

Grant writing tips & resources

Writing grant applications and proposals can sometimes be an overwhelming and time-consuming process. At times, the turnaround time to complete these applications can be very tight or there are multiple funding applications due with different requirements.

The following tips and questions are designed to help you write a strong funding application.

- Before you start writing your application
- Get organized
- Describe your project or initiative
- Develop a relationship with your funder(s)
- Consider the 'big' picture
- Partnerships and collaborations
- Financial budget
- Evaluation
- Sustainability plan
- Application review and submission
- Resources

Before you start writing your application

Ask a colleague to assist with the grant writing process. This allows for more critical examination of your project and the impact you're hoping to achieve. It also helps to balance out the workload!

Check the funder's website for grant writing tips and frequently asked questions. It's beneficial to see what type of information you could use to help write your application.

Pay close attention to the funders:

- **Strategic priorities and outcomes**
- **Areas of targeted investments**
- **Funding criteria and funding streams**

Get organized

Review all the sections of the application to get an understanding of what type of information and documents the funder is asking you to include. For example, you may be required to submit your most recent strategic plan, mission/vision statements list of

board of directors, financial audit statements, operating budgets, workplans, assessment tools, etc.

Take a look at existing resources and reports that can help enhance your application. The following resources are evidence-based frameworks for positive youth development that can help ground your project in evidence and demonstrate the link to clear outcomes:

- [Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development](#)
- [The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents](#)
- [Stepping Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed](#)

Describing your project or initiative

Clearly articulate the key elements of your project including the impact you'd like to achieve and your target population.

- **Who is the target population that will benefit from your project?**
 - What is their age group?
 - Are they an under-served population?
 - Will you be targeting specific neighbourhoods or catchment areas?
 - Is there any additional relevant information to include that describes your target population such as, race/marginality, income levels, education levels, etc...) Source: ([Community Tool Box](#))
- **Will your project directly address specific barriers, experiences, assets or challenges facing the population you intend to serve?** Source: ([Ontario Trillium Foundation, 2015](#))
 - What are these barriers, experiences, assets and/or challenges?
 - Have you identified what you're trying to accomplish and the impact you'd like to make?
 - Will your project make an impact on an individual level? neighbourhood or community level? systems level?
- **What needs or gaps will be addressed? How was this need or gap identified?**
 - Do you have [data and/or research](#) that can support the needs or gaps?
 - Are you able to make a connection between what the need or gap is within your target population and the project you'd like to start or continue?

- What is the context or environment of where your work will be happening? Are there systems or structures that may influence your work?
Source: ([Ontario Trillium Foundation, 2015](#))
- Are there other agencies doing the same type of work?
- **Is this an existing or new project?**
 - If this is a new project did you adapt it based on an [evidence-based model or best practices?](#)
 - If you're expanding or improving upon a project that already exists try to include the following:
 - Evaluation results and recommendations that highlight the need for continued funding in order to improve or expand the project. Highlight your key successes and learnings that you will build upon;
 - Describe any new partners or stakeholders that you'll be engaging;
 - Demonstrate the impact the project has already made with your target population.
- **Have you consulted your target population for their input and feedback about your project?**
 - Have youth been involved in identifying the specific issues, barriers, challenges or opportunities that will be addressed?
 - If so, describe how you've obtained their feedback. For example, focus group sessions, [photovoice](#), surveys, storytelling, etc.?
 - How did their input inform or shape your project?
 - If there wasn't enough time to seek feedback, can it be built into your plan as a goal or phase of the project?

Youth engagement is a key component of evidence-informed practice and empowers youth as a valued partner in addressing issues and making decisions about what affects them. Source: ([Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child & Youth Mental Health](#))

Develop a relationship with your funder(s)

Due to the competitive nature of the selection process, try building a relationship with the program manager assigned to your area or region can help to give you a

competitive edge. They may be able to provide you with input and suggestions on the concept of the project that you are applying for to ensure that it aligns to their funding priorities.

They may also be able to provide additional helpful information such as:

- A list of past successful grantees with a description of their project;
- Deadlines for future upcoming funding opportunities;
- A list of potential mentor or sponsoring organizations to connect with if required.

Quick tip: Take advantage of any information sessions, webinars, grant writing workshops and design days hosted by the funder. This is a great way to meet face-to-face with support staff and build a connection.

Consider the ‘big’ picture

Take some time to reflect on the youth-serving sector as a whole in relation to the trends and issues within the community or neighbourhood you serve by conducting a [situational assessment](#).

