

Guide

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# A funder's view on making a funding application

An interview with **Adam  
Jeanes**, Senior Relationship  
Manager at Arts Council  
England by **Wendy Smithers**



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***What should we be thinking about or doing before we go anywhere near a funding form?***

You need to be credible as an individual and an organisation. Think about how you can use your track record to help your application.

Make sure you research the funder before approaching them. Use their website and call them if you are unsure about anything, don't be shy. Even if it is not right for them, they may put you in touch with another funder where there is a better fit.

Know where you are and where you are trying to get to. How does this match with where your funder is trying to get to? What are you trying to achieve and what have you already achieved? If these things are clear before you start fundraising, you're much more likely to be successful.

Finances are important, if you're putting on a show the numbers need to add up. What level of risk are you taking and is this an appropriate amount of risk? Weigh this up before you start making and submitting bids.

Don't add in a blanket 10% management fee, unless it can be explained in relation to the project or the funder operates a full cost recovery model where a 10% overheads fee is acceptable. If the funder states they will not fund core costs or management fees, ensure any staff costs are for project management or delivery staff who will be carrying out the project.

***What common mistakes are best avoided?***

Not balancing the budget. Income and expenditure should equal the same! Breakdown all figures where you can so it is clear how you have arrived at them, particularly the large figures.

Always talking about yourself with no reference to why it is relevant to the funder or with no evidence or back up.

Avoid a boring first paragraph or one that doesn't excite or make sense. Get to the point!

Don't forget to refer to the aims of the funder.

***What are the key ingredients of a successful application?***

Being ambitious but realistic. Applications that are too far-fetched will not be successful.

Don't be put off by duplication; it could be your activity is complementary to other programmes. It's more important to demonstrate understanding of what else is happening in your sector/field.

A credible budget but not just that, a credible financial scenario to go with it.

Making/creating something exciting and inspiring that funders themselves would want to see. Think about what makes it attractive and understand the size and impact of what you are trying to do.

Use clear and simple English but do express enthusiasm for what you are trying to achieve.

***How can you best build a relationship with a funder?***

It depends on the funder. Each will have their own rules and you should be led by them as to what level of communication is appropriate. Check their website for what level of reporting and contact they would like. If there is little information given, don't be afraid to take the lead, they will let you know if you are contacting them too often or sending too much information.

Make sure you keep communication open at all times, even more so when things go wrong. If you have problems with artists, venues, partners or finances don't be afraid to discuss the issue with the funder. They won't think less of you and will be happy to offer an opinion as to how things could be resolved. It is better that they are a part of this conversation than that they find out from a third party that things have changed or gone wrong. Remember it's their money you're using.

Always credit your funders and use their logos correctly.

***How important is the partnership factor?***

It can be really important, particularly if you are starting out, as it gives a funder confidence to know that others believe in you and your idea. Even if your partners have an informal role (eg a mentor) or are providing in-kind support (eg room hire, tech staff or equipment etc) it will give your application weight and credibility.

It can also be important in financial terms. If you can identify partners who can support the project, even if in-kind, you can demonstrate financial risk is better spread, as well as showing other partners are committed to the project.

It is also relevant in artistic terms. If you are naming peers and companies that are known and respected as your project partners, this can help the artistic credibility of your case and assure a funder of the quality of your work.

***How important is evidence of impact/track record? What if we are an emerging artist or company rather than firmly established?***

If you can show you have attracted audiences in the past, this will help but just as important are any reviews or references you can add to make the case for the quality of your work. Back up what you say with any evidence, quotes or statistics. Talk to venues you're working with and get some information on their audiences and a quote from them as to why your show is right for them.

If you are new to the scene, demonstrate understanding of your scene/sector and awareness of what is happening in it. Mention any relevant partners or mentors you are working with who can help demonstrate your credibility as an artist or organisation. Whenever you can use photos or film to better tell your story.

Make sure you deliver all evaluation and reporting promised and follow up on what you said you would and offer something extra if you can. Think about your next application/ask and how you position that in your evaluation. What did the grant help you do, what did you learn and what do you want to do next?

***What would you do if you were fundraising?***

I'd always start with the Artistic Vision. What am I trying to realise/create? Then I'd break it down into the key steps to achieve it. I would consider who it was for, what it would cost and how I'd resource it.