



Ten Golden Rules for Bidding for Funds

The things you need to know to construct a winning bid

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Ten Golden Rules for Bidding for Funds

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Overview

Money is scarce. Even if we really are emerging from recession, we are still being very selective on where our money goes. Savings are being retained, loans paid down and a general reigning in of spending has taken place.

Organisations are doing the same. They are investing less, reducing their borrowing and cutting their headcount. Despite good economic forecasts, spending is only taking place when the business case is clear and fully justified.

The third sector has suffered more than most. Funding and grant giving bodies receive more applications for funding from third sector organisations than ever before. In 2007, 1 in 5 applications were successful. Today (2014) **only 1 in 15 applications** is being funded.

Against this bleak backdrop, people charged with raising income for the voluntary sector are forced to compete for the same pots of money. They will simply have to become more creative to survive. They must significantly raise their game, as each bid is now analysed with ever-increasing levels of scrutiny. Rejection rates are higher, and often the effort put into a bid for funds comes to nothing or, at best, a reduced sum that would simply make the project unsustainable.

Do you currently know how to:

- Write a clear and persuasive bid document that is superior to the competition?
- Persuade funders to put your project ahead of the pack?
- Ensure you can reduce your losing applications and greatly increase your win-rate?

Remember that good applications sometimes win; **poor applications *always* lose**. Luck has very little to do with it. Over the years, we have looked at many winning and losing bids. We have seen a range of winning themes emerge and we have captured these rules for you here. These are our **Ten Golden Rules for Bidding for Funds**. If you apply these rules you will become 'bid ready' and optimised for success.

Can you afford not to?

Bid Perfect – 2014

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Preparing the way

Funders estimate that between 50% and 60% of all applications they receive are immediately turned down because they are ineligible and do not meet clearly laid out guidelines.

Building a bid is like building a house. You need strong foundations, a competent and robust structure built by experienced and skilled people. Your creation also needs to work in sympathy with the environment in which you are operating; one that people are attracted to and want to invest in. But before all that, you need to do one thing. You need to begin by preparing the ground.

You must, before you begin to write your bid:

Find a competent funding search engine^[1] and gather a list of potential funders.

Create a calendar for submission and result deadlines.

Read the Guidelines several times. Each time highlight points you may need to question.

Map out your project proposal, making sure it brings together the main themes from the guidelines.

Check that you are clear about:

- Your eligibility. If not eligible, don't stop there; find another funder.
- The aim/objectives of your project – what will your end result look like.
- The trends in the field of practice.
- The budget (as per individual guidelines).
- Detailed requirements in the application i.e. number of pages; words; characters; support material; attachments; number of copies required; how they want it received (online or hard copy, etc.). Write them down in a checklist.
- The aims of the organisation from which you are seeking support i.e. their vision or mission statements or policies, strategic plans, etc. The key is to show as much correlation as possible between their vision and your outcomes.
- If you are not clear on any of these items, seek clarification from the grant making body as this information will be crucial.

6. Phone *the contact person or project officer to:*

- Check if your interpretation of the guidelines is correct
- Ask questions, seeking additional clarification where necessary

1. <http://www.grantfinder.co.uk/>

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Golden Rule No. 1

Be realistic

You are in competition with other organisations. Money is thin on the ground and funders often want to make awards that distribute their funds across as wide a spectrum of projects as possible. For funders, value for money (or, more specifically, *return on investment*) is vital. Therefore, you should ask for a realistic amount; pragmatism must be your watch word.

If your scheme is large scale and will need significant funding, you are probably reducing your chances. Also, the higher the amount, the closer the scrutiny will be – sometimes a large bid will have to struggle against an extra level of bureaucracy (for example, a further board meeting where your bid will be more closely scrutinised) – as a consequence your case will have to be more robust. You may even find it best to split your project up and ask a range of funders to make an award to a portion of your project.

Gauging how much you can ask for

There will often be thresholds and limits to awards. It is critical that you know what is likely to be given out (don't be afraid to ask how much is available or how much their average grant is). In this case, it makes sense to investigate what awards have been made in the past and in what amounts. Check their website, ask them, or search their case studies to see what other organisations have secured funding.

You will generally find potential funders are very approachable and willing to give you advice and guidance through the process. This is your opportunity to build a relationship with them and to ask them key questions about their objectives and aspirations (more of this later) and try to find out what, in their view, makes a successful application.

