

The Advice Plus Programme - Assessment considerations for grants officers when assessing applications at round two

The bullets under each judgement point list areas that you should consider when assessing the extent to which the project meets each judgement point. The points under each judgement point are intended to form a basic framework for grants staff. The points are by no means exhaustive. You may want to consider any wider issues that will help you to form a judgement and provide information for the committee. Assessments should take into account the scale and scope of projects.

Criterion one: The intended project outcomes meet an identified need and help achieve the programme outcomes.

Judgement points

1. There is a need for the project and this has been clearly identified

In making your judgement you should consider whether:

- there is a clearly identified need for the project
- there is evidence of open and inclusive consultation or research that is relevant to the project and up to date
- the results of the consultation demonstrate and support the need for the project
- the project will add value to any existing services or fill any gaps
- there is support for the project from the communities or organisations that will benefit
- the applicant has demonstrated an understanding of existing local, regional or national strategies and has made appropriate linkages.

2. The intended project outcomes will address the need of the target beneficiaries

In making your judgement you should consider whether:

- the intended project outcomes are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based)
- the project outcomes are clear and well researched
- the project delivery method is the most appropriate way to address the beneficiaries' needs
- the project delivery method is realistic and achievable and responds to a clearly identified need
- there is a clearly defined group of target beneficiaries that is relevant to the project and programme
- the project outcomes directly and effectively address the need of the target beneficiaries

3. The identified need or needs are relevant to the programme aims and the intended project outcomes will help achieve the intended programme outcomes.

The Advice Plus programme aims to help people in need access good quality advice on their legal rights and responsibilities, so that they can avoid or overcome disadvantage. To achieve this we will fund projects where organisations work together more effectively to deliver legal advice services.

Outcomes describe the proposed changes that happen as a result of the project. The project outcomes should address the identified needs of the beneficiaries as well as helping to meet the intended programme outcomes. In round two we want to fund projects where organisations work in partnership to achieve ALL of the following programme outcomes.

- People in greatest need have better access to legal advice services that help them to avoid or overcome disadvantage and improve their lives
- People in greatest need receive timely, accurate and effective legal advice that is quality assured and joined up with other services, so that they are better equipped to deal with their problems and improve their lives
- People in greatest need avoid disadvantage because commonly encountered legal problems are identified and prevented.

This programme also has three key themes:

- Partnership working
- Quality standards
- Sustainable benefits

Applications must show that they have considered all three themes and that these are fully integrated into the project.

In making your judgement you should consider whether:

- the identified needs of the project fit to the needs that the programme aims to address
- the intended project outcomes will help achieve all the intended programme outcomes
- the project outcomes will enable the partnership to join up all legal advice and other services across its area
- the project outcomes will enable the partnership to achieve recognised quality standards in all new areas of legal advice
- the benefits of the project will be sustained when funding ends
- the partnership will gain greater influence on policy and practice.

Criterion two: The organisation can deliver the project well and achieve the intended outcomes.

4. The organisation has the experience and capacity to deliver the project.

In making your judgement you should consider whether:

- the project outcomes fit with the applicant's current work or future plans

- the organisation has experience of delivering similar projects
- the organisation is financially healthy
- the organisation has all the necessary skills and expertise to manage the project
- the organisation will put in place the resources needed to deliver the project
- the organisation has adequate policies and procedures to manage the project
- the organisation has fully considered how the partnership will be managed and operated
- the project will start spending the grant within six months of the award date.

5. The project is likely to achieve the intended outcomes

In making your judgement you should consider whether

- the project is the most effective way to bring about the intended outcomes
- the applicant has clear plans to monitor progress in achieving the intended outcomes
- the applicant has planned sufficient resources to deliver the project
- the applicant has in place effective plans to manage project staff and/or volunteers
- the budget is accurate and includes all necessary costs
- the level of overheads that the organisation is applying for is in line with the full cost recovery policy
- the project offers value for money in comparison to similar projects in terms of costs, resources, intended outcomes
- where relevant, the applicant has secured other sources of funding for the project.

