

Toolkit

A simple guide to attracting people and writing grant applications to support community and voluntary groups

Available to attendees of the Grant Writing Session 7th May 2024.

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1 Introduction

This toolkit is designed as an easy to follow practical guide to help community volunteers to attract more people and finance.

2 How to use this toolkit

The toolkit provides you with a template in Microsoft Word format which you can fill in and have ready so that you can more easily complete applications for funding. It is laid out like a workbook, containing blank tables for you to complete. If there is not sufficient space in the tables then expand the cells or add cells as you need.

Perhaps the biggest issue facing voluntary bodies is a shortage of volunteers. Many organisations just need an infusion of new energy. In section 3 below “Attracting more people” we provide some methods for attracting more people to join your Board or simply volunteer to help.

In section 4 “Successful engagement” we suggest some simple steps showing how your group can successfully engage and consult with your community. We focus on how to engage in a way that involves as many people as possible and motivates people to support you actively.

In Section 5 below “Getting ahead in application preparation” we set out the key questions that most funders ask. This will help you be ever-ready to apply for the opportunities that can sometimes come with short submission deadlines.

You just have to use the questions you think are relevant to you.

3 Attracting more help

Here are some suggestions as to how your organisation can attract more volunteers and/or Board members.

	Ideas	How you might go about it
1	Identify and describe the gaps	Identify where the real gaps are among your Board or cohort of volunteers. Do you especially require people with particular skills, knowledge or experience, people who represent a certain cohort of the population or people to carry out a selection of well-defined tasks? This exercise helps because we have now got a picture of what we need.
2	Refresh your engagement with the local community	<p>It may be worth considering a community engagement exercise where your organisation invites local people/organisations to a public workshop or even series of workshops. At the workshop(s), you would highlight how your work is benefiting all types of groups e.g. young people, adults in education, women, enterprises, integrating new ethnicities, early years learning and so on.</p> <p>Seek to attract people who have a real interest in these areas and then use the workshop to not only actively listen to their views but also to recruit potential volunteers. These volunteers could, in time become your Board Directors.</p>
3	Tasks – Not committees	Many people, especially young people, are not attracted to committees. They are more attracted to carrying out tasks which have a defined time-span and which could give them valuable experience.
4	Find other ways to engage volunteers	Introduce ways in which people can engage with your organisation. For example advisory committees can sometimes provide opportunities for volunteering, leading to potential board membership in appropriate instances. However, one would have to assess the general merits of this and the time and resources needed to do this.
5	Surveys of needs resulting in engagement	From time to time carry out surveys to identify needs or get feedback. Sometimes it can be useful to add a question which asks if the respondent is interested in hearing more about the issue and then in helping out and whether they wish to share their contact details with you for that purpose.
6	Re-engaging with your “Alumni”	Many people have been involved in your programmes over the years. You could re-engage with those who have benefitted from involvement with your organisation over the years and who may like to be asked to help out.

7	Positive recruitment	Board vacancies are best marketed as opportunities rather than a problem of filling gaps. Good recruitment practices treat Board member recruitment in a similar way to any professional recruitment practice: role profiles, interviews/discussion, attractions of the position, requirements etc. This tells the applicant that this is a respected position.
8	Marketing and presentation	Your day to day communications and marketing influences perceptions of what it might be like to be on the Board or to volunteer for your organisation. Keep your language simple. Communicate the impact you are achieving on people. This is another way of talking about the real heart-felt purpose of your organisation. People are attracted by organisations or people with a strong sense of purpose and value.
9	Use the recruitment facilities on your doorstep	Contact your local Volunteer Centre It has access to recruitment and induction packs for volunteers as well as a growing database of volunteers.
10	Ask people what they think?	The most powerful way of attracting collaborators is to ask people what they think. Invite people to suggest what priorities should be addressed, what should be done and how to go about it. This gives people a real sense of ownership after which they are more likely to become involved. See “successful engagement” below for the practical steps you can take to do this.

4 Successful engagement

4.1.1 Asking the right questions

Just gather people in a room and ask the right questions. Questions empower people far more than if you stand in front of them telling them what to do.

