Writing Funding Applications A Practical Guide

Monaghan PPN

What is the guide about?

This practical guide to writing funding applications, aims to provide you with a deeper understanding of the grant application process and how best to demonstrate the value of your project to an intended funder.

The guide will take you through the grant writing process and identify some of the common reasons why funding applications fail to receive support. Understanding what type of information you are likely to require when completing a funding application, will enable you to prepare for the task more effectively.

How should I use the guide?

The guide is divided into several sections, each of which is designed to mirror the funding application process. Hence, you may wish to read this guide through from beginning to end or dip into a section as you prefer. If the latter, you will find each section located at the following pages:

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A Chairde,

It is my pleasure as Chief Executive of Monaghan County Council to introduce you to this publication, which is a collaboration between Monaghan County Council and Monaghan Public Participation Network (PPN).

In 2014, Local Authorities established Public Participation Networks (PPN's) in each area primarily to give the Community an input into local decision making. Monaghan PPN forms part of the County Council's commitment to assisting the Community Sector in this regard, and together we will make County Monaghan a better place to live, work and invest. Monaghan County Council wishes to acknowledge the contribution that the Community and Voluntary representatives, appointed through the PPN's structures, make on the various sub-committees of Monaghan County Council which is very much appreciated.

This document is designed to help Community and Voluntary groups to successfully take full advantage of the various funding opportunities that are available. This type of knowledge is crucial for PPN member groups achieving success, and we hope that by providing information on the various sources of funding, and some notes on issues to consider when completing a funding application, we can help communities to help themselves.

This booklet is meant to be used as a resource, that you can refer to as and when the need arises. Please also remember that the Council has many staff who are always willing to assist and advice community and voluntary groups. Contact the Community Development Department on 047 30500 to speak to one of the staff, or check out the Community pages of the Council's website, <u>www.monaghan.ie</u>.

I would like to congratulate Monaghan PPN on the production of this booklet, which I am certain will be a much referred to resource over the coming years. I look forward to the strong project applications which I am sure will emerge as a result of the advice given in this booklet. Finally, I reiterate my promise that Monaghan County Council will play its part in assisting the Community Sector to secure as much funding as possible for the benefit of the people of Co. Monaghan.

Eamonn O'Sullivan



Where to begin?

To begin with, it is important to understand that structured funding applications serve four important purposes:

- They ensure that all of the information of relevance to a funding decision may be captured.
- ✓ They enable each applicant group and project promoter to present the merits of their cases in a clear and concise manner.
- ✓ They ensure that all groups and project promotors can be treated in a fair and equal manner.
- 𝔍 They assist funders in their respective decision-making and grant allocation processes.

Think like the funder, the application process is there to help them identify the projects which will make best use of their money.

Getting Started

- Sefore you commence writing any funding application, please remember to check:
- 𝒞 The funding scheme eligibility criteria i.e. What elements of your project are eligible for funding?
- ✓ The correct and most up-to-date funding application form to use and whether or not the application can be made online.
- ✓ The type and extent of the information you are required to submit on the structured funding application form.
- ✓ The type of supporting documents that you are required to attach to the funding application at the time of submission.
- ✓ The closing date for receipt of completed funding applications.

There are six key steps in the funding application process including:

1. Define the problem or need that your project is addressing

In other words, what problem have you identified in your community that should be addressed, or what particular needs does a defined group of people in your community have that are not being met? This statement of need or problem identification is the first step, as it determines what type of funding schemes you may apply for.

2. Identify suitable funding opportunities

Based on the problem or needs your group is trying to address, you can better identify funding streams and grant opportunities that are suitable for the type of project or initiative you have in mind.

3. Evaluate your planned initiative or project and align with funder priorities

Read very carefully the funding priorities set out in the funder guidelines that accompany funding application forms. In writing your funding application, you will need to demonstrate how the project or initiative you have in mind aligns with the funding priorities, types of project or project elements the funder is prepared to financially support.

4. Gather the evidence necessary to write the funding application

Firstly, study the funding application form structure and identify what type of information is required to fully complete each section of the form. Secondly, identify what supporting documentation is required to accompany the application at the time of submission.

5. Submit on time

Ensure that the funding application is submitted by the application deadline indicated by the funder and in the correct form e.g. Online through a web form or the correct paper-based application.

