

The Fore: How to write a good application

Webinar

Webinar transcript

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Welcome to The Fore. This webinar is intended to help people who have registered for one of our funding rounds to write the best possible application document.

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The Fore is a pioneering funder with a mission to find, empower and accelerate innovative young charities and social enterprises with exceptional leadership that have the potential to transform society. Since 2017 we have given away over £6m in unrestricted funding and offered skills support to over 450 grantees.

We are looking to fund small organisations. That includes charities working with marginalised groups and led by people in the community that may have found it hard to access trust and foundation funding in the past. Our funding process is specifically designed to level the playing field and give no advantage to those with fundraising experience or connections. We are trying to be different from other funders and to make it easier for organisations who don't have fundraising experience to get the support they need.

The Fore's ethos is one of partnership – we trust small organisations to tell us what they need. The Fore's grants programme is 'charity-led'. Organisations can request up to £30,000 (spread over 1-3 years) for whatever they need most to transform their organisation. Applicants can work in any location or sector, and grantees set their own targets for the grant term with the support of our assessors. There are no long application or monitoring forms, and we guarantee feedback to every applicant.

In addition to our unrestricted funding we offer wraparound support.

The Fore helps small charities upskill their organisations in two ways: firstly, by hosting training workshops on a variety of topics, and secondly by connecting organisations with professionals from our pro bono network who have a wide range of skills including business planning, strategy development and financial management.

Small charities frequently report that they struggle to meet the impact measurement standards that many funders now demand. The Fore provides a combination of programmes and workshops to help organisations develop their impact management, putting them in a stronger position to apply for other funders in future.

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So who is eligible for The Fore's funding? The funding is open to:

- All UK-registered charities
- Community Interest Companies (CICs)
- Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs)
- Community Benefit Societies (CBSs)

with annual incomes under **£500,000**.

We particularly encourage smaller charities and social enterprises with turnover of under £100,000 to think about applying.

If you had income over £0.5m last year, you are not eligible, even if you know your income this year will be under the threshold.

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To apply for the Fore's funding you must first register on our registration day. We have a cap on the number of applications we can assess in each funding round, to ensure that each application gets the time and attention it deserves from our grant assessors. Registration involves filling in a very simple form with basic details about your organisation and full details of how to register can be found on our website on the same page that you find this webinar.

You then have 3-4 weeks until the deadline to submit an application. In this time, you need to write your application document and submit it online using the link emailed to you when you register.

The application document is a maximum of 3 A4 pages.

We have no set application form. We want you to be able to tell the story of your organisation in the way that makes sense to you.

The application document is your pitch for an interview with a grant assessor. It's your chance to make your case in your own words and your own format, and we are not looking for perfect language or design work – a simple word document is fine!

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At The Fore, we do funding a bit differently to what you might be used to from other funders. We don't fund project based work or 'business as usual'. Instead, we want our grants to have a transformative effect on the charities we support. We are looking to invest in your organisational capacity and strength. We want our grants to help you get to the next level – to make a step change for your organisation. Our funding might help your organisation to grow, increase your internal capacity, increase your reach to serve new beneficiary groups, become more sustainable, or more efficient – we don't mind, we just

want you to be able to be better at what you do. Please read our blog post and take a look at the case studies of our grantees on our website to find out more about what we consider to be transformational impact.

Organisations who successfully receive funding from the Fore are able to demonstrate both that the grant would have a truly transformative impact on the charity itself (not just the beneficiaries); and that the charity has strong management and inspiring leadership from senior leaders and trustees.

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We don't have an application form. Instead we just ask you to write a simple Word document with four sections. The Application should be 3 pages long at most. These are the key sections and I'll go through each in more detail. Firstly a short description of your organisation and its leadership. Secondly, your request for funds, and how the funding will help your organisation be stronger or better. Thirdly, a few simple targets for the grant and finally a basic financial table.

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The first part of the application should be the short description of your organisation. This needs to cover four main aspects of your work – hopefully you might even be able to cut and paste from other documents or funding applications you've written previously

Firstly, tell us what issue your organisation is addressing?

Are you helping people in debt sort out their finances, or providing mental health services to children, or you may be bringing together isolated older people in your community. Whatever it is, tell us your mission and why you do what you do.

