GRANTBANK

THE GRANT READY PLAYBOOK

How Founders Win Grant Funding - and Prepare Applications That Actually Score

A practical, step-by-step guide to the framework grant assessors use to score applications, built from the patterns behind hundreds of funded and rejected proposals.

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A note before you start

Published by Bankole Anifowoshe. This edition was prepared in 2026 for founders, nonprofit leaders and small business owners who are preparing a grant application for the first time or want to raise their odds on the next one.

The material in this guide reflects general good practice drawn from public funder guidance and Grantbank's own work supporting applicants. It is offered for information and educational purposes. It is not a guarantee of funding and it is not a substitute for reading the specific rules of the competition you are applying to, which always take precedence over anything written here.

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PART ONE

Foundations

What assessors are actually scoring, before you write a single sentence of your application.

CHAPTER 1

Why grant applications really lose

Most rejected grant applications were not written by unqualified applicants and they were not proposing weak projects. Read enough scoring feedback and a pattern shows up quickly: the project was good, the write up did not prove it. Assessors mark what is on the page, not what is in the founder's head, and a strong idea explained poorly loses to an average idea explained clearly almost every time

This matters because it changes where you should spend your time. Founders often put nearly all their energy into refining the idea itself and treat the application form as a formality to fill in at the end, in a rush, the week before the deadline. Assessors see the results of that imbalance constantly: vague objectives, unclear ownership of tasks, a budget that does not match the plan, and a risk section that pretends nothing could go wrong.

> The good news is that the fix is learnable. Grant assessment is not a mystery and it is not a matter of taste. Public funders publish scoring criteria for a reason, and once you understand what is being scored, writing to it becomes a structured task rather than a guessing game.

> "The businesses that treat their application like a pitch, with a clear problem, clear numbers and a clear plan, consistently score higher than the ones that lead with the technology." HOW WE BRIEF EVERY CLIENT BEFORE THEY START DRAFTING

> i What this guide will not do: it will not tell you which specific grant to apply for or write your application for you. What it will do is give you the framework assessors use, so that whatever form you are filling in, you know exactly what each question is really testing.

CHAPTER 2

Who this playbook is for

This guide is for anyone preparing a grant application and wondering what assessors actually need to see. You might be a startup founder, a small business owner, a nonprofit leader or the colleague who has been asked to pull the application together.

You will get the most from it if you have a project in mind but have never applied before; you have applied and been unsuccessful; you are supporting somebody else through their first application; or you have a deadline approaching and need a clear way to organise the work.

A quick note on scope. Every funder asks for something slightly different. Some add sector-specific tests such as safeguarding, environmental impact or a particular technology stage. Always read the competition guidance in full. This playbook gives you the underlying structure, but the live guidance wins whenever the two differ.

Be honest about fit. Strong writing improves your chances, but it cannot turn an ineligible project into an eligible one. Test alignment first. That decision can save you weeks of wasted effort.

CHAPTER 3

The four questions every assessor asks

Application forms differ, but the judgement underneath them is remarkably consistent. Keep these four questions beside you while drafting; every strong answer should help resolve at least one of them.

01 FIT

Does this project genuinely belong in this competition? Use the funder's priorities and language.

02 MERIT

Is the innovation or approach specific, evidenced and meaningfully better than the alternative?

03 CAPABILITY

Can this team deliver the work, with this budget and within this timetable?

04 NECESSITY

Why is public funding needed, and what would happen without it?

You do not need to answer all four in every section. They simply need to be answered somewhere, clearly and consistently, by the end of the application.

CHAPTER 4

The eight pillar framework

Grant scoring criteria differ by funder, but underneath the wording, most reduce to some combination of the eight pillars below. Part two of this guide gives each one its own chapter, with a worked example, common mistakes to watch for and a quick gut check you can run against your own draft

Scope fit 1 Does the project match this fund's stated priorities, sector and stage, in the funder's own words?

Real innovation 2 Is there a genuine step change here, evidenced and specific, not a vague claim of being faster or smarter?

Commercial logic 3 Do the market, the numbers and the route to revenue hold up under scrutiny?