The simple things to remember are:

- ✓ Bid appropriately to the funding source
- ✓ Don't be afraid to talk to them
- ✓ Try to find out what has been previously successful
- ✓ If they give you advice – take it
- ✓ Don't remove yourself from the race before you have even started

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Golden Rule No. 2

Be empathetic: it's also about them

Empathy (*noun*) – *The ability to understand the feelings of another. The ability to identify with and understand the aspirations of somebody other than you.*

Ultimately, no matter how worthy your project, you are dealing with human beings who will make decisions based on their own opinions and objectives. Or even their prejudices and pre-conceived ideas. Even if someone rejects the idea that they have an inbuilt prejudice, they are only human and cognitive bias^[1] can be an unconscious behavioural trait!

The solution is to align your bid as closely as possible to the goals of the funding body. The more you do this, the more you demonstrate your knowledge of where they are going and what their vision is, the more likely your bid is to be well received. Remember: your mission is to ensure that your project clearly fits their required outcomes.

Focus your conversations with them on what *they* are trying to achieve. The greater your understanding of this the better your bid will be. **Never forget:** the bid is **at least** as much about *them* as it is about you.

The key points to remember are:

- ✓ Talk about **their** objectives as much as you talk about your own
- ✓ Research their history and where they have placed awards in the past – and how closely those awards mirror the objectives they are setting out to achieve
- ✓ Show that you understand them

It is also worth remembering that public fund sources like bids that:

- Show that beneficiaries actually want the project and that they are **involved** in shaping, evaluating and managing the project
- Are linked to the fulfilment of government strategies programmes and targets
- Will *add value* (however that value may be measured and quantified) to other initiatives
- Can jointly mobilise the efforts and resources of different sectors of the community – especially those who are marginalised
- Have a clearly sustainable legacy effect
- Work in partnership with other organisations.

¹A **cognitive bias** is a pattern of deviation in judgment, whereby inferences about other people and situations may be drawn in an illogical fashion. Individuals create their own “subjective social reality” from their perception of the input. An individual’s construction of social reality, not the objective input, may dictate their behaviour in the social world. Thus, cognitive biases may sometimes lead to perceptual distortion, inaccurate judgment, illogical interpretation, or what is broadly called irrationality. **Source: Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_bias)**

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Golden Rule No. 3

Prioritise: Be prepared to settle for less

Funders will expect you to set out the elements of the bid in a logical order of priority. If your project can be broken into clear elements, each individually costed, then they can see how it all fits together. There may be some 'nice to haves' which, if you dropped them to reduce the overall amount you are asking for, will not necessarily affect the complete outcome. In other words, if you were to receive only, say, 50% of the funds you are seeking, what would you still be able to achieve and will this damage the viability and value for money of the project?

Could you employ a good/better/best formula? This means that for any particular element of a funds bid there may be lower cost alternatives which, although they may not be as desirable, may make the difference between securing the overall requirement or your proposal being rejected.

Here is a small scale example:

A local voluntary playgroup is bidding for funds to provide a new safe play area for children under five. They have broken down their requirements as follows:

Overall Project Costs Breakdown

Clearance and preparation of site:	£540
Purchase of new play equipment and structures:	£2,900
Equipment installation costs:	£2,400
Fencing – hard wood bar fencing	£1,240
Preparation of grounds for decorative planting:	£440
Purchase of plantings:	£260
Planting and landscaping labour:	£880
Signage design and production:	£300

Total cost of project: £8,960

Now, presented as a series of alternative funding propositions, the playgroup could offer cost compromises as follows:

Overall Project Costs Breakdown (in the event of part funding decision)

Clearance and preparation of site:	£540
Purchase of new play equipment and structures:	£2,900
Equipment installation costs:	£2,400
Fencing – hard wood bar fencing	£1,240
Preparation of grounds for decorative planting:	£440

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Purchase of plantings:	£260
Planting and landscaping labour:	£880
Signage design and production:	£300

Revised Total Cost of Project: **£7,080**

The simple rule is that you should allow them the option of awarding slightly reduced funding if some of the elements are 'nice to haves' but are not critical to the delivery of the project.

The key points to remember are:

- ✓ Decide what elements are crucial to the outcome
- ✓ Provide alternative funding models
- ✓ Give the evaluators a chance to award by offering a pragmatic and flexible approach

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Golden Rule No. 4

Prick their conscience

Your bid might have a better chance of success if you can show that the project will not go ahead without the support of the funding. If you have done a good job of selling the project and shown how various stakeholder groups will benefit from your project, then you may be able suggest that, by not selecting your bid, they are likely to deprive deserving people of something special.

