



Five steps to successful grant applications

A good way of securing funds for your community project is through grant funding. Grants can range from £100 to over £1million and can help pay for anything from a small piece of equipment, to staff costs, to a new community building.

There are thousands of grant-giving organisations in the UK usually in the form of charitable trusts and foundations. But grants can also come from local and national government, national organisations such as utility providers, banks and lotteries. Businesses also support community projects through grant giving – for example **Tesco Bags of Help**, **Greggs Foundation**, and **ScrewFix Foundation**.

Grant-giving organisations decide on the type of projects they want to support and will often have a very specific focus such as sport, homelessness, mental health, animals, environmental issues, disability, the arts and heritage, children and young people. They might also only support projects taking place in a specific geographical area.

In Gloucestershire there are several grant-giving organisations, supporting local projects, such as

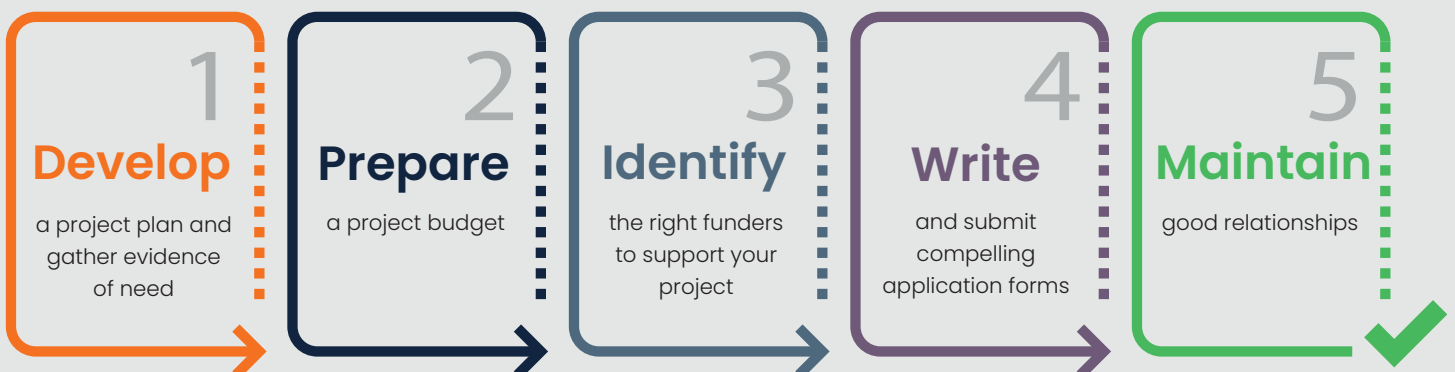
Gloucestershire Community Foundation,
Barnwood Trust and **Summerfield Trust**.

Visit the Tewkesbury Borough Council Website to read more about local Trusts and Foundations:
[tewkesbury.gov.uk/services/
community/community-funding/](http://tewkesbury.gov.uk/services/community/community-funding/)

Grants aren't loans but there will be an agreement between your organisation or group and the grant-giver on how the money will be spent – you don't have to give the money back unless you are unable to spend the grant on its intended purpose.

You don't necessarily need to be a registered charity to apply for grant funding but if you are a community group you will need a written constitution. Your group will also need a bank account with at least two signatories – grants are rarely paid to personal accounts.

Grant funding is a competitive process and it's essential that you find the right funder to approach, meet their eligibility criteria and, through a compelling application form, persuade the funder to support your cause. Here are five key steps to help you on your way to successful grant funding.





Develop a project plan and gather evidence of need

It's good to make a project plan no matter what you need funding for or the size of grant you are seeking – so if it's for a small piece of equipment, a building project or a project involving staff and volunteers – making a plan is the key to funding success. Project plans will help you clearly describe your project to funders when you get to the application stage.

Funders want to know that they are investing their money wisely and will quickly reject the projects which have not been properly developed. A project plan should include as much information as possible such as:

- Why the project is needed.
- How this need will be addressed.
- Who, and how many, will benefit from the project.
- How the project will be delivered (location, key activities, who will be involved).
- Timescale of the project or work – when it will start and how long it will last.
- How you will know the project is successful – plans for monitoring and evaluating the project.
- How you will ensure the project is sustainable – what happens when funding runs out.
- How much it will cost.

Gathering and using evidence is an important part of any successful funding application. You will need to demonstrate to funders that there is a real need for your project and that their investment will make a real difference. You cannot make assumptions about the issues you are tackling – funders will want to see that you have thoroughly researched the need and involved your community or beneficiary group with the solution.