Wider value 4 Who benefits beyond the applicant, and can that benefit be named and, where possible, measured?

Delivery plan 5 Is there a credible, resourced plan with milestones a stranger could follow?

Team 6 Does the team have the specific skills and track record this project needs, with named gaps addressed?

Funding gap 7 Is the case for public rather than private money clearly made?

Honest risk 8 Are risks and mitigations named plainly, rather than hidden or waved away?

i These are not eight separate sections to write. Most application forms braid several of these pillars into a single question. A "business case" question, for instance, is usually asking about commercial logic, wider value and the funding gap all at once. Read each question on your actual form against this list before you draft an answer, so you know exactly which pillars it is testing.

PART TWO

The eight pillars

One chapter per pillar, with examples, common scoring mistakes and a practical gut check.

CHAPTER 5

Scope fit

01 The first thing an assessor checks, and the fastest way to be rejected before your idea is even considered

Alignment gets checked before anything else does. A beautifully written application for the wrong competition is still rejected, no amount of polish elsewhere rescues it. Before you draft a single sentence, read the guidance twice, note the exact language the funder uses, and if there is any doubt, ask the help desk before you invest weeks in writing.

Fit is not only about sector. It also covers company stage, project size, geography and sometimes the technology readiness level the fund is designed for. A brilliant seed stage idea submitted to a scale up fund fails on fit just as surely as one from the wrong industry.

i In practice. A robotics founder applying to an agri tech fund reworded their entire summary around the funder's stated priority of 'reducing labour dependency in food production', rather than leading with the robotics itself. Same project, same numbers, a completely different first impression.

! A common misstep. Applicants who copy and paste a generic company description instead of mirroring the funder's own priority language. Assessors are trained to spot this within the first paragraph.

? Before you move on. Could a stranger who has never spoken to you explain, from your application alone, exactly why this project fits this competition? If not, this pillar needs another pass before you move on.

CHAPTER 6

Real innovation

02 Not every good business is innovative in the way a grant competition means it, and that distinction matters

Funders are not rewarding incremental polish. They are looking for a genuine step change, whether that is a new technology or an existing one applied somewhere it has never been used before. Be specific about what is actually novel, back it with evidence such as patent searches, competitor gaps or literature review, and be honest about your freedom to operate.

Make the timing case too. Why is the market ready for this now, when it perhaps was not two years ago? Assessors read hundreds of applications that claim novelty in vague terms. The ones that name the exact mechanism of what is new are the ones that score.

i Make it concrete. Rather than writing 'our platform is smarter and more efficient', one applicant wrote 'existing systems recalculate routes every sixty seconds, ours recalculates every two, using a lighter weight model that runs on the delivery vehicle itself rather than a remote server.' Specific, checkable, scoreable.

! Where applicants lose credibility. Claims of novelty with no evidence attached, or innovation claims that turn out, on closer reading, to describe a feature every competitor already has.

? Clarity test. Have you named the exact thing that is new, in a sentence a non expert in your field could still repeat back accurately? 'Faster' or 'smarter' on its own is not a claim an assessor can score.

CHAPTER 7

Commercial logic

03 Assessors are checking whether this project has a real business behind it, not just a research exercise

Even research focused grants want to see a credible route to impact, and most innovation grants want to see a credible route to revenue. Show your market sizing with a source, name your buyer specifically rather than describing a broad demographic, and be honest about competitors rather than claiming you have none.

A common trap is presenting numbers that look impressive but do not survive a second look. Growth projections with no stated assumption behind them, or a market size quoted with no source, tend to lower an assessor's confidence in every other number in the application.

i A stronger way to frame it. Instead of 'the market for this is worth two billion pounds', a stronger version reads: 'according to [named industry report], the UK market for X was valued at two billion pounds in 2025, of which our addressable segment, businesses with fewer than fifty employees, represents roughly one hundred and eighty million pounds.'

! Watch the numbers. Market size figures with no source, a total addressable market presented as if it were the immediately reachable market, or a competitor section that claims there is no competition at all.

