

**Applying for Funding Masterclasses**

**Template to support applications for funding and subsequent delivery of projects**

This template has been produced drawing on good practice from the library sector and beyond. This version was used for the masterclasses the Libraries Taskforce ran in February and March 2018.

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| **Steps** | **Issues to consider** |
| **Step 1** | **Don’t start with the money….** |
|  | 1. **Being part of the bigger picture:**  * What are the strategic objectives for your local authority area and its communities? What priority outcomes is it trying to achieve? * Look at strategic plans produced by the local authority and partners, eg. Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STP), Local Enterprise Partnership Strategic Economic Plans; Combined Authority strategic plans (if relevant) |
|  | 1. **Library service contribution to the strategic objectives for the community:**  * What is the library services contribution to these strategic objectives now? * Which objective(s) is it supporting most strongly? Which need boosting? * Is there a specific objective where you think the library service might be well placed to do more? [Once you’ve identified this, move onto question 3 below] * Think about all the Outcomes libraries can contribute to as set out in [Libraries Deliver: Ambition](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021#the-outcomes-libraries-deliver-for-their-communities): Cultural and creative enrichment; Increased reading and literacy; Helping everyone achieve their full potential; Greater prosperity; Stronger, more resilient communities; Healthier and happier lives; Improved digital access and literacy. |
|  | 1. **Defining your proposed project:**   Thinking about the specific objective you identified in (2) above:   * How are things now? * Why do they have to change? * What is your organisation’s solution to the problem/issue? * Why is your organisation the best one to change things? * Have you engaged with communities/target groups/stakeholders to test your thinking out? What did they say? * Who or what will benefit from the work you plan to do? Focus on the outcomes you want to achieve, not outputs * What will be the difference you make if you are successful? Detail the impact you want to see * What will be the legacy from the project? * How will you make the project sustainable beyond the end of the funding period? |
|  | 1. **Creating a compelling narrative:**  * If you were asked to summarise your proposed project in 20 words or less, what would you say? * What’s your 2 minute ‘elevator pitch’? * Is your proposed project name memorable? * Test out your narrative on colleagues and stakeholders - does it resonate with them? Would your friends and family understand it if you told them? |
|  | 1. **Articulating what your library / library service would bring to the project:**  * People - staff / volunteers? * Knowledge and expertise? * Money or in-kind support (eg. space to run events, access to communication / publicity channels, access to collections)? * Reach into the community - access to the target group / audience? * Access to partners / networks? * Anything else? |
|  | 1. **Building partnerships:**  * Working with partners to develop and deliver your project can bring a myriad of benefits, including widening knowledge and expertise. Also, increasingly funding organisations welcome - and sometimes favour - bids from consortia (eg. with other libraries / library services or partners) * Are there national / regional / local organisations or individuals who you might want to work with on this project? What would they add to the project? * Do you have a ‘way in’? Have you worked with them before? If not, has someone else you know worked with them and could they make introductions? * Would they be interested? How would they benefit from it? * Do your organisational cultures fit? Do you have shared values? * What capacity do they have to deliver what you need? * Do you have a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the organisation already? If not, would it help to have one? |
|  | 1. **Developing the project and resourcing plan:**  * How would the governance of the project work? Who would the project team report into? Who would have the authority to make decisions about the project? * What is the outline timescale for the project - start / finish / key milestones? Do the timescales need to tie into other work going on elsewhere? * Have you defined what your project team would look like? [go to question 8 for more detail on this] * Are you clear what funding you need? [go to question 9 for more detail on this] * Are you clear what other support you will need - from your library / library service and elsewhere (eg. council, partners)? * How are you going to measure progress and monitor the success of the project - delivery of outputs and outcomes? [go to question 10 for more detail on this] * What are the risks to the project? What are your mitigation strategies? |
