

# Ineligible Applications

The Wasted Work of the Voluntary Sector

## — Summary findings —

Since 1974 the Directory of Social Change (DSC) has published funding directories and worked to improve fundraisers' chances of success. It has done this by giving fundraisers the information they need to identify the right funders to support their work. Clear information on funding opportunities allows applicants to make informed decisions about where to target their valuable fundraising resources, thereby reducing the likelihood that bids end up in the bin.

As part of DSC's Great Giving campaign we asked 2,500 grant-making trusts about the applications they received in the last year – how many in total, how many of those were ineligible and how many awards they made. The figures presented in this report are based on a representative sample of 377 trusts which responded to all three questions. Information from those trusts and a wider group that were able to answer one or more of the questions posed has been incorporated into the respective entries on DSC's [trustfunding.org.uk](http://trustfunding.org.uk) website.

**This summary report highlights:**

- Issues surrounding ineligible applications
- Key findings from the research carried out
- Recommendations for applicants and funders

For more information on DSC's Great Giving campaign visit [www.dsc.org.uk/greatgiving](http://www.dsc.org.uk/greatgiving)



## The issues surrounding ineligible applications

The problem we are concerned about involves applications made to funders which fail to meet the funders' basic eligibility criteria, and so are rejected at the first stage of assessment. These applications are a waste of the applicant's time since they rarely, if ever, result in funding. They are also a waste of funders' time.

### So what causes ineligible applications?

- Applicants submitting requests without having fully researched the funder's criteria.
- Applicants taking a quantity not quality approach (i.e. blanket appeals which target large numbers of funders inappropriately).
- A lack of clear and accessible information from the funder, which leaves the issue of eligibility open to interpretation.
- Unclear or missing information from applicants.
- A lack of experience in, or knowledge of, researching and approaching funders.
- A shortage of constructive feedback from funders, which prevents fundraisers from better targeting their efforts.

### Why should we try to reduce the number of ineligible applications?

- They waste applicants' time and resources which could be better spent on applications with at least some chance of success.
- They represent a waste of time for funders – fewer ineligible applications could mean quicker responses to the eligible ones or even more resources to allocate as grants.

## Research findings

The top 2,500 grant-making trusts made grants worth £2.4 billion in 2008/9.

### Overall:

- 983,753 applications were made.
- Trusts received 361,149 ineligible applications (36%).
- Trusts made 316,762 awards.
- Ineligible applications made to the largest 2,500 trusts in the last year equate to around seven years of wasted effort (if each application took 10 minutes on average).

### Concentration of ineligible applications

- 53 trusts received no ineligible applications, and awarded grants to every applicant.
- 570 trusts received fewer than 10% ineligible applications.
- 829 trusts had over 50% ineligible applications.
- 113 trusts had over 90% ineligible applications.

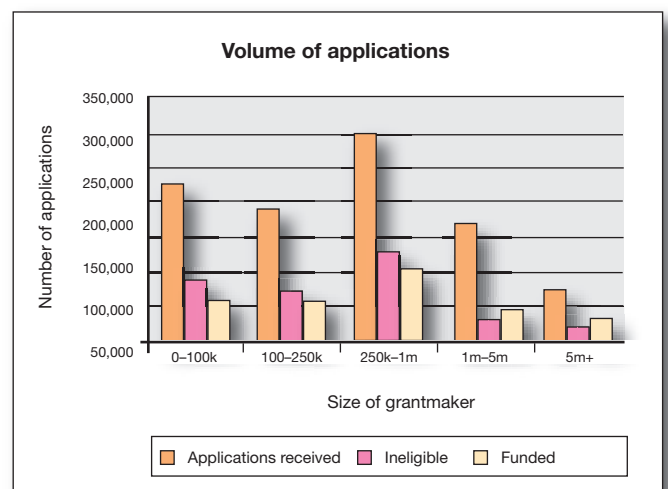
### A question of size?

- Trusts which gave more than £5 million a year had the lowest ratio of ineligible applications to applications received (22%), and the highest ratio of awards to applications (37%).
- Below that threshold there was little variance in the ratios of ineligible applications to applications received; the average for trusts below the £5 million mark was 35%

### A question of volume?

- Trusts receiving over 2,500 applications and those receiving between 501 and 1000 had the lowest ratio of ineligible applications (32%).
- The highest ratio of ineligible applications was from those trusts receiving 251 to 500 applications.