6. The project is likely to be delivered well

In making your judgement you should consider whether:

- the applicant demonstrates a high level of commitment to equalities and has provided details on how the project will be made accessible to all potential beneficiaries
- the project beneficiaries will know that the project exists and will be able to access it
- there are clear plans to promote the project to hard to reach groups
- the organisation has realistic and detailed plans for continuing the benefits of the project when the grant ends
- there are comprehensive, appropriate and inclusive plans in place for measuring and evaluating the success of the project
- the applicant has identified the main risks involved in delivering the project and will put in place effective responses.

Grading the judgement points

You should grade each judgement point using the following standards, which are the same across all our programmes:

Excellent	Very high standard: consistently of high quality, exemplar project setting the benchmark for similar organisations to aspire towards.
Good	Good standard: project is well thought through, consistently at an acceptable level and supported by sound evidence.
Satisfactory	Acceptable standard: generally of acceptable quality with borderline issues offset by other stronger areas to create a balance.
Weak	Poor standard: although there may be acceptable elements, quality is inconsistent, with some areas incomplete or flawed and needs substantial further work to reach an acceptable standard.
Unsatisfactory	Unacceptable standard: impractical, misconceived, irrelevant or poorly thought through.

Your grading should be based on evidence from:

- the application form and any additional information requested, (e.g. capital checklists)
- any additional documents about the organisation, such as accounts
- any communication you have had with the applicant during the assessment
- any additional information or clarification sent to us during the assessment
- any relevant information or issues from previous grants the organisation has had from us
- for existing projects, the evaluation report provided
- any context information supplied by our policy or regional teams.

You will need to consider the quality of the evidence contained in the application and gained during your assessment. You must be satisfied that any statements made are supported by accurate information and that any assumptions made are reasonable. The level of detail required will depend on the scale, scope and complexity of the project. You should consider if there are any omissions or gaps that you could reasonably expect to have been covered for this type of project.

To help you decide your grade, under each judgement point is a benchmark, which summarises the main features we would expect to see in an excellent application. You should consider how the application compares with the benchmark and our overall grading standards.

There is also a table that lists the main points you should consider and the quality of the evidence we expect to see for each grade:

- ✓ **clear evidence that the point has been addressed to the benchmark standard.**
- ? **some evidence that the point has been considered but not to the benchmark standard.**
- ✗ **little or no evidence that the point has been considered.**

You should record your grading of each judgement point on Merlin, together with text explaining the reasons for the grading given. The benchmark and tables do not cover every scenario, so you should look for the 'best fit'. You should discuss any issues around grading with colleagues at moderation and overview meetings or with your programme manager.

When you have graded all judgement points you should then grade the two criteria as Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Weak or Unsatisfactory and enter this on Merlin, together with explanatory text referring to our overall grading standards and the judgement points as appropriate. Your assessment report must explain and justify your grading of the two criteria.

Criterion one: The intended project outcomes meet an identified need and help achieve the programme outcomes.

Judgement point 1: There is a need for the project and this has been clearly identified

Where to look for the information: Application form questions 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 and 4.5

Benchmark

An excellent application will evidence a clearly identified need for the project that is supported by robust evidence or research.

Consultation or research will be extensive, wide-ranging, inclusive, thorough and up to date, involving all the voluntary and community organisations that deliver legal advice services, as well as key statutory and commercial advice organisations and other stakeholders. The consultation or research will clearly and fully support the identified need for the project.

The applicant will show that the partnership has a comprehensive knowledge of all legal advice services currently being delivered in its area and how the project will support and add value to this. All relevant advice organisations and wider stakeholders will be involved in the advice partnership and be very supportive of the project.

The applicant will show a strong understanding of the relevant existing local, sub-regional, regional and national plans and developments and clearly demonstrate how the project relates to them.

