

Common reasons why bids fail

The following points are based on feedback from a range of major funders which are listed at the end of this hand-out:

Eligibility: funders often receive applications from organisations and individuals which they cannot fund within their own rules. These applications are a waste of everyone's time.

Funders criteria: many applications fall outside the funders' own criteria (e.g. the BBC Children in Need Trust aims to benefit disadvantaged under 18's, but still receives many bids which don't show how their target group is disadvantaged), or do not fit the funders priorities or outcomes. Lloyds TSB Foundation's top reason for failure was that the applicants' core work was not sufficiently focused on the Foundation's mission or bids were outside of their guidelines.

Planning Projects: often bids fail because the project is not well planned or managed with unclear milestones and delivery methods. Comic Relief stressed groups need to demonstrate the skills and capacity to carry out the work and show they have a well planned and managed project. Esmee Fairbairn give useful examples of work plans on their website as again this is one of the reasons for failed bids. Capacity builders found some bids showed how projects would fit strategies and outcomes but without the detail of how the project would be delivered on the ground. Bids should involve those who understand strategies and those who understand how to plan and deliver activities. Even a bid for a computer or a vehicle needs to show how it would be stored, insured and used and by whom. Has the group thought through all the implications of taking on this new piece of equipment, vehicle, post, premises, etc.?

Costing: are the figures realistic - enough to pay for the work in question? Do they represent good value for money? Has the group handled similar sums before? What financial controls do they have in place?

Bids to benefit organisations, not people: a bid to keep a group going (or even keep someone in a job!) is less attractive to a funder than one to provide a much needed service with clearly identified end benefits. Similarly, 'we need a computer' has less impact than 'with a computer we could keep our records more efficiently, freeing up time to spend with our service users'. Funders tend to prefer projects rather than continuation funding.

Involvement: BIG's Reaching communities programme have rejected bids on the grounds that they did not appear to involve either the projects' beneficiaries or local people. Both the National Lottery Community Fund and BBC Children in Need are concerned about bids which do not appear to come from the group - i.e. they seem to have been submitted on their behalf by support workers.

Need: not enough evidence of need including using statistics not related to the project. Groups could do a survey of users/potential users, use waiting lists and referrals, ask people what their needs are and record this, use local research and related statistics from the health/local authority etc.

Timescales: very few funders will make grants retrospectively - i.e. after the project has taken place. Groups need to bear in mind it can take months to consider an application, so applications should be submitted well in advance of the funding deadline - if a group wants to run a play scheme in the summer holidays they should not be applying in June - even if they have the money to 'lend' to the play scheme.

Outcomes (SMART): many of the larger funders state the main reason bids fail is that they do not have SMART outcomes showing how the project will benefit people and the 'change'

that will occur. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based. SMART outcomes should include the specific expected benefit i.e. how many people will benefit, that the outputs can realistically be met and achieved within a specified time-scale with the resources available to the project. An example of SMART outcomes might be: the project will enable 20 young children to develop confidence through attending a week-long summer programme of 12, 2 hour drama workshops.

Form-filling and additional documents: all questions should be answered on the application form (unless the form states they are optional) - not just on other enclosed documents so the funders have to hunt for the information e.g. if they ask for details about accounts on the form they need copying in even if they also ask for accounts to be enclosed. Governing documents and policies may also be asked for. If these are not made available bids may be ineligible.

Match funding: if match funding is required, it must be secured before a grant will be released.

Partnerships: bids have failed with some funders because applicants had not formed clear partnerships with groups cited in the bid.

Long-term funding: projects receiving large investments will need to demonstrate how they will become sustainable, through providing an outline of their exit strategy for the end of the project or a plan to continue funding their project through a mix of funding options including generating income. For major capital projects, applicants will need to show how they plan to raise funds for the long-term running costs and maintenance.

Other common weaknesses which have been identified by a wide range of different funders include:

- the bid did not show how the project was additional to statutory services
- the bid did not reach minimum quality standards