



Training Guide

Finding and Obtaining Funding



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Introduction

Every library service and SLS wants to deliver a great service for children and young people.

Securing external funding enables your service to do more. Libraries Rising's skills audit highlighted how important you think this is, and how you'd welcome more support in this area.

This guide will support you with:

- Identifying suitable funding opportunities
- Developing a compelling case for support
- Securing funding for your service

We want to help you enhance your offer for children and young people, ensuring they feel they belong in public and school libraries.

Keep sharing your ideas and feedback with us, as it helps Libraries Rising to develop more tailored training in the future. Good luck with your funding applications.

The Libraries Rising team

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Doing the research

It's important to find the right funder for your project or programme.

If your Library Service is run by a charity or other independent organisation, you'll have more freedom in terms of who you can apply for funding from. If your service is run by your council, you'll need to clarify what funding you can apply for and how that money will be allocated if your bid is successful. Here are some things to consider:



Searching for funders

There are thousands of funders out there. [Arts Council England](#) and [Libraries Connected](#) both offer grants for libraries - they're a good place to start your search. The following websites will help you to identify suitable funders:

- [360 GrantNav](#) provides open data on grants. You can search for funders to see what activities they've recently funded. You can even search for similar organisations to your own to see who has recently funded them.
- [FundsOnline](#) is a database with over 8,000 funders listed. It's a subscription service so there is a cost involved. At the time of writing, subscriptions are either weekly or annual.
- [GetGrants](#) have a useful database of funders. It's a free resource and worthwhile exploring.



Why do you need this funding?

It sounds obvious, but it's important to establish what you need the funding for before you start your application. Make sure your team are in alignment and can deliver the activity if your bid is successful. Also, does this activity support your organisation's strategic priorities? What outcomes do you want to achieve and why? We'll explore this in greater depth later.



What are the funders looking for?

Every funder will have different priorities. For example, some might give priority to organisations who support children and young people. Others might want applicants to focus on a specific geographic area. Make sure you read their priorities to check they match with your own.



Examine the details

Every grant is different. For example, some funders will only cover one year's activities, others might be multi-year. Look at their application process too. You might have to submit an expression of interest (EOI) before you apply, or fill out a form with a limited word-count per section. Find out what's required first before making a start. It's a good idea to write your application in a Word doc then cut-and-paste to an application form, so you've got the content saved if technology fails you mid-application!



Cost it out

It's likely you'll be asked to provide a budget plan when you apply for a grant. Before you apply, take some time to cost out your planned activities. This might involve getting quotes from suppliers. If the funder permits it, aim for full cost recovery (covering staffing and overheads). Every funder will have a minimum and maximum amount of funding available, so make sure your costs aren't too low or high.



Next stages

Funders want to understand your plans for the future. Think about how your planned activities will evolve once this initial funded activity is complete. It's worth bearing in mind that the funder might want to offer you more funding in the future to continue this work.

Top tip: It can help to speak to the funder on the phone, to clarify details and start building a more personal relationship with them.



Building a funding application

Building a good funding application isn't as hard as you might think.

Funders want to see the following:

- Clear information about who you are and why you're the best organisation to deliver this work
- Who this activity will help and why that matters
- What the outcomes of this activity will be
- How you'll monitor and evaluate results
- How much it'll cost you



Who are you?

You don't need to provide a full history. Focus on your key services, your experience and expertise. This section tends to be a short one and helps to 'set the scene'.



Why your organisation?

Your funder wants to know you'll be able to deliver this activity and generate the desired outcomes. Think about how you can give evidence of this. For example, do you have any reports or case studies, or statistics? Testimonials from customers and partners can also help to build the case for support.



Who will you be helping?

Be really clear about who will benefit from this activity and what the outcomes will be. Use numbers where possible.

For example, it's better to say These weekly activities will be attended by 50 families with children under the age of 5, than to be vague with the details.

Funders also like to see evidence that you've co-created your plans with your beneficiaries too, or at least involved them in the development process.

Think about your desired outcomes carefully. For example, those 50 families might feel more confident using storytelling to support their child's literacy and language development.





What will the outcomes be?

It's important to understand the difference between an activity, an outcome and impact.

- An activity is what you'll be doing. Examples include: a weekly sensory play session or a monthly meet-up with younger parents.
- An outcome is what's achieved as a direct result of that activity. This might be that attendees learn new skills or gain knowledge in a particular area.
- Impact is the long-term benefit. Some examples include: children from refugee families feel more welcome in their community, or primary school teachers attending your sessions use the learning to better support d/Deaf children in their school.

Be as clear as possible about what the outcomes and impact will be.

Top tip: Look at the language used in the information provided about the funding. What words does the funder regularly include? This might be: transformative, innovative or empowering, for example. You can include some of these in your bid to make sure the application resonates. This is a common negotiation technique called 'mirroring'!



How are you going to evaluate this?

Every funder wants proof that their money has been used to improve lives. Consider how you'll monitor your activities and evaluate impact. This might include:

- Recorded attendance at your sessions
- Feedback from participants
- Photographs of a product your participants produced
- A video of an event you ran

It's likely you'll have to complete a report for your funder when you've completed the activity, so ensure you're able to collect the required data.



How much will it cost?

Most funders will want to see a budget sheet itemising each cost. An Excel spreadsheet is ideal for this. For better clarity, you might want to separate staffing costs from the direct costs of running the activities.



Tips to make your funding application stand out



Be clear about what you're asking for and how it'll benefit others.



