

Which Trusts Should We Ask for Money? Identifying Likely Funders

If you are seeking funding for a church building or outreach project you will almost certainly find yourself working through long lists of charitable trusts.

Approach the task methodically and with clear objectives to make it more effective.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Be certain what you want. It's fine to tweak a funding application to fit a trust's buzzwords. But it's pointless to shoehorn an unsuitable project into a trust's remit. The trust will have plenty of applications that are a better fit and you will be wasting your time, plus losing focus on your goals.

Therefore, before you begin a funding search, establish the basics of your project.

- **What is the primary purpose of your project?**
Original fabric repair? New facilities? Renewal of heating, lighting? Social welfare activity?
- **Who are your beneficiaries?**
Existing worshippers? Potential new worshippers? The wider community, regardless of faith?
- **What is the cost?**
What is the ballpark total? Are you seeking capital costs only, or core funding/running costs?
- **How much can your church contribute itself?**
What can you commit from unrestricted reserves? Are you in an affluent or a deprived area? What share of the costs could you raise from your community?
- **What is your timetable?**
Do you have enough funds in hand to start soon? Do you still need to raise more than 50% of the total cost? If so, how much time should you allow for this process?

Once you have established these basic points, you can begin whittling down the potential funders to a manageable size.

TYPES OF INFORMATION

Funding databases

Some helpful funding databases are listed at the end of this advice sheet. Most will provide a summary of a trust's remit and operations. That will often be enough to eliminate some trusts and to flag up others for investigation.

Note, however, that a lot of databases are not routinely updated. References to pre-2021 dates and broken links are a sign of old information. Assume that many of the funders will have changed their remit, schemes, or application procedures since that database was compiled, particularly in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has shaken up the funding world considerably.

Trust websites

Many grant-awarding bodies have their own websites. Pay attention to funding remits, eligibility, application procedures, deadlines, and payment terms.

If this information looks promising, see if the website has a page listing recent grants awarded. This is where you can establish if institutions or projects like yours have won funding from a trust.

For example, a trust may say its remit includes ‘the advancement of the Christian religion’. But if the recipients of grants under this head are theological colleges, say, and there are no individual PCCs listed, that’s a sign your church is unlikely to win funding from it.

If PCCs *are* listed as recipients, note the size of their grants and the heading (if any) under which the grants were made, such as ‘Heritage’ or ‘Environment’ or ‘Social Benefit’. Will your project fit here?

Charity Commission website

Many smaller trusts don’t have their own website or don’t publish their grant decisions on the web. To learn about their grant recipients, go to the search page on the Charity Commission’s website:

<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search>

Enter the name or charity number of a trust in the search box and from the results click through to its summary page. That will give you an overview of the trust’s operations.

Click on the ‘Accounts and Annual Returns’ tab and open up the most recent report. In most cases this will include a breakdown of grants awarded by the trust, often towards the end of the report.

The annual report will also give you contact details and – often – a summary of the giving policy and application procedure. This is especially helpful for those trusts that don’t have websites.

360 Giving

360 Giving enables charities to publish their grant data in an open and standardised format, helping people to decide which funders to approach for support. It doesn’t include all funders, but it does include important ones such as the National Lottery Heritage and Community Funds, Garfield Weston Foundation, National Churches Trust, and Sussex Community Foundation. You can keyword search by funder, location, recipient, etc. on 360 Giving’s Grant Nav page. It is an extremely helpful tool for showing what sort and size of projects appeal to which funders.

<http://grantnav.threesixtygiving.org/>

PRIORITISING APPLICATIONS

Determining when and in which order you apply to different trusts requires effective planning.

If you need a big, core grant then start with that.

Applying to a body such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund will force you to plan and cost your whole project. You can then use that data to shape applications to other trusts for match-funding.

To keep track of things, create a timeline that operates in months and years.

Mark on it when you expect to make your big funding application and when you will learn the result. Build applications to smaller trusts around that timing.

Check grant terms and deadlines carefully.

The terms will influence when and if you can make an application. It’s a pity to miss out on a good funding opportunity just because the timing was wrong.

For example, some trusts will only accept an application when 50% of the funding has been secured, but they won’t accept applications for work that has already commenced. Plus, they may only have one or two application rounds a year. So working out in advance the timing for an application is vital.

Be aware of necessary consultations and permissions.

Enter key permission dates in your timeline too, e.g., pre-planning advice, consultation with amenity societies, informal advice from the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC); planning consent, formal advice from the DAC, petition to the Chancellor for a faculty. When permissions are time-limited (such as planning consent and faculties), record too when they can be expected to expire.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

- **Read the rules**

Every trust is different. Follow the application procedure exactly. You can recycle information from one application to another, but always put it in the format that each trust requires.
- **Ask!**

If there's any doubt about the suitability of your project for a trust or how much money you can ask for, contact them first – especially if an application is for a large sum and involves a lot of paperwork. But, obviously, **don't** do this if a trust says they don't accept unsolicited applications or give pre-application advice. If it's a local trust and you know one of the trustees personally, consider inviting them for a site visit.
- **Show willing**

If a trust asks for more information or in a different format, provide it with good grace. It is a sign that a trust is interested in your application and wants to improve your chance of success. It's encouraging!
- **Tell the truth**

Never attempt to hide or disguise unrestricted reserves – not least because your annual accounts will reveal all anyway. Instead, explain what those reserves are earmarked for and how they aid your sustainability and serve your vision for the future.
- **Be realistic**

If you live in an affluent area and/or have substantial reserves, don't expect other charities to fund the bulk of your project. Show how much you are willing to contribute yourselves, both in cash and volunteer time and skills.
- **Look to the future**

Demonstrate your future planning and sustainability. No trust wishes to fund a venture that is going to fold in a few years' time because it was unsustainable. For the same reason, no major funder will expect you to expend all your reserves before they award you a grant.

DATABASES OF POTENTIAL FUNDERS

Parish Resources – National List of Charitable Grants for Churches

<https://www.parishresources.org.uk/resources-for-treasurers/funding/>

Brief, accessible information on faith-friendly trusts downloadable (Option 4) from the Church of England's Parish Resources website. Regularly updated.

East Sussex 4 Community – <https://www.idoxopen4community.co.uk/eastsussex/>

County-specific funding advice, regularly updated. Free registration and email updates. Excellent source of small, local funds that are often easier to access than the big national trusts. Churches in West Sussex can sign up here too, though the information won't be as targeted for them.

Idox Open 4 Community – <https://www.idoxopen4community.co.uk/sportengland/>

Nation-wide community funding database. Organisations with a turnover of less than £1 million can sign up for 90 days free access to the database.

The Heritage Funding Directory – <https://www.heritagefundingdirectoryuk.org/>

A 500+ list of trusts and other bodies who provide grants, advice and awards for built, environmental and cultural heritage. Not updated regularly; always check trust websites. Keyword searchable.

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