



# Big Grants kit

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“get ready, get more”

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### Introduction

Many people ask me why I've been so successful in getting big grants. There are the obvious things like writing skills and knowing what grants are available, but they're just the tip of the iceberg. **The key to getting big grants is preparation.**

### Where do we start?

Start with a good understanding of where you want to end! My personal career goal is to get paid to do lunch. It's clear, ambitious, and helps me to decide priorities.

On a more practical level, Hallett's goal is to attract people with ideas and energy so that we can build a more diverse community with new businesses and job opportunities.

**When we know what we want to achieve, it's easier to decide what we have to do to achieve these goals.**



#### Secret grant tip #1

The more plans you have, the more impressed they will be. Your planning documents don't need to be huge, so try splitting them into Strategic Plan, Project Plan, Operating Plan, Business Plan etc – sooooo impressive!

### Step 1: Your strategic plan

Before you even think about which projects and how to fund them, you need to develop a Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan doesn't have to be extensive, but it should cover:

1. Why your group exists
2. Your capabilities (highlight how well you've managed grants/projects)
3. How your plan fits with other key strategies (e.g. Council or RDA plans)
4. Your 'big picture' goals
5. What you want to achieve in the next 3-5 years
6. Your priorities for the next 1-2 years
7. Actions to achieve these priorities

A Strategic Plan isn't set in stone. When you complete actions, 'successor' tasks may change. So it's OK to update your Strategic Plan, and (depending on your group governance) it's OK to tweak it to make it more relevant to specific grant and investment opportunities.



### Step 2: Good governance

#### Secret grant tip #2

You need to prove that you can manage a project within budget and timelines even if things go pear shaped. Grant assessors run a mile from small groups that do things on a handshake. They want to know that you are professional, organised and focused – and have regulatory and governance compliance under control.

Small communities are accustomed to getting things done without fuss. They often don't think about contracts because they know and trust their community. This won't cut it with your grant assessors – they're usually government people sitting in high rise city offices. They don't operate that way and they don't understand that the handshake system works for us. So we need to make them comfortable by showing that we can operate in a professional way.

Here's a checklist of things you should have in place:

1. An incorporated body (or Association) that's had its **constitution/rules** approved by the government [the Office for Consumer and Business Services in South Australia]. Your constitution should be reviewed every couple of years. When reviewing your constitution, focus on whether it's clear about how you manage 'people behaving badly', that's when you'll need the protection of a good constitution.
2. **Insurances** to cover your committee's actions, your volunteers, your building and contents, and your activities. Expect to pay for this – good insurance isn't cheap. If you are affiliated with a sporting or social group and are using the group insurance, make sure it covers you for activities not directly relating to the sporting/social purpose.
3. **Audited financial statements** for the past 5 years, *that show a surplus*. Make every possible effort to avoid a deficit at the end of the financial year. Even a loss of \$1 puts you in the grant assessor's 'financially unsound' pile. So monitor your financials throughout the year to make sure you're in surplus at 30<sup>th</sup> June.
4. Your meeting **minutes** are a legal record of your group's decisions and activities. Your Strategic (and other plans) should be formally endorsed (i.e. moved and seconded), and you should minute your group's intent to apply for specific grants.
5. A record of **insurance** claims or **legal proceedings**.
6. Police, child safe, or working with vulnerable persons **clearances**.

#### Why are minutes important?

Hallett had the amazing experience of reading in the local paper that we'd applied for planning permission for a new structure on land we leased from Council. Turns out someone in town decided they wanted to use that land and fraudulently named our association as the applicant. Council didn't want to know about it and proceeded with the application. Our minutes proved that our group was not the author of the application, and the development committee finally threw it out.



### Step 3: Stitch up your partners

#### Secret grant tip #3

You'll get more money if you are doing projects that benefit more people. So a regional project is more likely to get money than a local project (except when grants are specifically targeted at small communities). Partner with other groups, organisations, or regions to service a broader community without overextending your resources.

It's too late to start talking with potential partners when the grant has been advertised ('released'). You should be identifying possible partnering opportunities in your Strategic Plan – this carries the most weight because it's obvious you're planning well ahead and 'thinking big'.

Before you approach possible partners, be very clear about what you want them to do. Sometimes it's as simple as asking them to auspice a grant if your group doesn't qualify, but you may be talking about a full delivery partnership with each group contributing complementary strengths.