No.	Step	Examples of questions
1	Ask people plainly and inclusively what their vision is.	What will success look like in 5 years in your community? What will failure look like in your community in 5 years? Describe the people you would most like to see benefiting from the success.
2	Now think of projects.	What projects will help you achieve the success you want? What will they achieve and how close are they to your vision?
3	How are the projects going to get done.	How will you achieve the project? Who will achieve it? When will it happen? What resources will it take to achieve it?
4	Form groups around sets of projects and work at working well together.	Prioritise all your projects, often starting with those that are easiest to achieve and with the best impact. What structure are you going to use to work together effectively? What type of working culture do you want to create in your organisation? How are you going to nurture that working culture?

4.1.2 Using techniques that involve everyone

Asking the right questions is a good start. Now make sure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to answer them. Make sure too that answers are mostly worked out together so that projects are ones that have the energy and the backing of small working groups.

No.	Step	Example of guidance
1	Small core group	Start with a small core group that is committed to genuine engagement.
2	Keep an open door.	Invite as many as possible. Be as open and transparent as possible. Tell people what you want to do, who is leading for now.
3	Make sure everyone has their say.	Limit large group discussion to a minimum. Break into small groups – have members of the core group spread throughout the small groups. Let people make and enforce rules for proper group discussion.
4	Acknowledge all points	Record points being made in a way that everyone can see or hear them.

5	Use themes	Split long lists into key emerging themes. Invite people to form groups around the themes they like. Send them away to work on them.
6	Be objective	Encourage people to prioritise projects in an objective way identifying how impactful/not impactful, how easy/not easy each project is to implement.
7	Reward action	Further refine the final choices of projects based on the degree to which people volunteer to do them.

5 Getting ahead in application preparation

5.1 Common questions to work on

These questions revolve around some key areas:

- The legal structure and type of organisation you are.
- Your governance.
- The needs of your area or sector.
- How your project responds to those needs
- Your ability to manage the project in a timely fashion
- How your organisation and project fits in with other relevant initiatives and policies and the people who manage them.
- How you communicate, and finally
- Your grant request and your overall sustainability.

5.1.1 Legal

Which of these structures describe you?	Helpful suggestions
The more usual structures are company limited by guarantee (CLG), charitable trust or an unincorporated body. The latter really means you are simply a group of people.	Grant making bodies often ask for a constitution. If you are an “unincorporated body” then click the link below and go to Model constitutions and Clauses to find a template to create a simple constitution for an unincorporated body. https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/en/information-for-charities/guidance-for-charities

5.1.2 Type of organisation

Type of organisation	Helpful advice
This can be just choosing a category such as community development project, community or voluntary organisation, sport and recreation, education, family resource centre, social enterprise.	“A Social Enterprise is an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders.” ⁱ

5.1.3 Your Governance

For registered charities, adherence to the six principles of the Charities Governance Code is very important. If you are not a registered charity it will still be advisable to write up how your organisation complies with the standards in the code. Many public sources of funds also want to see evidence of adherence to the Governance Code. It is likely in the future that all bodies acting like charities will have to comply with the Charities Governance Code.	<p>If you want to view the full Charities Governance Code then click https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/en/information-for-charities/charities-governance-code</p> <p>If you are not a registered charity then its best to begin to ensure you can respond to core elements of the Code as set out below.</p>
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Principal standards of the Charities Governance Code	Helpful suggestions as to the questions you can begin answering
Principle 1 Advancing of charitable purpose	A governing document or constitution that sets out what your charitable purpose is, your specific objectives and how you aim to achieve them.
Your response 1	
Principle 2 Ethics and integrity	What are your ethics and standards and how do you uphold them?

Your response 2	
Principle 3 Leading people	Be clear on the roles of board members, management, staff or volunteers. Be clear on how you recruit, train and support, supervise, appraise and remunerate.
Your response 3	
Principle 4 Exercising control	Be clear on your legal structure, which specific regulations you must adhere to, how you control finances, annual and other accounts and how you manage risk.
Your response 4	
Principle 5 Working effectively	Show that your board, staff or volunteers have the skills to carry out their roles, that your meetings are run effectively, that you report and evaluate progress and review your effectiveness.
Your response 5	
Principle 6 Behaving with integrity	Being prepared to explain regularly to all your stakeholders what you do, why you do it, how you do it and what you achieve. Do this typically through social media, briefings and through involving your stakeholders in planning what you do.
Your response 6	

5.1.4 Key questions about your area/sector

Needs/Context	Helpful hints/links
The first basic requirement for most funders is that you are responding to a real need and that you have evidence to prove that the need exists.	<p>Describe the relevant conditions in the area (economic/social/cultural)</p> <p>What is the situation there that you wish to address?</p> <p>Evidence of need/demand.</p> <p>Baseline data: statistics that show the current status.</p> <p>Your key sources of information for this are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing data e.g. from the Central Statistics Office, local authority or published reports. You can get a wide range of stats on local areas by clicking on the CSO link here https://visual.cso.ie/?body=entity/ima/cop/2022 New surveys which you could conduct yourself. Here is an example of an App that helps you create an online survey https://www.surveymonkey.com Focus groups/consultations that express what the needs are.