This may seem to be a cynical approach and often meets with some resistance when we recommend it as a strategy to our clients, but you have to recognise that you are in competition with other proposals and you should seek all appropriate ways of making your case. This approach is not wrong – it is simply one more tool in your bag.

This is a good point at which you should make sure that your project is synchronising exactly with the aims and objectives of the awarding body. It may also be that you can demonstrate that by awarding you the funds, they increase the likelihood of meeting their own goals.

At the same time it can be useful to indicate that you have finance committed to the project from other sources of funding that **recognise the value of what the project is trying to achieve** and are prepared to invest in it. Though often described as *match-funding* (every pound you seek from the funder is exactly matched by yourselves or alternative sources) it often means showing you will raise a portion of the total project cost yourselves – sometimes not necessarily the full 50%. This is especially useful if the cost of your project exceeds the likely level of award.

You are unlikely to succeed if your project cost is higher than the amount of funding available and you do not have the balance already committed, or can demonstrate how you will raise the remainder.

The key points to remember are:

- ✓ Show the outcomes are dependent upon being awarded the funds
- ✓ 'Connect' with the evaluating body by understanding and empathising with their aims
- ✓ Provide match-funding if you have secured it through donations from elsewhere

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Golden Rule No. 5

More Bang for their Buck!

This golden rule is critical and probably the most important one of all. Return on investment [ROI] is a phrase that has become almost clichéd of late but it can mean the difference between winning or losing a bid.

In our experience, winning bids can generally be defined as achieving five key things; these are:

1. A bid which leads thinking, is innovative and will genuinely result in positive outcomes for all concerned
2. That the awarding body feels the bidder has truly understood their agenda and is bidding for funds that link to their own objectives
3. That the bid is comprehensively thought through, well-articulated and properly presented
4. That the return on investment is clearly defined, quantified and where possible, provable
5. That there is a sustainable legacy to be achieved (See Golden Rule No. 7)

Take No. 4 and the notion of return on investment. If the evaluators of your bid are doing their job properly, they will be looking for bids that maximise the outcomes of the funds being awarded and create the highest level of return – financially and operationally. In other words: where is their money going to do the most good and be of greatest benefit.

While you will not be able to see what others are bidding for, you will vastly increase your chances of winning by clearly demonstrating that for each pound invested in your project the return will be greater than the investment. It is especially important to be clear how much of their funding is actually going to be reaching the ‘front-line’ and is not going to be caught up in administrative costs. As a rule, many funders allow you to put a portion of your administrative costs, say 10%, into the bid. Often, they also encourage full cost recovery, where you can include all those organisational costs that have a bearing on the project.

Some very large charities and voluntary organisations have been the subject of criticism that donors money is often chewed up by running infrastructure, providing large executive salaries, marketing costs and other ‘corporate’ cost lines. They are taken to task because a reduced percentage of the money donated to them actually arrives on the front-line. Be clear: the higher the percentage of the cash reaching the intended use, the more likely it is that your bid will succeed. In fact, if you can demonstrate that the funds will achieve a greater than 100% return, then your bid’s chances of winning takes a massive leap forward.

Proposals for pilot or demonstration projects must show that what they are seeking to demonstrate is **genuinely innovative**, and that the results will be useful to the **widest possible stakeholder group** – **this can mean the widest diversity of stakeholders or simply the quantity of stakeholders from the same group, depending on the funders’ criteria**. You must also demonstrate the **return on the investment** in **quantifiable terms**.

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The key points to remember are:

- ✓ The percentage of funds that reach the front line are maximised and the cost of administration minimised
- ✓ That there is a clear and quantifiable series of outcomes for all stakeholders
- ✓ That you can prove your propositions through strong evidence
- ✓ Provide match-funding if you have secured it from donations from elsewhere

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Golden Rule No. 6

Robust (and transparent) financial governance is essential

Regardless of the altruistic nature of your organisation and the good intentions of all involved, funders will want to see that you also have a clear understanding of how to handle money and account for it. This will mean your initial application must have a sound and professional methodology for controlling cash and show that you will be able to report on its management and use. It may be useful at this stage to highlight past projects and monies you and your organisation have managed. This will help demonstrate that their grant is safe.

You should present:

- A fully costed project
- A business plan for the implementation of the project
- A cashflow analysis for the use of the money

Depending upon the size of the application, it may be that you get these documents professionally drawn up by an accountant who will prepare them according to accepted conventions. In fact, you should be demonstrating that the person (or people) responsible for the management of the funds is properly qualified to do so and will be accountable during the life of the project.