If you're going to have an ongoing relationship with a partner, consider developing a Memorandum of Understanding (also Memorandum of Agreement) which is a document endorsed by both groups that sets out your expectations and specifies what each partner will contribute. An MOU is useful because it's not a legal contract, but it ensures all partners have a clear understanding of the relationship, and because the MOU will be endorsed by your committee, everyone should know what's happening.



#### Secret grant tip #4

You'll get more money if you have a bit of money to start with. Try to squirrel away, or get commitments for 'seed' funding. With a bit of money in the bank, it's easier to attract more, and most grant funds are happier if they're part of a larger cocktail of funding because they're getting 'bang for their buck', and it proves that a number of funding partners think you're worth the investment.



### Step 4: Document your successes

Grant assessors want to be confident that you can deliver your project, but they are also concerned about project reporting – that you will finish off the paperwork, financial acquittals and project reports by the deadline.

#### Secret grant tip #5

Start your evaluation at the beginning. Think about how you will collect evidence that establishes your 'baseline' (the pre-project situation). This may be as simple as taking 'before' photos of the project site, but if you're doing a community project you might have to interview people to find out attitudes and skills at the beginning of the project so that you have a basis for comparison at the end. All grants require you to keep financial records, many also require attendance or volunteer hours, and most physical projects need progress photos and evidence.

A well-structured Evaluation Plan shows that you know your stuff and gives the grant assessors confidence you're thinking about the things that are important to them.

The grant guidelines, or the grant conditions that come with the funds, will set out the evaluation and reporting process. Follow these to the letter! Bigger projects require progress reports and won't pay the next instalment if these are late or incomplete.

Even if you're working on a project that doesn't ask for a report, get into the habit of documenting what happened. When you finish a project, write a short report that covers:

1. What you planned
2. What actually happened
3. How you managed variation (to scope, finances, time, outcomes)
4. Detailed financials: budgeted, actual, variation
5. What you learned that you will incorporate in future projects
6. Include start and finish dates and the names of everyone involved.

Make sure you table the report at a committee meeting, and have it formally endorsed and noted in the minutes.

Next time you apply for a grant and they ask for evidence of successful delivery of previous projects, drag out one of your project reports (the one most like the grant you're applying for) and include it as an attachment.



### Step 5: Be shovel ready

It's rare that you'll be successful in a grant if you're not completely ready to go. There are a few reasons for this:

- One of the big risks to grant schemes is people not spending the money. It causes paperwork headaches and most grant agencies really don't want their money back.
- Most grants need to be spent (acquitted) within specified timelines. If you haven't got Council and other approvals, there's a good chance you won't complete the project in the available time.
- If you don't have fixed quotes, the budget will almost certainly blow out, so there will be a funding gap that may put the project at risk. It's very difficult to find 'top up' money – there won't be any more from the original grant provider and grants don't pay for projects that have already started. Most grant applications specifically ask whether you've completed previous grants, so if you don't finish, you may not be able to apply for future grants.

#### WARNING

On no account actually start your project before your grant/s have been approved. Grants *never* pay for retrospective work, so even if you're approved, won't get the money if you've already started work.

If you have a large or complex project, consider splitting it into stages with each stage as a separate (and clearly different) project. If you're thinking about doing this, seek advice from an experienced grant writer who will help you separate the various project elements so that you don't inadvertently break the 'retrospective work' rule.



However, there are a few things you can prepare ahead of time:

1. Council and planning approvals
2. Health inspections/regulations
3. Compliance training and tickets (e.g. Responsible Service of Alcohol)
4. Licences (e.g. liquor licence)
5. Copyright and ownership (e.g. of photos)
6. Making sure key people are available
7. Fixed supplier quotes
8. Letters from landowners/landlords (essential for building upgrades)
9. Letters of support from peak bodies, Councils, partners
10. Risk management plan

Being 'shovel ready' also means having all plans in place. You'll need a 'kit bag' of plans ready to roll out when needed.



### Secret grant tip #6

Big grants are released with intentionally short timelines. They do this because they want shovel ready projects, and it takes a lot of time and effort to get a project to this stage. By making the grant deadline only three weeks after announcement, they filter out the 'good ideas with no substance' and only have to assess viable projects.

When I'm working on big projects, the only thing that still has to be done when the grant is released is the application – all the supporting work and planning is in place ready to go.