Think about what the funder really wants to know.

They want to see that you have:

- A clear plan for delivery and evaluation
- Consulted with beneficiaries, or even better, actively involved them in developing plans for this activity
- A proven track-record in delivering this type of activity well
- A clear understanding of the funder's priorities too



Use photos, graphs or other related images where possible.

To add interest to your application, . This won't be possible if you're applying using an online form.



Be specific with your targets and goals.

For example, rather than saying many of the participants will feel happier after attending this event, it's better to say 80% of attendees will benefit from increased mental wellbeing after attending.



Don't use jargon or abbreviated terms.

Make life as easy as possible for your funder by keeping your language accessible and clear. For example, they may know what 'CYP' stands for, but it's better to write 'children and young people' to guarantee they understand your application fully.



Preparing for success

There are steps you can take to improve your chances of success.

We recommend following the steps below to get the funding you need:



Get colleagues on-board

The best funding applications are often a team effort. Work with your team (and other stakeholders like partners and customers) to prepare your funding bid. Make sure that your line manager agrees that this is in line with your strategic priorities. Also, a colleague with an eye for detail is useful for proofreading!



Be organised

As time goes on, it's likely you'll want to apply for more than one grant. The following approaches can help you to stay organised:

- **Funding tracker.** It's a good idea to keep track of what funding you've applied for, when you applied, and what the outcome was. Excel is a useful tool for this.
- **Cut-and-paste content.** After applying for a few different grants, you'll notice that you often need to provide the same information on each application. Speed up the process by saving your responses, so you can cut-and-paste then edit them for the next application form you're working on.
- **Record feedback.** Funder feedback can be really useful. Keep records of the feedback you receive, even if your application wasn't successful.
- **Communicate with colleagues.** If other colleagues are applying for funding, develop a system to ensure you don't both mistakenly apply for the same one.





Fact-check

Double-check any statements you make or information you provide to ensure it's correct. It's also a good idea to check your budget to make sure the figures add up.



Map activities against strategic priorities

You'll find it helpful to create a list of activities you'd like to obtain funding for. Then, map each of those activities against your library service's strategic priorities. This will help you to identify which activities to prioritise.



Think about the bigger picture

Funders want to see that your work is not only going to fulfil short-term needs in your community, but contribute to lasting positive change. It helps to have a clear vision of what your 'ultimate goal' will look like. For example, this might be: Every primary-aged child feels they belong in their library and attends at least one library session per month. It's a big ambition, but starting at that exciting end-point can help when creating a roadmap for how you'll achieve it.



Use a SMART approach

Funders like to see that you're using SMART goals. That means your goals are:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time-bound



Be emotive... and sell your library's benefits

Emotive writing can be very effective. After all, you're asking for funding to support an activity that will change people's lives for the better. Keep it realistic, factual and believable, but don't be afraid to tell a compelling story. Remember your unique selling points too. For example, you might have great footfall in your library, or work with a large number of children from a variety of local schools. You might work with multiple local partners. Make sure you don't undersell yourself.

Common mistakes (and how to avoid them)



You're too vague

Avoid too many general statements like 'libraries change lives'. This is true but difficult to prove! Being too general about your proposed activity is inadvisable too. Your funder wants to know the specifics. What are you going to do? When will you do it? How will you involve your beneficiaries right from the start? Be clear and use numbers where possible.



Your budget lacks detail

Not all funders will want a detailed breakdown of your budget (though some will). Check what level of detail they require before you start planning. Avoid 'guesstimating' too much, as this can result in securing too little funding to deliver the activity. Also, if your budget only includes round numbers (e.g. £1000 rather than £940), your funder will suspect you haven't put much thought into costing this out.



Who said what?

If you're going to include quotes, testimonials or references to studies, make sure to let the funder know where they came from. If the testimonial needs to be anonymised, give a general idea of who gave the feedback, such as a partner or customer.



Being overambitious

It's great to have ambitions but important to work within your capacity. See this as a starting point. This funded activity could lead to more activities in the future. The learning could be shared with colleagues, who could then put in a funding application to launch a similar activity in their library. Remember that funders are skilled at spotting when an application is overpromising. They'd rather support you with getting started and help you to grow the impact over time.





Too complicated

Sometimes, the simplest ideas are the most effective. If your proposed activity is complicated, this can make it hard to describe in a funding application. If your funder is confused, it's less likely they'll understand your vision, and less likely they'll award you the funding.



Unnecessary information

Once you've drafted your application, read it through carefully. It's possible you've included information that isn't totally relevant to the bid. You might have also repeated yourself in different sections. If you've got enough time before the deadline, put the application to one side for a few days, then review with fresh eyes. This can really help to identify all unnecessary information and repetition.



Weak evaluation process

You need to show your funder that your evaluation process is robust. Tell them clearly how you plan to collect data, track progress and measure the outcomes at the end. It can also help to tell the funder what you plan to do with the evaluation afterwards. For example, you could create a report to share your learning with colleagues.



Sustainability

Your funder wants to be reassured that this will have lasting impact. Tell them if you have plans to secure further funding once this activity is complete, or broaden your partnership-working to spread the learning more widely within your community, for example.



Cross-partnership working

Funders like to see that you're working with partners to deliver activities, as this offers a more joined-up experience for the beneficiaries. If you're working with partners, make sure to mention this in your bid. Even better, obtain a quote from a partner or two to emphasise how beneficial this activity will be.