You will need to demonstrate that your internal processes will operate at best practice at all times and that expenditures will be controlled and focused on exactly what the funds were originally intended for. In this respect, you should put in place a system for monitoring the funds (ring-fencing them where necessary if you have other finances operating), measuring outcomes associated with the expenditure of the funds and having a reporting process. By doing this you will be showing optimum stewardship and accountability.

Your bid will need to show, in detail, how these processes will work and how you will report back to the funding source (if you are required to). Even if you are not required to report back, it will strengthen your bid if you make it clear that you will do so in any case. Why not establish Oversight Groups, to demonstrate that more than one person is accountable for monitoring and evaluating the project? Place any groups – Finance Group, Stakeholder Groups – in a Gantt chart so funders can immediately see the various checkpoints at which you will scrutinise the project.

You will also need to look at contingency for changes in the financial assumption that you have made. For example, what will happen if material or services costs change between the time of application and actually using the cash? How much margin for error will be built into your project? It will make sense, if you are going to be making purchases in markets where there is volatility in prices, that you can show you have pre-agreed pricing for a fixed period. This reduces risk and will add gravitas to your application. Proof of secure pricing will add a further element of protection to the funds.

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The key points to remember are:

- ✓ Present a breakdown of total estimated costs to demonstrate the project represents good value for money.
- ✓ Set out in the bid your plans for **monitoring, measuring** and **reporting** progress.
- ✓ Awarding agencies need information about the **benefits** achieved through the use of funding so as to be able to make a case for the fund schemes to continue in the future. You may be asked to provide a business case in support of your figures.

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Golden Rule No. 7

The Legacy Effect

Sound social, economic and environmentally sustainable outcomes have quickly become a priority in all sectors and your bid *must* clearly articulate how the positive outcomes from your project will last long after the funding has ceased i.e. your legacy. Your chances of a successful award will increase if your project goes beyond the need for continual cash injections. Therefore you must be able to demonstrate your outcomes are sustainable, which in turn will create a *legacy* effect. The Legacy Effect must reflect well on the funders of the project.

Creating a sustainable legacy will require more than a single strategy. You must describe how your project will affect different groups in different ways and how the outcomes are varying and differently sustainable. It may even be that there is an exponential effect for the positive benefits and the legacy effect will actually expand over time – leading to a good example of maximised outcomes (see *Golden Rule No. 5*) when measured against the original funding award. In this way the funds become an investment in the future rather than just today or the timeline of the project. By doing this your proposal is much more likely to stand out from the competition.

Remember these guiding principles when writing your bid:

- Make sustainability an integral part of your funding bid. Show how your entire organisation will make this a priority, culturally and operationally
- Make it clear that you understand the nature of a positive legacy and that your project will deliver a better future for those involved
- Be able to provide evidence of your suppositions – people will invest in what they believe in and compelling evidence will help them to believe in you
- Prioritise, develop and implement a robust set of sustainable development practices which will stand careful scrutiny
- Show in your bid how you will regularly measure your progress, adapt, improve and extend sustainable development practices to all areas of your project

The key points to remember are:

- ✓ The work of the project must continue after the funding ends
- ✓ That there must be a legacy for everyone involved
- ✓ Legacy and sustainability must be more than buzz-words: they must be ideals that you aspire to and will achieve.

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Golden Rule No. 8

Minimise Risk – Maximise Success

Risk is a catch-all word. It covers many things and can be applied to any aspect of business whether in the private, public or not-for-profit sectors. However, you will need to demonstrate you have thoroughly taken risk into account. To do so, your bid will need to address these specific areas:

- What is the risk of your project not achieving its objectives?
- What is the risk that the project will not be sustainable?
- What is the risk of individual component elements failing?
- What is the risk that the funds you are bidding for will not be properly managed or applied?
- How much does the project depend on factors over which you have limited (or no) control?

What is the risk of your project not achieving its objectives?

You must demonstrate that you have made a *realistic* assessment of the project's weaknesses and what you have done to mitigate them and ensure that the likelihood of maximised outcomes is optimised.

What is the risk that the project will not be sustainable?

Once funding has ceased or been spent, what are the reasons that your project will keep going? What are the potential factors that might mean a failure of the project or a reduction in the outcomes and how will you manage that? *See Golden Rule No. 7.*

What is the risk of individual component elements failing?