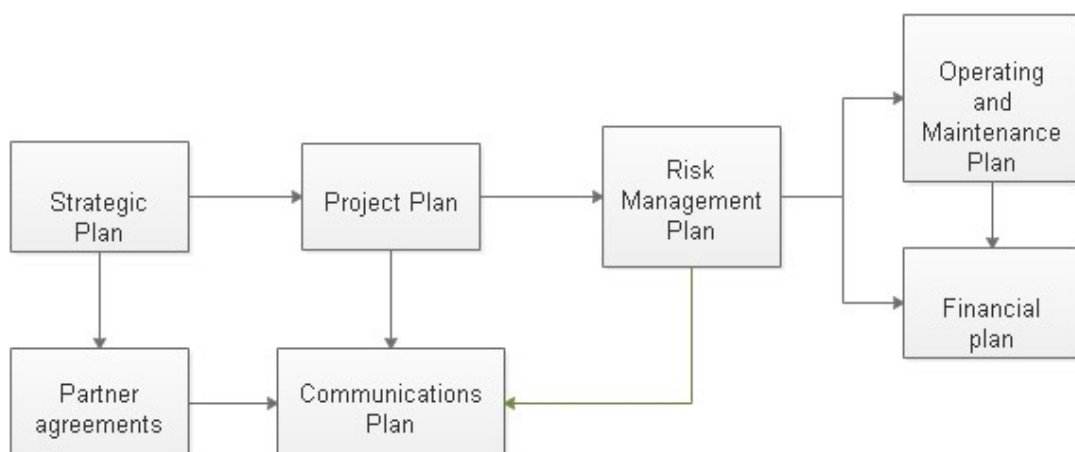
So what plans will you need? It depends on the size of the project. For a big project you should be thinking of 'nested' plans, with the overarching direction set by the Strategic Plan (it's worth its weight in gold when applying for grants), and the Project Plan as your implementation guide. Your Project Plan should cover all aspects of the project, from risk management to procurement and marketing. People often ask how detailed it needs to be, to which there's a simple guide:

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*"The Project Plan needs to be detailed enough for a competent person to complete the project without other instruction".*

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Not only is your Project Plan a very useful management tool, it tells the grant assessors that you've thought of every contingency, which in turn gives them confidence that you can complete the project. The flowchart shows the range of plans you might prepare, and the relationship between them.





None of these plans needs to be big. Hallett got \$150k from the Commonwealth Government and Council on the basis of our (very good) strategic plan, and a series of one page supporting plans.

### Secret grant tip #7

Create a brand (logo) and use a professional report-writing style for your plans. A well-presented one pager is far more impressive than a rambling ten page explanation. If the grant assessors have to wade through your supporting material to work out what you want to do, you've lost them.

## Step 6: The devil in the detail

So far we've been talking about 'big picture' preparation – the things your group should be doing anyway. Now we need to look at the specific projects for which you're seeking funding.

Let's say you're looking at an upgrade of a town building. On the surface this looks like one big job. But if you break it down, it could well comprise several smaller projects, for example:

- Planning, design, costings, site preparation
- Development and building approval
- Fixed quotes and contracts
- Construction
- Fitout and decorating
- Landscaping
- Launch

Grants are available (although not necessarily when you want them) for each of these sub-projects. If you have a very clear picture of what you need, and some plans you can trot out whenever the opportunity arises, you can deliver your project through a series of smaller grants.

For example, Hallett is currently spending a cocktail of funding (Drought Communities, Engie Wind Farm, Council Ward Funds) on the redevelopment of our Bowling Club into a multi-use sport, recreation and social hub. Because Drought Communities funding had a very short lead time, we had to apply without fixed quotes, and of course the budget blew out. So we applied for every small grant we could – for things like a stove and hot water system, play equipment, child safety fit-out – and these grants took the pressure off the main construction budget. We also used volunteer time to do a lot of the preparation (e.g. removing trees, digging septic trenches) and the painting which helped stretch the budget.



The benefit of staging the project as a series of smaller grants is that small grants are almost constantly available, whereas the big grants are often only released once a year and may be discontinued when a new government is elected.

### Secret grant tip #8

Put yourself in the shoes of the grant assessor. They know nothing about you or your project, so you need to explain very clearly what you are trying to do and how you'll go about it. Most grant applications fail because people provide too much detail and not enough big picture.

If you've got your plans in place, it's not such a big job to apply for small grants – as long as you're specifically addressing the goals of the grant, 'copy and paste' can save a lot of time.

### Step 7: Are we there yet?

We're finally at the bit you thought you were coming to learn... actually applying for the grant.

If you've done your preparation, this bit is relatively easy (although for a big grant you can spend many days getting the money to line up and every explanation *exactly* right).



### Secret grant tip #9

Don't waste your time if you're not eligible.

