

Tips to help you prepare winning applications for African Palliative Care Association (APCA)/True Colours Trust (TCT) small grants

Introduction

Each year, the African Palliative Care Association administers two rounds of small grants, funded by the True Colours Trust in the United Kingdom. The small grants programme targets hospices and palliative care providers across Africa to support the development of palliative care in the continent. Funding is primarily for one-off projects, and ranges from £500 - £5,000. Of the 783 applicants since 2009 when the programme was established, one hundred and thirty two (142) organisations in twenty two (22) African countries have been successful as of December 2017. This means that six hundred and forty one applications (641) have not been successful. We believe that all organisations that apply for the grants have interest in the programme and are doing important work in palliative care. The tips provided in this document aim to help you prepare more competitive and winning proposals. However, being a competitive process, there will always be proposals that are more competitive than others and the tips just increase your chances of preparing a successful proposal for this and other donors

Common reasons why proposals may be unsuccessful and how you can write more competitive and winning proposals

Common reasons for applicants being unsuccessful include weak applications which may be due to not following application guidelines and instructions. Below are some specific reasons why your application may not be successful:

1. The applicant may not be eligible

- There are guidelines outlining who is eligible and who is not for the small grants. Examples of those that are not eligible are: individuals and Ministries of Health. As a first step, you should always ascertain whether you are eligible to apply for a grant or not. This saves you writing and submitting a proposal that is eliminated during the first proposal review exercise.
- Organisations that have previously benefited from the grant can only apply again after one year from the time their final close out financial reports were submitted.
- You can find more detailed information on eligibility in the grant application guidelines, accessible at: www.africanpalliativecare.org

2. Non alignment with the funding priority areas of the programme

- The Small Grants programme supports work that directly improves the patient experience and the standard of palliative care services. All work supported in the programme must adhere to the World Health Organization's definition of palliative care accessible here: <http://www.who.int/cancer/palliative/definition/en/>. ;
- Seven priority areas are specifically supported. These include:
 - i. Equipment for patients
 - ii. Palliative care for children and young people
 - iii. Palliative care medicines
 - iv. Capital improvement costs
 - v. Increasing access to palliative care in rural areas

- vi. Developing small palliative care projects
- vii. Training courses for palliative care service providers held in Africa

Proposals outside the above areas cannot be successful.

3. Incomplete applications

- Grants are applied for using a well elaborated grant application form. Submitting an application with incomplete sections will lead to an unsuccessful proposal.
- The application also requires a set of supporting documents which are elaborated in the grant application guidelines in form of a checklist. Omitting any of these documents without a clear explanation leads to the elimination of an application. An example of such a document is an annual financial audit report. Sometimes government hospitals are unable to include this due to the central accounting and reporting systems of governments. Such reasons must be elaborated within the application or in a separate document attached to the application.
- Start preparing your application early enough so that you have enough time to review it for completeness and comprehensiveness.

4. Use of the wrong grant application form

Some applicants use the older versions of the grant application form. This is common among those organisations which have benefitted from the small grants programme before. It is important to use the right up-to-date application form for each call for applications. This is because the form is regularly revised, especially in preparation for each call for application. Use of the older version of the form may lead you to miss important and required information.

5. Content accuracy, comprehensiveness and alignment

The grant application form which is usually available for you on our website when we send out a call for applications every 1st of February and 1st of August each year has key sections which you are required to complete fully. These sections include: *project management; background information; project summary; project implementation work plan; sustainability; previous donors and budget and bank information*. Below is a summary of what the reviewers of your application look out for in each of these sections:

5.1 Project management

In this section, we are interested in getting to know the details of the person who will manage the grant, including his or her position in the organisation, qualifications, skills and experience the person possess that are relevant to the efficient and effective management of the proposed project. We would also like to know about other staff to be involved in the project, their qualifications, skills and experience.

We have found that some applicants name a member or members of their governing board in this section. In such a situation we require a satisfactory explanation of why a member or members of the governing board are named as project managers. Under normal circumstances, it is expected that the project/grant manager is a member of staff of the organisation.

5.2 Background information on the organization

In this section, the applicant provides a brief description of the organisation, and what it does. Such description includes:

- The nature of the organisation and what its core business is, e.g. if it is a non-governmental organisation
- Date of establishment, legal status and location (both country and city/district/province)
- A summary of the vision, mission, objectives and activities of the organisation

The applicant must demonstrate how the proposed project fits within the overall aim of the organization. Many applicants are able to describe their organisation well, but forget to demonstrate the link between the proposed project and the aim of the organisation, and this affects their score of this section.