? Pressure-test it. If you handed this section to an investor, would your numbers survive their first question? And could you point to a beneficiary of the project who is not sitting on your cap table?

CHAPTER 8

Wider value

04 Public money is spent to create public benefit, and this pillar asks you to name that benefit precisely

Wider value covers jobs created, skills built, supply chains strengthened, communities served or environmental outcomes achieved, depending on the fund. It does not need to be enormous, but it does need to be specific and, wherever the fund allows, quantified.

A frequent mistake is bolting on a generic sentence about job creation at the end of a section without connecting it to the actual mechanics of the project. Assessors can tell the difference between value that flows naturally from what you are building and value that has been added in as an afterthought to satisfy the form.

i For example. Rather than 'this project will create jobs and support the local economy', a stronger version reads: 'delivery of this project requires three additional technician roles in year one, recruited locally, plus an estimated twelve indirect roles across our two regional suppliers as order volume increases.'

! What weakens the case. Value claims that are not connected to any specific mechanism in the project plan, or numbers that are asserted with no method shown for how they were calculated.

? Name the beneficiary. Could you point to a beneficiary of this project who is not you, not your co-founder and not your investor? If the honest answer is no, this section needs more work before submission.

CHAPTER 9

Delivery plan

05 A plan and a partner list only convince an assessor if they would survive contact with the real world

Your delivery plan needs milestones with dates, named owners and outputs that can be checked, not just activities. 'Conduct market research in month two' is an activity. 'Complete forty customer interviews and publish a segmentation report by the end of month two' is a milestone an assessor can actually score.

Assessors are also looking for realism. A plan with no buffer for delay, or one where every task somehow takes exactly one month regardless of complexity, reads as a template rather than a genuine plan built around this specific project.

i What good looks like. A twelve month plan broken into four quarters, each with two or three named milestones, a responsible team member against each one, and a short note on what happens if a milestone slips, reads as far more credible than a single paragraph describing the year in general terms.

! A plan that will worry an assessor. Vague activity descriptions with no checkable output, milestones that are all suspiciously evenly spaced, or a plan with zero acknowledgement that anything might take longer than expected.

? Day-one test. If this project won funding tomorrow, could your team start work the following Monday? A plan only earns its marks if it reads as something you could actually walk into on day one.

CHAPTER 10

Team

06 Assessors are backing people as much as ideas, and this section is where you prove the team can execute

List the specific, relevant experience of each named team member against the specific tasks they will own in the delivery plan, rather than a general biography. If there is an obvious gap, such as no one with regulatory experience for a medically regulated product, name it and explain how you plan to close it, whether through a hire, an advisor or a partner.

Advisors and non executive input can genuinely strengthen this section, but only when named with their specific relevant background. A long list of advisors with no stated relevance to the project reads as padding.

i Connect people to delivery. Rather than 'our team has over twenty years of combined experience', a stronger version names each person against a specific task: 'our CTO led the sensor calibration team at [named prior company] for six years and will own the hardware validation milestone in month four.'

! Avoid the biography dump. Generic biographies with no link to the delivery plan, unnamed gaps in critical expertise, or an advisory board listed with no explanation of what each advisor actually contributes.

? Ownership test. If an assessor cross checked every named milestone in your delivery plan against your team list, would each one clearly have an owner with the relevant background? If not, that gap needs addressing directly.

CHAPTER 11

Funding gap and necessity

07 The question underneath every application: why does this need public money at all?

This is often the most skipped question, and it costs applicants more marks than they expect. You need to explain, in plain terms, why a bank, a private investor or your own revenue cannot fund this specific piece of work, whether that is because the risk is too early stage, the return is too far out, or the work itself is pre commercial research rather than a fundable product.

Being honest about this actually strengthens your case. Assessors are wary of applications that seem to be chasing free money for something that is already comfortably fundable elsewhere.

i A credible explanation. 'Our core technology has been de-risked through two years of lab testing, but the field trials required for regulatory approval carry a level of technical risk that our existing investors are not willing to fund at this stage, which is precisely the gap this grant is designed to close.'

