

Behind the scenes at The October Club

Advice for Charities considering an application for a grant

By Addie Pinkster

“Over the past 31 years we have consistently delivered two things to our members; a sensational and carefully-chosen charity for them to transform, and a jolly good evening and dinner in mid-October. This simple formula is key to our success and something we take very seriously.”

Nigel Gliksten, Committee member & Director, former Chairman

Introduction

The October Club is passionate about supporting small and worthwhile UK charities with transformational projects. We are keen to maximise each applicant's chance of success and see it as our responsibility to help them to allocate their fundraising resources wisely. This article is intended to be used as a guide to those who are considering applying for our funding. We have summarised our own views and have also asked the CEOs of recent beneficiaries what advice they would give to a charity on what makes a good application.

This article discusses:

- The three key criteria all applicants must meet
- Considerations before an application
- What makes a good application
- What to expect at the final selection pitch, and
- Whether to re-apply

If you have any questions, please get in touch with a member of the Committee.



The three criteria

The October Club has three criteria that all successful applicants must demonstrate that they meet.

1. ANNUAL VOLUNTARY INCOME

Every applicant must demonstrate that they meet the voluntary income criteria, which stands at greater than £500,000 but less than £2,500,000 per annum.

Please refer to the guidance notes with the application form for our definition of voluntary income.

“The voluntary income threshold is there for a reason. We are looking for a charity that is big enough that it won’t get swamped by a £500,000 investment, but is small enough that the money will make a transformational difference.”

Henry Knapman, Committee member & Director, former Chairman

An application where the charity does not meet the voluntary income requirement is likely to be dismissed at the first selection meeting, and will not receive feedback beyond “does not meet the funding criteria”. A charity may get in touch to explain and demonstrate an anomaly in the voluntary funding for that particular year. For example, a ring-fenced donation or a timing technicality. In such a circumstance, the application may be considered, though the chances being taken forward to the second selection meeting are reduced.

“As a small charity, we found the due diligence process extremely helpful in making sure we were equipped to handle large donations. This transparency with The October Club gave them confidence in our ability as a charity partner.”

Helen Matthews, Deputy CEO, The Cure Parkinson’s Trust

The Club will verify the accuracy of the stated numbers - we employ an independent charities accountant who verifies the information stated in each application ahead of the first selection meeting. A more detailed due diligence process is undertaken on the successful charity after the final selection meeting, prior to the formal announcement of selection.

2. A TRANSFORMATIONAL PROJECT

The transformational-nature of the project is absolutely fundamental to getting funding from The October Club.

“First and foremost, I tell charities that they have to have a transformational project. Because that is what the October Club does. It gives you the funding, relationships and support to totally change what you are doing.”

Simmi Woodwal, CEO, Honeypot (Charity of the Year, 2015)

The October Club is about transforming the impact of a charity, and will not fund ‘business as usual’ or linear growth.

“Every charity wants funding to grow; not all are looking for transformational growth. A good application or presentation leaves a strong impression that this is a total game changer for the charity”.

Nick Crean, Committee member & Director

The nature of the transformational project could involve a few small steps that, combined, will have a big impact, or could be just one step. It is important that the charity can demonstrate that the project is deliverable, both in terms of financial and staffing capability. It doesn’t work if the “transformational project” appears to have been made up for the sake of the application!

“Winning applicants typically walk in saying “we have been really successful at this thing we’ve been doing, and we know that if we pull this one lever then we can radically change the impact we can have. We are desperate to do that”. The passion, genuineness, and almost desperation to do the project, comes across very clearly.”
Mark Pumfrey, Former Chairman

“Being able to communicate the scale, importance or urgency of the issue the project wishes to address through funding is important, but it is even more essential to be able to demonstrate the impact that project will have through tangible evidence wherever possible. The fact that WellChild had piloted the project and therefore had evidence to back up the more emotive impact narrative really resonated with the committee. A charity is asking the committee to commit time, networks, reputation and most importantly, a great deal of money to the project – being able to properly evidence the impact that money will have should be a key element of both the application and presentation.”

Colin Dyer, CEO of WellChild

“It is important to understand that applicants need to demonstrate how the project will be transformational for the charity, not just the beneficiaries.”

Helen Matthews

“Every charity who applies has a good cause. What’s important is setting out a clear and compelling case about how your project will transform your ability to support your beneficiaries. It is about demonstrating how your project will take you to a different level of operating. You have got to demonstrate that you really want it; that you have really thought it about it and with this kind of support, you can actually deliver on it.”