5.3 Project Justification

Here the applicant demonstrates the need for the proposed project. It is important to use quantitative (statistics) and qualitative evidence to convince the reviewers that your proposed project should be funded. The applicant should aim to answer these questions: what problem(s) is the proposed project addressing? Why is it important to address this problem? What change will you achieve from implementing this project? How will the palliative care patients benefit from the project?

5.4 Project summary

This section has various important sub-sections. These are elaborated below:

a) Main objective or aim of the project

Here you need to articulate the larger outcome or impact you wish to achieve by the end of the project. Please ensure that what you state is the overall objective/aim of the project and not that of your organisation. The overall aim/objective is a broad statement of what will be achieved. It therefore elaborates the intention of the project or its long term outcome. Below are some examples of overall objective/aim of a project:

- *To contribute to improved access to palliative care and pain relief services by patients who need them in four East African countries.*
- *Increased utilization of comprehensive chronic care services in Kampala district of Uganda.*
- *Improved access to palliative care services in Kabwe Province in Zambia*

b) Specific objectives of the project

These should be able to lead you to achieve your overall objective or aim. Objectives outlined in this section must be project specific and not the objectives of your organisation. In the past applicants have scored low in this section, mainly because they state organisational objectives instead of project specific objectives.

Specific objectives must be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time bound. See a further elaboration of these below:

Table 1: Elaborating SMART objectives

S- Specific – objectives must be specific about the end result of the project. Some of the action words to use are “To reduce”, “to establish”, “to increase” and “to create”. An example of a specific objective is: *To increase the number of patients accessing palliative care services...*

M-Measurable – the objective must be clear on measuring progress. Within the objective, must be a measure of achievement which is normally called a target e.g. To increase the number of patients accessing palliative care services by 10%. If such a proportion is used, then it is important to also provide a baseline, upon which progress will be measured. A measure can also be in terms of numbers e.g. *to increase the number of patients accessing palliative care services from 50 to 100...*

A-Attainable – can the objective be achieved using the resources available? The different resources are skills, time and money. It is also important to consider the political, economic and other contextual factors and constraints. For our small grants programme, the maximum funds available for an applicant are 5000 British pounds, and longest implementation period is one year. This means that the proposed project and its objectives must fit into this framework of resources. Using the earlier example, an objective can be stated as: *To increase the number of patients accessing palliative care services from 50 to 100 patients within 12 months.*

R-Realistic - the objective should be one that the organisation will have control or have influence over. Other ways to know if your objective is realistic is to determine if you have accomplished anything similar in the past or ask yourself what conditions would have to exist to accomplish this objective for example, the support from local partners such as the Ministry of Health.

T-Time-bound - what is the time frame for achieving the objective? This helps you to monitor progress made against the objective.

c) *Area and setting where the Project will take place*

It is important that the applicant describes the geographical area and setting where the project is to be implemented. This can be urban, semi-urban or rural setting. The name of the specific area – district, province, village or city must be stated and perhaps why this setting is preferred in the proposed project.

d) *Project activities*

Activities must be well stipulated and clear. These must be activities that will help you achieve the project objectives. Activities must therefore be aligned with each one of your project objectives. Aim to answer the questions: what actions will we undertake to achieve the project objectives? Activities that you propose should flow naturally from the project objectives. It is equally important to be reasonable and realistic in what activities you can accomplish with the time, money and other resources available.

Previously, some applicants have been too ambitious and outlined too many activities that are not achievable within the resources available. There is also a tendency for applicants to list their general activities rather than activities that are specific to the proposed project. This lowers the score for this section.

e. *Project beneficiaries*

The applicant should state both primary and secondary beneficiaries of the project. Primary beneficiaries are the immediate beneficiaries of the project e.g. patients for a project aimed at providing palliative care services, but these become secondary beneficiaries for a project which aims to build skills of health care workers. Beneficiaries should be clearly segregated by gender, adults, children, cadre, physical abilities (e.g. disabled), status in the communities (e.g. marginalised or not), urban or rural. It is also important for the applicant to summarise how each of the beneficiary groups will benefit from the project and how they were involved in designing the project or informing the problem(s) to be addressed, if at all.