6. Request feedback

If the funding application is not successful, contact the funder and request feedback. It is important to learn why the application failed to receive support. This feedback can then be used to help improve the information provided in subsequent funding applications, with a view to achieving a successful outcome!

Defining Problems or Needs in the Community

The first step in the funding application process requires us to clearly identify the purpose for which we are applying for funding. The reasons we apply for funding may often be for one or more of the following reasons:

- We have identified a particular problem that a group of people in our community share and we wish to provide a solution to ease the problem.
- We need to invest further in existing services or supports in order to continue maintaining facilities and services for an existing cohort of service users.
- We need to invest in existing infrastructure to expand our capacity to deliver more services arising from greater levels of demand in the community for these services.
- We have identified an opportunity to start providing particular supports and services in a community where none currently exist.

We have a clear mission and objectives in our strategic plan, business plan, or annual work plan and we require external funding to enable our group to achieve its objectives and carry out the activities indicated in our plans.

Irrespective of why we are applying for funding, we all need to be able to provide evidence that a real need or problem exists to which we are providing a real solution. In addition, this solution should be an appropriate response to the problem and in keeping with the mission and objectives of the group.

When defining the problem or need that our group is addressing, we should be able to refer to the outcomes we are expecting to achieve i.e. the difference our solution will make to the group of people we are intending to support. It is not enough to explain **what** the funding will be spent on, but also **why** it is worth spending in this way.

What information is included in a problem or needs statement?

Some funding applications will simply ask you to describe the purpose for which you are applying for funding. This is another way of asking you to describe the problem or needs you wish to address. The length of your answer may be influenced by the space suggested on the application form or by the character count (e.g. 800 characters) available when completing the application online.

When explaining the purpose for which you are applying for funding it is helpful to:

✓ Explain the actual problem being addressed

For example, in a community centre that seeks funding to renovate its sports hall, the problem is likely to be one where the existing sports facilities are inadequate, worn out and as such not fit for continued use. The problem is that without access to the sports hall, children, local sports groups, and other groups in the community won't have the facilities they need to engage in sports and activities designed to aid health and well-being. Hence, the real problem is not that the sports hall needs refurbishment and renovation. It's that without the investment, the hall will not be fit for purpose, as a result local people will have to stop using the facility. The ultimate impact of a loss of the sports hall may be that people's fitness, health and well-being will be negatively impacted and activities designed to encourage social inclusion diminished.

In this example, refurbishing the sports hall is the solution (a means to an end), the ultimate purpose of the funding sought is to help particular groups or members of the local community continue to access facilities that aid their physical and mental well-being and provide opportunities for social inclusion.

✓ Consider funder priorities

In articulating the problem and solution your community group is proposing, remember to consider the funder's priorities and how your solution aligns with those priorities.

✓ Refer to your mission and objectives

Though in most instances it will be apparent why a group such as yours is applying for funding, some funding applications are not always as apparent. Therefore, do not assume that the funder understands the nature of your group, the community you are supporting, the beneficiaries of your project/initiative or the problem you are addressing.

Sample of a needs statement

In our community, parents are actively seeking out opportunities for their children to engage in recreational opportunities, so as to better enable their children to build crucial interpersonal skills and develop a positive self-image.

In our community, we lack the necessary recreational space to enable activities to be safely organised for the 315 children under the age of 16 who live locally.

Engaging in sports activities, music, dance and art are extremely important for the development of healthier lifestyles in children. Creativity and good interpersonal skills are linked with improved outcomes at school, lower levels of aggression and improved working opportunities later in life.

We are proposing to build a community centre in our village. This centre will enable local schools to deliver sports activities such as basketball and indoor soccer, provide an opportunity to establish a youth club, provide local music and dance instructors with a space from which to run classes on a weekly basis and provide other recreational pursuits of interest to children. In addition, the facility will cater to the needs of other groups in our community including Mother and Toddler groups, active retirement groups and the newly formed drama society. The centre will also offer facilities for sports clubs in the wider locality.

We need to address the lack of recreational space in our community as a matter of urgency, if a whole cohort of children are not to miss out on fully developing essential life skills. Healthier children can make for healthier adults who in turn will become the community leaders of the future.

