

Preparing for submission

Writing a 'successful' proposal is mostly about thinking.

The actual wordsmithing part is far less important to the final result than many people imagine.

(Haydon, R. 2007, 'The Shredder Test', p. 12)

1. **Thinking is key** – If you do not know what your 'big idea' is for a submission, how can others be expected to understand it. 'Focusing down' is important for two key reasons, 1) it will help you and a potential funder ensure you are a 'good match' (remember many philanthropic funds are managed by a Trustee who match proposals to funds), and 2) it will help you speak and write about your project. 'Focusing down' is not necessarily a once-off process, but to approach a submission without taking the time to 'think' is a big mistake. Here are four related strategies to help with crystallising your 'big idea':
 - a) *Start with the end in mind*: Can you write a press release about your project? What would be the headline?
 - b) *'Killer points'*: An advisor to Blair said that when he was asked to write a briefing or meet with the Prime Minister, he had to succinctly provide his 'best' five killer points about an issue.
 - c) *Ideas book*: Keep a small notebook handy. The number of good ideas you get when you least expect them are too precious to let evaporate into the ether (or leave to memory alone!). Preparing for a submission does not just have to start when a funding round 'opens'. Remember, this is not just about getting more funds into your school. It is about ensuring that the funds you do get in and, as a consequence, what you have to deliver are a good match to your school's values, priorities and capacity.
 - d) *Talk with others*: This seems so obvious, but the reason behind talking with others is that the questions people (funders, colleagues, family members!) ask can lead to better formed and/or different thoughts.
2. **Organisation is key** – start with the application **GUIDELINES** and map out a plan of points you need to include, as well as any essential documentation (e.g. financial statements etc.). Be clear on all the conditions of funding to ensure that you can meet them before you start:
 - a) *Write a list* – as you set out, make a list of things you will need to do once you have written your submission (e.g. signatures from whom? photocopies of what? How many copies? covering letter required? etc.) This will be a handy cross-check before you finally submit.

3. **Understand the funder** – it is important to understand the philosophy and priorities of the funding body from whom you are seeking your grant. This will help you target your submission appropriately and clarify why yours would be a good project for them to support – show how you share their values. A simple strategy is to use a priorities / values matrix and use the funder’s current information on their website to map their priorities and values against what you are proposing:

Funder priorities & values	Our project/initiative idea	Compatibility match
e.g. Capacity building	e.g. Mentoring program	✓
Youth	Year 11 & 12 students	✓
Rural and remote	City location	X
Can/should we modify our project? (reasons ‘for’ and ‘against’)		

If possible, get hold of a previously successful proposal as a guide. If you are sending applications to more than one organisation, make sure they are tailored to the individual organisation; DON’T send the same submission to all.

Every foundation is different so always check the guidelines and application requirements before submitting an application. Don’t prepare a standard application and send it off to every foundation you can find.

Many foundations welcome (and at times strongly advise) contact before an application is submitted. This will save you time writing an application if in fact it is not suitable. Wherever possible, contact the foundation to discuss your application before writing your application.

(Jane Kenny, Sydney Community Foundation)

4. **Do your research** – Once you have clarified what you are proposing, do some research ‘around’ it to identify not only the specific need for your school but what the benefits will be (perhaps even beyond your school); identify any similar projects that yours might learn from etc.
5. **Look for support** – if appropriate (and asked for by the funder), gather letters of support from those who will indirectly benefit from the project i.e. parents, community groups etc. This will help prove your credibility as well as demonstrate a broader impact of your project.
6. **Be realistic** – be sure that what you are proposing can be achieved with the human resourcing available, within any specified time-frame and with the funding being requested. Funding selection committees will be well acquainted with identifying any potential risk of an incomplete project. It is important to include the full cost in your application. As Jane Kenny (Sydney Community Foundation) notes, ‘No funder wants to make a grant to a project that falls over part way through because of insufficient funds’.