Tips for Funding Applications
From Transitions Alumni Christopher Michie

1) Read the criteria and guidelines thoroughly

Each grant has a document for guidance which you should read thoroughly before starting an application. Not only is this a chance to check you are eligible to apply and confirm the application deadline, but also to signpost possible documents you need such as a birth certificate, proof of address and references. The worst thing is spending hours applying for a grant and then later realising you are not eligible to apply in the first place!

2) Reminder of Deadlines

Being a student is a busy time with you having to manage numerous aspects of life - juggling a full-time education, gigging/performing, creating a career and applying for funding. It is a tricky balance to accomplish but all it takes is good organisation and dedication.

At the beginning of each academic year I create a document that has each funding organisation, the deadline for applications, the deadline for references and possible dates for interviews and auditions. Having one document with all the information makes it so much easier to manage and keep on top of. When it comes to funding there are so many people applying, organisations don't have the time to chase after applicants. It is our responsibility to apply on time, with all required information and stay on top of communications.

3) Communication is Vital

Good communication is so important to funding organisations. In a world that is fast paced, keeping on top of emails and correspondence is integral to being successful in funding applications. When applying make sure that you receive receipt of your application and then flag that correspondence so you can keep an eye on it. Also regularly check your spam and junk folders as if it's the first communication you've had with an organisation, it sometimes ends up in those folders.

4) Save your login details

Over the years the best thing I ever did was save my login details either in my diary or on a secure saved document. There's nothing more infuriating than forgetting your login details and having to go through the laborious task of resetting passwords. Another tip is use one email address for all funding applications which allows you to keep track of applications progress.

5) Save answers in a word document

For me, this tip is one of the most important. As applications have moved to online forms instead of hard copies, I recommend saving answers in a separate word document. I do this

firstly because I'm worried about either forgetting my login details and not being able to access the online form after completing some of it, or the website crashing halfway through.

Another reason I save my answers to the questions in a word document is for efficiency. Many applications have the same criteria and need similar answers which reduces the time of completing them – you can cut and paste from your document and adapt as required. Just like a CV, after you complete a funding application you update your 'Funding Answer Document', so you have up to date answers. This is also helpful if you're offered an interview or audition - you can look back over your application to see what you said.

6) References

Many applications require references from people who know you well, and sometimes from more than one person. It's likely that your referees will be writing references for many students so being organised and early is best. When applying for a grant, you need to be clear with your referee and provide the key information they need.

What I've done over the years is write an email to my referee with the subject title as the organisation I'm applying to. In the body of the email I include my deadline for applying, the deadline date for the reference, the email/address the reference should be sent to and if it's an online form or PDF, I copy that into the email too. It should look something like this:
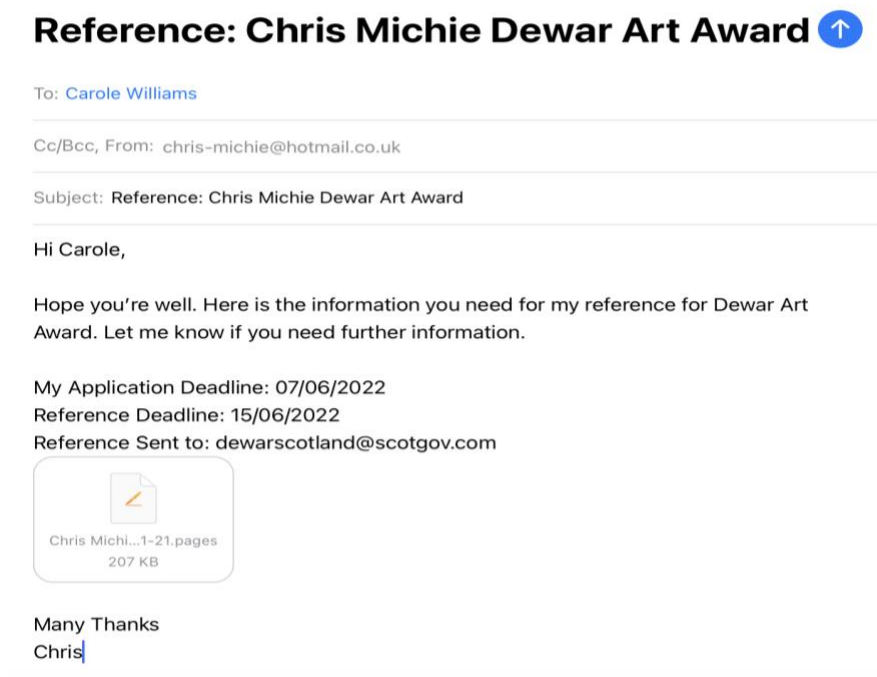
Something else to be aware of is the deadline for the reference to be completed. As your referee is no doubt busy, make sure you give them plenty of notice. Some of my referees needed at least three weeks' notice to complete my reference. Your referees are doing you a favour so the least we can do is be early, upfront and organised so the process is simple and stress free.

7) Send your application to be checked

Once you've completed your application, I've found it useful to send it to my friends or my parents for them to check over it. It's a good test to check spelling, grammar and punctuation but also if your application reads well. If the people who know you well struggle to understand the points you are making, then strangers from a panel will definitely struggle to understand. Don't worry about your application not being good enough, it's just a chance to have positive contributions and suggestions to give a better chance of being successful.

8) Don't Ramble

Over the years I have completed applications which have strict and sometimes difficult word constraints. Being able to tell your story and get your point across in a concise and direct way is much more powerful than rambling away – it also takes less time for funders to read. By completing your applications in a word document, you can keep an eye on your word count and stay within the limit.

9) Don't just list things

Something funding organisations don't want to see is applicants just listing things they have done prior to their higher education. For example, if a funding organisation asks, "Please tell us what ways you have positively contributed either in your community or school life, and how that has impacted your education today."

Instead of just listing activities I did to contribute to my school and community, I would structure it like this:

1. **What did I do?**

2. **How did I go about it?**

3. **What did I learn from it? What skills did I gain? How did it impact me?**

4. **How could I use those skills going forwards in my UG degree or in my career?**

By structuring it like this, you show the organisations that you can reflect on your learning and that you spent time on your application. Writing answers like this gives the organisations the answers they need as well as getting to know you.

10) Be upfront and honest, tell your story!

My last top tip is simple. Be you, answer truthfully and know that your application matters. For a long time I put off applying for grants and funding because I didn't want to be seen as a charity case, someone who deserves pity and handouts. This is not what funding organisations are! They are there to help people like me and you, to give us extra support that we don't have access to and in some ways to diversify and change the path for artists of the future.

Being successful and studying the arts shouldn't be elitist and we are the change the industry needs. Applying for grants and funding allows us to be that change and have the financial assistance that we are entitled to.

And if you are successful…..

It's useful to create a document which tracks any grants that you will receive – this will help you know when to expect payments into your bank account, and also remind you when reports are due back to the funder.

If you've created a budget at the beginning of the year to work out how much income you need to support your studies you can also note any awards received here.

Good luck!

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