



THE
IRELAND
FUNDS

Guidance on Preparing a Proposal for Funding

The Ireland Funds
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About this guide

This guide was created to help those who are new to writing proposals for funding. It is a 'crash course' that will warn you about common mistakes but will also provide some helpful hints and some suggestions for building relationships with potential funders.

Many funding agencies deal with a large volume of applications, which can mean that even relatively strong applications are unsuccessful in securing funding. However, there are also a lot of common mistakes that can cause an application to be rejected early in the review process. These include:

- Incomplete applications
- Mistakes in budget figures
- Requests for activities that are outside of the guidelines
- Not explaining why the project is needed
- Outcomes poorly described
- Lack of detail as to how funds will be used

THE GRANT WRITING PROCESS

When thinking about writing a grant proposal, it is helpful to think about it as a five-step process:

1. Plan the Activity or Project for which you will seek funding
2. Research and identify potential funding sources
3. Prepare a budget
4. Write the Grant Proposal. Take the time to review the document and to seek feedback on your grant proposal from senior staff or other colleagues in your organisation
5. Submit the Proposal

1. Plan the Activity or Project for which you will seek funding.

Your organisation probably has several projects for which you could apply for funding. An activity or project that your organisation has been running for a number of years may need additional funding, or the organisation may be branching out to tackle a new need or to try a different solution to an old problem. Whatever the activity or project, your organisation will benefit from having a plan of action before you begin seeking funding.

If you can easily answer the following questions, you are ready to work on your proposal or application:

- What is the need or problem you aim to address and what experience does your organisation have working on this issue/in this field?
- Who is your target audience for this project? Make sure that any proposal lets the funder know who will benefit from the project, whether your organisation already works with this group and whether they have been involved in developing this project.
- Where will the project be delivered? Is it a national initiative or a local activity? Where will you service users/participants come from?
- How will you address the need you have described? Why are you convinced that this is an effective means of addressing the need you have described?

- What do you expect to change as a result of the project? Be sure to describe what success looks like.
- When will the project take place? Is it an ongoing activity or is it something you will deliver for a set period of time?
- How much will it cost to deliver the project you have planned? How much have you secured from other funding sources?

Keep in mind that a prospective funder may not automatically know the answers to the questions above, even if it is obvious to you based on your experience with your organisation. Being able to answer these questions succinctly and persuasively will go a long way to helping you prepare your application or proposal.

2. Research and identify potential funding sources

Finding a funder for your activity or project can be challenging, particularly in such a competitive funding environment. Ireland has relatively few grantmaking foundations and government agencies are still the top funders of non-profit organisations. Regardless of whether you are applying to a public or a private funder, it is essential to conduct thorough research before writing and submitting a grant proposal. Below is a quick checklist for the kinds of questions you should be asking before developing a proposal or completing a funding application:

- Does the proposed activity or project meet the general eligibility criteria outlined in grants guidelines?
- Does the funder identify specific activities, target groups or types of initiatives that it has prioritised for funding? Can you explain how your activity or project fits in with these priorities?
- Have you made a note of all application deadlines? Keeping a record of grantmaking timelines can help you ensure that your organisation does not miss out on a funding opportunity.
- Will the funder host any information sessions about its funding programmes? The more you learn about the funder and its priorities, the easier it will be for you to write a compelling grant proposal. Get to know what organisations are funding what kinds of initiatives. Establish contact with a member of staff that can answer any questions you may have throughout the process.

For information on funding in Ireland, you may find the following websites useful:

- fundingpoint.ie
- philanthropy.ie
- pobal.ie

3. Prepare an Overall Budget for the Activity or Project

Preparing a budget need not be overly complicated. You should have some idea of the cost of delivering the entire Project or Activity. Funders offering larger awards will most likely require a detailed, and possibly multi-year, budget. For smaller grants, it is likely you will only need to provide a breakdown of costs for the amount sought.

Spend some time thinking about what the project will cost to deliver. Make sure your budget is realistic (funders look at many budgets and can usually spot when you have inflated the figures) and that be sure to

- Provide a breakdown by category of what the project requires (e.g. staff time, facilitator fees, equipment, materials)

- Note that some funders may offer to partially fund an activity or project. If a project can be delivered with partial support, it may be helpful for this to be stated on the application form (if asked) or to be able to tell the funder which budget items are critical to project delivery and which can be pared back or omitted depending on funding.
- Check your math—like spelling errors, budget mistakes can make a proposal seem unpolished and hurried.

Bear in mind that some funders will want to see a complete budget for the project or programme you plan to deliver. If this is the case, be sure to include figures for staff time and for overheads so that the full cost is shown. Other funders may seek a breakdown of the amount requested, i.e. that you only list the items or activities the grant will cover.

An organisation applying for €8,000 for a youth arts programme, for example, would submit a budget that looks like this:

Grant Request – Breakdown of Costs

Art supplies for 50 pupils/1year	€3500
Room hire for art classes 1 evening per week/per annum	€1500
Art teacher for 2 hours, 1 evening per week/per annum	€3000
Room hire for showcase event for parents and teachers	€250
Refreshments for showcase event	€100
Total Cost:	€8350

Funding Available for Project

Donation by local business	€350
Total Amount Requested:	€8000

Some funders will require that all items paid for by the grant must be receipted or otherwise documented. Make sure you understand why the reporting requirements and do not hesitate to approach the funder if you require clarification.

4. Write a Grant Proposal

Most funders will review many grant proposals at a time. To help them assess whether your project is a good fit for their priorities, we recommend using concise, persuasive language, and requesting a reasonable amount of support for the project or activity you plan to run. The format of a Grant Proposal will vary depending on the funder but, in general, an organisation applying for grant funding should include each of the following elements in its proposal:

- Summary
- Statement of Need or Problem
- Description of Community
- Project Goals and Evaluation Tools
- Description of Activities
- Budget

Once you have drafted a proposal, take the time to review it for spelling, grammatical or factual errors. Avoid jargon, abbreviations or language that may confuse the reviewer. Ask

colleagues for feedback on the proposal and make sure that the final version is approved by a senior member of staff or the Board.

For many funders, their only experience with your project is what they see on the application form. Be as concise as possible and do not assume background knowledge that they may not have, or provide an unnecessarily extensive explanation of the context within which you are working. Once again, if you have any doubts as to the eligibility of your proposed project, contact the funder for advice.

5. Submit the Proposal

Do a final review for spelling and typos and check that you have included all required information or documentation before submitting your proposal in the format specified by the funder e.g. online, by email attachment, by hard copy. Ensure that the contact details you have provided are up-to-date and notify the funder if these change.

Many organisations wait until the last day to submit their Grant Proposals. It is advisable to submit a Grant Proposal at least one day before the deadline to avoid delays in the post or technical difficulties in electronic submissions due to an influx of last-minute submissions.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Even a perfectly planned and well-written proposal may be rejected – do not be discouraged if your grant proposal is not successful. If your proposal is declined, it may be worth contacting the funder to request feedback—having a sense of how applications are assessed, what the funding priorities are or what errors were on your application can help you prepare a more competitive proposal the next time.

Best of luck preparing your proposal.