

# **Guide to Successful Small-Project Funding**

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# Guide to Successful Small-Project Funding

Obtaining funding is possibly the single most difficult task involved in running with any community arts project — it's bureaucratic, laborious and, not least, time-consuming. In this guide, Pauline Hadaway, project director with Belfast Exposed, lays out in one succinct document everything you could possibly need to know about funding - tips and warnings to guide you from start to finish. Keep it and refer to it when tackling funding applications — it could well become your bible to successful small-project funding...

## Three Golden Rules!

Approach with extreme caution! Putting together a funding application can be time consuming and, if you're not careful can steer your project off course. You can get tied up meeting someone else's targets and may find your original aims and objectives have been compromised.

Don't be led by funding criteria. Your ideas and your project should always come first.

If you are new to funding applications, go for fairly small sums from two or three funding bodies and investigate independent trusts and foundations, especially business sponsored funds (for example, Lloyds TSB, Nationwide and Tesco all fund arts projects in Northern Ireland).

## What is arts project funding?

Arts Project funding involves raising money from local government departments, independent trusts and charitable foundations and statutory agencies, for example:

- Local authority arts and community services departments
- The Gulbenkian Foundation
- Lloyds TSB Foundation
- The Arts Council

There are a large number of bodies which exist to finance groups and, to a lesser extent, individuals, developing arts or cultural projects which are deemed to support the public good. I'll deal with the problem of identifying potential funders separately, but if your project raises issues or provides services which are of public interest or for the public good, then somebody, somewhere will probably be willing to support you. Obviously some projects are more attractive to funders than others. These are projects, which explore issues around the environment, health, poverty and social exclusion, minorities, education, safety, local community issues, children & young people etc. The information in this article relates solely to project funding, i.e. activities and outcomes that are time-limited and self-contained. (Revenue funding supports programmes of activities which are ongoing, often requiring salaries and higher capital spend, rent and equipment for example. At the early stages of an idea, revenue funding is probably out of the question.)

The following is a step-by-step guide to putting together a successful funding application for a small project (budgets between £500 and £5,000).

## Define yourself as a group

While a small amount of funding is available for individuals, most public and charitable funding will support the activities of groups and organisations. The size of a group can vary and, obviously, the more people involved in a project the better. However, a relatively small, active group of three people could involve larger numbers as audience or participants as the project evolves. Don't worry too much about the size of your group, but think about its potential and its

ability to deliver. Groups can be identified in a number of ways, for example:

- A community group, representing the interests of a geographical area or indeed a special interest, such as disability, the elderly, the unemployed, people with a shared interest in drama etc. Community groups are expected to be community-driven. As a community group, you must demonstrate a willingness to engage with your community, not only as a potential audience but as active participants.
- A charitable or voluntary group providing services or support for any of the above, for example, organising residentials for young people, putting on a performance, providing training and access to lifelong learning or mobilising interest around issues. This type of group has more autonomy to carry out its own programme of activities, but should be able to demonstrate a public interest or need for its work and a willingness to engage a wider public.

Such groups are generally defined as non-profit making or voluntary. However, public funding is available for organisations in areas like, for example, the arts, where professional companies from small fringe groups to the Royal Opera House can operate independently from the “community”. Groups and organisations like these provide a product - a play, a film, a photographic exhibition. They generally have more freedom to be experimental and innovative, but they obviously have to demonstrate some expertise and, increasingly, prove that their work will be relevant and accessible to a wider audience.

As a general principle, all groups applying for public funding should be driven by a principle or an idea, rather than a desire to make profits. Not so much profitability as sustainability - generating income which allows them to function more efficiently.

### **The mission statement**

The first stage of constituting a group, therefore, is to write a mission statement (2 or 3 sentences) which defines your identity, purpose and approach. For example:

“Parents for Play in East Belfast” promotes children’s right to accessible, good quality play in East Belfast by fostering public awareness of the issues and problems around play and providing a platform where children’s needs can be explored to build strategies for play at local and national levels.”

Your mission statement should reflect the issues your project will be exploring or promoting. You may not be absolutely clear what your mission statement will be until you have started thinking in greater depth about your project. At this stage, try to agree on a broad definition and return to your statement when you have reached the end of the planning process. Be careful. A mission statement defines you and impacts on your work.