Depending on your project, evidence might include:

- Consultations with your community or beneficiary group through face-to-face meetings, surveys, focus groups, social media.
- Case studies, testimonials, real-life examples.
- Reports, research studies, statistics and data relevant to your cause. Inform Gloucestershire is a great source of data that can help you illustrate your case.
- Written support from associated organisations and professionals.
- Some funders now ask for short video clips to bring your project to life. This can be simply done using a smart phone – there is no need to create anything too complex.

Evidence gathering will help you to put forward a strong case to funders, highlighting the need for the project.

Top tip!

Real life stories can bring your project to life and funders like to hear about the people involved in your work. Storytelling is a powerful way to persuade a funder to invest in a project. You can do this through case studies, quotes and photographs. When planning your project, make sure you spend time gathering the stories of those who are involved in the issues you are tackling. Have a look at the fundraising campaigns for some of the bigger charities either online or in newspapers and see how they use real life examples in their appeals. Always make sure you have consent before using personal information.



→ 2 Prepare a project budget

The project budget is vital – you need to have a clear idea how much it's going to cost before you approach funders. Try to include everything associated with the project:

- Staff salaries and expenses.
- Volunteer expenses.
- Venue hire.
- Equipment, refreshments.
- Insurance and other legal requirements.
- Publicity – website costs, printing of leaflets and posters.
- Overheads such as rent, utilities, IT, stationery.
- Monitoring and evaluation.

If you are looking for funding for equipment or building work, then make sure you have quotes – don't guess at how much things will cost – funders will want to see that any work they are funding represents value for money.

Generally, funders do not like to award grants retrospectively so it is unlikely you will secure funding for costs already spent.

If you have staff costs include these in your project budget along with a proportion of your overhead costs (e.g. rent, utilities, insurance, stationery, IT) so that your project budget accurately reflects how much it costs to deliver the work. Remember to include staff who are not directly involved in the project but play a part in its delivery such as admin and finance. These costs are sometimes known as core costs and budgeting in this way is known as full cost recovery. Although not all funders will support salaries and core cost, many will.

See link below for further information on full cost recovery.

Funders will often ask for a budget breakdown. As well as knowing how much it will cost to deliver your project, funders will also want to know about other sources of funding which are either secured or pending.

When you come to completing a funding application, you will need to be clear about how much money you are requesting, the total cost of your project, how much you have raised so far and how you will raise the difference. Make sure you are asking for an appropriate amount of money which matches your project budget and is in line with the level of grants the funder usually awards.

Top tip!

Project budgets don't need to be lengthy, but you do need to add the detail which will enable the funder to understand the need for the expenditure. It's good to present your budget in a table or spreadsheet. Add a short narrative next to each cost to explain exactly what it is and why it is needed. If your budget is for a specific project, then include the costs for the duration of the project; if it's ongoing work then present annual costs.



Further reading:
[Preparing your budget | NCVO](#)
[Full cost recovery | The National Lottery Community Fund \(tnlcommunityfund.org.uk\)](#)

→ 3

Identify the right funders to support your project

There are a wide-range of funding opportunities available to charities and community groups – the trick is to find the perfect match for your funding need. Some funders will have rolling funding programmes, while others will launch specific funding opportunities at certain times of the year. Here are some suggestions for finding potential funders:

- Talk to **Tewkesbury Borough Council's Funding Officers**, who will be able to suggest grant funding opportunities for your project.
- Sign-up to the **Gloucestershire VCS Alliance funding bulletin**.
- Search online for grant-giving organisations who may be interested in your work. There are tips on Tewkesbury Borough Council's community funding pages.
- Follow some of the key funders locally and nationally on social media.
- Sign-up to e-newsletters – funders like **The National Lottery Community Fund** and **Sport England** will announce new funding opportunities in their newsletters.
- There are several funding search websites – some free, some charge a subscription.

Funders have very definite ideas about what they will and won't fund and there's no point in applying if you don't match their eligibility criteria. It's crucial that you read their grant guidelines before applying so you have a good idea if your project fits their criteria – this avoids wasting time submitting applications which are not eligible. Here are some of the things you need to be looking out for:

- What type of organisation does the funder support – some grant-giving organisations will only support registered charities while others will accept applications from community groups, CICs, social enterprises, parish councils – is the status of your organisation eligible?

- What size of organisation does the funder like to support – they might focus on grassroots community groups, national charities, organisations within a specific income bracket.
- Does the funder have a minimum or maximum restriction on the amount of project costs they are prepared to fund?
- If the funder has supported your organisation previously you may have to wait before you can reapply – check their policy on repeat applications.
- Make sure your cause matches the funder's interest areas – there's no point in applying for a youth project to a funder who likes to support projects working with older people.
- Some funders will only support projects operating in a specific geographical area.
- Check to see what costs they will support – for example some funders don't like to fund core costs (salaries and overheads) preferring to fund specific project costs.
- Check application deadlines and timescales for awarding funding – does this fit with your project plan?