If your project can be broken down into elements, each of these must perform to expectations. If you clearly address the risks of each element of your bid individually, funders will take note.

What is the risk that the funds you are bidding for will not be properly managed or applied?

The award of funds will be dependent upon you being able to demonstrate excellent financial stewardship. The better controls the awarding bodies see, the more likely they are to have faith that you will guard their investment wisely. *See Golden Rule No. 6*

How much does the project depend on factors over which you have limited (or no) control?

If there is a third party connected to your bid, you should ensure that you have provided a substantial analysis of their role and how their action will be monitored and governed. This is especially the case where there may be builders or other contractors involved. If you are relying upon estimates for building works or similar, then you must ensure these are firm quotes and that

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the project will be governed by a strict contract with a reputable organisation with a history that stands scrutiny. The risk in a project may not lay with you but with other people you will employ.

Summary

You must carefully review your project and look for all the weak points, the places where it could fail and then produce what is known as a Risk Register. A Risk Register acknowledges the inherent risks, grades the likelihood of that risk occurring and what you will do to a) mitigate it and b) deal with it if it happens.

Example Risk Register:

Risk Identification		Qualitative Rating				Risk Response		
Risk	Risk Category	Probability	Impact	Risk Score	Risk Ranking	Risk Response	Trigger	Risk Owner

Key Terms Explained:

Risk: A sentence that states the cause of the risk, the risk itself, and the potential negative effects the risk would have on the project.

Risk Category: Categorise risks by which area of the project they affect, the source of risk or other useful categories.

Probability: The likelihood that a risk or opportunity will occur (on a scale from 0 to 10 with 10 being the highest).

Impact: The impact of the risk on the project if the risk occurs (scale from 0 to 10 with 10 being the highest).

Risk Score: Determined by multiplying probability and impact (scale from 0 to 100).

Risk Ranking: Rank risks by priority within the project, with the number one being the highest risk score.

Risk Response: Action taken if this risk occurs.

Trigger: An indication that a risk is about to, or has already, occurred.

Risk Owner: Individual, assigned by the project manager, who watches for triggers, and manages the risk response.

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The key points to remember are:

- ✓ People are generally risk adverse; if they see risk, it will reduce your chances of securing an award. If you can see it, so can they.
- ✓ Mitigate all risk.
- ✓ Be honest and bold in your approach and do not try to 'paper over' weaknesses in your project plan. If you address weaknesses, it will count in your favour.

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Golden Rule No. 9

Never forget that you are selling

You might not think of a bid as a sales document but the simple, unvarnished truth is that this is exactly what it is. You have to sell; you have to sell your project; you have to sell your organisation and the people in it and you have to sell your vision.

Selling, in its purest form, is a simple concept. You have something which you believe others will want and so you ask them to buy it from you. If you are the only person selling it, and the buyer recognises that your product or service answers a need, then you are going to make the sale. But (and it's a big BUT) complications set in extremely quickly. The **first issue** is *competition* – others selling what you are selling. The **second issue** is *how you sell* – if your competition is doing it better, you will not achieve success. The **third issue** is the buyer *not recognising they want what you have* – in other words you have not established the need. The **fourth issue** is that they want what you have but are *not sure you are the people to deliver it* – you have not convinced them.

These issues can all be countered in a truly compelling bid and we can take a quick look at them now:

1. How to handle competition – other organisations bidding for the same funds that you want

You can make your organisation stand out if you:

- Follow the Golden Rules given in this document (naturally)
- Do your research – know more about the funding source than your competitors
- Align your philosophy with that of the funding agency
- Reflect them in your bid (colours, language, terminology, etc.)
- Use good quality evidence to back up your bid
- Professionally produce your bid with high quality graphics
- Write it well (More of this later)
- Have your document professionally reviewed and proofread

Ultimately, a bid stands an increased chance of achieving its objective if it is an excellent proposal that stands out from the chasing pack. It will fail if it is a poor bid which just blends into the crowded background. It will certainly stand apart if it follows the rules given here.

2. How to sell:

Simply remember this rule; people **buy what something does, not what it is**. In other words they buy outcomes, whatever they might be. The difference between what something is and what it does is often described as a **feature** versus a **benefit**. A feature is something about your organisation, a benefit is what that feature delivers. Write about what it *does* not what it *is*.

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A good thing to remember here are the Common Buying Motive, which are:

Increase – Improve – Reduce – Save – Gain

These five words represent the range of primary outcomes that can be expected to be achieved when anyone buys anything, in business, or for when they are looking for the ‘greater good’.

