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# Make your applications clearer, grant-seekers urged

23 May 2017 by Liam Kay , Be the First to Comment

Representatives of four major trusts and foundations tell a panel session that charities should have a better understanding of what funders are looking for



*Grant applications: 'say why, not what'*

Charities that make grant applications need to be clearer and ensure they have a good understanding of what funders are looking for if they are to be successful, four representatives of major trusts and foundations have told *Third Sector's* Annual Fundraising Conference.

Speaking on a trusts and foundations panel session today, Regis Cochfert, director of grants and programmes at the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, said most grant providers received large numbers of applications and it was crucial that applicants "tell us who you are and what you

want to do instead of spending most of your word count describing a context of which we are very aware".

Cochfert said that formulating common advice for grant applicants so they could build relationships with their funders was very difficult given the number of organisations that were applying for grants.

"In reality we manage 550 live grants, so we are struggling to have relationships with people we are supporting," he said. "It will be virtually impossible to develop a relationship with prospective applicants."

For example, in the first year of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's new strategy, Cochfert said there were almost 2,000 applications, with a success rate of 4 per cent, which he called "a disaster for everybody: a disaster for us as a funder, a disaster for my team and a disaster for applicants, because it simply is not workable".

This included £138m worth of funding requests in the first 48 hours of the application period for just £2m of funding, although by year two the balance between applications and grants was "much healthier".

Gilly Green, head of UK grants at Comic Relief, said it was vital that applicants did their homework and made sure they spelled out why they were applying.

She said: "In application forms, you have a limited amount of space. To be honest, we as funders have a really big responsibility to make sure the questions we are putting in those forms work for what you want to tell us and what we need to know.

"A lot of applications we get talk an awful lot about the 'what' – what you are going to do. Actually, we're interested in the why."

Chris Anderson, director of grant-making at the Lloyds Bank Foundation, urged charities to pay closer attention to what information funders were requesting.

He said: "Please look at our criteria and interpret them correctly for your organisation. Don't waste your time or our time."

Adam Lopardo, director of partnerships at the Community Foundation, which covers Tyne and Wear and Northumberland, said applications should be short, meet funders' guidelines and explain the impact the money would have.

He said: "Don't use the word unique. Whatever you are doing that you might think is unique, it might be unique in your town, city, region or county, but the chances are that national funders have seen the same thing over and over again.

"If you absolutely stand by the fact that it is unique, then tell us why. If you really believe it is, justify it."