

Grant Writing Tip Sheet 1

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Developing a Project Outline

Before you even begin to complete a funding application, it's important to have a very clear understanding of your project – by preparing a Project Outline.

Who?

- Who will be the key driver or drivers?
- Who is the project for and who are the beneficiaries? (For example, a youth project could have widespread community benefits through reduced vandalism.)
- Who are the major stakeholders and what is their capacity to help with the project?

What?

- What is the project and what will it contribute to your community?
- What are the project's purposes? (For example, is it for tourism development, business development, employment creation, social or environmental benefit?)
- What are the risks associated with the project? (Is there anything that could prevent the project from coming to fruition?)

Where?

- Where will the project be located? (Be reasonably exact, including local municipality and townsite.)
- Will its impact extend nationally, state wide, regionally, or only in your local area?

When?

- When will the project start? When will it finish? How long will it take?

Why?

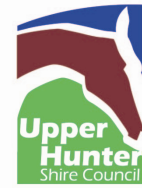
- Why do you need this project? (Is the project actually a 'want' or a 'need'?)
- What is the problem you want to overcome? Why do you want to overcome it?
- Why is it important in the context of the area (economic dependency, population losses, insufficient employment opportunity, difficult socio-economic conditions)?
- Is there community support?

How?

- How will you start and how will you finish the project?
- How much will it cost? How much funding is needed? How much cash and in-kind resources are available?
- How will it be implemented or operated (for example steering committees, management structures)? Are there any special skills or resources needed?

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Project Timing

This is one area of a project application that can present problems down the track when it comes to meeting interim and final deadlines.

It is important to ensure that you have allowed yourself enough time to get the project started; implement the various stages; complete the project; and achieve any outcomes you have included in your application.

Projects don't always run as smoothly as we would like, so it's a good idea to build in a little time for stages where something 'just might not go according to plan'.

Potential timing delays you will need to be aware of include:

- It may take 12 weeks or more for your project to be approved, and then for the contracts to issue from the funding body and be signed.
- Usually no work is permitted on the project until such time as the contracts are signed. If work does begin before this takes place, then the whole application can be rendered 'retrospective' and funding withdrawn or not approved.
- If your project needs to employ one or more people, there will need to be an advertisement and interview process. You need to allow time for the advertising to run; time for jobseekers to submit an application; time to assess the applicants; time before the successful applicant can commence work. This could mean more than a month before the person selected is able to start work, so be sure your project 'start date' is not a little too ambitious!
- In the case of building projects, or others that are influenced by the weather, make allowances for interruptions in the original timetable. It is much easier than having to obtain a variation of contract part-way through the project.
- Sometimes the benefits of a project will not begin to flow immediately that the project starts and, in some cases, will not begin until after the project has been completed. Your project may need to include some of these outcomes in the evaluation and reporting process, so you may need to build in some additional time to complete the total project.

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Project Rationale (Statement of Need)

It is important to clearly state why the project is needed. This is where you justify to the funding body why they should fund your project.

In order to do this, you will need to:

- Demonstrate the need of the community or region your proposal relates to
- Objectively describe the specific situation, opportunity, problem or issue that your project addresses.

You will need to clearly and concisely demonstrate that a relevant, compelling problem or need exists and that your project will alleviate the issue or support other efforts to do so.

Support your statements with qualified third-party research or other evidence to substantiate the need or problem. Your Local Council or Area Consultative Committee may be able to help you to locate this information.

Your statement of need – or rationale – should include the following:

- Describe the target population
- Define the community problem to be addressed or clearly identify the local needs
- Identify and outline any studies or reports which have been done by other organisations that highlight the 'need' to be addressed (at a local or regional level)
- Describe any unusual circumstances which have given rise to the need (for example, drought or bushfires, major employer closure or relocation)
- Describe any studies or circumstances which have given rise to a particular opportunity that the project relates to.

When you clearly demonstrate how your project will address the problem or alleviate the needs of the community, you may also include any opportunities that the project will present for the future.

It is important that the project 'fits in' with existing local planning. You should consult with groups already involved in community development to ensure this is the case and include this 'compatibility' in your argument.

Some organisations to include in this consultation process include:

- your Local Council
- the local Area Consultative Committee (CCACC)
- a Progress Association or other group working on economic development
- a Chamber of Commerce or other group representing local businesses.

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Methodology (How the project will be conducted)

The methodology describes what will be done in the project to achieve its submitted outcomes and how you intend to do this.

It's important that the methodology section of your application gives a very clear description of how your project will progress, including details of the time it will take to accomplish your project objectives and who will undertake specific activities.