Secondly, tell us what work do you do and how do you know it works?

We need to understand what your activities are – are you running workshops and groups, tutoring children, putting on theatre productions or campaigning for change? How is your work changing things and having a positive impact on people's lives?

Thirdly, you need to tell us about the demand for your work?

How do you know your work is needed? Do you have a waiting list of people to support, or organisations wanting to partner with you? How does your work fill a gap and complement the work of other organisations in your local area working on similar issues?

Fourthly, tell us who is running the organisation and why are you the best people to do this?

We want to hear about their expertise and skills of the people running your organisation which might have been developed through lived experience, professional experience or training. Tell us why your leadership team and board are best placed to work on the issues you are addressing.

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The second section of the application is the funding request.

Our grants are intended to help your organisation become stronger or better at what you do. In this section you should tell us how the grant would create transformational change for your organisation.

Do you need to invest money in new IT systems so you can track your beneficiaries and help more people? Or perhaps you need to hire a coordinator so you can increase the number of volunteers you are working with. Perhaps it's time to hire your first paid member of staff? We'd like you to tell us. You are the experts in what you need!

We are looking to give you funding so you can plan for the longer term and think about your growth or sustainability. Maybe, once you've spent our money you might be in a more secure place because you have created more funding streams, you might have expanded to a new area or community, or proved that you can help people in a different way. It might be something new and risky or it might be something less exciting, but essential to your efficiency and sustainability. Tell us what will help you take your organisation forward.

So, in this section make sure you've mentioned:

Firstly, how much funding you are applying for - £30,000 is the maximum but you can apply for less than that.

Secondly, over what time period you want the funds – funding can be spread over 1 to 3 years.

And finally, tell us what you propose to spend the money on to enable the transformational change to happen. We do not require a full budget breakdown, just a brief explanation of how the money would lead to the change you want to see for your organisation.

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To help us understand what the grant will achieve for you, we ask you to set some simple targets for your organisation that link to what you are trying to achieve in the funding request.

I'm now going to give three examples which I hope will help you understand the sorts of things we're looking for in your targets.

They are all examples and you need to think about what is right for you and your organisation. Again, it doesn't need to be perfect. Applicants that are short-listed will get to sit down with our assessors and talk things through so the targets can be refined.

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Here is an example of an application with some simple targets.

Imagine you are a group that works with older adults in the community. You have recently moved to remote delivery and need new IT systems to do this effectively. The council are

also asking for your advice because they can't reach many of the isolated individuals that you are helping. If you can track the numbers of people you're working with and keep better records, and start measuring your impact, the council might give you funding in future.

For a one year grant the target therefore could be to research, purchase and install the equipment. Then to make sure everyone who needs to use it, is trained and that people keep using the new systems. And thirdly to continue to develop conversations with the council into a partnership agreement where you support 50 older adults they refer on to you.

This is transformational as it improves the efficiency of the organisation, enables better impact measurement, and unlocks a new partnership and potential income stream from the council.

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The second example is for a two year grant.

In this example, you are a charity that provides debt advice. You currently have no paid staff members, your model uses volunteers to work with your clients. These volunteers are managed by one of your trustees in their spare time. You have a waiting list for your services and you know there are lots of people who would like to volunteer but no one has any time to find and train the new volunteers and look after them.

A two year grant could solve this by paying for a part-time volunteer coordinator.

In the first 6 months you could be writing a job description, interviewing candidates, choosing one and training a new coordinator.

In the second six months the targets could be for the new coordinator to recruit and train 20 more volunteers, and the trustee with time freed up would be able to submit funding bids.

In Year 2, the targets would be to work with 200 additional beneficiaries, Secondly to recruit and train 20 more volunteers and thirdly to submit 5 further funding bids.

This is transformational as it not only increases your capacity to meet the demand for your service, but also frees up your trustee to focus on fundraising, helping you become more financially sustainable and grow your income to sustain the new paid role in future.

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The third example is for a three year grant. In this example you are a youth organisation working with girls at risk of involvement in gangs and youth violence. YOu set up the organisation, and you have three volunteer staff. Demand has skyrocketed with the demands of the pandemic and parents and young people are self-referring. You need more time to think about strategy and fundraising but you are currently spending all your time delivering workshops and mentoring young women. You see that lots of funders are encouraging applications from organisations like yours, but you have no time to apply. You only have two trustees who are both your friends. You have a brilliant volunteer who could do more of the

workshops and mentoring for you but you need to pay them. Funding for a part time role would give you time to concentrate on building the organisation and raising more funds.

