

## IMPROVING YOUR APPLICATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

This factsheet is designed to give you information on several ways that you can improve your applications. Specifically: prioritising the most important things to do; further information on the differences between need and demand; the key skill of 'influencing'; some thoughts on how you can write for different types of assessors; and finally how to critically assess your application and ensure it is concise.

### WHERE TO START

*"I'm rather like a mosquito  
in a nudist camp;  
I know what I ought to do,  
but I don't know where to  
begin"*  
Stephen Bayne

The place to start any new or developing project is with a vision of where you want to be at the end of all your work – what will your scheme look and feel like when its operating? Think about the targets you want to achieve.

When you've got these things firmly in your mind you need to create an overall plan for how you will get to that end point, prioritising the most important things that need to be done on the way. Stephen Covey has

a simple way of putting this: **'Begin with the end in Mind'** - Visualise, Target  
**'Put first things first'** - Plan & Prioritise

So, to develop the most effective approach to creating an application, start with a clear plan and within that plan, make sure you do the most important things at the right time, by establishing clear priority tasks.

One practical way to set about this is to follow the 7 steps indicated below, in order. Take a sheet of paper and create 7 columns. Head the top of each column with the highlighted word in the 7 steps below and then complete as indicated:

1. List all the **tasks** you need to do to develop your scheme (make sure you include sending the application)
2. Then, put a **deadline date** next to each
3. State **how long** you think they will they take (hours, days)
4. Define **start date** (from points 2 & 3 above)
5. Now give them a letter for their **importance** in relation to achieving the project: A, B or C (where A is critical and C is not important)
6. Now order them for how **urgent** they are: 1, 2 or 3 (where 1 needs doing urgently and 3 doesn't have any deadline)
7. Indicate who is **responsible & resources** needed

Note: the least important things can be sacrificed to the most important, if necessary and 'urgent' does not mean it's 'important'.

**You now have a prioritised list of actions, with who is going to do what, when, with what and when you can expect it to be completed! All you need to do now is tell everyone!**

### **NEED AND DEMAND**

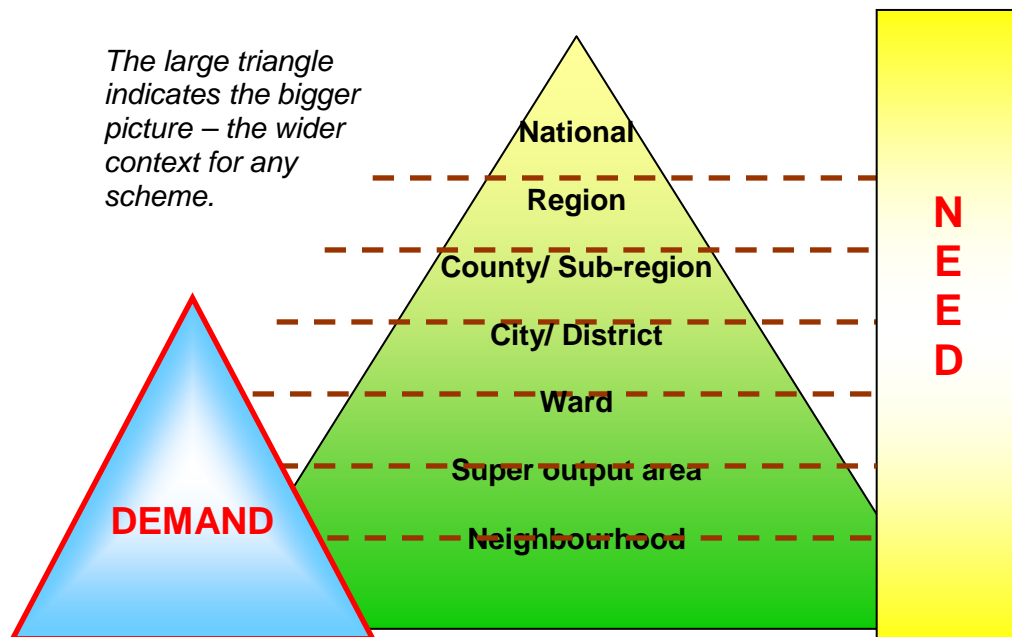
It's very important to be clear in applications about the difference between 'need' and 'demand': it helps funders to understand the reasons for, and background to, the scheme.

**Need** is: 'the problems or issues that will be addressed' e.g. increasing levels of obesity- and this would normally link to clearly to your stated aims and objectives.

**Demand** is: the number of individuals or organisations who might benefit from the project. Demand shows that your project is worthwhile e.g. 50 young people with obesity in the city will benefit.

### **WHERE CAN I FIND THE EVIDENCE?**

There is a notable distinction between where you can find evidence for need and evidence for demand. As the diagram indicates, need can be shown at all levels from national policies, reports and strategies right down to local area agreements, neighbourhood reports – because all of them will deal with issues or problems. However demand, for most projects (unless they are regional or national projects) will have to provide evidence of local demand because that is the extent of their realistic impact. So for most projects, demand will be shown through such things as local surveys, questionnaires, feedback, parish plans and ward statistics.