There should be a clear pathway linking individual stages.

If the project is to be on-going, this section could also include what steps you are taking within the project for maintaining it as a long-term program.

The methodology could include a brief recap of the need, objectives and expected impacts of the project, but must certainly provide a very clear description and explanation of how you are going to go about achieving those objectives.

The section should cover:

- Sequence and time line of activities
- Who is going to manage the project – does it require a Co-ordinator or other specifically skilled employee to make it happen?
- Does the project require the people involved in tasks to have any special skills? If so, outline why; what those skills are; and how you intend to ensure those skills are available.
- If consultants are going to be employed, detail what work they will be doing.
- Any specific materials that may be required to undertake the project, including how you intend to obtain them
- Are there going to be 'in kind' contributions in terms of volunteer labour (for example painting a hall, undertaking landscaping or other labour intensive activity)? If this is the case, detail who will be involved, along with any donations of equipment that will be provided with the labour.

After reading through your methodology statement, the assessor in your funding body should feel comfortable that they know exactly how your project is going to work!

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Evaluation (Is the project 'on track'?)

Evaluation provides information to improve the project as it progresses. The information is collected to check whether the project is proceeding as planned and meeting its stated objectives according to the submitted timeline.

Frequently, project evaluation will be used by the funding body to assess whether the project merits continued funding of the project stages, so it is important to be clear in your application about exactly how you will measure progress.

Ideally, the collection of information will begin soon after the project is funded, on a planned schedule (for example every month or quarter year). This information may lead to and support recommendations to continue, modify, or delete project activities.

In answering this question on your application, you will need to show how you will measure the effectiveness of your activities. This will include who is involved in the evaluation and how they will judge if the project is 'on track'.

Evaluations should include:

- Were the appropriate participants selected and involved in the planned activities?
- Do the activities and strategies match those described in the plan? If not, are the changes in activities justified and described?
- Were the appropriate resources (including people) used, and are the resources working in accordance with the proposed plan? Were the appropriate materials and equipment obtained?
- Were activities conducted according to the proposed timeline? Did the most appropriate personnel conduct them?
- Was a management plan developed and followed?
- To what extent did the project or program meet each overall goal?
- What was the benefit of each goal or objective? In what ways?
- What components were the most effective?
- Were the results worth the project's cost?
- Is the project sustainable?

Remember, project evaluation should not fall into the 'autopsy' category. Many project coordinators wait until a project is completed before they consider doing an evaluation, when it is often too late to change some of the activities that could have improved the program.

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Budget

The Budget is one of the most important parts of your application and goes a long way to providing evidence of your ability to financially manage the grant if successful.

The first thing to do is to carefully price all the costs that relate to the project. This includes items that require cash payments and those which can be met by 'in kind' contributions.

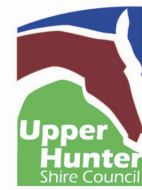
Then check that what you are requesting money for is in line with what the guidelines stipulate. For example, are you requesting too much or too little? What percentage of the total project cost can you apply for? If the guidelines indicate that a program will fund 'up to 50%', then it does not mean that you have to apply for 50%. Generally speaking, the lower the percentage of funds sought the better chance the project has of attracting funding.

Some tips for the budget are:

- If major pieces of equipment drive up total budget costs, investigate whether the equipment can reasonably be shared with other non-profit organisations or whether second-hand equipment would provide a reasonable substitute. Would the program prefer to fund a hire purchase lease agreement?
- Include an inflation factor and projected salary increases when applying for multi-year grants.
- Beware of including even minimal costs for letterhead, postage, photocopying, and utilities, if not essential to project operations. Costs should relate directly to the project itself, and not to the general operations of the organisation. The funding body might perceive these expenses as part of normal operating costs and view relatively trivial line items as artificial budget inflation.
- Be cautious about including non-essential travel in the budget, especially for a project that only has local impact. Any travel should be at a 'reasonable' rate and relate directly to the project.
- Use only whole numbers (no cents) with proper formatting: \$1,270 (not 1270).
- Funding is very rarely given retrospectively, meaning that if you've already completed the project or even part of the project, it is then not eligible for funding. This may also apply if a person has already been employed to carry out the 'project management' role; contracts have been signed to purchase or lease equipment; or with a consultant to work on the project. In essence, no obligations should be entered into in relation to the project until such time as funding contracts have been signed by all parties.

