

# Proving *The Need* In Funding Applications

One of the biggest reject reasons reported by funders is that applicants fail to make a good case for the need for their project.

When asked “what is the need?” applicants too easily start describing the solution “there is a need for this activity” or “we’ve identified the need for our project”. But they find it harder to explain *why* there is a need, and *how they know* there is a need.

This information sheet is based on the Fundraising Plus course *Prove It!* It sets out to help you think more clearly about the people you work with, and how you know they need your project.

## Understanding Why Funders Ask About Need

Funders only ever have a limited amount of money to spend, and competition for their support increases all the time. Funders have to make hard choices sometimes, about which projects to support.

Above all, they want to know that their funding is going to make a real difference where it is most needed. They also want to know that if they give you the funding for your project that it has a chance of making a difference and that you haven’t set off on the wrong track because you have made some assumptions, or because you haven’t tested your ideas by talking to people or doing your research.

## What is “Need”?

It can help to break this down into three Ws:

- Who are the people you are trying to help?

You should be able to describe the people you are trying to help – e.g. are they older people, younger people, people who live in a certain place, people with a particular health condition or disability etc.

- What is the problem they face?

You need to describe their lives and experiences. The “problem” might be obvious like inequality, poverty, health problems, or it might need a bit more explanation, e.g. challenges, disadvantage, difficulties, things that hold people back, opportunities that are not there, the lack of something important, or too much of something bad.

- Why is it important?

Why does it matter? Why should we be concerned? What would happen if you are unable to help them?

## Making A Stronger Case

Next, take this Need that you’ve described and using the following table, start to think about your evidence.

<p><b>The Need</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Who</i> are the people you are trying to help?</li> <li>• <i>What</i> is the problem they face?</li> <li>• <i>Why</i> is it important?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>What do you know about this need?</b></p> <p>In this column list all the <i>facts</i> you know about this need e.g.</p>	<p><b>How do you know what you know?</b></p> <p>In this column list how you know what you’ve listed in the left hand column, what evidence you have e.g.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numbers</li> <li>• Statistics</li> <li>• Percentages</li> <li>• Facts about the problem and/or the people you’re trying to help</li> <li>• Details about the people you are helping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• your own monitoring data</li> <li>• Government Statistics</li> <li>• Local Authority statistics</li> <li>• reports etc</li> <li>• Formal research about this problem that’s been done by e.g. academic institutions, or national charities, or government bodies</li> <li>• Research you’ve done, e.g. surveys, questionnaires, etc</li> <li>• Your experience of working with people on this problem</li> <li>• Your own monitoring data</li> <li>• Anecdotes, case studies</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facts and figures about the scale of the problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referrals</li> <li>• waiting lists</li> <li>• Research you've done, e.g. surveys, questionnaires, etc</li> <li>• research you've done asking other agencies</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solutions that have been considered and why your chosen solution is right</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal research</li> <li>• Your experience, including any pilot projects you've tried</li> <li>• Your own research, surveys, evaluations,</li> <li>• research you've done asking other agencies</li> </ul>

You might find this exercise works best with a group of people – talk to your volunteers and your committee and partner organisations – get as full a picture of you can of this need.

If you find that there are any gaps – particularly in the right hand column, that shows there is some work you need to do – e.g. if you have no real evidence of something that you know, can you get it somehow? Is there some research you can do to check? Even if all you can realistically do is gather up a couple of anecdotes or count the number of times an issue is raised, try to do it. If you really can't get any evidence, don't discard that piece of information, but be ready to explain why it is not possible to get any evidence about it – make clear if you are assuming something, but make sure you have other information with good evidence.

Once you are satisfied that you have covered everything, you are ready to start your application. Different funders ask different questions about Need, so you will need to be able to select the information you need to respond to the questions you are asked.

### “There Are Three Kinds Of Lies: Lies, Damned Lies, And Statistics”

A word of caution, however, about statistics. Some grant applicants fill their application forms with lots of Government statistics – these are easy to find on the Neighbourhood Statistics website, and will be much quoted by local agencies, particularly the Local Authority.

#### ***However, Government Statistics are not enough!***

Funders can track down Government statistics for themselves, and in many cases they will already know about the areas of highest deprivation that they want to support. What they

need to know from you is about *real people*, not statistics. You must write what you know – and only use Government statistics to *back up* what you know. What do those statistics mean for real people's lives?

Funders also need to know that your project actually targets the people in most need. Even in deprived communities, there are people who are relatively well off for whom life is not such a struggle. Which people are accessing your project?

Statistics are dry, faceless, dull. You need to bring them to life, show their human face. Case studies from your own experience, or the results of your own research will go much further to proving the need for your project than simply reciting tables of Government statistics alone.

Your own information will show two things: firstly it shows that you know what you're talking about. You know the people, and you have contact with them. You are speaking from experience. Secondly, it shows that your project has more chance of making a real difference because the people you aim to help want you to help them, and their views have informed your plans.

Use relevant Government Statistics like seasoning – sparingly, and only enough to enhance rather than smother the flavour of your own information.

You can find information about the Humber at the following websites:

- [www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk)
- East Riding Data Observatory [www.goferinfo.com/dataobs/index.aspx](http://www.goferinfo.com/dataobs/index.aspx)
- One Hull Knowledge <http://hull.localknowledge.co.uk/>
- North East Lincolnshire Informed <http://80.6.94.205/ias/>