Here are some examples:

- ✓ Saves (*conserves**) management time
- ✓ Reduces or eliminates cost
- ✓ Reduces (*shrinks or diminishes*) risk
- ✓ Improves (*boosts*) staff morale
- ✓ Increases (*grows*) turnover
- ✓ Improves (*delivers higher*) margins
- ✓ Increases (*drives up*) productivity
- ✓ Reduces (*decreases*) waste
- ✓ Enhances (*promotes, improves*) image
- ✓ Reduces (*minimises or eliminates*) environmental impact
- ✓ Decreases (*significantly lowers*) staff turnover
- ✓ Improves (*delivers higher*) quality levels
- ✓ Increases (*elevates*) skills levels

*The words in brackets are alternatives or synonyms – words that can replace the primary words to ‘spice’ up your writing.

A simple example is a company that makes, let’s say, widgets. Their current manufacturing line makes 500 widgets an hour. You are going to sell them a new machine which can make 1,000 widgets an hour. They won’t buy your machine because it is faster; they will buy it because it will:

- Increase production capacity
- Increase stock volumes allowing them to reduce delivery times
- Increase staff efficiency allowing a greater return on staff costs
- Increase competitiveness
- Save time and cost
- Improve margins...etc.

This is why we are not necessarily interested in hearing about how big, old, tall, fast (whatever) a company is, despite what marketeers sometimes think we want to hear. A really good salesperson knows that buyers/evaluators simply want to know what you are going to do for them. What will I get from your product/service/project? Tell me something interesting in that respect and I might buy from you.

Selling also benefits from a little well-placed passion. Passion is an overworked word in modern business. Companies are always passionate about something; customer service, the environment, the community but it is hard for them to overcome the fact that they are, ultimately, businesses with a profit driven rationale.

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The third sector already has some goodwill in the bank from the passion perspective. However, voluntary, not for profit and charitable organisations have to tread the tightrope between good business sense and delivering on altruistic motivations. Passion for delivering a better life, to reduce marginalisation, to increase engagement, to reduce deprivation (and many more) are all things to be talked about. Ultimately they will be more believable if you write from the heart.

3. Establishing the need.

We have discussed this earlier but it does no harm to re-visit the nature of *need*. Whatever project you are seeking support for should have a rationale based on clearly identified and proven needs or, at least, an outcome which will result in improvements in people's lives. There is nothing so disheartening than conceiving a service or project which you think people will want but no one else sees it the way you do.

Typically, the best way to establish a need (to which *you* will provide the solution) is by demonstrating through hard evidence (usually third party) which supports your project. This may be, for example, by employing third party data, perhaps from a local government agency or a formal survey carried out by a professional body. It may be that you simply ask people who are representative of the service recipients, what they want.

However you present the nature of the need, you have to demonstrate that you have carried out your research.

4. Convincing them you are the people to deliver

Without wishing to appear too glib – you will convince them you are the right people to deliver based on following the rules in this document.

Simply be these four things **sincere, passionate, professional** and **businesslike**. If you can provide the correct blend of these attributes, funding evaluators will connect with you.

Your sincerity and passion for making something happen should permeate the pages of your bid. Tell them why you feel so strongly about your project and focus in on the outcomes which will be of benefit to the widest possible stakeholder group (as we have previously discussed).

Your professionalism and businesslike approach will convince them that you will deliver what you say you will and that their money is safe in your hands and that the investment will be maximised with a lasting legacy.

Back up everything you say with high quality evidence*; people buy what they believe in and they will believe in what you say if you prove it to them.

*Bid Perfect provides a separate briefing document: **Providing Evidence/Proof in a Bid** available at www.bidperfect.co.uk

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Golden Rule No. 10

Write well and present your bid professionally

This is a vast subject and one that we will cover here in basic detail but the key things to remember are:

Writing:

- Write concisely removing all hyperbole and ‘brochure speak’
- Write clearly using a good vocabulary range
- Write positively
- Ensure your bid is 100% error free (i.e. employ a proofreader)

Writing concisely

Consider the following paragraph:

This document is for the purpose of giving the reader a detailed explanation of the inventory process. It describes the activities we currently do in the majority of instances on a daily and weekly basis. In order to provide an introduction to the process for employees who work on a temporary basis, we also have prepared an overview, which describes the highlights of the inventory process in just two pages.

How could this be made more concise? How about this edited version:

This document explains the inventory process in detail, describing our usual daily and weekly activities. We have also prepared a two-page overview for temporary employees.

