**Bid writing tips and guidance.**

**Bid writing essentials:**

**Evidence of Need:**

* Who are your target group (beneficiaries)?
* What issue/problem/barrier do they face?
* What is the scale of the problem?
* What is the reason for this need?
* What needs to change to address this problem/issue?
* What happens if you don’t address this need (do nothing)?

**What are you proposing to do?**

* Do you have a clear vision of what exactly your organisation is going address (your priorities)?
* Why have you chosen these priorities?
* How are you going to address these priorities (your activities)
* How do you know that this approach will achieve the required impact?
* How will you know if your activity has worked?
* What capacity does your organisation have?

**What will it cost?**

* How much do you need to deliver the proposed outputs/outcomes/impact?
* Include a breakdown of all costs
* Demonstrate any potential cost benefits
* Demonstrate any social impact or added value

**The bigger picture:**

* Who are your stakeholders?
* How do you involve your stakeholders (partnerships, consultation, project management, etc)
* Who else is supporting your target group?
* How will you compliment their work (not replicate it)?
* Why is your organisation best placed to address this need?
* Are you aware of any policies or strategies that might impact on your activities?

**Sources of Evidence:**

* Strategies
* Statistics
* Research (Govt/Academic)
* Reports
* Consultation/community involvement
* Evaluation of current support
* Current provision (ineffective/lack of)
* Letters of support

Online course: <https://knowhownonprofit.org/studyzone/write-a-winning-funding-bid>

Before you start applying for funding can you answer the following questions:

**Current situation**

* Who does your organisation support (beneficiaries/users, clients/etc)?
* What is the need that your organisation addresses (evidence of need – reports, market research, local/national evidence, etc)?
* What does your organisation do to address this need (should be outlined in your vision, mission, objectives and activity/services)?
* What skills, expertise, experience, resources (people, equipment, buildings, systems, etc) does your organisation have?
* Who else do you work with or have an impact on (who are your key stakeholders – include other organisations and services that support your beneficiaries)?
* What change do you create (what is your social impact)?
* How are you currently funded?
* How do you use this money (a breakdown of finances)?

**Additional funding**

* What do you need additional funding for?
* New or additional need
* New opportunity (diversification) – new service/activity
* Continuing existing services (continuation funding)
* Growth (doing more)  - new geography, new client group, supporting more people
* How much do you need (breakdown of costs)?
* What change will be created?
* How will you measure and demonstrate this? – monitoring and reporting
* Is the new/additional activity sustainable post funding? Great if it is but not all projects can be sustainable once the funding ends - if it isn’t then you need to acknowledge this and have an exit strategy

**Understand what the funder wants – does this match your organisation’s mission?**

Understanding a funder’s priorities is crucial. Do your homework. Funders will have a key set of guiding principles, an overall vision that they are trying to achieve. Your bid's outcomes need to be in step with those of the funder's.

You'll need to show how you've identified the need for your service, engagement with the intended audience, and most importantly, the measurable outcomes you are aiming to achieve.

If a funder’s vision does not compliment your own, then focus your efforts elsewhere. Avoid ‘Mission Drift’ and chasing the money. Be clear about your vision.

Build relationships with potential funders if you can. Find out what concerns them, ensure they know what your organisation does and how it could help them achieve their vision, compliment their services or overcome a potential issue they have.

**Is the grant/contract worth winning?**

As tempting as it is to adopt an approach whereby you submit lots of bids in a hope that you'll get lucky eventually, think carefully before applying for anything.

Do you have products, services or systems that enable you to deliver the contract and provide better services than your competitors? Be selective about the opportunities, which you pursue – the scattergun approach is time consuming and often means you waste valuable resources submitting bids with little chance of success. Pursue those where you have a clear unique selling point, strong offer or better relationship with the funder/beneficiaries than your competitors.

There are three key questions you should always ask yourself before preparing a project proposal:

1. Is it deliverable? (Can you do what needs to be done without having to significantly change your operating model or deviate from your core work?)
2. Is it winnable? (Do you meet the funder's criteria in the first instance, and do you have a strong case that elevates your proposal above others?)
3. Is it financially viable? (Can you do all that needs to be done with the funds available?).

Is the contract of the right size? As a rule of thumb only bid for contracts that are up to 25% of your annual turnover. Bidding for larger contracts may be seen as a risk and count against you.

**Evidence of need**

Do you have the required evidence to show that your organisation and its services are needed? Such as reports, baseline evidence, market research, national and local data. Do you know what the future trends might be – is demand likely to grow, change or decline?

Find out what your community needs. Putting in an application without properly assessing community needs and finding out what you target groups want is one of the biggest mistakes community groups can make. Simply assuming you know what the problems are will not be enough – you need to prove that this need exists and demonstrate that you have undertaken relevant consultation.

Understand the bigger picture – what are the strategic priorities of the funder, how will your project compliment and support these priorities?

Know who your stakeholders are and how your work will impact on them. That includes funders, beneficiaries, other agencies, competitors, etc.

Your evidence of need should be complete and compelling; your engagement with your target audience well documented, showing clear demand for your work. Your outcomes must be clear and measurable; your management and financial models shown to be robust. In short, you must show your organisation to be capable, credible and visionary, with definite aims and objectives.

Avoid duplication - Funders like new and innovative ideas If there are other organisations delivering similar services or supporting the same client group then make sure you clearly identify what you do that is different, better, innovative, new, complimentary, etc – your ‘USP’.

