

The Essential Guide to...

Writing a Business Plan

Writing Your Business Plan

A basic business plan generally includes some, if not all, of the following:

Your group's aims – a statement of what your organisation is about, what it hopes to achieve; the needs in the community you serve;

Your group's objectives – what are your aims; how you hope to achieve this

History & Context – briefly showing what/how/why you were set up; the geographical/economical/social makeup of your area as appropriate; how your work is set in this context to show your work is needed; your track record showing you have the skills, expertise and experience to run your organisation/project; any awards or notable achievements. If new - you will have no track record so show skills/experience of people involved.

Current Activities And Development Plans – the services/activities you provide now and details of projects you want to start or work you want to develop or expand – how these fit you're your aims/objectives

Evidence Of Need – proof your work/project is needed and wanted. What else is around, are you offering something not already being done by someone else, and is your way of working different. Include statistical or research references if you have them.

Marketing – how will you promote/sell your work/project to your target group; how will you ensure you reach everyone who may be eligible (think about equality of opportunity)

Operational Structure – what is your organisation's legal status. How is the organisation managed (diagrams are useful), who is responsible to who, for what, who supports who; what induction/training do you offer. Will new projects be managed in the same or a different way, and how will they be staffed. Include job descriptions for new staff and volunteers. What resources do you have and what additional resources will you need to develop these new projects.

Board Members – information about the make up of your Board; members with special responsibilities (ie Treasurer); the range of skills, expertise and experience that Board members have;

Equal Opportunities And Diversity – how you will ensure equality of opportunity for everyone concerned with the project or who might benefit. Show practical ways of ensuring equal opportunity; how will you address diversity and its implications.

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Action Plan – a clear plan for the life of the project or organisation’s development – show what you expect to be done, by when and how – milestones

Evaluation And Monitoring – what targets do you wish to achieve, what are your mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating your work; how do you record the effects it has on your beneficiaries

A Budget – how much it will cost; what money you expect to received and where from

A Cashflow Forecast – how much money you expect to be getting in and spending, when and how; how you plan to record this movement of money into and out of the project’s budget

Financial Management – how are your finances managed; who is responsible for this; how is your financial information recorded; what are you banking arrangements including signatories;

Funding Strategy - how you plan to finance your current work and/or new work in the future. If the plan is supporting a funding bid, how might you continue the work after this particular grant finishes

Executive Summary – a one page summary of all the above, which doubles as a content sheets. Use this to highlight the most important aspects of your plan. It’s usually easiest to write this last, although it usually goes at the front on a Business Plan.

Appendices – These may include copies of surveys or questionnaires; tables of local area of deprivation, estimates for work to be done; documented cashflow examples; job descriptions for posts, both paid and voluntary; and other information which supports the plan.

Which of these sections are included in your plan will depend on its purpose – whether it’s mainly for internal use or as part of a funding application. You may not need to include them all. More information may be necessary if you have a plan that is financially or technically complicated (e.g. a new building) Major funders may have their own requirements, giving details of the information and format they prefer.

Presenting Your Plan

When you write you plan try to make it:

Clear – avoid jargon or acronyms – people reading your plan may not know anything about your subject area and will find jargon off-putting.

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Concise - Make things straightforward and unambiguous. Give your draft plan to someone who knows nothing about your organisation and its area of work to test if you are getting your message across.

Brief – funders don't want to wade through masses of information – don't pad it out, don't add anything irrelevant. Most of the above sections can be covered in well under a page, even a paragraph. Some funders will rely on the Executive Summary, deciding to abandon the application based on this – or consider it further.

Professional - the plan must be easy to read so have it typed; it should be simple to refer to – the Executive Summary can act as a contents page for a reader who just wants to pick out bits rather than read the whole thing. number all pages clearly; identify all pages of the document ie with a subtitle showing name of organisation and date (in case pages come loose); don't make it glitzy – funders need to know how well organised you are, not that you have a colour printer and a flash graphics programme.