

Step 4 – Application Go!

Key Principles

'The cream always floats to the top'

Hints & Tips! Application Go! Before writing your application take a moment to review all the paperwork and make some notes. A little preparation at this stage can go a long way to making the development of your application a lot easier and can help you avoid some mistakes that will cost you time and cause frustration.

Start Early

Hints & Tips! Application Go! Start writing your application well ahead of the closing date, even if you think you have plenty of time and even if the application appears 'easy'.

Like most things in life, doing a good job takes time. Completing a good quality application is no exception. Do not leave your application to the last minute! Start on the application as soon as you can and aim to finish it ahead of time. This will ensure that you can produce the best work you can and will also help you avoid the considerable pressure of an imminent funding deadline. Taking this approach also gives you a buffer for unexpected difficulties in writing the application. Some applications can appear deceptively easy – you may only realize the extent of work required part way through so start early even if you think you have plenty of time. You also need to consider the amount of time required for getting all the necessary supporting information – letters of support and other documents may take longer than writing the application.

The Alien Principle

Hints & Tips! Application Go! Write your application as though the person reading it will know nothing about your organisation, your project, or your community. Never assume that anything will be obvious to the reader.

In all likelihood your application will be read and assessed by people who know nothing about your situation. They will be judging the merits of your application, and every other application, entirely on the basis of what is presented in it. Sometimes you may be so close to the project that you fail to get the message across to others. Write the application as if you were writing it to an alien:

- Assume the reader will know absolutely nothing about your organisation, the project, or the area.
- Include photos, maps, and diagrams to further portray key information (as appropriate given the specific nature of the application form and requirements of the guidelines)

Answer All, Answer Right

Hints & Tips! Application Go! Assessment will be based on the responses you provide to the questions. Answer the question - read the question and think about your answer. Every question is relevant to the assessors! Answer every question even if it seems to be asking the same thing and even if you feel you have answered it elsewhere in the application.

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Hints & Tips! Application Go! Try to provide short, clear answers – use as few words as possible to get your points across. Use 'dot points' if you can. If necessary, provide more explanation below the short points or in the attachments.

- Read the questions and completely answer them (surprising how often this does not happen). Include additional information on related key points you want to make but do so after the key information requested by the question is presented.
- Adhere to answer lengths. Some funding agencies have word limits on the answers to their questions. If you exceed the word limits they may ignore part of your answer. Some also have electronic entry as part of the assessment process with 'hard' limits, which means that they will not be able to enter your entire answer if you exceed the stated limits.

- Never leave a blank; always put something in or, if it does not apply, put 'not applicable'. Even if you have addressed the question elsewhere include an answer again. Assessors often have to read scores, even hundreds, of applications – they often use marking criteria for each question so if you have not answered a particular question you could score badly in that question even if you have answered it elsewhere in the application.
- Short then Long –. Use short sentences and dot points on key points you want to get across at the start followed by a more detailed description on important or complex points. Getting key points across in a clear and simple manner will help assessors immediately see your main points.
- Use 'Alien Speak' (Jargon) – Use exactly the same jargon as in the guidelines and link your application to the key words and phrases contained in the application guidelines and application form.
- Highlight Key Statements – Use underlining, italics or bold type (underlining is probably the best as it tends to remain clear when photocopies are made).
- Talk it Down, Talk it Up – Always point out the problems driving your need for the funding but put a good 'spin' on the project in your answers. Show how your project will help to solve the problems noted.
- Link to Attachments – Where additional relevant information is included make a statement clearly linking your answers to the attachments – e.g. For further information 'see Attachment A'

The Timetable

Some applications require inclusion of a timetable for the project. This involves dividing the project into stages or steps and showing their ordering and the time required for each stage – project stages are sometimes called Project Milestones¹. Ensure that you set realistic times and include provision for any delays (err on the cautious side). Some funding programs will link the payment of the grant to the completion of these steps in which case they will become Payment Milestones² – and you may be required to link project expenditures to these milestones.

The Budget

Hints & Tips! Application Go! *The budget is an important part of your application. Getting it right helps demonstrate your professionalism and strengthens the assessor's belief in your capacity to execute the project. Spend some time getting it right – get help if you need to.*

Most applications will require you to complete a project budget. While some funding applications only require a basic budget summary (mainly smaller grants) most will require a moderate to high level of detail. Failing to complete a detailed and accurate budget is a common source of application error. Mistakes in the budget can cause your application to fail.

- Check Funding Limits – Ensure that your requested funding amount falls within the limits of the maximum allowable funding under the program. If you exceed a stated maximum it is likely that your application will be rejected. At best, you will only receive part of the amount you request.
- Eligible Items – Check the guidelines to determine that your project items are allowed. If your budget includes items which are not eligible your application may be rejected.
- Include all cost items – Carefully consider your project to ensure that all the cost items have been included. If you fail to do this, the funding agency may lose confidence in your ability to complete the project and may decide not to make a funding contribution.
- Contributions – Contributions from other sources (including your organisation) are generally expected. Sometimes minimum co-contributions are stated. If you fail to meet minimum co-contribution requirements your application will be rejected. Even where minimums are not stated it is good practice to show at least some contribution from other sources as this demonstrates commitment to the project.
- Value in-kind contributions – donations of labour and materials, venue use, expert advice etc should all be valued at normal purchase rates. Provide justification for the values you place on these items.

