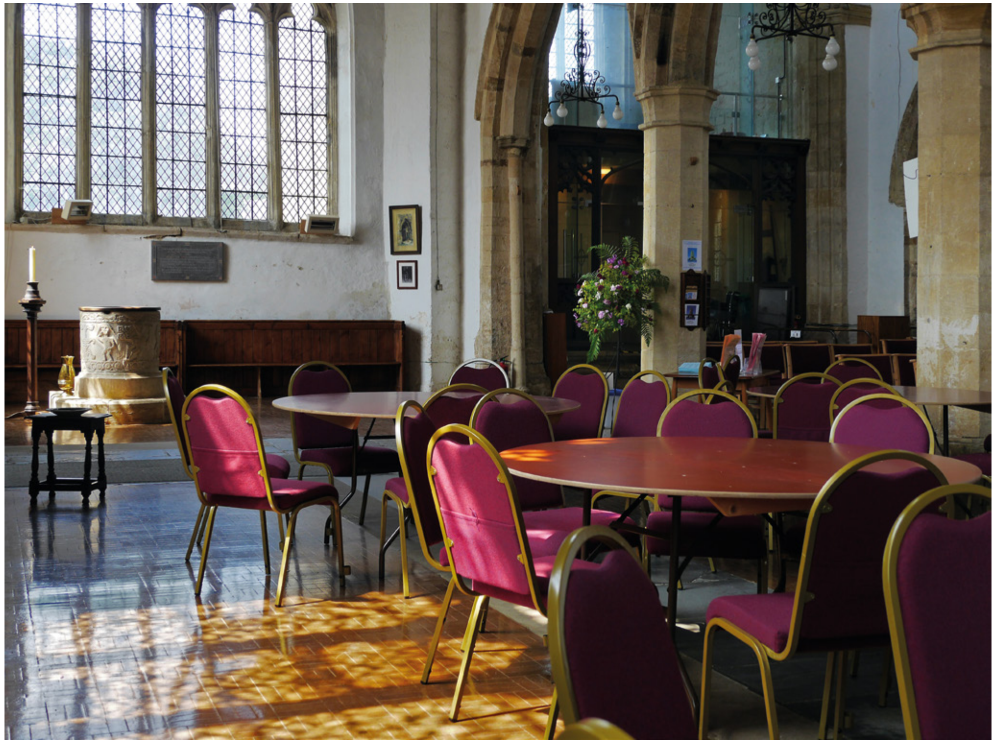
How will you collect the number of new users of your project facility in the future?

You could consider using electronic automated visitor counters which can be purchased relatively inexpensively. These can be included against "evaluation costs" by some funders on the basis that they will give an accurate total of visitors; more sophisticated versions will allow you to interrogate the data so you can find out which are the busiest and quietest days and times. This method of counting visitors does not give you any qualitative feedback (e.g. whether visitors enjoyed their visit or not) so you should use it in conjunction with questionnaire forms or a visitor book.

FACE TO FACE

Funders collect most of their information via application forms; however some may also want to meet with you. This could involve you travelling to their offices and giving a short presentation, or they may come out and visit you. Coming to visit your church building can help them understand what it is you are trying to achieve. Don't let this worry you. It's an opportunity for them to ask you questions about anything they don't understand. Sometimes a paper application can't convey everything about a project. If you are asked to meet the funder, either for a chat, or to meet an 'appraisal panel', consider following these steps:

- the whole Group doesn't need to go, but nor should it be left to one person. Get members who are used to giving presentations to go with you;
- it might be appropriate to bring along some future users to say why they are supporting the project;
- a presentation doesn't have to be a slick, computer generated audio-visual show. Talk to the funders. Ask them what you need to do. It may be a simple question and answer session;
- review your application before you go and take any documentation you think you may need;
- remember, it's an opportunity for you to ask them questions too.



TOP TIPS

- Be as clear and as succinct as possible, while still providing enough information to explain your project. The appraising officer at the grant organisation may have a pile of applications to work through. Make your application clear and simple to read.
- Think evidence. If you say something, what evidence do you have to back it up? You don't need to submit everything with your application (see point above), but having the information to hand in case a funder asks for it saves time and demonstrates professionalism.
- Get someone who isn't involved in your project to read your application – they can give you some objective feedback
- If you don't understand a question the funder is asking, then ring them for clarification. (Check the FAQs on the website first though!)
- Check to see if there is an application deadline. Some funders deal with applications on a quarterly basis.
- You're selling your project, not begging for money. Be proud of what you will achieve with their help.

CHAPTER 12 CHECKLIST

Have you identified your bid writer and set up a supporting fundraising team?	☐
Have you answered ALL of the questions on the application form?	☐
Have you given the funder ALL the information they require? (Remember, funders know little, if anything, about your local community.)	☐
Do you have evidence to back up all of your claims, figures and costings?	☐
Have you identified all the appropriate outputs and outcomes your project will achieve?	☐
If meeting funders face to face, have you prepared yourselves by reviewing your project, application form and background information?	☐

FURTHER RESOURCES

The **National Lottery Heritage Fund** publishes useful guidance on preparing high-quality applications at *www.heritagefund.org.uk/hub/application-guidance*