The first paragraph is seventy words long whereas the edited version is nearly two thirds shorter. This is what good editing can do for you. The editing process has reduced the length to focus in on the message and decreased the reading time, as well as making the paragraph more memorable and therefore more likely to be processed easily. We are continually having to restrain our clients from overwriting. There are no extra points awarded for length and most bids we read can normally be condensed by at least a third while still saying exactly the same thing.

If you are going to self-edit, some of the main things to look out for are:

Heavy phrasing – here are some examples:

for the purpose of	=	for
the majority of	=	most
in order to	=	to
provide an introduction	=	introduce
on a daily basis	=	daily
on a regular basis	=	routinely
as a consequence of	=	because

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during which time	=	while
on numerous occasions	=	often

Tautological phrasing (phrases which use words that mean the same thing). Here are some examples:

In my opinion, I think that... – *They mean the same, so use one or the other.*

We will act in joint cooperation – *Cooperation means working with other parties, so the joint is redundant.*

They came one after the other in succession – *In succession means one after the other, therefore it should be used alone.*

The delivery will be made at 4 am in the morning – *Very common amongst non-native English speakers who do not know the meaning of am (ante-meridian – 'before noon'). 'In the morning' is not needed.*

So then, to reiterate again – *Reiterate means to say something again, making the use of 'again' redundant.*

She will be in close proximity – *They mean the same. Close is usually fine in non-technical writing.*

These are necessary requirements – *If something is required, it is necessary. Use one of them.*

With today's modern technology – *Use modern technology or today's technology – they mean the same.*

Whenever editing, make sure you remove all extraneous words and keep your text as simple as possible. Use the words you need to and no more.

Write clearly using a good vocabulary range

Simply use language well. For most conversations we rely on a core of about 750 words but the English language is rich with synonyms and alternative phrasing. The syntax (sentence construction) can be swapped around to make reading easier and the insertion of alternative words when you can see you have used the same one several times will also improve readability. Naturally, you are not trying to dazzle your reader with your extensive knowledge of our language but what you are trying to do is make your text more appealing and intriguing.

If we refer back to our common buying motives (**Increase – Improve – Reduce – Save – Gain**), we will find that there is an array of alternative words we can use which have the same impact.

For example:

Increase	Improve	Reduce	Save	Gain
Augment	Advance	Decrease	Retain	Grow
Amplify	Progress	Lessen	Accumulate	Expand
Enhance	Develop	Lower	Accrue	Achieve
Boost	Mature	Cut	Amass	Add

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Surge	Expand	Diminish	Stockpile	Attain
Rise	Nurture	Condense	Assemble	Realise
Escalation	Grow	Shrink	Collect	Accomplish
Proliferation	Encourage	Contract	Gather	
Maximise	Promote	Eliminate		
Capitalise on	Help	Minimise		
Exploit	Stimulate	Decline		
Strengthen	Motivate			
Enlarge	Excite			
Intensify	Inspire			
Magnify				

The simple rule to remember is whenever you feel you might be overusing a particular word or phrase – seek an alternative through the use of a Thesaurus or by rearranging the syntax of your sentences.

Write positively

Whenever you have written the words ‘*would*’, ‘*could*’, ‘*can*’, ‘*might*’, ‘*may*’, which are passive words and which introduce a possible sense of non-commitment, caution or doubt, consider using the word ‘*will*’. You will be surprised at how subliminally positive your text will become.

- We ~~can~~ produce a positive outcome for the community
- We will produce a positive outcome for the community
- We ~~could~~ improve the local economy
- We will improve the local economy

You should also focus on what you will do and not what you won’t do. For example, ‘*There will be some people we will not be able to help*’ becomes ‘*We will be able to help the majority of people*’. When you are writing or reviewing your bid, look for areas where your message will be positive rather than negative.

Ensure your bid is error free

For this we recommend using a professional proofreader, especially if the bid is substantial. Some people feel they are very good proofreaders but we regularly come across major bids which include the most basic of errors.

Try this short test; see how many mistakes you can spot in the text below:

Your unlikely to improve on you’re bid writing skill’s simply from this document alone. You must continualy practice your writing technique and pay proper attention to spelling and grammer. Your customer judge you based on your attention to the smallest of details.

The affect of poor spelling, sintax and grammer will remain in the mind of you’re reader long after he or she have finished reading your bid. If you want to illicit the right response, please ensure that

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you follow the principals laid out in this presentation and adhere to the basic tenants of what makes a truly compelling bid..