*“361,149 ineligible applications...”*



# Recommendations

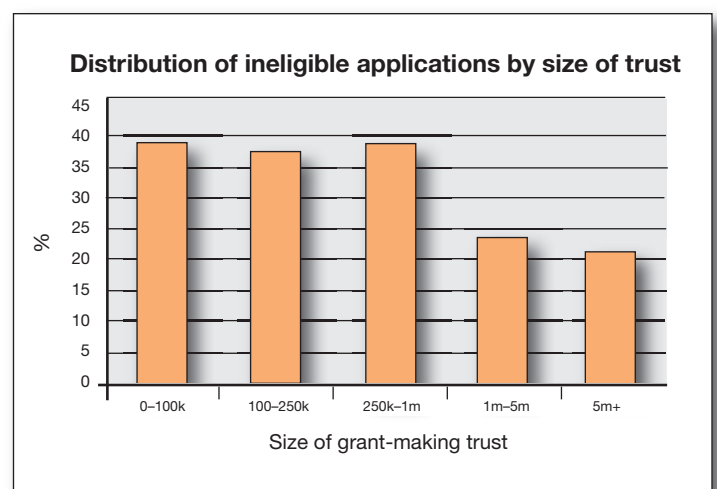
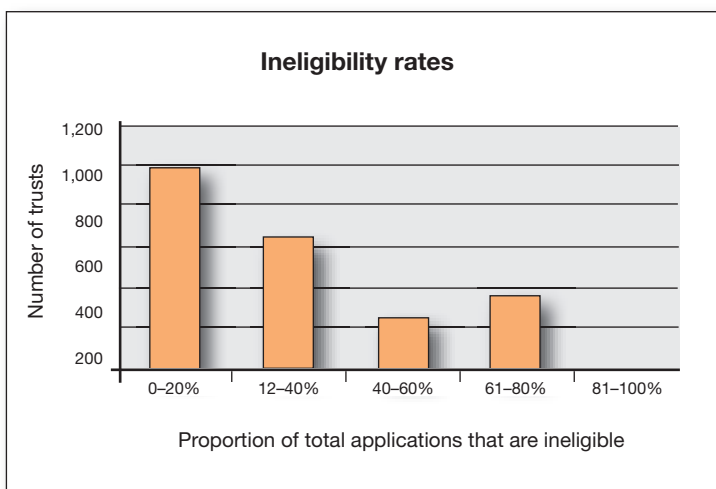
## For funders

- **Provide comprehensive and accessible information:** state what you do and what you want to fund, preferably online if you have a website.
- **Ensure your application guidance is clear, concise and as jargon-free as possible:** encourage prospective applicants to read it.
- **Explain the application procedure clearly:** what information will be required, by when and in what form.
- **Recognise the benefits of providing constructive feedback at all points of the application process, especially if the application is rejected:** this should make it less likely that the applicant submits the same ineligible bid again and again.
- **Provide a clear contact point for any queries,** together with instructions on how you prefer to be contacted, and when the fundraiser can expect a response.
- **Keep track of ineligible applications and analyse them periodically to see if there are any patterns:** consider how the information you provide could be changed to reduce their number.

## For applicants

- **Read the guidance:** it's there for a reason (if there isn't any, ask for some).
- **If the guidelines don't make sense, or you are not sure whether you might be eligible:** try to speak to the funder about your questions and what they are looking for.
- **Do your research:** it is really worthwhile to spend enough time trying to find a funder which is right for you. Fundraising appeals which begin with 'I know you don't usually fund this...' are unlikely to succeed.
- **Do not send blanket appeals:** they mean that funders have less time to give proper bids the consideration they deserve.
- **Ask questions:** if you're not sure if you're eligible, especially if the application process is informal (i.e. there isn't a standard form).
- **Ensure that your application is clear, concise and as jargon-free as possible:** trusts are unlikely to know what you are asking for if it is shrouded in unclear language.

*“...seven years of wasted effort.”*



# DSC's Great Giving campaign

The Great Giving campaign aims to improve the relationships between funders and recipients of funds, by achieving the following:

## **A clear picture of the funding environment**

- More comprehensive information about where funding is going and what it is supporting.
- A greater understanding by funders of that information and their responsibility to understand the environment in which they are operating.
- Better planning and decision making from funders and policymakers.

For more on DSC's Funders' Almanac, which supports this aim, go to [www.dsc.org.uk/greatgiving](http://www.dsc.org.uk/greatgiving)

## **Accessible funding for campaigning**

Financial support for campaigning is vital to achieving social change. Greater clarity from grant-making trusts about whether they will fund campaigning activity is needed to support this aim.

As part of ongoing research for our fundraising publications and websites, we will clearly identify funders that support campaigning and will encourage them to specify how they provide this support.

Download the Funding for Sustainable Change report at [www.dsc.org.uk/greatgiving](http://www.dsc.org.uk/greatgiving)

## **An end to 'hidden small print'**

We are asking funders to make all information that governs the use of funds available at the point of application, and to be open to negotiating terms when applicants request it. Download our report *Critical Conditions* at [www.dsc.org.uk/greatgiving](http://www.dsc.org.uk/greatgiving).

## **No ineligible applications**

We know that most funders receive applications that do not fall within their guidelines. Clearer guidelines can help, but applicants also need to take more heed of funder guidelines and target applications appropriately.

This report illustrates how much time and effort is wasted on ineligible applications and contains findings and recommendations for funders and fundraisers.

## About the Directory of Social Change

The Directory of Social Change's vision is of an independent voluntary sector at the heart of social change. We believe that the activities of charities and other voluntary organisations are crucial to the health of our society.

Through our publications, courses and conferences, we come into contact with thousands of organisations each year. The majority are small to medium-sized, rely on volunteers and are struggling constantly to maintain and improve the services that they provide.

We are not a membership body. Our public commentary and the policy positions we take are based on clear principles, and are informed by the contact that we have with these organisations. We also undertake campaigns on issues that affect them or which evolve out of our research.

We view our role as that of a 'concerned citizen', acting as a champion on behalf of those smaller organisations whose needs may not be accounted for in public policy. We ask critical questions, often challenge the prevailing view, and try to promote debate on issues that we consider to be important.

For more on the Directory of Social Change's policy principles see [www.dsc.org.uk/NewsandInformation/PolicyandCampaigning](http://www.dsc.org.uk/NewsandInformation/PolicyandCampaigning)