Why funding bids fail

A note for village halls, churches and small charities in Herefordshire

Most applications are not refused because the project was wrong. They are refused because of how the form was answered. Here is what that actually looks like, and what to do about it.

> **One recent Herefordshire capital round:** over 65 applications. Over £12 million requested. About £2 million available. Thirteen awards.
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> Applications were scored one to five, and anything below three was not taken forward. Five applicants in six were refused, most of them at the first sift, nine months before the money was announced.

Those numbers change what a good application has to be. Scoring three out of five is not a pass, it is the floor for being read at all. Your project can be needed, popular and sensible and still lose to one that is needed, popular, sensible and better evidenced.

The four things that sank a good project

1. It describes the works instead of the change

A new kitchen is not a project. The lunch club the kitchen makes possible is a project. Funders do not buy buildings, they buy what the building lets people do, and they want it counted: who, how many, how often, starting when, and how you will know it worked. The tell is usually in the title — "modernising the hall" describes building work, not an outcome.

2. The funding gap is left open

If the grant is part of a larger sum, the assessor needs to see the rest is real. That means other funders confirmed, or applications submitted with dates and decision dates, or a project genuinely broken into independent phases that each finish on their own. Any of the three works. Silence does not.

3. The answer is in the document, but not in the right box

This is the one that costs most, and it catches careful people. An assessor working through 65 applications reads against a scoring grid for about ten minutes. A point made under the wrong heading scores nothing. Every risk the form asks about has to be answered where it is asked, in plain words, and nothing can be left to carry over from another section.

4. Nobody checked the fund was live

Funds sit on websites and in directories long after the money has gone. A five-minute phone call before you write anything tells you whether the pot has money in it, whether you are eligible, when the panel next sits, and what they want to see on your accounts. It is the cheapest thing you will ever do, and the step almost everyone skips.

What a strong application has behind it

The writing is the easy part. What usually decides it is the paperwork behind the writing: accounts with the figures the funder actually asked for, a reserves policy and a straight explanation of why the reserves cannot cover this, a budget that adds up and includes contingency, three comparable quotes for anything built or bought, a cashflow showing the match funding is real, a check that your governing document permits the project, and adopted safeguarding, equal opportunities and data protection policies rather than drafts. Most halls have most of it somewhere. Very few have it pulled together in the shape a funder wants to read it, on the week the deadline falls.

One honest warning about timing

In the round above, the first-stage sift was decided in March and the awards were announced in December. If your hall needs money this financial year, you may already have missed it. Better to know that now than in nine months.

If you would like a hand

I am Stanley Young. I live in Pembridge and I am treasurer at the parish hall, so I write these applications for my own committee as well as other people's. I wrote the bid that won **£20,000 from National Lottery Awards for All**, the maximum that fund awards, and I have had one refused, which is where most of this page comes from.

Talk Community will point you at the right fund. The Community Foundation will talk your idea through. The Diocese will answer questions about faculties. None of them will write the application, gather the quotes, build the budget or hit the deadline. That is the bit I do, and I charge a fixed fee that is published on the website rather than a share of anything you win.

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Round figures from the published outcome of a Herefordshire Council community capital grant scheme. Stanley Young Consulting, Pembridge, Herefordshire.