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Weak	Unsatisfactory	
✓ meets the benchmark standard ? some evidence × little or no evidence						
There is a clearly identified need for the project	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
There is evidence of open and inclusive consultation or research that is relevant to the project and up to date.	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
The results of the consultation demonstrate and support the need for the project.	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
The project will add value to any existing services or fill any gaps.	✓	✓	?	?	×	
There is support for the project from the communities or organisations that will benefit.	✓	✓	?	×	×	

The applicant has demonstrated an understanding of existing local, regional or national strategies and has made appropriate linkages.	✓	?	?	×	×	
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Criterion one: The intended project outcomes meet an identified need and help achieve the programme outcomes.

Judgement point 2: The intended project outcomes will address the need of the target beneficiaries

Where to look for the information: Application form questions 2.4, 2.6, 3.1 and 3.2

Benchmark
 An excellent application will have outcomes that are clearly defined and SMART. The applicant will be able to show that the outcomes are well researched and based on previous experience or evidence. The outcomes will be ambitious and comprehensively address the identified need.
 The proposed delivery method will be robust, realistic and achievable and devised in response to the clearly identified need. The applicant will demonstrate an excellent understanding of the needs of a clearly defined group of target beneficiaries. The application will show that the project outcomes directly address the needs of the beneficiaries and are the most appropriate way of doing this.

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Weak	Unsatisfactory	
✓ meets the benchmark standard ? some evidence × little or no evidence						
The project outcomes are SMART	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
The project outcomes are clear and well researched	✓	?	?	×	×	
The project delivery method is the most appropriate way to address the beneficiaries' needs	✓	?	?	×	×	
The project delivery method is realistic and achievable and responds to a clearly identified need	✓	✓	?	?	×	
There is a clearly defined group of target beneficiaries that is relevant to the project and programme	✓	✓	?	?	×	

The project outcomes directly and effectively address the need of the target beneficiaries	✓	✓	?	x	x	
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Criterion one: The intended project outcomes meet an identified need and help achieve the programme outcomes.

Judgement point 3: The identified need or needs are relevant to the programme aims and the intended project outcomes will help achieve the intended programme outcomes.

Where to look for the information: Application form questions 2.2, 2.5, 2.6, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 4.5

Benchmark

An excellent application will clearly show how the identified need, which the project seeks to address, fits the programme aim and the intended programme outcomes. The intended project outcomes will clearly and directly address all of the intended programme outcomes.

The project will enable the advice partnership to join up all legal advice services and other relevant services across its area, improve the quality of advice services, sustain the benefits when our funding ends and gain greater influence on policy and practice.

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Weak	Unsatisfactory	
✓ meets the benchmark standard ? some evidence × little or no evidence						
The identified needs of the project fit to the needs that the programme aims to address.	✓	✓	?	?	×	
The intended project outcomes will help achieve all the intended programme outcomes.	✓	✓	✓	×	×	
The project outcomes will enable the partnership to join up all legal advice and other services across its area.	✓	✓	?	×	×	
The project outcomes will enable the partnership to achieve recognised quality standards in all new areas of legal advice.	✓	✓	?	?	×	
The benefits of the project will be sustained when funding ends.	✓	?	?	×	×	
The partnership will gain greater influence on policy and practice	✓	?	?	×	×	

Criterion two: The organisation can deliver the project well and achieve the intended outcomes.

Judgement point 4: The organisation has the experience and capacity to deliver the project.

Where to look for the information: Application form questions 2.6, 3.2, 3.3, 3.6, 3.9, 3.10, 3.12 and 3.13
Merlin for previous grants
Applicant's accounts

Benchmark

An excellent application will show that the project outcomes fit well with either the organisation's current work or future plans. The organisation will have a proven track record of delivering similar projects effectively and be financially healthy.

The organisation will be able to put in place all the necessary skills, expertise and resources needed to manage and deliver the project successfully. It will have all the necessary policies and procedures in place to manage the finances, staff and other aspects of the project.

The organisation has fully considered how the partnership will be managed and operated for the project to be delivered effectively.

The project will be able to start well within six months of the date of award.