### **The constitution**

A group must have an identity, a purpose, a set of aims and objectives and an agreed method of working. These are presented as a constitution.

The constitution is a written document, which sets out your mission statement, defines your group’s identity (arts, cultural, community, voluntary etc.) and sets out your group’s aims and objectives, its management structure and its methods of working. You should also give some background on how and when the group came together.

Aims are the outcomes you hope to achieve which are on going, for example, to:

- Raise public awareness and encourage debate (around a particular issue);
- Promote the interests (of a particular community);
- Promote the involvement of young people (for example) in projects around a particular issue.
- Objectives relate to the specific activities you will engage in, for example, to:
- Support activities and initiatives at local level which raise awareness of....
- Input into activities and events at regional and national level to promote...
- Organise and deliver a programme of public seminars, exhibitions, performances and/or information days to highlight...

Obviously there is a lot of overlap between aims and objectives, so don't get bogged down in separating the two. Again, your aims and objectives will become clearer as you get into the process of developing your project, so simply define them broadly at this stage and come back to them when your project is agreed.

Management structure relates to the people involved in carrying out your group's aims and objectives. At its simplest level, you should have a chairman, treasurer and secretary. Financial procedures are important.

You will need to set up a bank account for the group and have two signatories for cheques. All public funding bodies require evaluation reports, which include details of spending, so some sort of accounting system, however simple, must be in place.

A management committee to oversee the work of the project would be a big plus. People in the group with specific skills should be designated to oversee marketing, finance, administration or whatever. In a small group, people have to take on multiple roles. Funding bodies like to see an awareness of the need for good management, but the management structures are obviously relative to the size of the budget and the targets the group has set itself. For a first ever project it is always wise to keep everything small, simple and manageable. The management committee/team should agree to meet on a regular basis and agree rules and structures (minimum numbers for a quorum etc). The constitution is written up with reference to all of the above.

### **Group's activities to date**

Funding bodies often include a section asking "what are your group's aims and objectives and what does it do to achieve them?" This may be a problem for newly formed groups, in which case you should state that you are recently established and outline the work and expertise of your individual members to date. Engagement in public events, publications, press coverage, involvement in similar projects, qualifications and experience. Anything that has been done which is in any way relevant to your aims and objectives should be listed. You can include this information in your constitution.

### **Planning your project**

You are now ready to describe your project. Quite simply, this is the activity or event you propose to undertake. Most projects which attract support from public funders have elements of production, process and progression.

## **Production**

This is the public presentation of the work of your project. Describe the form it will take (exhibition, seminar or performance etc.); when and where it is scheduled to take place; how many people you hope to attract as audience and participants, performers, speakers, etc.; everything that will happen during the event.

## **Process**

How will you get to the production stage? How will you involve your community in 'workshops' to generate material, ideas for your production? If you have defined yourself as a community group you will be expected to involve the community. You can do this by throwing the project open to the community at large or working with a target group in a particular school, college, youth club etc. You may organise community events around the issues you are exploring.

A project which aims to debate attitudes to crime and young people could, for example, employ an arts worker to engage with young people at a local youth club. The young people could produce a short play or film or photographic exhibition. A project debating issues round transport could employ a writer and/or photographer to explore people's attitudes to public transport, or their relationship to the family car. Be imaginative. Make sure your overall direction is tight and if you're employing arts or youth workers, get the right people who can deliver what you want.

## **Progression**

This is simply a recognition that your project is part of a bigger ongoing programme; that you expect, having "raised awareness" or "fostered public concern", to continue developing more projects or will capitalise on the outcomes in some way.

## **Outcomes and Targets**

Most public funding bodies expect you to identify potential outcomes and targets. Outcomes tend to be broader than targets and are generally related to the Aims you have defined for your group. "Raising public awareness of", "providing a platform for..." etc. Targets are quantitative. They can be measured, for example:

How will you measure the targets?

- To deliver a public performance
- To promote the performance at local level      Press and media coverage at local level; ticket sales; attendance at workshops
- To attract an audience of 100      Ticket sales
- To engage six speakers for the seminar
- To employ an arts worker to design and deliver 8 workshops
- To involve eight young people in the design and delivery of a dance-drama performance  
Keeping records of attendance at workshops
- The greater the number of targets and the more imaginative your methods of measuring these targets, the better.