Anita Grover, CEO Auditory Verbal UK

3. THREE-YEAR TIME FRAME

The third criteria is that **the funds must be used within 3 years of the grant being made**. The general expectation is that the funding will be used over the course of those three years, and will provide a stepping stone to further growth in its own right.

“By building on the North Wales house that The October Club funded, Honeypot has been able to get more funding and partnerships, including with Downing Street, England Football Team, National Trust. We are now considering opening our third house in Scotland.”

Simmi Woodwal

“Parkinson’s Movement has transformed the way people living with Parkinson’s are able to access research by creating opportunities to work with researchers, to take part in research and to understand breaking research news. The October Club funding provided the credibility that has allowed us to attract further investment from the Wellcome Trust.”

Helen Matthews

Furthermore, the Club will often continue to add value beyond pure financing during that period. This may include access to a network of advisors and influential people, supporting, guiding and advising the charity as it grows.

“Looking back on the charities that The October Club has supported, they tend to be successful, worthwhile, and growing before the Club got involved. But the rate of that growth and impact turned a corner at the point they partnered with The October Club. It’s not just getting funding that they desperately need, but mentorship, connections, profile, confidence, encouragement.”

David McDonough, OBE, Life President and founding Chairman

Considerations before an application

In addition to the three criteria that are pre-requisites for any application, there are a few other considerations for potential applicants.

WHAT DOES A “UK PROJECT” MEAN?

The charities that we support are typically UK based and focused, but not focused on just one part of the UK. Many great charities fail to succeed because they operate in just one region (for example, London or Greater London) or only one country within the UK.

“Two of the most promising applications I have seen in recent years have been turned down because they operate across Greater London and want to extend their operations to the home counties. Subject to feedback, a re-application which applies that project on a more national scale could well be successful.”

Addie Pinkster, Committee member & Director

That said, the transformational nature of the project could be that the charity intends to broaden its geographic scope from just one region to reach out to a drastically wider scope. Honeypot and AVUK were both good examples of geographical transformation.

“Honeypot had just one house in Hampshire and was able to service the South East of England. By opening a second House in north Wales, they were able to service England and Wales, including the thousands of service users in the large cities in North East England.”

Simmi Woodwal

“In the case of AVUK, The October Club helped them towards their goal of ensuring that any child born deaf in England, Scotland or Wales could get access to the specialist practitioners needed to help them learn to listen and speak and have the same opportunities in life as children with normal hearing.”

Will Tovey, Committee member & Director

“Auditory Verbal UK’s project was about how we could roll out a programme that would increase the number of specialist therapists for deaf children across the UK. We were at a critical point in our development. We could see where we needed to go and how we might achieve it but needed a significant investment that would transform our ability to do so.”

Anita Grover

ARE SOME CAUSES MORE LIKELY TO GET FUNDED THAN OTHERS?

Successful applicants are always doing remarkable work with the ambition to extend this. Generally, the winning charity will not be in the same field as our beneficiaries of the previous two years. There are no particular causes that we definitely fund or avoid. Reflecting on the previous beneficiaries, they include charities related to medical conditions, both common and rare, mental health, loneliness, social-isolation and prisons.

“We have supported charities which have helped newly born children through to caring for the aged and terminally ill. For a long time we didn’t have beneficiaries in scientific research, and early stage speculative research remains unlikely as it is too binary.”

Simon Bond, Committee member

Committee members discuss the sustainability of the project, the fit and the ability of The October Club to make a difference.

“The range of charities we have backed speaks for itself, and shows the forward-thinking and often brave approach to selection. We look for something that is transformational, offers permanency, and is self-sustainable. It is important that our members know that we have made an impact beyond a year or so. We have put something down that will make an impact for years to come.”

Neil Pegrum, Committee member & Director

DO I NEED TO DECLARE ANY EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE CITY?

“We are always interested to know of any existing relationships that applicants have within the City and The October Club, with both individuals and organisations. We expect charities to tell us if they have existing links to, or recent fundraising from, the City. It is fair to say it is taken into consideration.”

Samantha Huggins, Chair

Sometimes such links can be a help to engagement and fundraising on the night. On the other hand, it is unlikely that a charity will be selected by the Committee if it has recently had a prominent association with a City organisation, for example if they have recently been Charity of the Year for an investment bank or asset manager. Our primary audience is the City's equity markets community.

“We have a reputation for bringing small growing charities to our members, and for many people in the room it is the first time they have heard about the charity. It works well when we are introducing a new, fresh charity and project to the audience, and vice versa. It is less engaging for the room, and harder for us to raise money, for a charity that has already faced that audience from a different angle.”