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Weak	Unsatisfactory	
✓ meets the benchmark standard ? some evidence × little or no evidence						
The project outcomes fit with the applicant's current work or future plans.	✓	✓	?	×	×	
The organisation has experience of delivering similar projects.	✓	?	?	?	×	
The organisation is financially healthy.	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
The organisation has all the necessary skills and expertise to manage the project.	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
The organisation will put in place the resources needed to deliver the project.	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
The organisation has adequate policies and procedures to manage the project.	✓	✓	?	?	×	
The organisation has fully considered how the partnership will be managed and operated.	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
The project will start spending the grant within six months of the award date.	✓	✓	✓	?	×	

Criterion two: The organisation can deliver the project well and achieve the intended outcomes.

Judgement point 5: The project is likely to achieve the intended outcomes

Where to look for the information: Application form questions 2.2, 3.1, 3.3, 3.6, 3.9, 3.10, 3.12, 3.13 and 4.5

Benchmark

An excellent application will clearly demonstrate that the intended project is an effective and appropriate way to meet the identified need and bring about the intended outcomes.

There will be clear plans to monitor progress and the project outcomes, as well as sufficient resources across the partnership to deliver the project. There will be an appropriate reporting structure in place for staff and volunteers.

The budget will be clear, accurate and include all relevant costs, and will offer value for money in comparison with similar projects. The level of overheads the organisation is applying for will be in line with our full cost recovery policy and the applicant has secured any additional funding required.

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Weak	Unsatisfactory	
✓ meets the benchmark standard ? some evidence × little or no evidence						
The project is the most effective way to bring about the intended outcomes.	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
The applicant has clear plans to monitor progress in achieving the intended outcomes.	✓	✓	?	?	×	
The applicant has planned sufficient resources to deliver the project.	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
The applicant has in place effective plans to manage project staff and/or volunteers.	✓	✓	?	?	×	
The budget is accurate and includes all necessary costs.	✓	✓	?	?	×	
The level of overheads that the organisation is applying for is in line with the full cost recovery policy.	✓	✓	?	?	×	
The project offers value for money in comparison to similar projects in terms of costs, resources, intended outcomes.	✓	?	?	?	×	
Where relevant, the applicant has secured other sources of funding for the project.	✓	?	?	?	×	

Criterion two: The organisation can deliver the project well and achieve the intended outcomes.

Judgement point 6: The project is likely to be delivered well

Where to look for the information: Application form questions 2.4, 3.1, 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7

Benchmark

An excellent application will demonstrate a high level of commitment to equalities, which will be evidenced in the policies and practices adopted by the organisation. There will be clear plans to promote the project and ensure that all relevant beneficiaries and hard-to-reach groups will be able to access the project.

The applicant has identified the main risks involved in delivering the project and will put in place effective responses. The sustainability of the project has been considered carefully and an appropriate exit strategy developed, with realistic plans to continue the benefits of the project. Baseline information will have already been collected or it will be clear how this will be gathered, together with detailed plans on measuring and evaluating the success of the project.

Projects already running will demonstrate the successes and achievements to date. There will be plans to evaluate the project, disseminate knowledge and share the lessons learned. The project may be used as a model of good practice.

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Weak	Unsatisfactory	
✓ meets the benchmark standard ? some evidence × little or no evidence						
The applicant demonstrates a high level of commitment to equalities and has provided details on how the project will be made accessible to all potential beneficiaries.	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
The project beneficiaries will know that the project exists and will be able to access it.	✓	✓	?	?	×	
There are clear plans to promote the project to hard to reach groups.	✓	✓	?	?	×	
The organisation has realistic and detailed plans for continuing the benefits of the project when the grant ends.	✓	✓	✓	?	×	
There are comprehensive, appropriate and inclusive plans in place for measuring and evaluating the success of the project.	✓	?	?	?	×	

The applicant has identified the main risks involved in delivering the project and will put in place effective responses.	✓	?	?	?	x	
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