

It is incorrect to assume that there is specific writing style that can be used to guarantee success in all applications. However, certain basic rules can be followed to ensure a higher success rate.

1. Preparation - "Read the small print"

As soon as you have obtained the application form and guidance pack – read it!

You may have only 6-8 weeks to prepare a bid so time is of the essence.

The documentation should explain both the application procedure and how to complete application form.

a) Application Procedure

Most larger programmes have a three-stage process, for smaller funds these stages may not be acknowledged but probably happen nevertheless.

- **Eligibility Checks** – this will involve checking that all the documentation requested have been enclosed. It may also require a small number of questions to be answered in sufficient detail i.e. equal opportunities;
- **Scoring** – it is likely that certain questions may be given marks as part of scoring framework. For example, six questions allocated a total of 80 marks (weighting of marks per question will vary) and a required amount, say 65 are necessary to ensure an application goes forward for appraisal (see below). These weightings may be listed in the applicant's guidance.
- **Appraisal** – this final check has come more to the fore with the emergence of professional bid writers and a greater emphasis on value for money (see below).

b) Understanding the documentation

Ascertain if you require further clarification on certain points/issues raised by the guidance at the earliest opportunity. From a practical point of view, programme contacts will become busier the closer the time moves towards a deadline date and eligibility issues should be dealt with before a significant amount of time and effort has been expended.

- **Technical Questions** - Are there any questions that require further clarification? What type of projects can be funded? Have you consulted internally first (Your Directorate contact? External Funding Unit?). If your query is more complicated please make contact with individual(s) named in the guidance.
- **Appraisal Criteria** – Some programmes indicate factors which will determine the overall appraisal of the bid. The appraisal process seeks to assess that the project demonstrates: realism and coherence; fit with the relevant strategies; value for money; a proven track record (where appropriate) and the capacity to deliver. Please take account of these criteria when structuring any kind of response.

For further information contact:

Martyn Riley, External Funding Officer, External Funding Unit, Room G.50, Kent County Council, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1XQ Tel: 01622 694384
Fax: 01622 694448, Email: martyn.riley@kent.gov.uk

c) **How to Complete the Application Form** – In addition to bid writing techniques that are addressed below, there may be other issues to verify. For example, is additional documentation is required i.e. a copy of a business plan (if it isn't do not send it!). Other issues :

- **Partner contributions** – if partners are involved the funder may wish for details of their estimated financial situation, maybe authorised by a letter or a signed form;
- **Partners signatures** (usually originals);
- **Authorising the bid** – who in your management structure will need to sign a bid, when are they available?
- **Copies of previous year's accounts** – these may sometimes need to be enclosed? In the case of KCC - a copy of our Annual Statement of Accounts should suffice;
- **Details of previous grant application** – not just to the programme you are bidding for but across a whole range of initiatives e.g. the Lottery;
- **Deadlines** - How and when does the application need to be submitted? Hard copy? Electronically? Both? Remember deadline dates and time are absolutes, failure to submit on time will mean your bid is rejected?

2. Who prepares the bid?

It needs to be established at the earliest possible opportunity who will be preparing the bid. This need not be a single individual, indeed this may be beyond the capabilities of a single person. Whoever this person is they have to be given the time (perhaps 3-6 working days just to complete the text) and support of other colleagues.

While the “bid writer” does not necessarily have to have a direct knowledge of the work area covered by the application. The involvement of a person(s) involved in project delivery is absolutely essential – this should ensure that the bid is grounded in reality and is achievable.

3. Bid Writing Techniques

Be clear and concise (many applications have word/space restrictions) and avoid as far as possible the use of jargon (unless explained in the text or encouraged by the funder).

Applications are not great works of literature, often well-crafted answers appear stilted and lack flow when viewed by a third party. However, this is often due to the way that questions are structured, sometimes requesting information which appears to have provided in another part of the form! While this can be confusing it can be overcome by carefully reading the guidelines.

Some funders now require some answers to be SMART i.e. objectives. While under normal circumstances most answers would cover some or all of these issues – it may now be beneficial to simply prepare a sentence or paragraph dealing with each SMART criteria and relate it to your specific project:

- **Specific** – Objectives should specify what they want to achieve.
- **Measurable** – You should be able to measure whether you are meeting the objectives or not.
- **Achievable** - Are the objectives you set, achievable and attainable?
- **Realistic** – Can you realistically achieve the objectives with the resources you have?
- **Time** – When do you want to achieve the set objectives?

Start to complete the application form as soon as possible only by attempting to answer the questions will it become obvious what gaps exist in your bid and provide you with a checklist for further action e.g. clarify the outcomes or seek advice from colleagues and partners (see below).

4. Using Colleagues and Partners

Possible the biggest resource we have is a human one! Within KCC (and partner) organisations we have a vast repository of knowledge related to developing, managing and delivering projects. Many individuals have also prepared successful applications for government and EU programmes.

Some of these people may have moved positions but still remain within the organisation and while they may not be (or want to be!) involved with project development, they may welcome of the opportunity to comment on a bid. In addition, colleagues and partners could have a specific specialism, which is invaluable to an application e.g. equal opportunity. However, there is a danger that this approach could lead to “application by committee”, which often results in bland, anodyne and disjointed bids which are unlikely to find favour with funders.

This could be overcome in a number of ways:

- **Restrict comment** – Only request input from specific colleagues and partners on those parts of the bid for which their specialist knowledge may be beneficial;
- **Request specific input** – Given the opportunity most people would restrict their comments to grammar and spelling, very useful but not the type of information and guidance that you may require? Instead you could prompt a specific person for statistical information or the background to current government/EU policy;
- **“Critical Friend”** – The use of a third person to provide general feedback on a bid, its structure and approach is extremely beneficial, particularly if this person can provide an objective view based on the programmes scoring/appraisal criteria.

Try to obtain feedback far enough in advance of the deadline to be able to react! This will necessitate completing a draft response for circulation 1-2 weeks before the bid needs to be submitted.

The basic problem with using colleagues and partners in the ways described above (apart from availability) – is that in order to make use of people’s knowledge and skills, you need to seek comment continually and obtain it promptly when requested.



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