



Defining and providing good evidence of need

Defining the problem or need

You are probably very passionate about your work and perhaps to you, the need for your work seems obvious - but you have to get this across to funders.

What is the problem you are tackling or the need for your work?

Questions to help you define the problem or need:

- What difficulties do the people you are working with face?
- Why do they have these difficulties?
- How widespread is the problem? How big is the need?
- What are the consequences of this problem or need, and what will happen in future if nothing is done about it? Are there any social, economic or environmental trends that might make the problem worse in future?
- If you are a local project, what are the key features of your area or community that make it especially important for you to do this work?
- Is there anyone else dealing with this problem or addressing this need?

“You must define the problem in words the funder can understand and in a way that makes them feel they want to do something about it. If you can’t show why it is really important that your work continues and develops, you will not get the money.”³

Try not to generalise – be as specific as possible – and do not assume that the funder knows about or understands the problem or need you are describing. It is important to spell out why it is important to deal with this problem soon.

Providing evidence

A clear and powerful explanation of the problem or need must also be backed up by evidence.

Why is it important to provide evidence of need?

- There is a lot of competition for grants – high demand for limited resources
- To prove that your project will make a difference to the community
- To prove that you have not just guessed what the community needs
- To prove that you are talking to the people involved

³ p.8, Writing Better Fundraising Applications, Mike Eastwood and Michael Norton, DSC, 2002

- To prove your project is the best way to address the need
- To prove that you know no one else is meeting this need (in the way you are)
- To prove that you understand your community and their needs
- To reassure the funder that they will not waste their money by giving it to your organisation.

What sources of evidence are there?

- Statistics based on monitoring and evaluation of your existing services
- Feedback from consultation events and community involvement (using surveys/questionnaires, focus groups/meetings, interviews)
- Local government statistics and local area or community profile
- Academic, government or other specialist research (reports, surveys)
- Government or third sector strategies and policies (general and specialist)
- Information about other existing services or lack of services
- Letters of support from service users, professionals working with your organisations, MPs, local councillors or other important decision-makers, other organisations that make referrals to your organisation (support from public sector agencies/staff often have a stronger influence on funders e.g. Primary Care Trust, social workers, police)
- Newspaper articles about your work or providing information which supports the level of need for your work
- Photos of your work
- Case studies
- Anecdotal evidence

What do you need to consider when collecting evidence?

- **VERY IMPORTANT:** As a minimum you must talk to the people involved in the work you are applying for. Who are they? What is the best way to consult with them? (If you work with young children, you could talk to their parents or guardians.)
- Avoid using individual pieces of evidence in isolation
- Make sure the research you use is from a reliable source and relates to your specific project (quote the sources)
- Try not to use research that is more than 3 years old. The census is an exception because the last census was in 2001.
- If you do your own research, make sure it is not biased e.g. be careful when writing questions for surveys and/or interpreting data, ensure that surveys and statistics are representative
- When consulting others, be clear about who are the main people who have an interest in your work, you need to think about practical ways to consult with them (including people who may be 'hard to reach')
- Funders will want to see that you have consulted all the relevant people about your project and that they agree there is a need for this specific project.

- You need to show that you have a good understanding of other services available locally and show why you will be filling a gap and/or complementing other services.
- You need to show that you are aware of relevant local, regional and sometimes, national plans and strategies – and can show how your project relates to these.
- Make sure the evidence you provide shows why your specific project is the best way to meet this need. If this is a new project for your organisation, refer to similar projects elsewhere or any small-scale 'pilot' projects you have done.
- Provide evidence that is specific to the project you are applying for, not to the organisation as a whole.

How much evidence do you need to provide?

This depends on the scale of the problem, the capacity you have and the size of grant you are applying for. It is good to have a few different types of evidence which all support your case e.g. evidence based on your own monitoring and evaluation statistics, academic research backing up your analysis of the problem or supporting your approach to the problem, government statistics providing information about the people you are working with.

For example, evidence of need for a women's project on a housing estate could be:

The women who will attend our project live on the Anywhere Estate – a community that is among the most deprived in the country and has been identified in the Anytown local authority's Community Strategy as the area with the most social problems and highest levels of poverty in the city. We have good links and strong support from Council officers working on regeneration as our project will contribute to the Council's plans to improve living conditions for residents on the Estate.

According to research conducted by the Council in 2009, 63% of women on the Estate are living on welfare benefits, including female pensioners living alone (15% of all households) and female lone parents (53% of all households). The Estate has a total population of 11,300 people, it is 5 miles outside the city centre, has only two small shopping centres and a bus service that goes once every hour. There is a regular youth group but there are no activities for adults taking place on the estate.

In March 2010, we organised an International Women's Day event attended by 130 women on the estate. As part of the event, we did a survey of all participants about the main problems that they face. The key issues were:

- *Feeling stuck as they cannot afford to leave the estate very often*
- *Feeling isolated and depressed*
- *Most women had left school with few or no qualifications but lacked confidence or resources to join further education courses in the city. They also worried about the impact this was having on their children, whose aspirations and educational achievements are also low.*
- *Many women admitted that they resorted to alcohol or drugs to cope with the stress and this also had a very negative impact on their children.*

- *Many older women said they were afraid to go out and had little access to social activities.*

The feedback we received was striking: no events or activities for women had ever been held on the estate before and the majority of women said that no one had ever asked them for their views before. 74% of women were “very interested” in getting involved with at least one of the activities we plan to run on the estate, including exercise/relaxation classes, a weekly support group for women experiencing depression, IT classes combined with literacy and numeracy support.