! What not to leave unanswered. No mention of alternative funding routes at all, or a funding gap explanation that could apply to almost any company at any stage, rather than one specific to this project's risk profile.

? Answer this plainly. Have you actually written the sentence explaining why this cannot be funded privately, and does it read as considered rather than either reckless or suspiciously tidy?

CHAPTER 12

Honest risk

08 Naming your risks costs fewer marks than hiding them, and assessors can tell the difference

Every credible project has risk. What assessors are actually scoring is whether you have thought about it seriously: named the real risks across technical, commercial, delivery and, where relevant, regulatory categories, rated them honestly, and paired each one with a specific mitigation and an owner.

A risk register with everything rated 'low' is not reassuring, it is a red flag. It suggests either the applicant has not thought hard about the project or is not being straightforward on the form. We cover a full worked example of a risk register in part three.

i Put the real risk on the page. 'Our main technical risk is that the core sensor does not meet accuracy targets in real world conditions. We mitigate this with staged proof of concept testing and a go or no go review before committing to scale up spend, reducing the risk from high to medium.'

! False reassurance does not help. Every risk rated low with no real mitigation offered, only technical risks listed with commercial and delivery risk left out entirely, or risks described in such general terms they could apply to any project in any sector.

? The uncomfortable question. Have you actually written down the risk that worries you most at 2am, or only the risks that are comfortable to admit to? The honest one is usually the one an assessor wants to see addressed.

PART THREE

Writing the application

Turning the framework into clear, evidence-led answers on the actual form.

CHAPTER 13

Turning pillars into answers

Once you understand the eight pillars, the practical challenge becomes mapping them onto whatever questions your specific application form actually asks. Most forms use headings such as "project summary", "technical approach", "commercial case" or "impact", and each of these usually draws on two or three pillars at once

A useful drafting method is to work question by question and, before writing a single sentence, note which pillars that question is testing. A "project summary" question, for example, is almost always testing scope fit and real innovation together. A "wider benefits" question is testing wider value and, often, commercial logic. Once you know which pillars are in play, draft to answer those specific pillars rather than writing in general terms.

> Keep a running document of your answers to the four core questions from Chapter 3, scope fit, real innovation, capability and necessity, and check each drafted section against it. If a section does not clearly serve at least one of those four, it is either padding or it belongs in the appendix instead.

i A practical drafting order that works well: write your delivery plan and budget first, since these force you to be concrete. Then write team and risk, which flow naturally from the plan. Write commercial logic and wider value next. Write your project summary last, once every other section is finished, since a summary written first tends to describe the idea you started with rather than the application you actually wrote.

CHAPTER 14

Building a risk register: a worked example

A useful risk register is short, honest and actionable. Cover more than technical risk, name the owner, and show what changes after mitigation.

CATEGORY	RISK	MITIGATION	BEFORE	AFTER
Technical	Sensor misses its accuracy target in field conditions	Stage testing; go/no-go review before scale-up	High	Med
Commercial	Lead customer delays procurement	Run two pilot discussions in parallel	Med	Low
Delivery	Key technical hire is late	Advertise early; retain an interim specialist	Med	Low
Regulatory	Certification takes longer than planned	Book a pre-submission meeting in month one	Med	Med

Turn the table into prose only where context matters. State the risk, the action, the owner and the residual risk. Do not write that a risk “will not happen”; show what you will do if it does.

CHAPTER 15

Budgets and financials, the essentials

Budgets are where a well written narrative can quietly lose all its credibility if the numbers do not match the story. Assessors read the narrative and the budget side by side, and a mismatch between the two, such as a plan that describes three new hires but a budget that only funds one, undermines confidence in everything else

> Build your budget from the delivery plan, not the other way around. For every milestone in your plan, ask what it costs to deliver: staff time, materials, equipment, subcontracted work, travel where relevant. Resist the temptation to round every line to a tidy number. Specific figures, even odd ones, read as more carefully worked out than everything ending in a neat zero.

> Most funders also want to see your own contribution alongside the grant request, whether that is cash, existing staff time valued at a fair rate, or in-kind resources such as facilities. Be accurate rather than generous with these figures. An inflated match funding claim is one of the easier things for an assessor or auditor to unpick later.

