



5 Funding Application Hacks

1. Answer the question!

This might seem pretty obvious, but you'd be surprised how many people make the mistake of not answering the question asked. Think carefully about each question and what it is asking of you. There are often action words like 'explain' or specifics like 'who'. Act on these. Also, think about how a question relates to the funding criteria. The question is being asked for a reason, so make your answer count. Similarly, follow the instructions. If you're asked for a brief description, give a brief description.

Bonus tip 1: Read the funding criteria. Think critically about whether this funder is the best for you. If you are unsure, contact the organisation to get a sense of whether applying will be worth their time and yours.

2. Sweet talk

Perhaps especially in the world of innovation, we have a tendency to latch onto the 'it' words and phrases. Try to avoid jargon or, if you need to use a popularised word or phrase, explain it. For example, instead of saying, 'This is a disruptive technology', rather say, 'This is disruptive technology in that it changes the way caregivers read to children'.

Don't take your audience and their level of knowledge for granted. Make sure that if you are asking for funding for an augmented reality intervention, that you explain what augmented reality is. Being able to explain your idea in the simplest of terms is very impressive and demonstrates a sound level of understanding.

3. It has to be you!

Funding applications can be tedious, but it is important to show that you took care in completing your application. Avoid copying and pasting from previous application submissions. Find ways to identify specific reasons why this is the funder you want. For example, demonstrate that you've researched their mandate and their portfolio by mentioning how your idea speaks to their aim and complements their existing work. At Innovation Edge, we consider whether this idea would take off without us. What is it about Innovation Edge that tells us it has to be us?

4. Do your homework

Of course funding applications are about selling your idea, but being upfront about where you still don't have all the answers is not a bad thing. This is especially true with an early stage funder like Innovation Edge. Often those applying for funding in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) space have no knowledge of the sector. It is perfectly acceptable to note that you are not sure about how to ascertain the size of the market when it comes to ECD. When asked to identify potential barriers to success, it is often more impressive to list barriers and potential ways to overcome them than to simply state that there are none. This requires you to have done your homework.

Linked to the above, make sure you have done sufficient research into your idea and its dynamics. Claiming that something has 'never been done before' is a long shot. Demonstrate that you have looked into what is available out there and emphasise what sets you apart. Often, your app idea is not new, but the way you intend to get market penetration could be your unique selling point.

Bonus tip 2: An app is not always the answer. Apps are great, but they are not always the best solution for certain problems or certain groups of people. You need to be able to justify why an app is the right solution. Do not take for granted that when your solution includes an app, that a funder will buy into it.

5. Be open to questions

We know your idea is your baby and that you're protective of it. When funders ask questions or show some scepticism, it's mostly just for clarity and to stress test the idea in light of their funding mandate. At Innovation Edge, we want to take on new innovations, but we have to do our due diligence so that when we pitch the idea to our Investment Committee, we are confident in it and in our ability to do it justice. Showing a willingness to engage with feedback and respond to questions sets a good tone for a future working relationship.

For more on us and the way we work, please visit www.innovationedge.org.za