EXPERT ADVICE

10 tips for grant funding success

Applying for grants is a competitive practice, so how can school leaders increase their chances of success? Bid-writing expert Rachel Gordon shares her advice...

1 Meet the grant givers' objectives. Funders have their own priorities and your success will depend on how your project meets these. Criteria is often based on location, who will benefit, and the issue you are trying to address. Charitable bodies are accountable to their governing board, and must justify their funding decisions. It's all about finding common interests between your organisation and theirs, and communicating these clearly.

2 Find funders that want to support schools. There are hundreds of funding opportunities out there for schools from national grant givers to small and local charitable trusts. Many national and local companies also have charitable arms through which they focus their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. Find the right grant to match your needs by researching different funders, and using their websites and grant guidance notes to make sense of their interests and priorities.

3 You don't need to be a charity. Many schools have 'exempt charity' status (there are exceptions). This recognises schools as charitable organisations without the need for them to apply for registered charity status. Schools are eligible to apply for most grants specified for registered charities, but always check the grant guidelines. 70% of PTAs are registered charities.

4 Should your school budget cover this? Some grant programmes are designed especially to help schools achieve more during curriculum time or expand curriculum-related provision outside the school day. Other grants will only be given for activities that are beyond a school's statutory remit. This distinction is important. Funders expect statutory activities to be covered by school budgets, but may consider giving grants to schools that want to expand their work into new areas.

5 Check the criteria. Once you have found a grant of interest, check the eligibility criteria and read the guidance notes. This will help you to assess your school's eligibility and the suitability of your project. It saves you valuable time in the long run, ensuring that you do not apply for a grant that you have no chance of winning, and it avoids wasting the funder's time.

6 What's your project? It is difficult, if not impossible, to secure grants for general or unspecified purposes, or to cover retrospective costs. Instead, you should apply for grants for well-defined projects, events or activities that have a clear purpose and identifiable need. You should be clear about what funding you require, how you are going to use it, and the tangible impact it will have.

7 Gather and use evidence. This is an important part of any grant application. It helps put forward a strong and reasoned case that highlights the need for the project and support from the community and beneficiary groups. Any evidence you gather should be recent and relevant and should help you to: show that you have consulted people who will be involved in the design and delivery of your project; provide evidence that there is a real need for your project; explain how your project will not duplicate other work going on in your local area.

8 Good budgets are well researched and detailed. Keep a record of how you have worked out your costs, including any quotes received. Ensure that you have the necessary legal and policy documentation in place, such as planning permission and insurance. If your project has ongoing costs, explain how you will meet them. If you are asking the funder to make a contribution towards a much larger total project cost, provide details of how you will fund the work, including any money secured so far and any pending or planned grant applications.

9 Set aside time for grant fundraising. Grant fundraising can be a time-consuming activity, so it is vital that you plan your time. Dedicate at least weekly hour-long blocks for bid writing and related activities. Don't forget that a lot of grant programmes have application deadlines, so work out how long it is going to take you to research and write an application, and allocate time accordingly. Remember to include enough time to plan, draft, edit and proofread your work, which could take longer than first anticipated.

10 Build relationships with grant givers. Some funders like to speak to prospective applicants about their project. They may give you initial feedback before you begin the application process. Over time, it is possible to foster a long-lasting funding relationship where you repeatedly receive support from them. Keep in touch with funders and let them know about the difference you are making with their grant funding.

For ideas and advice on securing funding, visit funded.org.uk