

Going for grants? Six tips to become a better bid writer.



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Jess joined Oaks in 2015 and has quickly progressed through roles as Account Executive and Account Manager to become Head of Retained Contracts. In this role, Jess is ultimately accountable for the performance of our various fundraising partnerships with charities and organisations of all shapes and sizes, leading a ten-strong team of fundraising consultants of diverse experience levels.

Bid writing is an incredibly valuable skill for fundraisers and charity leaders to have in their repertoire. A successful grant application can enable your organisation to deliver the work you are setting out to do, and in an increasingly competitive fundraising environment, it's never been more important to nail your writing technique.

Our fundraising consultants have collectively raised over £120M from a mixture of Trusts, Foundations, major donors and corporates, for organisations delivering social value across a diverse range of sectors. Although we'd be the first to say there's no blueprint to a successful grant application (unfortunately!), we've found these six tips will help to take your bid writing to the next level and set you apart from the competition.

1: Make your introduction stand out

Your introduction is an opportunity to grab the grant assessor's attention right from the get-go, so it's important to start with a strong opening statement. It can be tempting to begin with 'X organisation was established in 2002 with a vision to..., achieved through...', and while there's nothing wrong with this, many funders have read thousands of iterations of the same statement.

Instead, why not open with an impact statement, or a quote from a partner or beneficiary linked to the work your charity does? As well as being more interesting, you're also immediately laying out your case for support, which is ultimately what this application is all about!

2: Use emotion to strengthen your case

Emotion stimulates action, and while grant applications may not be moving in the same way as fundraising appeals, there is still scope to be emotive. Remember that grant funders are human too, so appealing to their emotions can have a positive influence on their funding decisions.

How you choose to do this is up to you, but don't feel restricted to the 'need' section of your application. Using emotive language in your introduction will instantly help funders to understand the depth of the challenges faced, and the difference this funding will make to the lives of your beneficiaries. Inject emotion throughout the entire application by making use of relatable statements, and including quotes from case studies, partners and beneficiaries.

3: Have a coherent structure

As with any other written content, there should be a clear narrative running throughout your application.

For a novel, this usually begins with introducing your characters and setting the scene, followed by rising action, a pinnacle, and ending with falling action and the final resolution. Treat your grant application much the same way; with the introduction as your scene-setting opportunity, the need as the rising action, the solution as the pinnacle, and wrapping it up with monitoring and evaluation, sustainability and budget. Make the narrative easy for funders to follow by structuring it in a coherent and digestible way.

4: Tell the story

Case studies and quotes don't need to be limited to the impact section of your grant application. As with emotive language, use this evidence throughout to strengthen the points you are trying to make and tell the story of your charity from a variety of perspectives.

On that point, there is scope for creativity here: while it's important to highlight the voices of your beneficiaries, input can come from many different stakeholders. Why not cast your net a little wider, and feature stories from donors, volunteers, network partners, or community stakeholders, too? It's great for funders to see engagement across a diverse portfolio of stakeholders, and this will set you apart from the many other participant-focussed applications they receive.

5: Raise the opportunities, as well as the challenges

Gone are the days when grant applications were simply an opportunity to list the hundreds of challenges that exist in your communities! While these are of course still relevant and provide important context for your charity and its programmes, the challenges should not form the sole focus of your application.

