

Words. Words, words....

Writing Appropriately in Funding Applications

- Write concisely in short sentences.
- Avoid jargon (i.e. language which only people doing your work understand).
- Don't use abbreviations and acronyms. .
- Use positive language e.g. *"We will...."* not *"We hope to..."*
- Use concrete words e.g. *"We run a gym club"* not *"We provide youth leisure activities"*
- Avoid unclear and over used phrases eg *"unique"* (how do you know you are unique?) or *"You will be aware...."* (how do you know what they are aware of?)
- **Be specific:**

| Good Phrase (specific) | Bad Phrase (vague) |
|--|---|
| <i>We meet monthly</i> | <i>We meet regularly</i> |
| <i>An advice centre used by 200 people per week</i> | <i>A very busy advice centre</i> |
| <i>45 people attend each week</i> | <i>much valued by the community</i> |
| <i>a seminar for 25 councillors</i> | <i>a high profile event</i> |
| <i>We will grow our users from 20 to 40</i> | <i>We will increase our users</i> |
| <i>We have a grant of £10,000 from the County Council</i> | <i>We have substantial backing from the local authority</i> |
| <i>ranked 2nd in the indices of deprivation</i> | <i>a most deprived area</i> |
| <i>20</i> | <i>several</i> |

Words to Avoid

1. You are not unique - sorry

- “we are the only”
- “our service is unique”
- “there is no one else offering this support”
- “our unique approach”

“My response may often be: “no, you’re not – I visited another charity doing similar work just last month”; or, “you are the 5th one using this approach that I have read today”. Without backing up your claim, you have caused me to question not just this but all your assertions.”

2. Innovative? - not really.

‘Innovative’ is one of those positive words used without too much scrutiny. Innovative means introducing new ideas; being original and creative in thinking; featuring new methods. Applicants often reflect back the term ‘innovative’ to show how they meet the criteria, but saying “we are innovative” does not make it true. You need to back it up with evidence. What is new about your approach or model? And how do you know you are innovative – what research have you done? Avoid the term altogether if you can’t back it up. It is better to qualify your statement e.g. “we are the first in the UK to...”

As funders we really do get to see and read about a lot of different ways of doing things. We can spot a true innovation when we see it.

3. Hard to Reach

‘Hard-to-reach’ is commonly used in the voluntary sector and we all sort of know what it means. But it falls down on closer scrutiny. The first issue with ‘hard-to-reach’ is that it begs the question, why? Are people hard to reach because:

- they live in a rural isolated area
- they have no access to a computer and online services
- English is not their first language
- they distrust authority?

Without adding detail, the generic ‘hard-to-reach’ means very little.

What I think people mean when they use ‘hard-to-reach’ is ‘people we need to take extra steps and operate in a different way to engage with’. Tell us about the barriers people have in accessing services and tell us what you do in response. That way we will get a deeper understanding of the work you do and the costs involved. Don’t just say ‘hard-to-reach’ and assume that we will understand what you mean by that.

4. Wellbeing

Wellbeing is a positive word that conveys a lot and so is very useful. The problem is that wellbeing is so pertinent a word that it is used a lot. All charities are working to improve people’s wellbeing. So using wellbeing in funding bids stops being useful and starts being meaningless.

If you use it you must qualify it. Use short examples that bring your work to life. Do your service users go to their doctor less often? Do they sleep better? Do they feel more positive about themselves? Are they feeling more hopeful for their future? Are they buying healthy food? Or you use one of the wellbeing tools available such as the Warwick-Edinburgh wellbeing scale. For example, “following our intervention, 60% of our clients increased their score when rating themselves on the statements such as ‘I’ve been feeling relaxed’. Make sure the funder does not make wrong assumptions about the wellbeing your work brings about, or that you get lost amongst all the other charities saying the same thing. The funder is trying to work out which has the most impact – should they improve this group’s wellbeing for £25k or this other group’s for £50k?