Support your claims and your plans with evidence. So, if you're writing about your experience and the great things you've achieved in other contracts, provide the evidence. If you're writing about company procedures, show the evidence they are effective and if you're writing about your proposition for how you will deliver this contract, show the evidence that your plans are feasible and achievable.

Remember, the evaluator can only make their judgement based on the information you provide  and without the supporting evidence they have no way of assessing that your claims are valid or that you can deliver what you propose.

If you’re stating that you have an effective Quality Assurance System, what’s the evidence, why are you able to make that statement? Do you have audit data, client/customer feedback, or quality control data that ‘evidences’ the efficacy of the system?

If you’re stating you have the experience necessary to deliver this contract, why are you able to make that statement? Do you a success story from a previous, similar contract or national accreditation in an area directly relevant to the work involved in the contract?

If you’re proposing a particular feature of the contract delivery arrangements, why are you able to make those plans? Have you considered local demand, population profile, staffing or shift arrangements or transport logistics?

**The application**

Allocate sufficient time to plan, write and review your bid.

Allocate sufficient and appropriate resources – identify your bid team with the relevant skills, knowledge, technical expertise and time available to commit to the bid. Allocate specific tasks and deadlines.

Make sure you are familiar with the tendering/grant making process – such as: any specific requirements, key dates (submission dates, interview dates), required evidence, etc.

Always read, understand and follow the funder’s criteria. Don’t just focus on what you want the funds for, and make an application for money without carefully and accurately following the criteria of funding body.

Use the funder’s template where instructed for your response. Where a template is not provided aim to address the key points in the same order and using the same terminology used in the funder’s document.

Don't assume anything - especially that the funder has knowledge of your organisation and what it does. Very often, they won't. You have to explain it yourself, clearly and concisely.

Keep your bid factual and precise at all times. Avoid using technical 'jargon' and where industry-specific terms are essential, ensure you define them as there is no guarantee your tender will be evaluated by a sector or subject specialist

Try and ensure that your tone matches theirs, make it easy for them to understand and keep it to the point. Avoid overly 'wordy' forms of expression, avoid repetition and ensure your response proceeds in a logical, understandable manner.

Keep a file of supporting evidence but don’t keep masses of unnecessary material.

Questions in tender documents can be quite complex and there will often be a number of distinct points you need to attend to. Make sure your response covers all aspects of the question, don’t just focus on the first point or a particular point you are more comfortable with. The consequence of this scenario is that your response will achieve a low score because the evaluator is unable to allocate the marks available for the elements of the question that have been missed.

Ensure your response is complete. Start by closely reading the question and highlighting the key elements or components. Next, use these to create your response. This structure, derived directly from the question, will help to ensure your response covers all of the key points required.

Review your response once it’s complete and ask yourself if you have answered the question appropriately.

Avoid vague and superficial responses as they suggest plans that have not been fully worked out or even that have been 'cut and pasted' from previous tender submissions.

Try to be as detailed as possible. If you're writing about your current procedures, describe each step or each component. If you're reporting experience and track-record, be specific and, where possible – for example: “5 years' experience” rather than “several years' experience” or “20% growth” rather than “significant growth”.

Make sure everything you’re proposing to offer is do-able, within time, within budget, within available staffing resources and that it is permissible within the prevailing regulatory and legal constraints.

Ensure everything you’re proposing is reflected accurately in your costing model so that you are not out of pocket when it comes to delivery.

**The benefits and impact**

What benefits do your plans offer for the commissioning organisation? Very often, providers will describe their plans, thoroughly and diligently, but forget to highlight the benefits they bring. It is incredibly important to spell out clearly the advantages and benefits of your proposition, your organisation, your experience or your expertise. Describing the benefits within your tenders helps to interpret your proposition for the evaluator and helps them see what it is they are, potentially, buying.

There’s no point offering a benefit they don’t want or don’t value. Take a bit of time to research the commissioning body, understand their concerns and their needs and try to tailor your proposition to offer benefits that address these.

You have ten years of relevant experience? So what? Tell the evaluator why this is important and how they benefit from that experience. Your proposal reduces GP visits by 20% compared with the current delivery model? What are the benefits of that to the commissioners? Don’t assume they will see if for themselves. Take the time to spell it out - **We’ll do this, it will achieve this and the benefit to you is this.**

Don’t forget to include the social impact of your activity. Either based on previous similar activity or predicted impact based on sound reasoning.

**The added value**

Consider how and where you can add value to your proposition. If you read the evaluation information provided in the tender documentation, you will see that full marks are reserved for responses that ‘demonstrate clear added value’ or ‘go beyond the requirements for this tender’.

Adding value doesn’t necessarily mean doing more. Added value could come from your expertise and experience in the field, your way of working, your company ethos, or your shared history with the commissioner. In more specific terms, added value could mean that you will create opportunities for people who were long-term unemployed or young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) or it could be that you will facilitate remote working to reduce travel, thereby reducing the carbon footprint of the contract.

Added value is the collection of features your organisation, and your planned way of working, bring to the contract over and above what is being asked for. Take time to consider these, talk to your colleagues about what they are and then make sure your flag them up strongly and clearly throughout your tender.

**And finally**

Check your word count as you're going along and make sure you express all of your points, and the supporting evidence where appropriate, clearly within the word count.

Ask someone else to read it and provide feedback as it can be difficult to rigorously critique your own writing.

Make sure the sums add up. Ensure that you can actually deliver the service for the price you are quoting or that the budget for the activity you want funding for is sufficient.

If you don’t succeed this time then ask for feedback – use it as an opportunity to learn, improve and build relationships with funders for the future.