Henry Knapman

The October Club tends to be the lead investor for the project. It is possible that a successful charity might have £100,000-£200,000 put aside for the project, possibly as part of a ring-fenced donation or endowment. However, it is less likely that the Club will fund a project that costs £2m where £1m has already been given by another donor, or raised through another organisation.



CAN I TALK TO ANYONE ON THE COMMITTEE?

You are warmly invited to get in touch if you have any questions for the committee or any queries/concerns you would like to discuss.

Committee members are receptive to charities who get in touch to ask for advice. A good approach asks for feedback and advice about whether to apply and about what makes a good application. A less productive approach would be to ask “for support for the application” in its own right.

Each charity is asked to state any connections to Committee members. These connections are discussed with the relevant committee members in the selection committee. It is worth having meaningful conversation rather than “throwing down a name”.

“Different charities approach this in different ways. The charity advisor always asks any named Committee member to explain their connection to the charity. Often the person in question knows a lot about the charity, has had a meeting or two with them, and is able to discuss both what the charity does and also the transformational project with conviction. The other extreme is when the person is barely aware of the charity, and is not able to discuss them or contribute to the Committee’s understanding of their application at all”.

Nigel Gliksten, former Chairman

Charities should also be aware that Committee members are obliged to declare any support they have given charities in their application and in some cases may be asked to abstain from the vote.

What makes a good application?

Aside from meeting the three criteria, there are several areas in which a charity can increase their chances of a successful application.

CLEAN, CONCISE AND CLEAR

In terms of the application itself, it must be simple (layman’s language), realistic, clear and focused.

A tight and structured application, keeping to the format of the application form and guidance notes, is essential.

The key questions are:

- What does the charity actually do?
- Why is the charity important, and who is benefiting?
- What is the transformational project that you intend to undertake?
- What will the impact be of the project?

“Clarity is paramount. For each of the charities we have supported since I’ve been involved, I could tell you in 4 sentences what they do, why it’s important, what their project was, and how it transformed their reach and impact. A good application carries all of that information, in plain English. It is always disappointing to see that a charity has spent time on an application which – even after re-reading – hasn’t answered those critical questions.”

Michele Hunter, Committee member & Director

FINANCIALS

The Committee looks for realism and detail in the applications. It is critical that the financial aspect of the application is accurate, realistic and deliverable. A successful applicant will ensure that the Committee understand the financial position of the charity and that there is visibility on all financial aspects of delivering the project.

“A good application is tight. It isn’t trying to do too many things. It has been well thought through. And the numbers have to work. We have too many where the numbers don’t stack up, or they haven’t explained what they are spending it on. We can’t represent the case to colleagues and guests coming to the evening if we can’t talk about it confidently in numbers.”

Neil Pegrum, Committee member & Director

ABILITY TO EXECUTE

The application process gives an important impression as to the charity’s ability to execute on the transformational project and scale their service to users.

“I care a huge amount about how well-run the charity is, and how they control costs. The first impression is made by how the application is put together, how they discuss numbers, who attends the presentation, how well prepared they are.” *Michele Hunter*

GOVERNANCE

It is imperative that all aspects of governance are satisfactory and strong. The Committee will verify details provided in the application and ensure they are correct and accurate, and that the operations of the charity are transparent. Charities are expected to be transparent and offer full disclosure. Trustees are expected to be fully aware of, and involved in, the application to and relationship with The October Club.

AUTHENTICITY

“How genuine the project is comes across really clearly. What resonates is a project that the charity has been thinking about for some time but hasn’t had funding to do. The October Club provides that golden opportunity.”

Mark Pumfrey

The authenticity of the project is a key consideration for the selection Committee. It is critical that the applicant can prove that the project for which they are requesting funding is an integral part of the charity’s mission and success. They need to be focused on how it will be delivered and why it is essential.

“It is really important to stress that the project hasn’t been created for the application. i.e. that they haven’t forged a project in order to get funding to do more of what they are already doing. The selection committee are not keen on projects that appear to be an extension of “Business as Usual”.”

Martin Pope, Committee member

“We had been developing the idea for our project for over a year. The October Club application came at a critical point in the project’s development, and we were able to convey that urgency to the Committee.”

Helen Matthews

Contribution to the evening event

A charity who has some well-known supporters should check how they can help leverage their application, particularly in relation to creating something special for the auction or the evening.