|  | 1. **Creating the project team:**  * What would your ideal project team look like? * What skills, experience and knowledge would they have? * What would be the size / grading of the team and how would they be structured? * Where would they be located? * Do the answers to the above questions change throughout the life of the project? * Think about what you will need at all stages of the project, from the initial design through to the delivery and evaluation. Would the team benefit from being made up of a mix of people, eg. from the library service and potential partners? Consider the track record of your proposed team in delivering projects - would they appear like a credible delivery partner to potential funders? |
|  | 1. **Setting the budget:**  * What is the budget needed? Be realistic and ask for what you actually need - no-one will thank you if you run out of money part way through the project and/or don’t deliver on all your expected outputs and outcomes, or have an underspend at the end. Funders will have a feel for how much something should cost and may reject your bid if the budget appears unrealistic (too high or too low). * Split by capital / revenue expenditure? * Split by Year (or month / quarter if detailed)? * Have you included the cost of evaluation? |
|  | 1. **Measuring progress and success:**  * Have you produced a ‘Theory of Change’ diagram to set out how the inputs you make and the activities you undertake will lead to outputs, outcomes and longer-term impact [the Taskforce is looking to run a masterclass(es) on this later in 2018] * How will you monitor delivery of the project as it progresses? Have you defined your key performance indicators (KPIs)? * How will you measure whether you have achieved the outputs, outcomes and longer-term impact you set out to achieve? [refer to question 3 where you defined what impact you would have made if you were successful]. Are you going to do the evaluation of the project yourself or commission independent evaluators? * Are you clear about what data or feedback you need to collect? And at what stages? Is the data easy to collect/can data collection be automated? * Do you know how you will analyse the data collected? Do you have the skills available to do this? |
|  | 1. **Demonstrating value for money / return on investment:**  * Can you demonstrate clear value for money / return on investment from this project? * Can you value the impacts v expenditure? * Is there any existing standard methodology in place that you can use to calculate the return on investment? * Is there any existing research or data available that might help you make a convincing case? * Can you compare this project to other similar initiatives done in your area or elsewhere? |
|  | 1. **Getting approval to proceed:**  * What do you have to do to get approval to proceed to the next step with your project? * Do you (and your partners if relevant) have formal processes you need to work within / coordinate? Who needs to approve what and when? * What are the timescales for getting approval? |
| **Step 2** | **Step 2: You’ve defined your project. Now what?** |
|  | 1. **Signalling that you are ‘open to funding’:**  * Would possible funding bodies know that you are / might be able to contribute to their agendas? Have you made them aware? Do they know you have a project you want to deliver? [This is particularly important if you are looking to get into a new area of work with new stakeholders who might not see you as a potential delivery partner. Remember to talk to them first at a strategic level about what you might contribute to their aims and start to build a relationship, before you start chasing them for money!] * Can your partners help promote what you want to do? |
|  | 1. **Identifying possible funding sources:**  * If you’ve had funding for projects before, are those organisations still a possible source of funding? * Have you looked at funding databases [sites that aggregate lists of funding organisations / programmes] to identify possible new funding sources? * Have you explored both sector specific funders (eg. of library services) and thematic specific funders (eg. those interested in health / wellbeing / digital projects, etc)? * Are there any local funders who might be interested in your project? Do your partners know of any? |
|  | 1. **Prioritising potential funding sources:**  * Most funders will have all the information and guidance about their programmes on their website - read and inwardly digest... * Who has the ‘best fit’ with your project? * What is the level of funding available? Does it meet your needs? * Is there a particular window for funding? Does it meet your needs? * Do you have an existing relationship or ongoing dialogue with any of the potential funders? Have you been successful in applying to them in the past? [This may be a positive or negative thing - if you’ve had funding previously and delivered the project successfully, then you might be seen as a credible delivery partner in whom they might make further investments. However, if they want to be seen as distributing their funding evenly across the sector / a geographical area, then having received funding previously may make you less likely to receive funding again] * Have they funded similar projects in the past? [Again, this may be positive or negative depending on whether they only want to support new innovations or are interested in trialling a previous project in a new way / scaling it up, etc] |