Economic & Community Monitor

Monaghan County Council has procured a software package, "The Economic & Community Monitor (E&C Monitor)", as an information portal on the county. The E&C Monitor contains hundreds of individual indicators under <u>15 core themes</u>, such as, population, health & wellbeing, housing, education, environment, transport and others. It can provide a complete comparative analysis from County Monaghan to town/village level while providing contextual analysis with State and Regional trends.

Depending on the data source, the E&C Monitor is updated on a quarterly basis (Jan, April, July and October) with all datasets being updated when appropriate (i.e., all will not be updated each quarter). Environmental indicators will be updated annually and all Census indicators for 2016 results have been applied.

The E&C Monitor facilitates a move from 'anecdotal' to 'hard data' <u>evidence</u>. It provides users with the ability to compare and contrast indicators in seconds. The package will be of considerable assistance to C&V groups as well as business interests in building a business plan / strategy when preparing applications to a wide range of funding agencies. The link to the E&C Monitor can be accessed from <u>https://monaghan.ie/communitydevelopment/monaghan-economic-community-monitor/</u>. It is also accessible from the Community page of the Monaghan County Council website.

Compiling Evidence

You will need to compile evidence of the problem you are addressing and the community of people you are set up to support. There are various ways to compile this evidence including:

Oreate a table of key demographic data related to your community.

In this regard you can consult Central Statistics Office data or use data readily available through the Pobal Deprivation Index (a set of maps that breaks down population data for every part of the country available at www.pobal.ie). In this table, you can indicate the number of people living in your area who may benefit from your project/planned initiative, the number of males and females, number of children and so forth. Hence, it is possible to show that a sustainable population of people are living in your area to justify the investment in your project or initiative. Monaghan County Council has produced a step by step guide to using the Census data and Pobal deprivation data to produce your own local data which will back up your funding application. This is available in the "Resources" section of our website <u>www.ppnmonaghan.ie</u>

\checkmark Identify any competing projects close by.

If there are no competing projects to contend with, then your project may be intending to bridge the gap in supports and services locally. If there are alternative projects set up, then you may be offering an alternative solution to a group of people not currently served by existing services.

𝒜 Talk to professionals with experience of the problem.

It is always helpful to talk to professionals who work with the people whose problem or need you are seeking to address. You can gather together their opinions to help influence your thinking about the solution your group wishes to put in place.

𝒜 Talk to other community projects.

If your initiative or project has been successfully established elsewhere, talk to other groups (or pay a visit) and see what evidence exists that the solution you propose is implementable.

Gather letters of support.

Where other organisations intend to use the facilities or services that you intend putting in place, then it is important to gather letters of support from these groups indicating their intention to do so. Make reference to these letters of support when describing your funding purpose or needs statement.

Survey intended service users.

Use a structured questionnaire to ask people about their needs and the type of services or supports they may need. Ensure that a sufficient number of people complete the survey to make the findings representative and meaningful.

In most communities, the following can be relied upon for honest and relevant feedback to questions:

- Local health professionals;
- Teachers;
- Small business owners;
- Parents groups;
- Active retirement groups;
- Local family resource centres;
- Childcare service providers; and,
- Members of other community and voluntary groups.

O Carry out research online.

If the problem or need you are dealing with is common to other locations, then a body of research exploring issues around the problem may be available to read online. If so, you may gain valuable insights into the problem you are hoping to address and be able to learn from the experiences of others familiar with your circumstances.



Key Point!

How to present evidence in a problem or needs statement?

It is possible to gather a significant volume of evidence when preparing the information that will appear in a funding application. Thus, a way needs to be found to distil the key messages from the research gathered into a statement of purpose (or needs statement). Remember that when stating the purpose of the funding application, the difference the project or planned initiative will make to the community or beneficiaries (people who will benefit from the project) should be clearly articulated.

Collating Supporting Documentation

Before commencing the process of writing the funding application, it is helpful to gather any and all supporting documents that may be needed to accompany the application. On occasion, some of the details contained in these supporting documents may need to be referenced on the application form, for example a charity registration number or a company registration number.

In this section of the guide, we provide you with a list of the typical supporting documents that may often be required to be submitted along with an official and fully completed funding application form.