> ! What costs marks here. A budget total that does not match the sum of its own line items, categories of spend that are not permitted under this specific fund's rules, and a narrative that promises deliverables the budget has no line item to pay for.

> i Quick gut check. Could you defend every single line in your budget in a phone call with an assessor, with a specific reason for the amount, rather than "that is roughly what these things cost"?

CHAPTER 16

How assessors actually skim your application

It is worth understanding the conditions under which your application is actually read. Most assessors are working through a stack of applications against a scoring rubric, often with a strict time budget per application, sometimes as little as twenty to thirty minutes for a first pass. They are not reading for pleasure, and they are not going to hunt for your best point buried in paragraph four of a dense section

This means structure carries real weight. Open each section with your strongest, most specific point in the first sentence, not a scene setting introduction. Use short paragraphs and, where the form allows formatting, bullet points for lists rather than folding them into prose. Bold or highlight the specific figures and outcomes an assessor is scoring, so they are not lost inside a paragraph.

Assessors also frequently score against a rubric with explicit criteria, sometimes visible to applicants and sometimes not. Where the criteria are published, literally check each one off against your draft before you submit. Where they are not published, use the eight pillars in this guide as your working rubric instead.

"Write your summary as if it is the only paragraph the assessor will read carefully, because for a first pass, it often is." A WORKING ASSUMPTION WORTH WRITING TO

CHAPTER 17

Common mistakes that cost the most marks

THE MISTAKES WE SEE MOST OFTEN, ACROSS EVERY FUND AND EVERY SECTOR

x Reusing a generic company description instead of rewriting the opening in the funder's own priority language.

x Claiming innovation in vague terms such as "faster" or "smarter" with no specific, checkable mechanism named.

x A budget that does not reconcile with the delivery plan, either in total or in what each line item is actually meant to fund.

x A risk register with everything rated low, which reads as under considered rather than reassuring.

x Team biographies with no link to the specific milestones each person will actually own.

x Wider value claims with no mechanism shown for how the benefit is actually created by the project.

x Skipping the funding gap question entirely, or answering it in terms so general they could apply to any company.

x Submitting with no second reader, so the applicant's own blind spots make it straight through to the assessor.

i The pattern underneath all eight. Almost every item on this list is a version of the same failure: writing what is comfortable or familiar to explain, rather than what the assessor specifically needs in order to score you well. Draft with the scoring criteria open next to you, not just your own sense of what the project is about.

CHAPTER 18

Frequently asked questions

How long should each answer be? Follow the funder's stated word or character limit exactly, and use as much of it as you need to be specific, not necessarily all of it. A tight, evidenced answer at seventy percent of the limit beats a padded answer that fills it completely

Should I get help writing the application? Many applicants write their own first draft and bring in a specialist reviewer or writer for a second pass, since a fresh reader catches gaps the original author has stopped noticing. Either approach can work well, the key is building in a genuine second read before submission.

What if I do not have all the answers yet, such as a named hire? Be honest about the gap and show the plan to close it, with a timeframe. Assessors generally respond better to a named, acknowledged gap with a credible plan than to a vague answer that tries to paper over it.

Can I reuse an application for a different fund? Only as a starting point. Rework the opening and the framing sections around the new funder's specific priorities and language, since reused text that clearly targets a different competition is one of the fastest ways to lose scope fit marks.

How much detail does the risk section really need? Enough that a stranger reading it would believe you have genuinely thought about what could go wrong, typically four to eight named risks across different categories, each with a specific mitigation. See the worked risk-register example on page 21 for a full worked example.

PART FOUR

Submission and beyond

Final checks, what happens after submission and what to do if the answer is no.