¹ Jargon Explained! **Project Milestones** - Steps or stages in the completion of a project.

² Jargon Explained! **Payment Milestones** - Steps or stages in the completion of a project which are linked to payments of grant funds.

Include Supporting Documentation

Hints & Tips! Application Go! Prove your points and build your case by including relevant supporting information and documents which support the arguments you make in your application.

Include relevant extra information in the attachments. Subject to the specific nature of your project and the application, consider including the following:

- Area Background - regional or Shire description (relevant basic statistics and information); maps clearly showing where the project will occur in reference to an easily identifiable large centre.
- Organisation Background - organisational charter/mission and description; copies of relevant incorporation documents, GST registration documents and so on; audited financial statements and/or bank statements.
- Project Background – Include quotations and excerpts from relevant documents and reports supporting the need and rationale for your project.
- Project Details – Include specific details and documentation relevant to your project e.g. project plans, supplier quotes, site/title details and other documents relating to the project.
- Letters of Support – Include letters of support for your project. Letters of support can help you substantiate items cited in your application (e.g. funding partnerships, in-kind support, necessary approvals, evidence of project need and benefit).

Getting Letters of Support

- As many as possible – the more the better - particularly target key groups of relevance to the grant funding program. Individual community members can also be relevant (e.g. children writing about how hot their classroom is in relation to an application seeking funding for air-conditioning...)
- Avoid compromising the application by using people who are ‘too close to the assessment process’.
- Always send information to prospective writers - People are busy and are not necessarily informed of your projects. This will ensure that the letter of support contains relevant statements about your application. Write ‘sample’ or ‘pro-forma letters of support if required.
- Always include relevant response information in your request – date by which you require the letter, person to whom it should be addressed, mode by which it should be sent (e.g. fax back, post, email).
- Always include your contact details – They cannot respond if they do not know where to send it!

Application Review

Find any shortcomings in your application before lodgement. Review your application content before compiling it to check that it reads well and is free from spelling errors and typos.

Consider external review. A good practice, particularly for complex applications, is to have someone else (who has had no involvement in the application or project) read through it. If they can then tell you what the application is about, why it is needed and how much money you are seeking there is every chance the assessor will too!

Application Production

Hints & Tips! Application Go! Good quality presentation can help your application stand out from the crowd.

Application Compilation

Now it's time to compile your application and all the attachments and put the whole package together. Usually, the better and more professional the presentation the more credible you appear and the greater the chance of success of the application. However, check the quality of presentation required and any special requirements of the funding program. Consider the following: quality of printing and reproductions/photocopies; binding; cover page – consider modifying the cover page in some way to distinguish your application from others; covering letter - addressed to the *right* person or group; number of copies required (always keep a copy for yourself); and check whether original signatures are required on all copies to be submitted.

Compilation Check

Hints & Tips! Application Go! The assessors will evaluate what you submit to them. Check to make sure that the copies to be submitted are in good order and contain all the information you want to present.

Before sending the application look through the final copies one last time to make sure they are fine. You should check things such as the following: all pages are included; all attachments are included; pages are all legible; no missing or blank pages; no loose pages, page numbering is correct etc.

Submitting Your Application

Hints & Tips! Application Go! Submitting a poor quality application will undermine your chance of success and may also jeopardize future applications to that agency.

Never submit a half finished or a 'botched job'. A poor quality application is unlikely to be successful. Submitting a poor quality application may also undermine your credibility and jeopardize future success in that program or even other programs administered by that agency.

Hints & Tips! Application Go! Even the best application will certainly fail if it is sent to the wrong place or is sent after the closing date.

Make sure you submit your application in time to reach the funding agency before the closing date. Some funding agencies will accept applications which are post-marked on the closing date, others will not. Some agencies will give you leeway for receipt via post if you ring first and fax or email a copy, some will not. Check!

Check the preferred manner of submission – email, fax, or post. If using an electronic lodgement system check to make sure that the application was received by the funding agency. If posting your application, consider sending it via a means which allows you to track its delivery (e.g. Express Post or Courier). If using fax, check the transmission receipt to ensure that the transmission did go through and that all pages were sent – if it does not have a date and time printout, write the date and time on the transmission receipt.

Congratulations! You have finished the fourth key step 'Application Go'!

You're ready for Step 5 – 'Application Limbo'!

FundAssist Quick Guide to Successful Funding Applications - Part 5: Application Limbo

FundAssist is a leading consulting firm providing expert funding assistance services to local governments and community groups throughout regional Australia.

We can help you in all aspects of the funding process at whatever stage you need help – whether it is planning your project(s) and your funding strategies, identifying applicable funding programs, developing funding submissions and briefings promoting your project, preparing grant applications, or completing project management and reporting requirements after you have received funding.

Our funding services have assisted many clients with a wide range of projects.

Contact us to find out how we can help you.

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