|  | 1. **Finalising your short list of potential funders:**  * Do you have a short list based on your initial search? * Have you prioritised them as likely prospects? * Is there a facility or mechanism for you to have an informal chat with them to see if they might be interested in your project? * Do you have all the material you need ready to apply? |
| **Step 3** | **Getting the money: maximising the chances of success** |
|  | 1. **Making the formal approach:**  * What is the application process? Are there a number of steps to complete (eg. do you need to formally ‘express an interest’ and be shortlisted prior to making a full bid)? * Do you understand how the process works and what is needed at each point? If not, find out the mechanism for clarifying this * Do you know anyone who has applied before to that funder? Have you spoken to them about the process and what they learnt works / doesn’t work? * What are the timescales for application and can you (and your partners if relevant) meet them? * Is there any lead time to register onto a bidding portal or similar? If so, create an account as soon as possible so this doesn’t become a blocker later. [Some funding bodies require bids to be made through an online site and it can sometimes take a number of weeks from registering for an account until it is available for you to start uploading your bid] |
|  | 1. **Writing the bid:**  * Who is ‘holding the pen’ on writing the bid? * What arrangements have been made with any partners? * What systems will you use (eg. IT, etc)? * Do you (and your partners if relevant) have the necessary capability and capacity to construct a bid or can you call on external resources to support you? * Have you lined up everyone who will need to approve the bid prior to submission? |
|  | 1. **Using data and evidence:**  * What are your data sources to back up the need for the project, and to support your argument that making the proposed interventions will lead to the desired outcomes and impact? * Do you have any relevant internal data sources / research and/or can you reference any external data sources / research? * Has the funder published any relevant data / research from previous projects? [It is important to review what related work the funder has sponsored before. Showing you are cognisant of, and building on, work done before will strengthen your bid] * Do you understand any reporting and evaluation requirements and can you meet them (eg. will you have the data available when it is needed; is there a requirement for an independent evaluation and, if so, have you included this within your project plan and budget)? |
|  | 1. **Meeting funding criteria and conditions:**  * Do you fully understand the funding criteria and what the funder wants to achieve through its programme? * Do you clearly articulate how your project meets the criteria? * Are there any specific conditions tied to the funding (eg. the funding is only available to a certain type of organisation)? Do you meet them? Are you completely compliant? [If not, have you discussed this with the potential funder to ensure your bid will still be accepted? Don’t waste time applying for funding programmes where you will be ruled out on a technicality! Make sure you read the conditions carefully] * One common condition is a requirement for match funding:   + If requested, what level is needed and do you understand what each funder says can be used as match funding (eg. does it need to be money or can it be in-kind support through existing staff time, etc)?   + Have you identified possible sources of match funding?   + Do you need to provide firm confirmation match funding is in place to accompany any formal bid? Can you get this lined up in time? |
|  | 1. **Lining up supporters:**  * Do you have a list of potential advocates / supporters of your project that you can draw on? * Have you thought about how they might be able to help support your bid / help you make the case? * Have they been briefed on what you want to do? * Have you asked any partners to do the same? |
|  | 1. **Final checklist before pressing send…:**  * Don’t assume the funder knows anything about your organisation or the project, even if you have spoken to them about it. The person who assesses the bid may not be the person you spoke to. Spell out exactly what you are planning to do and why, where, with whom, when, etc. * Remember the assessors will only have a very, very, short time to read your bid and will probably already have read 5-10 other bids that day. Is your bid concise, entertaining and memorable (in a good way!)? * Get someone not involved in the project (eg. a layperson / critical friend) to read the bid make sure it makes sense to an outsider * Are your contact details all shown correctly? * Have you done a check for spelling, grammar and typos? Is it written in plain English; have you eliminated jargon and explained any abbreviations? * Do all the figures add up? * Have all application form questions been addressed with a response? * Are you sure?? * Have all the internal approval processes been completed? Are finance, commercial, legal, etc. colleagues all content? |