Typical Supporting Documents

Constitution

Whether formed as a company limited by guarantee, co-operative or an unincorporated voluntary group or community association, funders typically require a copy of a group's constitution. This document sets out the purpose for which a voluntary group has been established and the governance structure and regulations to which the management committee/board must adhere.

Financial Accounts

It is not uncommon for the last set of financial accounts to be requested. Some funders may require audited accounts for certain types or levels of funding. It is important to read the application criteria to determine if audited accounts are required.

Profile of Promoters or Committee Members

On occasion, the C.V.'s of promotors or committee members may be required.

Architectural and Site Plan

If substantial structural development works are to be undertaken, then a copy of the site plan and/or architectural plans may be required along with conservation reports.

Letters of Support

Where a project upon completion will be used by different groups in a community, then letters of support from each group should be obtained. This will indicate that the project has community support and is not a solo run on the part of the applicant group! Projects that can demonstrate that they enjoy community wide support present a stronger case to funders as it suggests the projects are likely to be sustainable in the long run.

Evidence of Bank Account

Though it may seem a small point, voluntary groups who apply for funding should have a bank account, post office account or credit union account. In other words, they should be able to demonstrate that any funding received will be going into a voluntary group account and not the account of a named committee member!

Evidence of Match Funds

In many instances voluntary groups will need to provide evidence that they have existing funds, which can be made available to support the project or planned initiative.

A bank statement for example, showing the cash balance or match funding at the time of submitting the funding application may be required.

Licence Agreement

Where other organisations are likely to be using part of a voluntary group's facilities, the licence agreement with regards same may be required.

Where other interested parties are providing financial support to the planned initiative or project, then letters of support should be collected. This is likely to be important where a funding application (if successful) will cover only part of the costs and where the project is reliant on the financial support of others to proceed.

Business Plan

Applications seeking substantial amounts of funding may be required to provide evidence of the sustainability of a project. To this end, a fully costed business plan (or feasibility study) may be required. This plan should include projected income and expenditure statements, cash flow projections and balance sheet projections for a defined time period, such as three years into the future.

Insurance and Company Policies

Funders may at times require evidence of insurance and company policies e.g. health and safety policy, child safeguarding policy, financial policy and procedures.

Proof of Ownership and Planning Permission

In some instances, the funder will require proof of ownership of the buildings or site on which a voluntary group wishes to develop. Alternatively, where the property is leased, the lease document may be required showing a substantial lease period e.g. 15 years. If planning permission is required to develop a property or site, then proof of a grant of planning permission may be required. To avail of Sports Capital Programme funding , a solicitors letter is required confirming you own the property.

Funding Application Form

Section 1: Applicant Organisation Details

Section 2: Project Details

Section 3: Funding

Section 4: Other Relevant Information

Section 5: Declaration

Writing the funding application

Once you are happy that you have compiled all the information that will be referred to or contained in the funding application, you can then proceed to actually writing the funding application!

To assist you in this task, we will now look at the structure of commonly used funding application forms and guide you through the type of information that should be contained in each section of an application form.

In this section, you are typically required to provide the following information:

Name of the applicant group

Contact address

Email address

Contact telephone number

Website address

A brief description of the group (typically between 50 – 80 words). Remember to include information such as, the year your group was established, what you are set up to do, the location(s) you serve and the clients/beneficiaries you serve or support.

A brief description of the governance structure of the group e.g. voluntary management committee, board of directors, etc. How often the committee meets, whether or not the group is a charity and if so, what the registered charity number is, what the company registration number is, etc.

Name, role in the group and contact details of the person making the application on behalf of the group.

In addition, some funders may also seek information about whether or not your group is a member of Monaghan Public Participation Network.

Some funding applications require groups to provide a history of prior funding that may have been received after a particular date in time. It is important to check with fellow committee members what if any prior funding has been received. Hence, it should be possible to answer the following questions accurately:

- Has funding been received under any capital grant schemes i.e. grants from government departments, LEADER or the Local Authority?
- Provide details of the scheme availed of, the funding organisation and the amount of funding received. Ensure that you have an accurate record of this type of funding to hand (if applicable).
- Details may also be sought of any funding received from other organisations. Again, have the details to hand.
- It is likely you will be required to provide a Tax Reference Number and Tax Clearance Access Number. Your accountant can provide you with both, if you do not have these references to hand.
- The first section of a funding organisation might also require details of any links your group has with other organisations or any affiliations with national bodies.