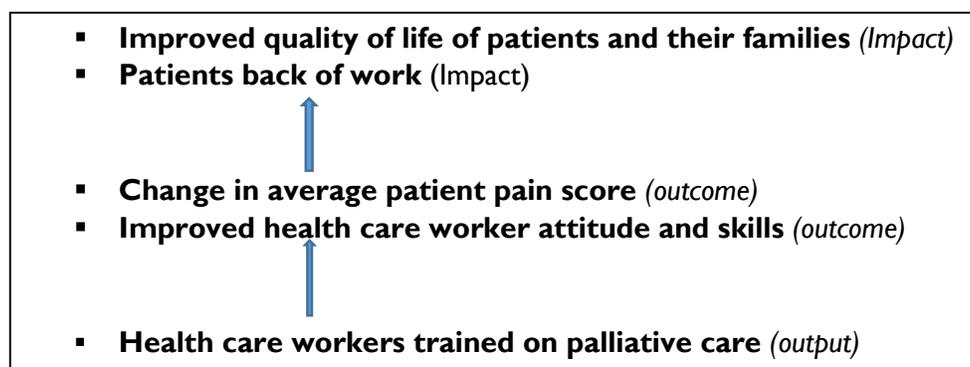
f. *Involvement in the project*

You need to state the key strategic partners and stakeholders in the proposed project, whether institutions or individuals. You also need to elaborate how you plan to collaborate with these partners and what their role will be in project. Such partners may include; the Ministry of Health, public hospital and national palliative care association, among others. If the beneficiaries will also be involved in implementation of the project, their role and contribution should be clearly stated.

g. *Results expected at the end of the project*

Think through the results you expect at the end of the project. Results include: **outputs**, which are immediate changes such as number of patients provided with a service; **outcomes**, which are medium term such as patients being pain free and impacts which are more long term changes such as patients having good quality of life. Results should be stated clearly and in line with proposed project activities. See the results chain below for another example:

Table 2: Example of a project results chain



h. *Measure of project success (indicators and targets)*

The applicant is required to outline the **key indicators** which will be used to measure progress and achievement against project objectives. **An indicator** is a specific, observable and measurable characteristic that can be used to show changes or progress a programme is making towards achieving a specific outcome. Indicators are therefore measures which will show progress and change.

There should be least one indicator for each objective/outcome which should be focused, clear, specific and linked to the overall objective of the project. Please ensure that you have indicators for each level of the expected results i.e. **output, outcome and impact indicators**. Output or process indicators relate to the short term or immediate results and are used to monitor the number and type of activities implemented in the project. **Outcome indicators** relate to change in the medium to long term and impact indicators relate to change over a very long period of time, more visible after the project has ended.

Indicators go along with targets. **Targets** define the expected level of achievement in form of numbers, proportions or percentages. To be able to identify or measure results that are attributable to your proposed project, please also outline the current status in form of numbers, proportions or percentages.

Good and clear indicators and targets should be aligned with project objectives and activities. These are very important in monitoring progress of the project and measuring project impact. Such indicators and targets also define what project success (best possible outcome) will look like and how will you will be able to identify it.

5.5 Project Implementation work plan

The project implementation plan should ensure a realistic and well spread schedule of activities, with timelines that are consistent with the duration of the project. These activities must be the same as those outlined under the application section on project activities (section 5.4 d of this document). A template for project implementation work plan is usually provided in the small grants application form.

Common mistakes are often made where some activities are left out in the project implementation work plan or new ones are introduced that are not outlined earlier in the section for project activities.

5.6 Sustainability plan

Reviewers are interested in seeing a realistic and practical description of how the change envisioned by your project will be sustained in the future beyond the small grant.

Donors are more likely to fund projects which demonstrate the results will be sustained beyond the project period. It is not value for money if results of a project will die with the end of the project. Below are some of the questions you must think about and answer when developing the sustainability section of your application:

- What components of the project will be sustained beyond the project period?
- Who will take forward the sustainable components of the project?
- What will be the resource implication for sustaining the project? Here resources can be money, skilled human resources, time, skills and technology, among others.
- Who will provide the resources for sustaining the project?

Examples of good sustainability strategies are: having an agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with strategic partners such as Government or other donors interested in work that relates to your proposed project and obtaining letters of commitment from a government institutions such as a hospital where staff are to be trained confirming that they will be supported to practice palliative care.

