

Finding Funds for Storytelling Projects By Martin Manasse

1. Have a clear knowledge of who you are and what it is you wish to fund
2. Be clear as to why you cannot fund it without assistance. Ask only for what you really need.
3. Any funder likes to think that the funding will "make a difference" so be able to set out what that "difference" is and what benefits it brings.
4. Have at your fingertips a clear knowledge of the income and expenditure budget for the project as the funders will want to see it and to know where their contribution fits in. Make sure that your figures actually add up. It is astonishing how many applications fail on this simple error.
5. Be aware that most charitable funders will only give to a registered charity so do not waste time applying if you do not fit the qualifications.
6. When choosing your potential funder, be it through a Google search or a charities directory or via the local authority or Arts Council website, look carefully at what they say about what they fund, why they fund and what sums they may be prepared to give. Note any additional conditions they may find desirable e.g. outreach work arising from the project etc.
7. Do not be afraid to ask for advice and if your potential funders offer to vet a draft application (Arts Council England are unlikely not look at a proposal that has not received advice from one of their officers) take it up and listen carefully to what they say.
8. Even if the final application has to be on hard copy, most communication can be by e-mail and many funders have their application forms and conditions available to download from their websites. Use the proper forms and follow the guidelines.
9. Make sure that any funding agreement still leaves you in control of your product. A funder or sponsor may well wish to see their contribution acknowledged with a logo or sales message but this must be in proportion so that your event does not become "The Joe Bloggs Wineglasses story show" etc.

All funding approaches, however large or small, depend on the understanding that the relationship is in the interest of both parties. Make sure you have a clear

knowledge of your potential funders and what they do. Pitch your first approach to attracting their interest through your knowledge of their needs. If, for example, your prospective funder were a manufacturer of wine glasses, you would start by assuming that wine glasses are their priority so you would talk about wine glasses, not about your project. Basically, they need to know that you care about them before they are going to start to care about you. A face-to-face meeting is always desirable, though many funders will not give the time.

For small local projects, a walk down the High Street can be as fruitful as a major internet search if you can make good contact with a local shop or firm. Economic conditions will always affect attitudes and the current (June 2008) climate is not good but that does not mean you give up trying. The key is always relationships and a sense that the interaction will benefit both parties and if the outcome delivers the goods you are much more likely to get a good welcome next time. With commercial applications the “our customers are your customers” relationship can work in your favour but do not make claims if you are unsure of your facts. Every application that fails because of insufficient care taken in the approach can reduce the potential size of the funding market. Remember that people talk to each other and, sadly, accounts of bad experiences have a tendency to travel faster than reports of the good ones.

For people seeking funding for the first time for storytelling, there can be no harm in contacting the regional Arts Council office and ‘phoning the Literature officer for a basic chat about thoughts on what may or may not be possible. Every contact can lead to another and with any luck there comes a point in the chain of communication where the right sort of contact is made and a successful deal can be struck. However, let there be no misunderstanding: it takes hard work, self-knowledge, patience and persistence to get a result. I like to think that the second one is always easier than the first.

Martin Manasse. June 2008

May I add to that: the Voluntary Arts Network (just Google the name to find the site) sends out regular news bulletins that include information on funding. You can receive it online and it is very easy to use. All you need to do is go to the website and find out how to sign up for the newsletter. If all else fails, contact me and I will give your e-mail address to Daniel Carpenter who runs the news bulletin.