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General tips for Grant Writing Success

- Where application guidelines are published, carefully follow the instructions. If outlines or a series of questions are provided, follow the indicated order, answer each section, and avoid evasive language.
- Do not send the same generic proposal to a random list of funding bodies. Always tailor the proposal and the specific budget request based on your research into the funding body's priorities and guidelines.
- Use 'declarative' rather than 'conditional' verbs. That is, avoid the words 'if', 'could', 'may' and 'might'. Instead, boldly declare that the grant 'will' create a positive outcome!
- Shorter is better. Keep your proposal tight and the details condensed. Never exceed the recommended page length or fiddle with margins to squeeze in more words. Make your proposal an easy read.
- Document the 'need' or 'problem' on multiple levels. If space allows, provide recent statistical information with the source identified by name or title and date. Be specific – provide statistical information that is of direct relevance to the geographic region the project will affect. Finally, summarise your internal data to show how many communities, people and organisations are benefiting.
- When submitting a proposal try to use language describing an 'investment', rather than a 'gift'. Be explicit on the benefits for the grant provider, such as visibility through media releases and media coverage as well as recognition on brochures or on signage.
- Avoid dwelling on problems. Although proposals traditionally document the "need" for funding, make sure that the challenges do not sound impossible. Focus on opportunities that result from the challenges your organisation faces and the problems that the project, through adequate funding, will address.
- Provide a realistic assessment of the urgency that drives your project submission. Is the unemployment rate dramatically increasing in your community because of recent events? Remember that funding bodies commonly require considerable time to deal with masses of paperwork to process grant applications. Your proposed timeline must reflect both the need for urgent action and the realities of funding cycles.

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What We Look For When Assessing Your Application

Projects that are well planned:

- Goals must be realistic.
- It will be obvious to the assessor if you haven't done the appropriate planning.
- Don't use emotional arguments.
- Learn and understand the jargon.
- Outcomes should be measurable, have a time limit and a challenge.

Projects that fit the guidelines & criteria:

- Read through the grant guidelines, assessment criteria and the programs objectives and highlight key terms - ensure these are addressed in your application.
- Speak to the contact people for the grant program and take notes.
- Tailor applications to each funding body.

Budgets that are appropriate for the project:

- Provide value for money.
- Be realistic.
- Include all cash components (capital, other grants, loans & sponsorship).
- Include in-kind contributions (volunteer labour, time & expertise, donated materials).
- Should reflect the whole dollar cost of the project.

All questions answered:

- Don't leave anything blank.
- Try to keep your answers short & concise (dot points can be used).
- Adhere to word limits.

Supporting documents included:

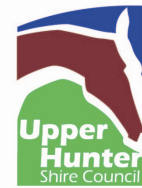
- Quotes.
- Letters of support (from people affected by the project, local council, Members of Parliament, government departments, private sponsors, key experts).
- Research documents (surveys, statistics).

Sustainable projects:

- Will the project continue after the initial funding has been expended?
- What will become of the project?
- Projects that provide at least some level of sustainability are generally looked upon more favourably.

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Grant Jargon (A glossary of what the words really mean)

Government and large funding bodies are notorious for including words and acronyms you are unfamiliar with in their program guidelines. **Don't feel intimidated** by the use of these words and terms. They will often provide a glossary with their guidelines, so you can decipher them. In order to help you out, we have listed below some of the most commonly used ones.

- Acronyms:** Abbreviations of words usually used to identify a Government Department or organisation. For example DOTARS is the Department of Transport and Regional Services, CCACC is the Central Coast Area Consultative Committee.
- Funding Body:** The organisation who supplies money to finance part or the entire project.
- In-kind:** A product or service provided to the project that has an intrinsic value, but is not provided as direct cash support. For example, the use of an office at no charge would normally be rented out – the value of the rent not charged would be an in-kind contribution; the use of volunteer labour to implement a project can be valued at a rate of \$15-\$20 per hour as an in-kind contribution.
- Objective:** A specific outcome that can be measured.
- Outcomes:** The result, impact or consequence of a project. For example, decrease in unemployment, increase in education, increase in child-care services, delivery of financial services, increase in community capacity. A direct outcome is the immediate consequence of a project. Indirect outcomes are the consequences related to the project but are not the immediate results. For example, decrease in youth unemployment (direct), reduction in youth petty crime (indirect).
- Output:** The product of the project. For example, a building, a plan, a service or a bus. An output should lead to an outcome.
- Proponent:** The person or organisation who submits an application for funding.
- Retrospective Funding:** Funding to meet any expenditure, or commitment to expenditure incurred prior to the Funding Agreement being signed by both parties. For example, you cannot ask for funding to build a fence if it has already been built prior to signing the contract (reimbursement).
- Stakeholder:** Anyone who has a vested interest in the project.