CHAPTER 19

Twelve things to check before you submit

A last pass through this list catches most of what costs applicants marks. Work through it once your draft feels finished, ideally with at least a day of distance from your last editing session

- Every answer directly addresses the specific question asked, not a related question you would rather answer.
- The funder's own priority language appears in your opening paragraph, not just generic company language.
- Every number in the narrative matches the corresponding figure in the budget, exactly.
- The risk register covers a genuine spread of categories, with no single risk rated low across the board.
- Every named team member is linked to a specific milestone or task they will actually own.
- The wider value section names a mechanism, not just an outcome asserted with no explanation.
- The funding gap question has been answered directly, not skipped or answered in generic terms.
- Word or character limits are respected on every section, with no answer cut off mid sentence.
- A second reader who was not involved in drafting has read the whole application end to end.
- All required attachments and letters of support are included and correctly named as the portal requests.
- The application has been read aloud once, since clunky sentences are easier to hear than to see.
- You are not leaving it to deadline day. Most portals allow resubmission, use the extra time to refine, not to panic.

CHAPTER 20

What happens after you submit

Once your application is submitted, it typically moves through a fairly consistent process, even though the exact terminology and timeline varies by funder. An eligibility check comes first, confirming your organisation and project meet the basic rules of the competition, often completed within days rather than weeks. Applications that pass move on to substantive assessment

Substantive assessment is usually carried out by one or more assessors scoring against a published or internal rubric, sometimes with input from an external expert panel for technical or scientific claims. Many competitive funds also include an interview or clarification stage for shortlisted applicants, where you may be asked to defend specific numbers or explain a section in more depth.

Timelines from submission to decision commonly run from six to twelve weeks for smaller grants, and considerably longer for major competitive funds with a panel stage. If a fund's guidance gives you a decision date, plan your own cash flow and hiring decisions around the later end of that range rather than the earliest possible date.

i If you are invited to a clarification call or interview, prepare by rereading your own application closely and having your budget and risk register open in front of you. Assessors most often probe the numbers and the risk section, since these are the easiest places to test whether the plan behind the narrative is genuinely solid.

CHAPTER 21

If you are unsuccessful, what to do next

An unsuccessful application is common, even for strong projects, since most competitive grant rounds turn down the majority of applicants simply on volume. The single most useful thing you can do afterwards is request feedback, which many funders will provide on request even when they do not share it automatically

> Read the feedback against the eight pillars in this guide rather than taking it personally. Feedback that says "commercial case not sufficiently evidenced" is pointing at pillar three, and the fix is usually specific and addressable: add a named source for your market figures, or name your pipeline of actual prospective customers rather than describing a market in the abstract.

> Many funds allow reapplication in a later round, and a reworked application that visibly addresses the previous feedback is generally viewed favourably, since it shows the applicant took the process seriously. Keep a short written note of the feedback received and the specific changes made in response, both for your own reapplication and, if relevant, to show a future assessor or reviewer.

> "An unsuccessful first round is often the most useful research you will do on your own application, provided you actually read the feedback." WORTH REMEMBERING BEFORE YOU MOVE STRAIGHT ON TO THE NEXT DEADLINE

CHAPTER 22

A worked case study

The following composite example, drawn from patterns we have seen across multiple real applications rather than any single client, shows the framework applied end to end

The project. A small manufacturing business wanted to develop a lower energy version of an existing production process, funded through a regional innovation grant. Their first draft led with the technical mechanism and read, in the applicant's own words, "like an engineering report."

Applying scope fit. The fund's guidance repeatedly used the phrase "decarbonising traditional industry." The rewritten opening paragraph used that exact phrase in its first sentence, tying the project directly to the fund's stated priority rather than describing it as a general efficiency improvement.

Applying real innovation. Instead of "our process uses less energy," the rewritten application specified the exact reduction, thirty four percent against the current industry standard process, and named the specific mechanism, a redesigned heat recovery stage, that produced it.

Applying commercial logic and wider value. The rewritten application named two named prospective customers already in discussion, cited a sourced figure for the addressable market among similar manufacturers, and specified that adoption of the process across even a modest share of that market would meaningfully reduce sector wide energy use, a figure the funder could actually score.

The outcome. The same underlying project, same team, same budget, scored well enough on the second submission to be funded, where the first draft had been rejected at the assessment stage with feedback citing "unclear alignment with fund priorities" and "commercial case underdeveloped," pillars one and three respectively.

