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A helping hand:

A councillor's guide to helping their local community secure funding

Idox. Do more.

As a councillor, you are the face of the local authority, interacting with residents and community groups on a regular basis. Improving the local area and the lives of your constituents is a key aim. However, when faced with a question from a constituent or a community group about how to access funding for their project, it can be easy to feel out of your depth.

Tips for attracting funding for local improvements

1. Get up to speed with the funding landscape

As part of your own council's induction programme for elected members you are likely to have been introduced to the specialist funding teams who work within the council. They should be your first port of call if you need advice on accessing funding information. If your council has a GrantFinder subscription, they can also set you up with an account.

2. Focus the search for funding

Research by SCVO suggested that 60% of smaller charities felt they lacked fundraising skills, which was affecting their ability to work at a local level. Many community groups also operate based on goodwill and volunteer with very few, if any, actual staff.

It's important that people don't need to be a trained fundraiser to be successful at winning grants and funding. The key to success is by identifying opportunities relevant to the precise project that needs to be funded. Avoiding the 'usual suspects' can also give groups a stronger chance – there is an increasingly varied number of alternative funding sources. GrantFinder covers all major EU, Government, and Lottery funds, along with more hard-to find regional and local programmes, charitable trusts, and corporate sponsors.

3. Local businesses can also benefit

There's often a perception that grants and funding are only available for the voluntary sector. In fact, local businesses in your area can also benefit. Councils commonly have a Business Development team who can support businesses to access funding sources. Grants and loans are available to help launch new business ideas and support existing businesses' growth. Finance is also available to enable research and development. Businesses can also collaborate with local universities – schemes such as innovation vouchers and knowledge transfer partnerships aim to increase competitiveness by letting businesses access university expertise.

4. Don't give up

While there is a lot of competition for funding, our recent survey showed that significant amounts of available money are not allocated to deserving applicants because they either don't receive enough applications or because applications don't meet minimum standards.

5. Impact matters

Two key things that are important to funders are sustainability and demonstrating impact. In fact, funding often depends on having a plan for evaluation because funders want to know their investment is making a real difference. Monitoring and evaluation systems don't have to be complex though and are achievable for any size of project or organisation. Key questions that organisations need to show they have thought about when applying for funding are: "We know what we want to achieve and we have a plan to collect information to show there is a change." Councillors can help organisations to create strong funding applications by making sure that they have thought about who their target audience is, what the project goals are, and how they will know if these goals have been met.

Call us now on 0333 011 1200 or email marketing@idoxgroup.com for more information about Idox's funding services.

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