Remember!

Make sure you answer all questions. Even if you have provided information in a previous answer box, if it is relevant to another question write it in again.



Key Point!

If you are completing a funding application for the first time for your group, you may need to obtain information from fellow committee members or your accountant to help you complete the first section of the application. Remember to speak to them well in advance of the funding application deadline, so that you get the information you require in time. You will be able to confirm your company registration number using the search directory at www.cro.ie and your registered charity number on the Charity Regulator's website www.charitiesregulator.ie.

Section 2: Project Details

The type of information sought in the second section of a funding application is very much dependent on the nature of a funding scheme. For example, if a funding scheme provides support for community events it will require specific details about the events being planned by a group. If a scheme provides funding for facilities, it will require details of the purpose of the grant and the nature of the expenditure sought.

With this in mind, you should be prepared to answer the questions in the text box below.

If the grant funding relates to an event that you plan to run, you will be expected to provide details about the number of people likely to participate, what type of event(s) will be run, how the event will be organised, what type of co-operation will exist with other groups, how the event will be promoted to attract participants, including how the event will be promoted online.

Project Map

Most grant applications will provide an opportunity to describe the nature of the work to be undertaken during the project. Thus, it is helpful to map out (list) each of the phases of a project and the work to be undertaken in each phase. When it comes to explaining in the application the work to be undertaken, you will then have a ready reference from which to work.

This project map is also most helpful in developing an accurate project budget.

The nature of funding being sought

The purpose of the grant. This is where you have an opportunity to describe the project in terms of the problem or need being addressed, evidence of that need, your solution to this problem, the benefits/outcomes or difference this will make to the community and beneficiaries, the number of people impacted or who will benefit from the initiative. In other words, you have an opportunity to describe your project in this section.

Because this section relates to specific details about the project, it is typical that questions will also be asked about:.

The start and end dates of the project work. This may include start and finish dates of different phases of the work.

Confirmation that all relevant permissions are in place e.g. grant of planning permission, written consent from property owner, etc.

Whether or not the project is part of a phased development with linked with other schemes operated by Government Departments or Local Authorities?

Section 3: Funding

Having explained the purpose and nature of the project in section 2, the third section in a funding application typically seeks information about the funding sought by a group.

To this end, you should prepare to answer several questions when completing the funding section, namely:

- ✓ How much the project will cost in total?
- ✓ How much funds do the group have and are able to contribute to the project?
- ✓ How much funds (if any) have other organisations committed to the project?
- ✓ How much funding is being sought in the funding application?

In answering these questions, it will be possible to see what percentage of project finance is being sought through grants.

Project Budget

The third section of an application typically requires a breakdown of the budget for the project. To provide this information, you should be able to cost each phase of the project and itemise costs. Remember to account for VAT.

Some funding applications will require further details to be provided with respect to project funding, such as:

- ✓ Percentage of match funding being provided.
- Solution Evidence that the group has match funding available.
- ✓ Administration/professional fees allocated to the project. Some funding schemes limit the percentage of professional/administration fees that can be allocated to a project.

There are several templates that may be used to present a project budget including the one provided below. If you have not prepared a project budget before, you may find the following format easy to follow. Remember to include all costs. It may be easier to itemise costs under project headings or on the basis of each element of the project. The funder should be able to see clearly the breakdown in anticipated expenditure. This is very important in circumstances where the funder may only be able to fund specific elements of the project.

PROJECT BUDGET	
Item Description	Cost (€)
Building/Capital Costs	
Construction	999,600
Preliminaries	72,000
Professional fees	50,000
Subtotal Capital - A	1,121,600
Programme Costs	
Marketing/Promotion	5,000
Official opening	2,500
Christmas festival	4,500
AGM	1,500
Subtotal Programme Costs - B	13,500
Total Cost A & B	1,135,100
10% of Total	113,510
90% of Total	1,021,590

Section 4: Other Relevant Information

As the name suggests, most funding applications provide applicants with an opportunity to provide further information to support their applications. Thus, in this section, you have an opportunity to more fully explain the value of the project or the research you have conducted which indicates the support for the project and solution proposed within the application.