| **Step 4** | **How will bids be assessed?** |
|  | 1. **Responding to queries:**  * Make sure you (and your partners if relevant) are ready to respond quickly to any queries or requests for clarification from the funder (eg. if your named contact point will be on leave at any time during the assessment process, make sure someone is going to pick up their emails / phone calls straight away and be able to respond). [This is your chance to make a good impression - don’t blow it!] * Have you addressed any points raised with a comprehensive response within the specified timescales?   **And now wait and keep your fingers crossed!**  If you’re successful, well done! And proceed to Step 5. If not, remember that most funding pots will be vastly oversubscribed (often by 5-10 times), so don’t expect every bid you make to be successful and don’t get disheartened if you get knocked back. Ask for feedback, iterate your bid, and try again, with another funder or the same one - many funders welcome repeat bids if you can show you’ve taken on board their feedback and improved your ask. Also many welcome initial applications for small pilots or ‘discovery’ periods to do user research and testing, followed by a larger bid for a wider rollout if successful. |
| **Step 5** | **You’ve got your money - hooray! What next?** |
|  | 1. **Lining up the rest of your organisation:**  * Does your management chain (including Portfolio Holder / Councillors where relevant) and all the necessary internal back office functions (eg. Commercial, Finance, Legal, Communications) know you have been successful in the bid? * Are they clear what you now need them to do (if anything) and how they can support delivery of the project? |
|  | 1. **Completing the paperwork:**  * Each funder will have their own processes, but there is usually a requirement for accepting / signing off on a funding agreement. Make sure you do this within the required timescales or you might lose the funding offer. * Make sure you know about any internal approval processes (within your organisation and partners as relevant) that are required prior to signing any funding agreement, and that you have identified the person(s) who will need to sign the agreement and that they are available at the required time. |
|  | 1. **Communications:**  * How will you go about communicating the project to staff and other parts of your / partner organisations; to the public; to target audiences? * What does your first press release say to confirm and celebrate you’ve being successful in the bidding process? [This is a great opportunity to promote your library / library service more broadly so don’t waste the opportunity!] * Are there points in the project that will make good PR / media opportunities (eg. when a new service first starts operating)? How will you promote these? Who will you invite? * Can you make a 2 minute (max) video of your project featuring your users / create other communication assets to distribute? * How can your partners and supporters help to promote your project? |
|  | 1. **Reporting on progress:**  * How and when will you communicate progress to decision makers within your / partner organisations? * What is the requirement for regular progress reports to your funder? Have they provided you with a standard template? Are you clear about the deadlines? * Who will compile the progress reports? * Have you set up the necessary processes to have the required data available to inform your reports? * Do you know the process you need to follow if you want / need to make amendments to the scope or detail of your project during the delivery phase? [Some funders can be more flexible than others on this, depending on the nature of the funding programme, but they recognise that sometimes circumstances beyond your control can arise that may make a change necessary. However, funders would all like notification and discussion in advance if something arises that significantly changes the nature of the project being funded so they can work with you to decide how best to address it] |
|  | 1. **Lessons identified:**  * How will you undertake retrospectives (looking at what went well, what went less well, and what you would do differently) and capture the lessons identified from the project? [Think about how you will do this at regular intervals during the project delivery phase, as well as at the end] * How are you going to use this feedback to iterate and improve delivery during the life of the project? * How are you going to use this feedback to improve delivery of subsequent projects? * At the end of the project, how will you create a case study to share what you’ve done and what you’ve learnt with others (including links to any independent evaluation report where possible)? Where will you publish, and how will you publicise, this? * How will you use the evidence gathered in any independently verified evaluation report to support future applications? |
| **Step 6** | **Onto the next successful funding application!! Good luck** |