5.7 Previous donors

Information in this section outlines the funding history of the organisation, an important aspect in funding decisions by new and existing donors. The name of the donor agency, contact person and contact details are required. Contacts include the postal address, email and telephone numbers, where the donor can be reached if necessary. In the past we have received applications which provide the name of the donor agency and contact person but without their contact details. We have also received applications without any information in this section. If you have not had any donor before, it is important to state this and reasons why we should be your first donor. Donors who give you in-kind but valued items can also be included. The grant application form provides you with a table where you can fill this information clearly stating the monetary value of what you received and indicating the funding period.

5.8 Budget and bank information

The budget should be based on the proposed project activities. Costs should be realistic and a detailed breakdown of the line items or cost areas of each activity are required. The budget should be both in local currency and British Pounds, with the exchange rate used clearly indicated. The budget **must** not go beyond the maximum funding available for the small grants, which is GBP 5000, including core costs of not more than GBP 500.

The bank details of the organisation applying for the grant should be clearly stated. Personal bank accounts are **not** acceptable. If the applicant organisation is unable to receive funds directly, this should be stated and the details of the intermediate organisation to receive the funds on behalf of the applicant should be provided. In such a situation, the applicant must submit a letter from the intermediate organisation confirming that they will receive funds on behalf of the applicant without additional costs to APCA and the True Colours Trust.

The budget should be clearly laid out and indicate the amount being requested from the True Colours Trust. If your proposal covers more than one priority area for the small grants programme, such as palliative care medicines and patient equipment, the budget should be organised according to these. You can also give a budget narrative/notes to clarify or justify the figures in the budget. A budget template is usually provided as part of the grant application form.

Below are some of the common reasons for a lower score on the project budget and bank details:

- A budget that is higher than the maximum amount for small grants i.e. GBP 5,000, without a clear elaboration of the source of the additional funds.
- Providing individual rather than organisational bank details.
- Not providing the exchange rate of conversion of local currency to British Pounds at the time of application.
- A budget only in local currency without the British Pound equivalent of the costs.
- A budget that is not aligned with proposed project activities.

- Lack of budget break down, some budgets are too general and become very difficult to track during project implementation. Such general budgets may misguide the applicant to incur unallowable costs such as the cost for salaries, per diems and others. We expect a detailed line item budget and not a generalised budget.
- Budgets in other currencies, other than the local currency and British Pounds.
- Failure to use the budget template provided as part of the grant application form.

6. List of projects which have been funded by the programme

Please see examples of projects which have been funded by the programme (to provide a link of the project title, name and country of beneficiary institution). This enables you to see the nature of projects supported by the programme to help you think through your project.

7. Contact for further support:

For any further support and enquiries, please contact Pamela Kalema at pamela.kalema@africanpalliativecare.org

8. Application review and score form

Application review criteria	Total score for each section
I. Project Management <i>(Person to manage the grant and skills of staff involved in the project. Will they manage the project given their skills)</i>	3
II. Background information on the organization <i>(A brief description of the organisation, and what it does. Has the applicant demonstrated how the proposed project fits within the overall aim of the organization?)</i>	3
III. Project Justification: <i>(is the need well explained, are there some statistics or evidence to back up the need?)</i>	5
IV. Project Summary	
a. Main Objective/ aim of the project	3
b. Specific Objectives of the project (are they SMART)	5
c. Area and setting where the Project will take place <i>(is it clearly stipulated whether urban or rural, district etc.)</i>	2
d. Are the activities well stipulated and clear?	5
e. Project beneficiaries <i>(are the benefits clear, is there a clear segregation by gender, adults, children, cadre, urban or rural)</i>	3
f. Involvement in the project <i>(key partners and stakeholders)</i>	2
g. Results expected at the end of the project <i>(are they clear and in line with the proposed activities)</i>	3

Application review criteria	Total score for each section
h. Measure of project success <i>(are the indicators clearly identified and are targets matching the activities?)</i>	3
V. Project Implementation work plan <i>(is it realistic and well spread in terms of activity and the timelines for the duration of the project)</i>	3
VI. Sustainability <i>(are the proposed sustainability strategies realistic and practical)</i>	3
VII. Previous donors <i>(has the table been filled in including contacts)</i>	2
VIII. Budget and bank information <i>(is the budget well laid out, do they indicate the amount they are requesting from TCT, are costs related to project activities, are costs realistic, is the exchange rate mentioned, and have the bank details been provided.)</i>	5
Total Score	50