

The project summary: An essential fundraising tool

Brin Best explains how project summaries can help maximise your school's fundraising work.

I vividly remember completing my first few funding applications over 20 years ago. Word-processors were just beginning to become available, and although they did not yet run Microsoft Windows, they greatly speeded up the writing and editing process, which had hitherto been a protracted affair carried out on clumsy typewriters. Fast forward to 2011 and it is difficult to imagine how a present day school fundraising coordinator would cope without today's advanced computer technology, including the amazing world of the Internet.

Yet despite all the technological advances of the last 20 years, one thing still marks out all successful school funding applications: a high quality project that will deliver outstanding outcomes for children and the wider community. And at the heart of such projects is the project summary, a one page (c.500-word; see box) synopsis that brings together all the key information about the project for a variety of audiences.

This article explains the significance of the project summary and provides guidance on what to include. It shows how project summaries can be used as the basis for a wide range of different funding applications, as well as serving as a tool to generate interest and support within school and the wider community. The article will argue that project summaries are an essential tool to help maximise your fundraising work, and should be built in to strategic fundraising at your school.

What to include?

Project summaries should follow a consistent format and should include:

- The name of the project – keep it short, simple and factual.
- A brief description of the project in about 100 words.
- The need for the project – if possible with supporting figures.
- The intended outcomes you are seeking – as bullet points (especially the impact the project will have on people's lives.

- The budget – be as precise as you can (it is recognised that this may be subject to change at a later date).
- A timeline for the project.
- How the project will be monitored and evaluated.

Widespread benefits

Project summaries bring with them a range of benefits both within and outside your school. They can be used to explain, justify and publicise your project idea within and beyond school. Remember that you are only likely to gain the support of key people if you make a clear case for the need for and value of your project.

Within school you can circulate the summary to all staff and invite those who wish to know more to approach you. This will hopefully lead to a tight-knit team of people who share a passion for the project. Beyond the school gates you can send the summary to influential people in the community, such as the local MP, business leaders and charity officers. You could also use it to write an article in your school newsletter/magazine, or to produce a press release.

The primary use of project summaries is to help construct the all-important funding applications – for more guidance see below. One of the most important roles of project summaries is to ensure projects bring genuine benefits to your pupils and the wider community. Without such summaries, applicants can have only a vague idea of what they are trying to achieve, and be swayed by the guidance in the application pack into preparing an application that does not reflect the priorities of the school.

Using your project summaries

It is vital to generate support for your projects within and beyond your school, and your project summaries represent a powerful tool to help achieve this. They can be circulated internally to key members of staff and distributed more widely in your local community among the people that can help make them a reality.

'One of the most important roles of project summaries is to ensure projects bring genuine benefits to your pupils and the wider community.'

Such publicity work should enable you to put together a small team of people to take the project forward.

Your project summaries can be used to make the process of applying for grants considerably easier. In particular, they will save you considerable time when you have identified a suitable funding source and are confronted with a blank application form to complete. Because you have done much of the thinking already, you can simply extract the information you need from the project summary and incorporate it into the application form.

It is also worth bearing in mind that some funders are prepared to look over your project summary to see if it matches their current criteria and priorities (for example, the National Lottery-funded Awards for All Awards team have helped schools in this way in the past). This is a very helpful service as it saves you the wasted effort of completing a full application and then finding your project sits outside the funder's current priorities or does not meet a key criterion.

It is vital to bear in mind that the project summary is a concise summary of the project. It should constitute the minimum of information that is included on the application form and it will probably be necessary to provide supplementary details in response to certain questions in the application. Some funders may also ask additional questions about your project which are not answered by the information in your project summary.

EXAMPLE PROJECT SUMMARY

Note: The Settle-Herbignac Environmental Exchange was the overall winner of the Franco-British Council School Partnership Prize, bringing with it a grant of £5,000.

The Settle-Herbignac Environmental Exchange

This collaboration, between the geography and modern languages department, will consist of an environmentally-themed exchange with a school in Brittany, France. Both schools involved in the exchange are situated on the edge of nationally important protected areas: the Yorkshire Dales National Park and La Brière Natural Area. Pupils from year 9 and 10 will spend a week staying in their partners' homes in the respective countries, and will take part in a series of visits to places of environmental interest (for example, a nature reserve, wind farm, science museum). They will also carry out practical work with their partners which will be published in a bilingual book comparing the landscape and ecology of the two regions.

Need for the project

Internal assessment of year 9 and 10 pupils' performance in French indicates that all pupils' speaking and listening skills (especially those of boys) lag behind their written skills and are in need of further development. The exchange would provide the ideal platform for these speaking and listening skills to be developed in an authentic context. Through a piece of written work on the environmental importance of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, the head of geography has established that many year 9 and 10 pupils' knowledge of the Park is surprisingly poor, with 60 per cent demonstrating only

a basic knowledge of the environmental issues affecting the area.

Intended outcomes

- Pupils will have a better understanding of the environmental issues affecting the Yorkshire Dales National Park and La Brière Natural Area.
- Pupils will have improved their French language skills (especially speaking and listening) through close collaboration with their exchange partner.
- Pupils' work will be published in a full colour book, boosting their self-esteem and providing a permanent record of the exchange.

The budget

Funds will be sought to subsidise the cost of the exchange for all participating pupils, as well as the purchasing of equipment and the printing of the book. The breakdown of costs is as follows:

■ Travel subsidiary	£2,000
■ Equipment*	£700
■ Printing	£1,800
■ Contingency	£500
TOTAL	£5,000

*Equipment costs will cover the purchase of a notebook computer (on which an exchange diary will be written at the end of each day by a different pupil), stationery (including a notepad for each pupil to record their thoughts) and first-aid equipment.

Timeline

- Identification of exchange partners: 1-15 March
- Settle students travel to Herbignac: 20-30 May
- Communication between partners for book contributions: 1-30 June
- Herbignac students travel to Settle: 10-20 July
- Finalising contributions to book: 1 Aug-15 September
- Book published and celebration event: 15 October

Monitoring and evaluation

The pupils' progress during the exchanges will be monitored by collecting in their notebooks every few days to take a snapshot of development. A variety of methods will be used to evaluate the impact of the project on the participating pupils, as follows:

- Pupils' knowledge of the environmental issues affecting the Yorkshire Dales National Park and La Brière Natural Area will be measured before and after the exchange visits – this will be overseen by the geography department.
- Pupils' French language proficiency (especially speaking and listening) will be assessed before and after the exchange visits – this will be overseen by the modern languages department.
- The views of pupils, teachers, parents/carers and the wider community will be sought on the book that will be published when the project draws to a close.

As you complete your funding applications you will need to adopt a somewhat flexible approach to create the best match between what you want to do and what the funder wishes to support.

Some aspects of your projects may need to be given greater emphasis; others might diminish in importance. While this sort of 'tweaking' of your project is to be expected, it is important not to lose sight of the original aims of the project.

Finally, remember that, as with all writing, there is an art to crafting really effective project summaries – but you will improve with practice (see example).

Concluding remarks

While project summaries are clearly important tools to help school fundraising coordinators access the cash they need, they will only be truly effective if they are underpinned by a really good idea. No amount of well-crafted text can make up for an unimaginative idea, or one that the funding bodies have received time and time again. For this reason it is vital to put every effort into generating and nurturing innovative project ideas across your school – from pupils, support and teaching staff – as well as seeking the views of the wider community.

Brin Best, educational consultant.

'One thing still marks out all successful school funding applications: a high quality project that will deliver outstanding outcomes for children and the wider community.'