So in this example, the targets for Year one might be to recruit and onboard your Programme Officer and hand over the delivery of activities to them. Secondly, to create an initial fundraising plan and write 5 applications, and thirdly to bring on two new trustees, one with business planning expertise and one with a legal background.

In year two, your targets could be to create a strategy and a full fundraising plan, and secondly to write 10 funding applications including one for over £30,000.

In the third year, your fundraising from previous years means you can extend the Programme Officer role to full time. The other targets might be to fundraise to ensure the continuation of the Programme Officer role, and then to double the number of beneficiaries supported.

This is transformational through creating capacity in your organisation, ensuring you retain your talented colleague and freeing up your time to fundraise and make the longer term plans needed to ensure sustainability and future growth.

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The final section of the application document is the financial table. We want to understand a bit more about your organisation's past finances and the story of how your finances could change if you had funding from The Fore. Assume for this table that you receive the funding you have requested from us and successfully realise the benefits from it that you aim to achieve. For example, if you are requesting to hire someone to do more of the delivery so you are freed up to do fundraising, include imagine how much more you will be able to raise.

This table is just an example. Fill in the headings with your own financial year end.

Don't panic if the information you are providing seems to be sparse. Some of you will have several years of past financial information to put in, but some of you will be new organisations. Again, don't worry, just enter as much information as you have.

In the table we ask you to split your income into restricted and unrestricted income. Restricted income refers to income that can be spent only for a specific purpose. Typically this reflects restrictions placed on a grant by a donor who might have funded you for a specific project. Unrestricted income refers to income that has no such limitations and can be used for any expenditure approved by your Board of Trustees. You might have unrestricted income if you have received a grant to cover your core costs such as rent, utilities and salaries. Or you may have earned income from running a café or selling tickets for a performance—that income will be unrestricted.

Over time, you may have built up reserves—income that you haven't yet spent. Sometimes this built-up income will be restricted to a specific project. But if it comes from earned income, an unrestricted grant or donations, it will have helped you build up some

unrestricted reserves. We want to know how much you have in unrestricted reserves so we can see whether your organisation has a cushion, and if so, how much.

Underneath your table, you can write a note if there is anything unusual about your financial history or your projections that you would like to explain further to your assessor.

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In summary, a good application should:

- Be a maximum of three pages long.
- Include a short description of your organisation, your funding request, your targets and your basic financial table.
- It is a pitch for an interview - *Don't worry* if it's not perfect.
- And finally, the application should make a request that would make your organisation stronger in the long term

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So, what happens next? Once you have submitted your application, all applications are reviewed by a grant assessor.

Short-listed applicants are invited for a phone conversation with the assessor and the assessor will contact you by email to arrange this call.

In this meeting you will have a chance to discuss your application in more depth and refine your ideas.

In consultation with the programme team at the Fore, the assessor will select finalists to be considered for funding by one of our panels. The assessor will prepare the final report for the panel and will present your request.

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Our process is extremely competitive. This is why we consider it vital to guarantee every applicant feedback.

Depending on how far you get in the process, this will either be written or verbal. The further you go, the more detailed feedback you will get from your assessor. If unsuccessful, you can re-apply as often and as soon as you like. Successful organisations have often applied unsuccessfully before, so we do encourage you to take the feedback on board and try again.

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The Fore offers a range of wraparound support for both applicants and grantees.

All applicants can access our workshops programme by signing up to the charities mailing list available on the charities page of our website. Any organisation can post a trusteeship opportunity on our pro bono directory. You can do this through the form on the Skills and Training page of the website.

The further you make it through the due diligence process the more wraparound support you can access. Assessors will select their top applicants from the shortlist to put forward for pro bono support even if they do not receive funding. If you receive a grant, grantees have access to our pro bono match-making throughout the lifetime of their grant and are also offered a free place on an impact measurement course.

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Thank you for listening, and we wish you the best of luck with your application. If you have any other questions that are covered by the webinar or the resources on the website, you can email us at info@thefore.org.