APPENDIX ONE

Glossary of grant terms

Assessor The individual or panel member who scores your application against the funder's criteria

Eligibility check The initial pass or fail review confirming your organisation and project meet the basic rules of a competition, before substantive scoring begins.

Match funding The portion of total project cost you or a partner contribute, alongside the grant, whether in cash or in kind.

Milestone A specific, dated, checkable output within your delivery plan, distinct from a general activity.

Rubric The published or internal set of scoring criteria an assessor works through when reading your application.

Scope fit How closely your project matches a fund's stated sector, stage, size and priority focus.

Technology readiness level A scale used by many funders to describe how developed a technology is, from early concept through to proven, market ready product.

Wider value Benefit created by a project beyond the applicant itself, such as jobs, skills, supply chain or environmental impact.

APPENDIX TWO

Quick reference checklist

Print this page and keep it beside you while you draft. It condenses the whole playbook into one pass you can run against any section, on any application form

- Scope fit: opening paragraph uses the funder's own priority language
- Real innovation: the specific novel mechanism is named, not just claimed
- Commercial logic: every market figure has a named source
- Wider value: benefit is tied to a specific mechanism in the project
- Delivery plan: every milestone has a date, an owner and a checkable output
- Team: every named person links to a specific milestone they own
- Funding gap: the case for public rather than private money is stated directly
- Honest risk: a genuine spread of risks, none rated low across the board
- Budget reconciles exactly with the narrative and the delivery plan
- A second reader has read the whole application before submission

WORKSHEET 1

Funding-fit test

Use this before committing time to an application.

- ☐ The applicant type, location and project stage meet the eligibility rules.
- ☐ The project directly supports at least one stated competition priority.
- ☐ The project costs, duration and requested grant sit within the permitted range.
- ☐ The planned activities and cost categories are eligible.
- ☐ The partnership or consortium requirements can be met before submission.
- ☐ We can explain, in one sentence, why this project belongs in this fund.
- ☐ We have enough evidence and team capacity to submit a credible application.

Decision: PROCEED / CLARIFY WITH FUNDER / DO NOT APPLY

WORKSHEET 2

Budget-to-plan check

Complete this after the delivery plan and before finalising the budget.

- [ ] Every work package has a named owner, dates and a measurable output.
- [ ] Every milestone has the staff time, materials and external support it needs.
- [ ] The narrative and budget show the same hires, partners and activities.
- [ ] All arithmetic, grant rates, match funding and totals have been checked.
- [ ] Each cost is eligible, proportionate and supported by a clear calculation.
- [ ] Subcontracting and equipment are justified rather than simply listed.
- [ ] No promised deliverable is missing a corresponding budget line.

Largest unsupported or uncertain cost: ________________________________

WORKSHEET 3

Application scoring sheet

Ask a colleague who was not involved in drafting to score this.

Scope fit: the connection to the competition is explicit.	/5
Innovation: what is new is specific and evidenced.	/5
Commercial logic: buyer, market and route to impact are credible.	/5
Wider value: benefits are connected to measurable outcomes.	/5
Delivery: milestones, owners and outputs are clear.	/5
Team: relevant experience is matched to the work.	/5
Funding need: the case for public funding is convincing.	/5
Risk: major risks have owners and workable mitigations.	/5

Total: ____ / 40 Weakest section to revise first: ___________________

A FINAL NOTE

You are now grant ready

Winning grant funding is not simply about having the strongest idea. It is about presenting the right project to the right funder, supported by clear evidence, credible numbers and a delivery plan an assessor can trust.

Before you submit, ask yourself:

- Is the project clearly aligned with the fund?
- Is the innovation specific and properly evidenced?
- Do the plan, team and budget support one another?
- Have I explained why public funding is genuinely needed?
- Could someone unfamiliar with the business understand and score every answer?

If any answer is unclear, the application is not finished yet. Use the frameworks, checklists and worksheets in this playbook to strengthen it. A good application should leave the assessor with fewer questions, not more.

Good luck with your application.

Bankole Anifowoshe

Founder, Grantbank