## **Budgets**

Most funding bodies will issue application forms, which include a section on budgets. You simply work out both the expenditure and income for your project.

Expenditure includes:

Professional fees (arts and youth workers, for example, or people delivering training);

Hiring space for meetings and workshops;

Production costs (hiring venues, expenses for speakers, transport costs, materials and hire of equipment);

Marketing costs: posters, leaflets, advertising in the press, photography, press launch;

Administration costs: stationery, postage and telephone calls, hiring office space and equipment, photocopying etc.;

- Childcare costs for management, participants and audience;
- Travel and transport costs.

Income includes:

• Income from sponsors and funding bodies (designate these as “applied for” or “confirmed”);

• Membership fees or subscriptions;

• Ticket sales (projected);

• Fundraising activities.

Income and expenditure should be equal. Obviously, most of your income will be “projected income” and it may be necessary to show how you will deal with any shortfall. Membership fees, ticket sales and fundraising activities not only demonstrate “sustainability” but local support for the project. Don’t appear to be too heavily dependent on funding. Show initiative and commitment to raising funds in other ways.

Demonstrate an understanding of monitoring and evaluation of projects - measuring outcomes through attendance, ticket sales, media coverage, questionnaires, critical feedback etc.

## **Choosing the Right Funding Body**

There is a wide range of funding opportunities available for small projects. Groups seeking funding should, firstly, try to narrow down their potential sources by clearly defining their project in terms of aims, activities, audience and participants and matching these criteria to half a dozen appropriate agencies.

For example:

Initiatives which explore ideas and social attitudes might attract funding through:

- New Opportunities Funds (Health & Education)
- Community Relations Council
- Gulbenkian Foundation
- Rowntree Trust
- Local Authority Environmental or Community Service Offices
- Prince’s Trust

Projects with a strong arts or cultural element should investigate:

- Arts Council of Northern Ireland

- Local authority arts offices
- Esmee Fairburn Trust

Individuals can access funds from some of these bodies. Get a copy of the NIVT booklet “Funding for Voluntary Action” to discover more funding bodies. Also:

- Find projects that are similar to your own, talk to the people involved, find out who is funding them.
- Go to a local library or to your local authority community services department and ask them for information on funding. Make it clear that you are interested in small-scale project funding and try to narrow it down to arts, environmental, social or local issues. You don’t want to get bogged down looking through pages and pages of irrelevant funding information.
- Find out where you can access FunderFinder - a software package that allows you to enter your needs and interests and gives you information on appropriate funding opportunities ([www.funderfinder.org.uk](http://www.funderfinder.org.uk)). Existing service providers in Northern Ireland include the Educational Guidance Service for Adults and the Belfast Unemployed Centre. Libraries also often have the package, as do advice centres and local authorities.
- If you feel confident enough, make an appointment with a local authority arts office, community services office or with the Arts Council and talk your project through with them.

The Community Arts Forum can help with information on small-scale community projects around Northern Ireland and relevant funding opportunities.

### **Tips on successful funding**

- Establish a relationship with your potential funders at an early stage. When you make the initial phone call, ask to speak to a development or information worker.
- Most, but not all, funders have application forms and deadlines.
- All funding bodies have procedures and criteria and will be able to give you an indication of timescales for assessing applications. Ask them about this.
- Smaller amounts are usually processed within a shorter timescale. Ask about this and, if appropriate, spread your income between two or three bodies.
- Always list the amounts you have applied for and where you have applied in your budget.
- Never underestimate costs. You may not get everything you asked for - be prepared to make cuts.
- Always demonstrate the amount of voluntary time dedicated to the project.
- Try to do deals with local resources, access to venue space, loan of lights and sound equipment or equipment for exhibitions. Demonstrate support for your project by telling your funders about any local support you have.
- Funding is never retrospective. Make sure your project is scheduled to start on a date after the funding body will have processed and approved your application.

**GOOD LUCK IN YOUR APPLICATIONS!**

If you need any additional advice or guidance, contact CAF on: 028 9024 2910.