The Do's & Don'ts when writing a funding application

Resources to help you with your funding

We provide a range of resources to help you find, apply, secure and sustain funding for physical activity and sport in Cornwall. Some of these are in the form of written bitesize guides, to help you with a specific stage in the funding process. When using this guide you may also want to use it alongside any or all the following resources:

1. From idea to funding application
2. The Do's and Don'ts when writing a funding application
3. Developing a strong evidence base to support your funding application
4. Applying for facilities funding
5. Securing sponsorship
6. Funding guide for individuals

Introduction

This guide provides a set of do's and don'ts when completing the final stage in the grant fundraising process which is writing the application.

This is the opportunity to sell the potential project to the funder. At this stage, it is very easy to undo a lot of good work by misrepresenting your potential project, not adhering to the funder's requirements, or simply not providing clear enough information to make the strongest case possible.

Universal

Do….	Don't….
Read any guidance in detail to understand how the application will be assessed.	Just start writing without having a clear idea of what you're saying for each question.
Check answers against this guidance and tick off any assessment criteria against what you write.	Write more than you need to reach the word limit.
Wait until you have all the detail you need – if you are struggling for things to say, you've probably started too soon.	Write significantly under the word limit.
Use the word limit as a guide to the level of detail you are expected to provide.	Expect to produce a good quality application at the last minute.
	Write the application in isolation.
Ensure information presented throughout is Specific / Measurable / Achievable / Realistic / Timebound (SMART).	Use jargon or acronyms without explaining them.
Assume the funder knows nothing about you and your project.	Submit the application without a spelling and grammar check.
Ask someone else to read through the application before you submit.	Repeat information that has been included in a previous answer – plan your answers to each question.

The 'need' or evidence base answer
It is typical early on in an application to have to provide evidence of why your project is needed. This evidence is vital in showing a funder that there is a need, and that you can prove it to them.

Do….	Don't….
Use evidence you a have gathered yourself, if that is what the funder wants. Back it up with strategic level evidence (e.g. from your Local Authority or Sport England). Focus on statistical evidence, and back it up with quotes or further qualitative evidence. Be clear on where evidence has come from and how it has been collected.	Copy and paste lots of high level strategy and demographic information in without explaining why it's relevant. Use inappropriate or sources you're not able to back up. Just rely on anecdotal information to prove your project is needed. Try to guess what the funder will be expecting and regurgitate this.

The project description
This is your opportunity to prove how thoroughly you've approached this project, and its feasibility:

Do….	Don't….
The background work in advance – call venues, gather costs, agree timelines. Answer the following: What are you proposing to do? Where? When? How? Try to capture the funder's attention from the outset with an engaging description. Be very specific – name days, times, exact costs, individuals, partner organisations by name.	Make any assumptions or estimates – take time to establish specifics. Make anything up – the funder often checks and verifies information. Be unrealistic. Have someone else check through your plans and comment.

Outputs and outcomes
This is where you clearly articulate what your project will deliver, often in the short term (outputs) and long term (outcomes). Sometimes these will be set by the funder or you may have to articulate your own.

Do….	Don't….
Make sure you know the difference between outputs and outcomes, and check it matches the funder's definition. Be ambitious about what you can achieve, but also realistic. Evaluate what you're proposing to achieve for a funder – does it look like good value? Ensure the outputs and outcomes address the need / issues you identified.	Be tempted to inflate outputs just to impress the funder – you must be able to deliver what you say you will. Make outlandish claims about what the project will achieve – keep it grounded. Provide 'finger in the air' figures - try to find benchmarks or examples to base your figures on. Put in something that you simply won't be able to measure / evidence.

Finance
This section is often overlooked but it is vital to present a detailed financial picture.

Do….	**Don't….**
Provide accurate costs that are professionally established if need be (e.g. for capital projects). Provide the methodology for how costs have been calculated in the appropriate section. Ensure you read the guidance on eligible and ineligible costs, and adhere to these. If appropriate, ensure that you fully consider and cost out in-kind match funding, as this can add considerable value to your contribution.	Make up costs or estimate using rounded figures. Add in any costs just to meet the maximum funding amount. Add in costs that are not directly related to the project.

Sustainability
A funder will expect to see a clear plan for what will happen in the long term, following their investment. You therefore need to have a strategy and be able articulate this.

Do….	**Don't….**
Ensure you present a clear strategy, not just an idea. Think about: • Participant sustainability – what will be their journey / long term experience? • Project sustainability – will the project finish or carry on, and how? • Financial sustainability – what will be the financial model once the grant investment has finished?	Treat this section lightly, for example by saying that the sustainability strategy is to simply apply for further funding when the project finishes. Have unrealistic expectations. Ignore the risks you've considered and hope that the funder doesn't think of these.