

Introduction to fundraising from trusts & foundations

Grant making trusts and foundations are charities with boards of trustees and sometimes paid staff to help them decide how to make their donations. They make donations in support of work that interests them.

There are different kinds of trusts:

Family Trusts – e.g. The Sainsbury Family Trust. Set up by family members to support areas that interest them. Often they make donations from the interest payments on their investments

Corporate Trusts – e.g. The Making a Difference Locally trust. Set up by NISA Retail to give donations from their profits

Community Foundations – e.g. The Community Foundation for Wales. Creating endowments from donations by local donors. Grants are often hyper local in nature.

Livery Company Trusts – e.g. The Leathersellers Company Charitable Foundation. Often give grants in support of their membership as well as some wider interest areas.

Preparing to make an application:

Most trusts / foundations have websites with clear guidance on what they will or won't fund

Research is essential. Don't just pick a trust and send a letter. Take time to research what they're interested in and see how your work can help them achieve their goals.

Find out who else they've funded, and the value of that funding. If all of their grants are for £1000, there may be little point in applying for £25,000. If they only fund hospices, there is little point in applying for animal charities.

A good tip is to start with the section on the website that says "what we don't fund" – if your type of charity or area of work is listed here, it's a quick way to find out that your application would be ineligible before you've spent time doing your other research.

Making your application:

Once you've established that you would be eligible for funding, make sure you follow the trust guidance exactly.

Only send the information they've asked for, in the format they've asked for it in.

Don't send any additional materials – they will only go in the bin or be deleted if they haven't been asked for.

Make sure you have a clear project plan, including stating the need for the work, the start date, the amount of money you need, and the outcomes you want to achieve. You should also think about how long your work will take; the milestones you will achieve along the way, and how you will know you have been successful.

If you're working in partnership with others, make sure you explain this, and how your partners will be involved.

If there is an application form to complete, make sure you answer all the questions and stick to any word limits given.

If there is no application form, make sure you explain your project, and need for funding concisely. 2-4 pages should be enough space to explain most work. If the trust wants more information after they've read this initial application, they will ask for it.

Tips:

Make sure you meet the deadline. It is highly unlikely a trust will accept a late application.

Diarise the application date. If you are unsuccessful, you will often need to wait a year before you can apply again.

Keep a copy of your application. If the trust wants to discuss it with you, it's helpful to have a copy to hand.

Make sure you start applying well in advance of your project date. It can take up to 6 months from the date of application to know if you've been successful.

If you're in any doubt about whether your application will be eligible, contact the trust before you start any work. The trust will usually give their preferred contact method on the website. But make sure you've thoroughly read their guidance first. No-one wants to spend time answering an enquiry when that information is clearly available on the website.

Find a 'critical friend'. When you've written your bid, find someone who is unfamiliar with your work to read it. They should be able to understand your work, your objectives and how you will measure success from what you've written. If they can't understand, then neither will the funder.

Finally, don't blanket mail. It's ok to use similar paragraphs, tables, pictures and information in each bid, but each funder is looking for something different. So while you think it might save time to have an 'off the shelf' bid to send to everyone, it just means that your application won't meet a funder's specific criteria and so you are more likely to be unsuccessful. It's a waste of your time and theirs.