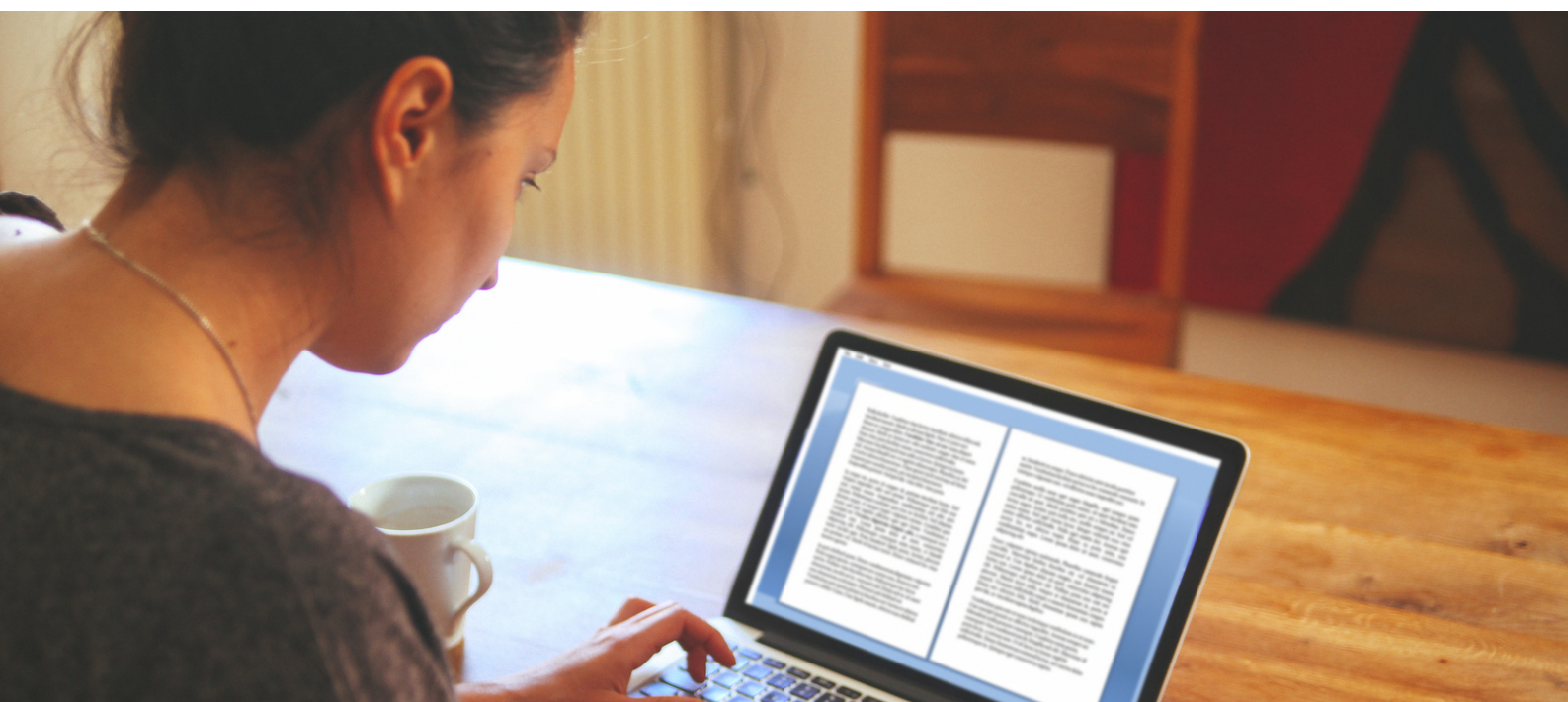
Instead, think about the opportunities that exist in your communities. Funders also want to know about how you can maximise your strengths, resources and capabilities: whether there are other local organisations you can/do collaborate with to deliver programmes, community spaces you can use, or just a strong sense of community spirit! This will show funders that your charity recognises and appreciates the good in your community, and that their grant will go towards opportunity activation.

6: Invite the funder along with you for the journey

Remember that funders are people too, and many will want to feel involved in the work they support. Make it clear in your application that they will be a trusted partner in this funding agreement, not just a financial backer!

Funders will also have their own aims, priorities and Key Performance Indicators that they need to achieve through their grants, so a strong application will clearly outline how both parties can work together to realise their goals.

It's also worth noting that many funders will have a wealth of experience within grant funding, programme delivery, strategy and industry best practice, so it's important to highlight how valuable access to their insight will be for your organisation. From a funder's perspective, it's good to know there's an interest beyond their finances!



A few fundamentals to bear in mind

Research the funder! What are their priorities? Which organisations and projects have they funded in the past? What types of organisations have they funded over multiple years? Gather as much data on the funder as possible, so you can shape your grant application to align with their interests.

While doing your due diligence, also make sure to read the eligibility criteria multiple times. Demonstrate a clear understanding of both the type of organisation and the type of project they're looking for, with details such as start dates, target groups, number of participants to be engaged etc.

Build comprehensive budgets which will make sense to the funder. Include salaries and whether these are full time or pro rata, as well as overheads and admin costs. Link all budgetary elements back to the project and make sure to explain why they are essential to delivering the impact you have outlined.

We wish you every success with your next grant application and hope these tips will help you on your way!

Find out more about our bid writing services at Oaks [here](#).

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