That said; “In the year we were selected, we nearly didn’t apply because we didn’t have a big celebrity to talk at the dinner on our behalf. We found that it wasn’t a prerequisite, and we were able to field a good speaker to talk about what we do & why it’s important.”

Anita Grover



What to expect at the final selection pitch

Any charity invited to the final selection meeting is welcome to have a more detailed conversation about what to expect in the meeting.

Talking to Committee members and previous beneficiaries, here are a few pointers:

- Be familiar with the three criteria and address them where relevant in your pitch.
- Have a concise, clear, detailed and well-prepared and practiced presentation.
- Bring all relevant documents. Make sure the tech works. Think about who is going to stand or sit where.
- Explain what the charity does, the impact it currently has, and how that would change post funding.
- Use personal stories and examples.
- Think about who you want to bring to the meeting: a service provider, an end user, a Trustee. It would be very unusual for the CEO not to attend.
- Explain how our monies will be allocated.
- Clearly explain the objectives of the project and be prepared to demonstrate how you can deliver it – including past successes.
- Explain how the project will be managed, by whom, and how it will be evaluated
- Identify any risks associated with delivering the project.
- Consider what you can bring to the evening – for example who might speak to introduce the charity and validate the transformation, and who might make the appeal on the night.
- Show how you can support The October Club in maximising the funds you receive
- Stick to the allotted time. (All applicants are restricted to the allotted time in fairness to all charities who pitch).
- Leave time for Q&A, and answer questions directly.
- Be aware that any Committee member who has not attended every pitch in full will not be allowed to cast a vote.

“Taking a beneficiary (preferably one who stands to benefit from, or really understands the benefit of, the project) to the presentation is essential as this allows the Committee to picture the message that will be delivered at the dinner. I would guess that, of all the elements of our pitch, it was Jill that resonated most with the committee.”

Colin Dyer

After the selection process

SHOULD WE RE-APPLY?

Any charity is warmly encouraged to re-apply, subject to and guided by the feedback on the previous application. There is precedent where charities have been selected on their 2nd or 3rd application. Some charities re-apply having evolved the projects they have previously proposed. In one case a charity won with a completely different transformational project having truly understood The October Club’s ethos.

“Members of the committee take a close interest in the journey and evolution of a charity and their projects. In the case of the Cure Parkinson’s Trust, they were selected on their second application. In the intervening year they had successfully completed the first stage of the transformational project that they initially pitched. That showed their intention, passion, ability to execute and determination that this was the course to transform their impact.”

Addie Pinkster

“I remember discussing why their application to fund excellent research at a university hospital hadn’t been successful with the team from the Samantha Dickinson Brain Tumour Trust. Having spent time with them discussing genuine transformation, they reapplied asking us to fund their Headsmart campaign. This transformed both the charity and the diagnosis time for people developing brain tumours in the UK. Subsequently, the charity has gone on to merge and become The Brain Tumour Trust, the UK’s leading charitable organisation in its field.”

Nigel Gliksten

We would not always recommend a reapplication. When considering whether to reapply, it is important to consider why the previous application was not successful, to and ensure there has been sufficient change within the organisation to now meet the requirements.

IS IT WORTH MAKING CONTACT IF WE DON’T MEET THE CRITERIA?

On occasion, a charity has got in touch prior to meeting the three criteria.

“Some worthwhile charities have been known to develop a relationship with The October Club prior to meeting the minimum threshold criteria. Their message in effect is “we are too small for you now on the grounds of minimum voluntary income but we are doing something really important and already know exactly what lever we need to pull to total transform our reach. As we hit that criteria we will be putting in an application to the Club to fund this game changer.”

Addie Pinkster

FINAL THOUGHTS

There are many worthwhile charities in the UK doing critically important work for their end users. If one of those charities meets the three criteria, and has ambitions to transform its service to end users, then we would welcome an application for funding. If you have any questions, then please reach out to a Committee member.

“Working with The October Club was and is inspirational. The committee’s generosity in terms of mentorship, advice and experience was invaluable, not only in the lead-up to the dinner, but beyond to the delivery of the project itself.”

Helen Matthews

“The October Club gave us not just the financial support, but the confidence, connections and the platform to turn our ambitions into a reality.”

Anita Grover

“There are clearly many reasons behind the Club’s longevity, but one aspect resonates with the committee and our members, namely leverage. We want to give our charities a boost to a whole new level of effectiveness. The October Club is the City’s charity and the City understands the leverage of transformation. We are immensely proud of our history and look forward to continuing this mission with a great many charities going forward.”

Nigel Gliksten