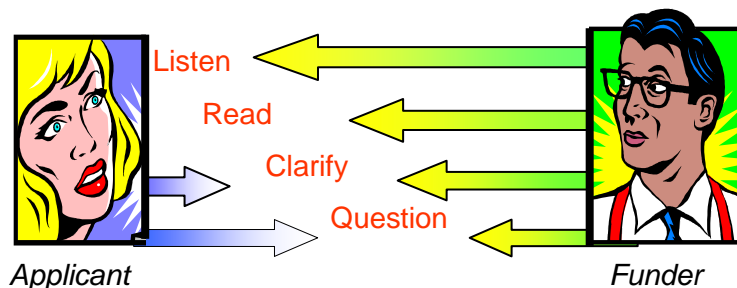
### **WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO ACHIEVE WITH YOUR APPLICATION? – THE BOTTOM LINE**

In simple terms we are trying to convince, persuade, argue, reason with someone, for money. These skills are known as 'influencing skills' and anyone can learn them – it can have positive effects in all aspects of life if you learn to do it well!

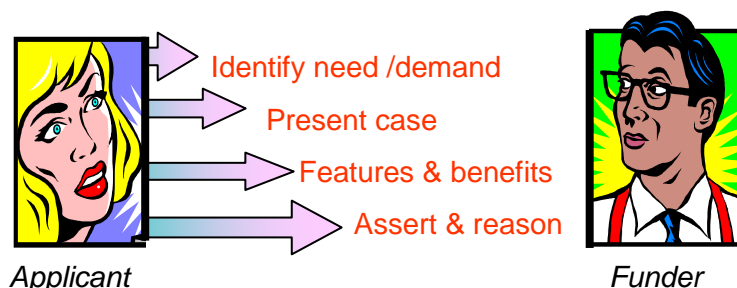
### **INFLUENCING SKILLS**

Influencing has 2 main components – 'Engaging' and 'Channelling'. You must 'engage' before you 'channel' - many people make the mistake of channelling before they engage.

**Engaging** involves discovering: what the funder is thinking; their expectations. Your attention should be entirely focused on: their needs; on preserving and improving the relationship with them. To do this you need to read all the information they provide; meet, with them; ask them questions about their funding; clarify their criteria. This stage is all about them and their needs – not about yours!



**Channelling** is the second stage, when you let the funder know the benefits of working with you; of funding your project. Here attention is focused on your organisation and services; upon reasons why you think your scheme is important but clearly this stage has to be influenced by what you heard when you 'engaged'. Remember you are trying to persuade the funder to provide money.



### ASSESSMENT - WHO EVALUATES

There may be a range of different assessments of your application. It's a good idea to keep in mind who you might be writing for, and their different viewpoints when you write different parts of your application. As an example there may be the following type of assessors and assessments:

Who	Interested in	How to write for them
1. Gatekeepers	Compliance	Demonstrate - eligibility; financial security; relevant standards
2. Technicians	Technical experts looking at feasibility	Knowledge of area; process; risk; appropriate jargon; project management
3. Champions	Knowledgeable workers who understand 'operations'	Heart; soul; commitment; operational experience
4. Third parties or the 'Man from the Ministry'	Particularly 'Quangos', Government, Tenders	Strategic issues; policies; wider context; partnerships
5. 'Upstairs' or the Committee	Final yes or no; big picture; total cost; precedent; innovation	Outcomes; presentation; précis; clear overall costs

### CONCISENESS

Funders are inundated with paperwork – don't overload them. It can be tempting to include 'everything' as that's easiest for you – it just gives them a problem in finding what they need and it may switch them off to your scheme. So, decide what's most important for them to read – parts of your scheme may be very important to you but are they relevant to the funder's criteria? Carefully analyse all information you provide and remove anything that hides/obscures the most important parts of your project. And do remember to put the most important things first!

*"Clear writers assume, with pessimism born of experience, that whatever isn't plainly stated the reader will invariably misconstrue"* John R Trimble

So what about technical language or jargon? It's sometimes right to include it - but not always. Think carefully about it: the reader may not be an expert in the field and if he/she doesn't understand they will have to work harder to work out what your application means. And always spell out any acronyms.

### **CRITICAL ASSESSMENT**

- Find someone else to read your application and listen carefully, and with an open mind, to what they have to say – don't be defensive about your work - it's important that any reviewers feel able to voice concerns – it's too late after the application's gone, so encourage honesty!
- Consider whether you said the most important things first – in their view, not yours...
- Get an expert to review any specialist parts of the application such as funding breakdowns
- Consider 'black holes' – the thing you forgot all about..... Other people may see it straight away – so encourage get them to ask you any questions they have about your project or application to 'smoke out' any of these – obvious ones or not
- Assumptions – we all do this all the time. Think about all the things that you might need to explain to someone new to your organisation or project and make sure there are no assumptions in your submission.
- Funding Advisers read them all the time – give them a draft to look over...



For those checking applications, consider these 3 reading processes:

1) Read for sense and clarity; 2) Read for structure, layout, cohesion, and finally 3) Proof read

**QUALITY** And finally check that:

- All pages /sections are included
- All permissions and approvals are in place
- Have you referenced all enclosures
- Make a full copy of everything you send for yourself and the main people involved in the project (including any Referees)
- Is the form signed, by the right people
- Is it dated appropriately
- Included letters of support and evidence

### **CONCLUSION**

You should now have a clearer idea about how to improve your funding applications. If you attend Course Four of the Funding Training Programme you will be able to acquire a deeper understanding of this information and how you can apply this to your own organisation.

Your local Funding Adviser is available to support you on a one to one basis by helping you to develop your project, research the right funder, plan a funding strategy, and give you advice about any funding applications you would like to submit. Visit the contacts page of this website for the contact details of your local Funding Adviser so you can make an appointment with them.

Also, download the other factsheets in this website to assist you along the other fundraising steps.