Please bear in mind you cant proof read your own work. Try to get some one else to help you by reading thorough you're work for you. If they are a proffesional proof reader, that is even better.

How many did you find? There are 24 (You can look on the last page of this document for the answers).

Remember these key points:

- Don't proofread your own work – your brain has familiarised itself with the mistakes
- Ask a (competent) colleague or a professional to do it
- Don't forget to check your numbers – prices and statistics!
- Use a Thesaurus and a Dictionary
- Spell-checker can be useful, but DO NOT rely on it to identify all errors
- Remember that:
 - Many people are irritated by continual misspelling and poor grammar
 - It is a poor reflection on your organisation and your attention to detail

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Eight common reasons applications fail

Of course, we have given you the main reasons bids win but it makes sense to capture the primary reasons a bid for funds will fail. This list is not exhaustive, but by paying attention to these common flaws, you will be reducing the chances of failure and increase the chances of success. Your bid might fail because it has not:

1. Met the prospectus criteria, for example in relation to proposed activity or capital spend
2. Supplied sufficient evidence about current provision and where the project will fit. It will be clear that if you are proposing to deliver a service which is currently well catered for, then you are less likely to win.
3. Provided clear objectives and/or outcomes. The purpose for your application, the clear needs and the anticipated outcomes must be clearly identified and expressed.
4. Given enough evidence about potential progression links.
5. Provided a clear plan for sustainability and exit strategy following the project completion.
6. Demonstrated clearly enough the value for money argument.
7. Been sufficiently innovative in its proposed delivery and/or dissemination.
8. Presented a proportionate budget, for example too much spend on publicity or non-delivery costs.

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Constructing a Bid: A Checklist

	Check
<p>Print off a couple of copies of the form – work in draft first. Use this to capture key input from associated parties, task and finish groups, delivery agents, directors and others that may be key to delivery.</p>	
<p>Contact people who will write supporting letters or testimonials, e.g. finance departments and other fund providers. Give them plenty of time to get back to you before your deadline. In some cases it may be useful to provide an outline about what you want covered in the support material. Check with them how to make it easy for them to supply the material in time.</p>	
<p>Use clear and simple language – use short sentences, write to the point, include additional information (Gantt charts, etc.) in attachments if allowed.</p>	
<p>Be as specific as possible with your proposal – describe in detail the project you would like to undertake.</p>	
<p>Your proposal will need to consider the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • workable time frames • the necessary skills and expertise • appropriate resources, venues and facilities • management and administration (try also to pictorially show this in a diagram / flow chart) • budget and financial accountability • processes and responsibilities 	
<p>Ensure your application brings together the themes and values described in the guidelines and that you meet all the criteria.</p>	
<p>To be fairly assessed a proposal must be presented in an assessable manner. It is essential that your proposal demonstrates to the funding body:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What you want to do (aim) • Where you want to go (objectives) 	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is required to get there (resources) • What to do once you are there (management structure, monitoring and evaluation) • How to back away once the project is complete (sustainability / exit strategy) 	
<p>Be accurate, double check and proof your spelling, grammar, budget details (many applications do not allow you to do this so cut and paste into a new document then move back once checked)</p>	
<p>Get someone not connected to the application to re-check (a fresh pair of eyes can make a world of difference)</p>	
<p>Leave yourself time to make changes based on feedback. Plan on at least two drafts with time between</p>	
<p>Make a checklist of all documents you need to send. These often include: a covering letter, a completed signed application form (they may require between multiple copies) and any other attachments such as an annual report, copy of the most recent constitution, etc.</p>	
<p>Get the application to the funding body before the closing date and time. It is rare that a funding body will grant you an extension</p>	

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Answers to the proofreading test on pages 23 and 24:

You unlikely to improve on **you're** bid writing **skill's** simply from this document alone. You must **continually practice*** your writing technique and pay proper attention to spelling and **grammer**. Your customer **will** judge you based on your attention to the smallest of details.

The **affect** of poor spelling, **sintax** and **grammer** will remain in the mind of **you're** reader long after he or she **have** finished reading your bid. If you want to **illicit** the right response, please ensure that you follow the **principals** laid out in this presentation and adhere to the basic **tenants** of what makes a truly **compeling** bid..

Please bear in mind you **cant proof read** your own work. Try to get **some one** else to help you by reading **thorough you're** work for you. If they are a **proffesional proof reader**, that is even better!

24 errors!

*** The word 'practice' is a noun; the requirement here is for the verb: 'practise'.**