If you have accompanying documentation in support of the application, you might list the documents in this section. Do ensure that these documents are submitted with the application.

Acknowledging the Funder

Some funding applications require information about your plan to publicly acknowledge funding support if an application is successful. This may be done in several ways i.e. erecting signage, providing an acknowledgement on the company website or promotional literature. Remember to mention the method of acknowledgement in the application.

Local Economic and Community Plan

Where a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) exists for your town or community, remember to check the development priorities contained in the plan and check against your project plans. Monaghan Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) produced a Local Economic Community Plan (LECP). It identified a number of key priorities for community and economic development in County Monaghan. Aligning your project with as many of these priorities as possible is a good strategic move, as it signals that your project will help the LCDC to deliver its objectives. If your project complements the LECP for your area, you should make mention of the fact in your funding application. Remember to specify which key priority areas of the LECP your project supports and the number of beneficiaries for each key priority area.

Section 5: Declaration

The final section of a funding application typically requires the person completing the application form to sign and date a declaration stating that the information contained within the form is correct.

There may or may not be several statements in the declaration such as:

- \checkmark Confirmation that the information in the form is correct.
- ✓ Confirmation that the group is tax compliant.
- 𝔍 Confirmation that the terms and conditions of the funding scheme are understood.
- ✓ Confirmation of acceptance of the funding schemes terms and conditions.
- 𝒞 Confirmation that the project can only proceed if funding support is given. 𝔅



Some funders require projects to be assessed or evaluated either mid-way through a project or at its conclusion. If this is a requirement in any funding schemes you may wish to apply for, remember to budget for external evaluation (if required) and identify the key indicators or milestones that will

help you gauge how successfully you are implementing the project.

Avoiding Failure!

Now that you have explored the steps in the funding application process, remember to avoid the common reasons why funding applications fail to receive funding support.

✓ Failure to meet funder selection criteria under one or more headings:

- poor alignment of project with funder priorities;
- lack of evidence of local community involvement;
- lack of a unique or innovative proposal;
- poor value for money demonstrated; and/or,
- capacity of the group to deliver the project not demonstrated.

Solution is practical and implementable by the group.

✓ Lack of information or reference made to how the grant sought will help the group achieve its stated mission and objectives or implement its business plan.

- \checkmark The application is not made on the official application form.
- 𝔍 The application is not submitted with all requested supporting documentation attached. ▮
- ✓ Key sections or questions on the application form are not adequately covered or explained sufficiently.
- ✓ Lack of information about how the project will impact on the community or beneficiaries.

Final Point!

When your funding application is successful, don't forget to go back to the funder and say 'Thank You'! They will appreciate the thought!

About Monaghan PPN

Monaghan Public Participation Network is open to all community and voluntary groups which have an address in Co. Monaghan. Membership is free of charge. The PPN is overseen by a Secretariat, whose members are drawn from the various interests which link into the PPN.

For the first time in the history of the Irish State, the inclusion of the community & voluntary sector in Council decision-making structures has been provided for **by law**, via the **Local Government Reform Act 2014**.

The Act charges the local authority with:

- Adopting a *Framework for Public Participation*, which lays out how the Council will include the public and the community & voluntary sector in its decision-making.

- Setting up and maintaining a *Public Participation Network*, enabling all community and voluntary groups to participate in a structured, representative way.

- Sourcing community & voluntary *representatives* for the various Council decision-making committees from the membership of the PPN.

 Providing *resources* to the PPN so that they can keep all groups in touch with their representatives and ensure meaningful participation.

The Secretariat acts as the meetings convenor for the PPN. They identify issues which require input from the community sector, and organise whatever meetings are needed in order to ensure a response from the community sector is made. They also plan special projects, designed to build the capacity of our groups, such as this publication.

Monaghan PPN has a full time Resource Worker who is based in Monaghan County Council offices. Leona Keenan is contactable at 047 73750

You can contact the Secretariat by email: ppn@monaghancoco.ie

Monaghan Public Participation Network, **Office of Community & Enterprise,** Monaghan County Council, The Glen, **Monaghan Town**







An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail Department of Rural and Community Development



Rialtas na hÉireann Government of Ireland