5.1.5 Key questions about your project

Funders want to know where you are and the purpose of your project. They want to know if it is going to have impact and how you measure that. They want to see that you have a concrete set of objectives to achieve that impact.

Your project	The type of questions to answer
Where are you and your project?	<p>Maps</p> <p>Diagrams</p> <p>Relationship/distance to other relevant landmarks</p>
Your response	
Why this project?	<p>What you want to change?</p> <p>How does it transform the situation or respond to the needs you outlined above?</p> <p>What is compelling about your project?</p> <p>What are the outcomes or the impact you are hoping to achieve? This means describing the effect your project is going to have on the people you are targeting.</p>

	What it will success look like in 5 years? Graphics
Your response	
What are your concrete objectives?	Measurable objectives that you plan to achieve. Short, medium, long-term. Describe this in numbers and/or in words i.e. either quantitatively or qualitatively.
Your response	

5.1.6 Managing the project

Management questions	Suggestions as to how you set about answering key questions
How are you going to do the project?	The different elements that make up the “doing” of the project. One way of doing this is to set out the different elements of a project e.g. getting designs prepared, hiring contractors, raising matching funding, setting up a website, commencing phase 1 of a building ... This is as if you step away from the project and describe it from a distance, breaking it down into its component parts. Use physical designs, graphs, images if appropriate.
Your response	
Which of our criteria do you meet?	Describe how your project meets the funding criteria. This may include criteria such as having ownership, planning permission, agreements in place and being ready to start – often referred to as being “shovel-ready.”
Your response	
When is it going to happen?	Timetable the different components over the life of the project Include monitoring and evaluation in your time frame. Describe if or when you are ready to commence the project and start spending the money you are applying for.
Your response	
Who is going to manage the	Who is going to manage the project? How will that person or team manage this project effectively?

project and how are they going to manage it?	Who are the partner organisations, if any, who will run the project with you? What previous relevant experience and skills have they of managing projects like this? Who are the other organisations that will work with you to support you in delivering the project?
Your response	

5.1.7 Questions about people, networks and communications

How does your project fit in?	Answering these will help demonstrate that you are adding value to government policies, that you are building on what is often there already and that you are open and transparent.
Policies	What are the key policies at a local or national level that are being addressed by your project? Reference the documents and quote the specific sections in them that your project fulfils. Try to quantify in a measurable way how your project's outcomes will contribute to the outcomes intended in the policies you refer to .
Your response	
Complementarity, relationships, co-ordination and non-duplication	What other organisations at a local level work towards similar or complementary policies above? What working relationships have you with these complementary bodies? Can they write a letter of support for your project? How does your project co-ordinate with the complementary bodies above towards the achievement of the policies and outcomes you envisage??
Your response	
Communication	Who from your organisation will be chiefly responsible for communicating with the funder? How will you communicate your project's progress? Who will you be communicating with? Who are your stakeholders and how will you keep them informed. Who will do the communicating with the public and the stakeholders?
Your response	

5.1.8 Questions about money

Funders want to know how much you want, your past financial status, your potential financial status for about the next three years and how financially sustainable your project based on your current and projected finances and resources.

Finance past present and future		Guide to the type of questions you need to answer.
How much?	How much are you looking for? When and over what period of time do you want it?	
Your response		
Eligible costs	List the eligible costs which will amount to the same as the grant request.	
Your response		
Total costs	This will include all costs including eligible and ineligible costs Your proven need for the level of funding you are requesting	
Your response		
Ability to fund any requirements	Ability to fund up-front costs before grant can be drawn down Ability to raise match funding requirements Ability to make in-kind contributions	
Your response		
Your financial status	Evidence of up to date tax compliance Recent audited accounts or financial records current and recent years. Current bank balance(s) Cash reserves and your reserves policy.	
Your response		
Projected finances	Cash flow forecast	

	Profit and loss projections Balance sheet
Your response	

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Supporting organisations to bring about meaningful
change.

ⁱ National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022; Government of Ireland 2019; Page 5