

Project Development & Funding

Why is it important to you?

Our communities are constantly evolving, some at a faster pace than others, and it is essential for the village hall or community centre to keep up to date with the ever changing needs of the community it serves. Not only is this key to meeting the objectives of the charity, but if it fails to change with the community then the frequency of use is likely to drop and the future viability of the charity may be at risk.

Village Hall projects can range anywhere from new kitchen equipment (a tea urn, microwave etc.) to a new extension or even a whole new building. It is good practice, if possible, to put some money aside each month for maintenance. This will help to keep the hall in a good state of repair and be a welcoming building rather than one which is a chore to use. However, sometimes it can be difficult to do this and even more difficult to save money for new equipment or a building project such as new toilets. It may be necessary to seek funding to help achieve improvement projects. In recent years, due to demand, obtaining funding has become more competitive and the need to submit a strong application has become even more important.

Key Points

Fit for funding (organisation)

Generally speaking there are a number of factors which must be satisfied before approaching a funding organisation for a grant. In almost all cases your organisation will be requested to submit a copy of the Governing Document (constitution etc), the last full set of accounts, and any relevant policies (such as child protection or equal opportunities etc.). Some funding organisations will only consider applications from registered charities.

If any of your organisation's documents are not up to date, then it is recommended to seek advice to get them updated as there is no point working on applications for projects which will be automatically rejected due to a technicality. There are a number of model policies for various issues available from voluntary sector support organisations such as CRCC.

Fit for funding (project)

Once you have checked that your organisation is "fit for funding" then you will need to ensure that your project application also fits the criteria set by funding organisations. The amount of supporting information required to

assist a decision is typically relative to the size of the grant requested. As village hall projects can be so diverse this sheet can only aim to cover the general principles.

The first place to start is to understand the role your organisation plays in a funding equation. Simply put; a funder will have a set of priorities relating to the type of improvements or benefits they wish to invest in. For example, Age Concern may fund projects where older members of the community will benefit. The village hall may be the mechanism through which that benefit is delivered, such as a lunch club for senior citizens. Therefore a lot of the information required in most application forms is about the changes made to the beneficiary. Equipment or a structural change to the village hall, although important, is merely the method through which the benefit is delivered.

For smaller projects it is usually enough to say that you have consulted with the user groups of the hall and that “X project” has been proposed to improve the circumstances. With larger projects it can be necessary to provide evidence of that consultation, such as a report of the findings from a community survey.

Letters of support, particularly from institutions or groups that will benefit from the project will also provide good evidence.

You should find out how many people will benefit from this project, what their specific needs are, e.g. elderly, very young etc., and how it will improve their lives. Also, you

need to be able to show that the benefits are achievable within a specific time-frame.

This information can be presented by creating “SMART Outcomes”. An “Outcome” is funders’ jargon for the benefits delivered by the project and SMART is an acronym standing for Specific-Measurable-Achievable-Realistic-Timely. An example of a SMART Outcome may be: “The Karate class will recruit 6 new members within 6 months of the project completion.” Phrasing your Outcomes like this gives a clear understanding of what it is you hope to achieve. It can be easier to write your Outcomes by first establishing what the benefits are and if they are Achievable. How would you Measure the benefits e.g. the number of people doing something new. Is this Realistic, have you said that 300 people will benefit when really it is more likely to be 50? Can you be anymore Specific (whilst remaining concise) about your Outcomes and in what Timeframe do you expect to achieve them?

You will need to get accurate costs for the project. Again, on very large projects this can be difficult as they generally take longer to develop and a percentage change in material costs over time can make a huge difference to the end cost, plus the timescales of receiving tenders and responses from funders do not always compliment each other. However, a toilet extension could be quoted for by a local builder and minor fluctuations in material costs should not affect the project.

You will usually have to explain in your application how you plan to monitor and evaluate the success of your project. Is the project on course to meet the stated Outcomes? On completion of the project you will need to evaluate or assess the effectiveness of the project and may need to provide a report for the funder.

Local fundraising

Ideally you will have some money saved towards your project and may also be actively fundraising through different events and collections. Approach your Parish or Town Council to see if they can support the project. Similarly approach your District Council to check the availability of grants for your project. Ask about their Community Strategy as a reference to supporting village halls could strengthen your application to regional and national funding organisations. The monetary value of a local grant is important, but it also displays for the project locally.

Searching for grants

Sources of funding may include funding programmes from Government initiatives, the National Lottery and about 4,500 grant giving Charitable Trusts. There are a number of ways in which you can search these sources, but it can still be very time consuming. It is often helpful to get in touch with local voluntary sector funding advisors.

It may be possible to fund smaller projects from one source of funding. However, often for medium to larger sized projects you will

need to combine funding from a number of sources; this is known as Match Funding.

Loans

If your organisation is considering taking a loan then it is recommended to speak with a lender that has experience of lending to community groups. For instance there are organisations such as Charity Bank and ACRE who offer loans specifically for charities and village halls respectively. The CRCC also has a small interest free loan available for village halls.

Business planning

It is always a good idea to have some kind of plan for the future of the organisation no matter how small. A business plan can assist in forming ideas to make the organisation sustainable or to be more prepared to overcome particular issues. Similarly, for large applications, many funders will require a copy of your business plan to see how the project fits in with the overall organisational plan. It also helps them to see how organised you are as a committee or board and will show how well planned and realistic the project is before they decide to invest in it. Business planning advice is available from voluntary sector support organisations; they may also have an appropriate model for use.

FAQs

This is a good project and we really need the money, are we guaranteed to succeed?

Unfortunately there is not usually enough funding to meet the needs of every application and so most funders are oversubscribed with applications. This is why it is important to submit as strong an application as possible and don't assume that because you know the geographical context, local problems, and potential solutions that the funder will. It is also the reason why your evidence of need for the project is so important.

The Youth Club are thinking about making applications for kitchen improvements to start cookery classes, can they apply on behalf of the village hall?

If the building is owned or leased by the village hall or community centre charity then applications must be made by the charity and not a separate group. The Youth Club should work very closely with the hall committee to ensure the application includes all the relevant information about the project Outcomes.

Further information

ACRE publications (available from CRCC):

- Funding trusts for village halls and community centres (£4)
- Village Halls and Community Centres – funding their provision (£3)

CRCC's Money Matters

www.cornwallmoneymatters.org.uk

Access Funds

www.Access-Funds.co.uk (Free 7 day trial)

The Directory of Social Change

www.trustfunding.org.uk

GRANTfinder

www.grantfinder.co.uk

Profunding

www.fundinginformation.org

FunderFinder

www.funderfinder.org.uk

If you know of a neighbouring hall that has successfully achieved a similar project then it may be useful to meet with them to discuss their experience.

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supporting cornish communities



LOTTERY FUNDED

Cornwall Rural Community Council
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www.cornwallrcc.co.uk/community_buildings.html

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