



Building Better Opportunities

Guide to assessment and award
(Version 1 - December 2015)

Introduction

This guide provides information for applicants and other stakeholders on how the assessment and award process works for Building Better Opportunities (BBO).

What are the stages of the process?

- ✓ **Stage one application** - The applicant emails a completed application form to the BBO inbox by the deadline.
- ✓ **Stage one initial checks** - As we receive applications, we'll carry out initial completeness and eligibility checks. These include a preliminary assessment of whether the application broadly responds to the relevant project outline. If an application clearly fails these checks then it will be rejected at this point. In order for the competition to be fair, we cannot contact applicants to ask for further explanations or missing information, so it is important that the application is clear and complete.
- ✓ **Stage one assessment begins** - We assess the application against the 13 BBO assessment principles. The principles are listed in the stage one application form and also shown in Annex A of this document.
- ✓ **Stage one supplementary reviews** - The local ESIF Sub-Committee is given the option to review the applications and provide views on how well they address the project outline and fit the local context. Anyone who feeds into this process has to complete a Declaration of Interests form and a Confidentiality Agreement. Anyone with a conflict of interest cannot take part. If a Committee wishes to give supplementary reviews they must do so for all applications, not just some. The Big Lottery Fund local manager also gives supplementary reviews. Again, local manager reviews must be for all applications, not just some.
- ✓ **Stage one assessment continues** - We complete our assessment, building in the supplementary reviews. Assessment reports are moderated by peers and managers. Most applications will be judged 'fundable' and sent on to the BBO Decision Panel. A few applications may be so weak that we reject them at this stage as 'unfundable'.
- ✓ **Stage one decision panel** - The panel is a sub-committee of the Big Lottery Fund England Committee. It considers all the assessment reports and decides which applications should be invited through to stage two. In most cases this will be the one or two strongest applications for each project outline, although in some cases it may be more. Occasionally the panel may decide that none of the applications is strong enough to take through to stage two. When this happens, we will work with the ESIF Sub-Committee to redesign the project outline and re-run the competition in a later round. The panel uses the 13 assessment principles to make its decisions. See Annex B for lessons learned from the first decision panel (November 2015). The panel may not always agree with the views expressed by the ESIF Sub-Committee or the local manager in the supplementary reviews. Its decisions are final. Anyone who wishes to complain about a decision can use the standard Big Lottery Fund complaints process (see <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/about-big/customer-service/making-a-complaint>) although the only grounds for making a complaint are that we have not properly followed our processes.
- ✓ **Inform ESIF Sub-Committees** - We inform ESIF Sub-Committees of the panel's decisions and discuss any issues.
- ✓ **Stage one feedback** - We contact all applicants to inform them of the panel's decisions. Letters to unsuccessful applicants include headline feedback. Unsuccessful applicants can contact us esf@biglotteryfund.org.uk to ask for more detailed feedback.
- ✓ **Stage two** - Stage two follows a similar process to stage one, although applicants will have far more contact with us during the application stage, as we will help them ensure that applications are complete. We will speak to the ESIF Committee's representative at the start of this stage to ensure we understand their priorities and any concerns and will discuss the applicants' progress with them throughout this stage. Only one application will be successful at stage two for each project outline.

Annex A - Our assessment principles

Area	Principle	
Need	1	The application is relevant to the project outline.
	2	The project will add value to and complement existing services, initiatives or strategies.
Impact	3	The project will make a significant difference to the people and communities it aims to benefit.
	4	There is a clear understanding at a local level of the barriers faced by the different groups of people who will benefit from the project.
	5	The project will integrate gender equality, equal opportunities and sustainable development throughout its delivery.
Approach	6	The planning carried out so far suggests that further development work would be carried out effectively at the next stage.
	7	The proposed activities appear to be the best way of addressing the barriers faced by the different groups of people who will benefit from the project.
	8	The project costs, including development funding, are realistic and based on reasonable assumptions.
	9	The project is likely to deliver to the targets identified in the project outline.
Capability	10	The lead organisation has the necessary skills, experience and resources to manage the project successfully in the local area.
	11	Individual partners have the right experience and role within the project to complement each other well.
	12	The partnership is working from a strong foundation with clear plans for ensuring all organisations work together effectively in the future.
	13	There is a clear understanding of how State Aid rules may affect the project.

Local needs and context

Successful applicants demonstrated that they were very informed about local needs and context, provided strong evidence they could deliver successfully locally, and were well-aligned with existing local provision, services and networks. We were disappointed to receive some applications that attempted to apply a generic approach, without a proper focus on the local needs and context; these were not successful.

Partnerships

We are very interested in the detail of how the partnerships will work. Successful applicants were generally the ones that were clearest on roles and responsibilities of each partner and how the partnership will be managed. At stage two we will look at this in more detail, particularly on how work, money and risk will be shared between partners.

Equalities

Only projects that have a well thought-through approach to equalities will be successful in securing BBO funding. We were disappointed that some applications were very weak on equalities. This is very important to the Fund and also to ESF. BBO is working with some of the most disadvantaged people in society and it is very important that BBO projects are designed with equalities as a key element and are informed by people from the groups that they will be working with. Again, we will be exploring this in more detail at stage two.

Outcomes

In many cases, the outcomes suggested by applicants were not strong. We are looking for outcomes that add value to the ESF targets by clearly tracking the wider impact that projects make, for example: measuring the quality and sustainability of the jobs or other results achieved by participants; measuring the progress made by participants who do not achieve results against the ESF targets; or measuring wider benefits to the community.

Participant numbers

We were glad to see that many applicants were ambitious about the numbers of people they plan to work with and the results they expect. In many cases, applications showed a deep understanding of participant groups and clear evidence to support higher targets. However, there were also some applications that suggested working with many more people than the minimum targets in the project outlines, without justification - these applications showed a misunderstanding of the intensive work with people facing complex challenges that BBO is designed to fund, so they were not successful.

Quality and focus

At stage two, we will make just one award per project outline so our plan is to invite the strongest stage one applicants through to stage two. It was noted that many applications were generic, with limited detail and appeared reliant on a chance to develop the project idea later on in the process. In many cases, only one applicant has been successful at stage one, and so applicants need to ensure that their stage one application contains as much detailed and relevant information as possible to allow us to make the best possible decisions. We generally found that the strongest applications were in areas where organisations had worked together to develop a comprehensive, considered, focussed approach. Where organisations had opted for a scattergun approach of submitting lots of fairly generic applications that were not clearly focussed on the project outlines, these were not successful.