Also consider the following questions to enhance your application:

- Have you done an environmental scan to see if there are other agencies or partners who are trying to achieve the same goals as your intended project initiative?
- Are you a new grassroots agency or has your organization existed for many years? Are you contributing to the youth-serving sector in a unique way?
- Will your project create change in the youth-serving sector?
- As an organization have you increased your collaborative efforts and partnerships with stakeholders to address this need, challenge, barrier or opportunity?

Quick tip: In some instances, the funding review committee is made up of a mix of individuals who may not have prior knowledge of your organization, programs and services. It could be helpful to highlight additional information that speaks to your organization’s role in the community and the sector overall.

Partnerships and collaboration

Many funders encourage organizations to actively partner in a meaningful way to make a collective impact.

In some instances, funders have created specific funding streams grounded in collaboration. Here are a few examples:

- [Region of Peel Community Investment Program - Collaborative Stream](#)
- [Ontario Trillium Foundation Youth Opportunities Fund - Strategic Collaborations](#)
- [United Way of Peel Region - Neighbourhood Development Grants](#)
- [Youth Collective Impact](#)

In the case where you're not specifically applying for collaborative funding, it's still beneficial to highlight how you've engaged other partners in your project.

In addition to identifying who the partner agencies are, take a step further and provide a short description of how your partners will be contributing to the overall goal of the project:

- What is the role of your partner agencies?
- What value do they add? For example, do they provide certain skill sets, expertise, financial or in-kind resources such as space, staff support etc.
- How will you communicate with each other?

Quick tip: If your project involves system level changes you will likely need to engage multiple stakeholders to tackle the complexity of the issues.

There are also various collaborative models that exist that you can use as a guide when you're describing how your partnership functions. For example, the [Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement](#) has numerous frameworks and tools that you may find helpful.

Are there opportunities for youth to lead or co-lead part of the project? Are there mentorship opportunities built into the project?

Be mindful of the powerful role that youth have in shaping or adapting your project. Engage youth in a meaningful way throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of the project. Review existing frameworks and models of youth participation such as [Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation](#) where the highest level of engagement involves youth-led activities where decision-making is equally shared between adults and youth.

Financial budget

When you're drafting an estimated budget first review your funder's list of ineligible expenses and then consider all your anticipated costs to implement your project/initiative such as:

- Staff salaries (new or existing)
- Rent
- Office expenses
- Project supplies
- Refreshments
- Equipment
- Travel
- Staff and volunteer training
- Purchased services
- Evaluation costs
- Other sources of funding or in-kind resources Source: ([Ontario Trillium Foundation, 2015](#))

Most funders will also ask you to also include audited financial statements, if your organization is financially unstable (i.e. large deficit) be transparent in acknowledging any recent challenges or transition that the organization has faced and explain how you plan to strengthen the financial stability of the organization.

Evaluation

Review your funder's expectations in terms of measurement and evaluation. In some instances, funders will ask successful grantees to use a standardized evaluation tool and may even offer support to develop their evaluation plan.

If this is not the case, there are many resources available to support evaluation, including this website under the [Evaluation and Performance Measurement](#) section.

The province's new [Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange \(YouthRex\)](#) also provides specific resources and support to the youth sector across Ontario in direct alignment to the Ontario Enhanced Youth Action Plan and Stepping Up Framework. Their goal is to mobilize research about youth, increase understanding of positive youth development and invest in continuous quality improvement in Ontario's youth programming. Many services are being offered through YouthRex such as customized one-on-one evaluation support to youth-serving organizations.

Sustainability plan

Demonstrate your commitment to sustaining the project over time.

You may be unsure of how your project/initiative will continue without re-applying for the same funding stream however it is beneficial to illustrate to the funder that this is a question you've considered by providing at least one idea of how you could potentially sustain the project/initiative, for example:

- Host a fundraiser
- Seek funding from the private sector
- Look at ways to reduce financial costs such as sharing a staffing position with another organization
- Submit a joint funding application with a partner organization

Application review and submission

If time allows, ask a colleague who is not directly connected to your project/initiative to review your application to provide feedback and recommendations from a third party perspective.

Include any supplemental documents in an appendix and review any funder checklists or guidelines provided to ensure that you've included all the necessary materials.

Source: ([Community Tool Box](#))

If you have any questions, or are looking for support to apply to a funding grant (e.g. locating data and evidence to support your application, how to best collaborate with other organizations, etc.) please feel free to [contact](#) our team.