Top tip!



Do your research before making any funding application: the more you know about the funder the better your chances of success. Read the funders website, and then if you think you are eligible – ring them up or email them to ask! A brief conversation will save you – and them – time.

Further reading:
[Understanding a grant fund | NCVO](#)

→ 4 Write and submit compelling application forms

Before you start your application make sure you have thoroughly read the grant guidelines and feel confident your project meets the funder's criteria. And crucially, check the deadline for submission.

Not all grant funding applications are the same; you will find that different funders ask different questions and vary in the supporting documents required. Some applications will be an online process, others will be a form template, and some funders prefer a covering letter with additional information.

A funder may receive hundreds of applications for a grant programme – it's important that your application stands out and makes the impact it deserves. Here are some tips to consider:

- Read through all the questions before you start completing the form – this way you will know what is required and can prepare in advance any tricky questions.
 - If it's an online form, compose your answers in an offline document and then copy and paste to the form when you are ready – this will enable you to edit your work and to save your answers in another format should you have trouble saving the online form.
 - There will always be standard questions asking about your organisation, what you do, what you hope to achieve and the impact your work will make – have these answers prepared in advance and then you can tweak them to fit each application.
 - Write about your project, work, organisation with confidence and passion – make the funder feel that your project is worth investing in.
 - Back-up anything you say with the relevant evidence and wherever possible, use real-life examples in the form of feedback, case studies and testimonials.
- Write your application with the assumption that the funder knows nothing about your organisation or the work you do – don't use jargon or acronyms.
 - Be concise – make sure that you answer the question clearly and accurately, with enough information for the funder to make a decision
 - Remember that the funder will be looking to see you meet their criteria; you will need to show that there is a strong match between your project and what they want to fund.
 - Before you submit your application, read it through several times – correct spelling and grammar are important – make sure you have answered every question and provided any additional information required.
 - If you choose to use AI, be careful! Funders will be able to tell the difference between an application written by someone who really knows their stuff, and a computer. You can always use AI to check or simplify your document, but do write it for yourself.

Top tip!

Give yourself plenty of time to write a funding application – they can often take longer than expected. You may need to gather supporting information from other sources so don't leave things to the last minute. The good news is, it does get easier – you can start to build a resource of information and then tailor what you have for each application.



Further reading:
[Writing your application | NCVO](#)

→ 5

Maintain good relationships

Hurray – your funding application has been successful! But that’s not the end of the application process. It’s important that you thank the funder for your grant. This may be in the form of a telephone call, thank you letter, or you may have to complete a grant acknowledgement form.

A thank you letter is a good opportunity to keep the funder engaged with your cause. It doesn’t need to be a long letter but do make it clear just how important their funding is to your project – you might even include a further case study or a quote from a beneficiary.

Make sure you know what the funder is expecting from you in terms of project reporting. Some funders don’t require any further contact, but others may want to know when the grant has been spent, a breakdown of expenditure, or an update on how the project has been delivered.

In the future, you may want to ask this funder to support your cause again. That’s why it’s important to maintain a good relationship after a grant has been awarded. You may have trouble securing further funding if you haven’t provided the required post grant paperwork.

If for any reason you can’t spend the grant on its intended purpose, then you must let the funder know. You will need to provide clear reasons for any changes of use and assurances that the overall purpose of your project remains. You will also need to let the funder know if you are unable to spend the grant in the timescale agreed – they may let you carry funds forward or you may have to return any outstanding funding.

Further reading:

After you apply | NCVO

Top tip!

Some funders are much more hands-on than others and will want to be kept updated about your project. Let them know about any developments, milestones, successes. Keep your funders in the loop by sending newsletters or invitations to important events such as launches or grand openings. You could even invite a funder to see your project in action and meet the beneficiaries of their grant – they might not come but it’s always nice to be invited!



Other useful sources of information:

National Council of Voluntary Organisations

knowhow.ncvo.org.uk

GRCC

www.grcc.org.uk/voluntary-and-community-sector/vcse-support

Gloucestershire VCS Alliance

www.glosvcsalliance.org.uk

Get Grants – free online events including ‘Meet the Funder’ and paid training courses

www.getgrants.org.uk

Good luck!

Support from Tewkesbury Borough Council

If you are part of a voluntary or community group based in Tewkesbury Borough and have been tasked with finding funding for your group, the Council’s Community Funding Officers are here to support you.

They can provide more in-depth sessions for staff, trustees and volunteers on the five key steps to successful grant applications and support groups through the funding process.

Please contact the Community Funding Officers on communityfunding@tewkesbury.gov.uk