Before you write anything, read the Grant Guidelines and make sure you fit *every* criteria. But don't stop there, download the grant application and make sure you can comply with *every* question. Then see if you can find out about the groups or projects that were successful in the last round – it will give you a good idea of the type of project the grant is seeking.

If you can't comply with every requirement, or if your project is very different to previous successful projects, you might be wasting your time. You're better off applying for a smaller number of highly-relevant projects than wearing yourself out applying for everything that's advertised.



When you hear about a potential grant, do your homework as soon as possible after the grant opens. You need to read the Guidelines and Grant Application *very* carefully. I find it helpful to think about the answers to each question – and ask myself whether I’m ‘spinning’ the story to fit the grant, or whether the project really does have a good fit with the intent of the grant.

Not every grant is suited to your project, and often the grant name is misleading, so read everything before you start filling in the application.

### Secret grant tip #10

Just because money is available, doesn’t make it the right grant for you. You should be strategic in applying for grants – if the grant fits your strategy and enables you to deliver your project, it’s worth exploring further. But if you have to bend your project to fit the grant, you should be seriously questioning whether the grant will take you in a direction you don’t want to go.

Remember that communities have a fixed amount of energy and time, if you waste that on grants that don’t help you achieve your goals, you’re burning through your limited goodwill.

## Step 8: Writing the grant application

You’ve got all your plans and supporting documentation in place. You’ve read the Grant Guidelines, Grant Application and checked out previous successful applicants.

### Secret grant tip #11

Don’t leave it to the last moment. Grant questions are tricky. It may not be very clear what information they’re actually asking for, and the best way of checking whether you’ve answered the question correctly is to sleep on it.

OK, it’s time to start writing. Go through the grant application and answer every question. This will save you a lot of time and stress at the end of the application period because it’s the small things that cause problems.

If it’s an online grant application, write it in Word first, and copy and paste it into the online form when it’s completely finished – this will save you a lot of grief if the page won’t load or your internet goes down.



Be especially careful to:

- Make sure you have every piece of evidence they require (I make a computer file called 'application materials' and put documents in there when they're finished and ready to go). Make a checklist of everything you need, keep track of who's providing what, and nag, nag, nag.
- Do the budget early. This is probably the worst part of the job, because every cent in the application has to line up with every cent in your quotes and other supporting information. If you don't have evidence, you may not be able to include it in the budget, and you need identify the gaps early so you have time to chase people up.

Now's the time to 'sleep on it' and think about what the grant is actually asking for.

### Secret grant tip #12

If the grant process allows you to talk to grant staff, for goodness sake run your idea by them! They'll give you tips on how to fit your project into the grant requirements and could save you a lot of time and effort. I was on a Government grant board where one of their assessment criteria was that groups had contacted the agency to discuss their idea. If they make this service available, it's there for a reason.

Now you're in a good position to finish the first full draft of the application. Once again, don't leave this until the last minute. Grants are very competitive and a well-polished application will beat a scrappy application that been thrown together at the last minute.

If you know someone who's good at getting grants, ask them to have a look over your application – but remember to send them the Guidelines and the Application Form so that they know what they're looking for.



### Step 9: Lodge early

All grants now need to be lodged electronically. That's good and it's bad. The good thing is that it's quicker than running around posting or delivering applications. The bad thing is that you can't trust the internet to be working when you need it.

A lot of government grants need to be lodged via a grant portal, and you can bet it will be overloaded on the day the grant is due because everyone will be trying to upload at the same time.



### Secret grant tip #13

Lodge your application the day before it's due. That way you're more likely to avoid the system crashing because it's overloaded. Even if it's their fault, they may not accept your application if they don't receive it by the deadline.

If you're lodging by email, request that the recipient acknowledges receipt of the email and if you don't hear from them by the day the grant is due, follow up by phone to make sure it's arrived.

Before lodging your application, double check that you have all the attachments in the format and file-size they want – a lot of online grant forms won't accept files in the wrong format.

### Step 10: Don't rest on your laurels

You got the grant application in on time. Nice work! But here's where the juggling starts. You aren't allowed to start the project until you hear the outcome of the grant process, but as soon as you hear you're successful, you probably won't have a lot of time. So there are some things you can put in place 'just in case'.

Do the things you are allowed to do – generally this includes getting marketing and promotional content ready, organising workers, staying in touch with suppliers who may have forgotten about your project, and putting risk management strategies into place.

When you deliver your project without having to stress over deadlines, you'll be pleased you did the preparation.

