INSTITUTE OF EXCELLENCE

Community Grant Writing with Ethical AI

How to Write Stronger Grant Applications

Workshop Workbook

Bayside City Council | Wednesday 28 October 2026

Name:

Group or organisation:

Date:

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Before you start

Everything in this workbook is about your own group and one real project idea. Rough answers are fine. Use what is true today.

The examples are illustrations only. Brightwater Community House is a hypothetical group and its figures are invented.

> **One rule for today.** Never write names, contact details or personal stories of members or participants in this workbook or in any AI tool. Describe your group in general terms instead.

Your starting number

On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that you could use AI safely and ethically to write a stronger grant application for your group's next project?

My number now, 0 to 10: ☐

Keep it. You will answer the same question again at the end.

How the exercises connect

Lesson and exercise	What you do	What you finish with
1.1 Grant Readiness Radar	Score your group across eight pillars	Your two lowest pillars
1.2 Exercise 1, Grant Idea Card	Unpack, test and improve your idea	Your idea in one clear sentence
2.1 Exercise 2, Plain-English Summary	Summarise grant guidelines with AI, then check them	What the grant funds and how it is assessed
2.2 Exercise 3, Grant Decoder	Find funders, check eligibility and weightings	A decision: go, adjust or not this round
2.3 Exercise 4, First Paragraph	Turn your idea into a grant answer with AI	One checked paragraph in your own voice

Three modules: Module 1 MAP, know your project before you write. Module 2 RUN, decode and draft. Module 3 RESULT, verify and get ready to submit. Each exercise builds on the one before, and your Grant Idea Card travels with you all day.

The Grant Readiness Radar That Will Show You Where Your Group Is Ready

Before you begin

You have 10 minutes. Score each pillar from 0 to 5: 0 to 2 needs support, 3 to 4 developing, 5 confident and ready. Score honestly and keep your scores private at first. There is no total score. Each pillar matters on its own.

Pillar	Statement	What a 5 looks like, illustration only	Score
Community need	We can clearly name the problem we're addressing.	We can point to a waiting list, local data or what people have told us.	
Project idea	We know exactly what we want to do.	Anyone on the committee can describe it in one sentence.	
Alignment	Our project fits our funder's priorities.	We can name the funder priority our project meets.	
Feasibility	We have the capacity to deliver this.	We have the people, time and venue lined up.	
Outcomes	We can prove our impact.	We know what we'll count or ask to show it worked.	
Partnerships	We work with other organisations.	Another group or service has agreed to help.	
Budget	We know what things cost and why.	We have quotes for the main costs.	
AI confidence	We're comfortable using AI tools.	We use AI with safe settings and never enter personal details.	

Your two lowest pillars

Lowest pillar, and one thing we'll do about it:

Second lowest pillar, and one thing we'll do about it:

> **Example answer, illustration only.** Partnerships, 1. Ask the library whether it would co-host one session a month.

Exercise 1. The Grant Idea Card That Will Point Your Project to the Right Funder

Before you begin

You have 12 minutes: 4 to unpack, 3 to write your sentence and 5 to share and question. Dot points are fine.

Grant Idea Card, page 1. Step 1. Unpack your idea

1. Need. What problem are you responding to, and how do you know it is real?

> **Example answer, illustration only.** Families new to the area tell us they feel isolated. 14 families are on our playgroup waiting list.

2. People. Who will benefit, and roughly how many?

> **Example answer, illustration only.** Up to 20 families with children under five who are new to the area, many speaking a language other than English.

3. Change. What will be different for them afterwards?

> **Example answer, illustration only.** Parents build local friendships and know where to find support. Children get more play-based learning.

4. Activity. What will you do, when, where, and who will run it?

> **Example answer, illustration only.** A second weekly playgroup at the house, with a bilingual facilitator, for 40 weeks.

Step 2. Say it in one sentence

We will [activity] for [people] so that [change]. We know this is needed because [evidence].

My sentence:

Example answer, illustration only. We will run our multicultural playgroup twice a week with a bilingual facilitator for up to 20 families new to the area, so that parents build local connections. We know this is needed because 14 families are on our waiting list.

Grant Idea Card, page 2. Step 3. Share and question

Share your sentence with a partner in two minutes. Your partner picks two questions and asks them. Tick the ones you were asked.

- [ ] How do you know the need is real?
- [ ] Could someone else run this from your description?
- [ ] How will you know it made a difference?
- [ ] What happens when the funding ends?
- [ ] Who else is already doing something similar?

One thing I'll change or find out:

Example answer, illustration only. Find out whether the library runs a playgroup on the same day, and ask about working together.

Step 4. Find the right funder. You will find two possible funders in Exercise 3.

Your completed Grant Idea Card. Your idea in one clear sentence, tested by a partner. Exercise 3 matches it to the right funder.

Privacy. Describe your group in general terms, such as "a neighbourhood house", and leave out names. Your idea and your sentence carry no privacy risk.

AI acceleration option. "I'm improving a community project idea before applying for a grant. Here is a description with no names or personal details: [paste your sentence and dot points]. Ask me up to eight questions, one at a time, about the need, who benefits, the change, the activities, how we'll measure it and what happens after the funding. Don't write the project for me."

Before You Use AI: Your Safety Check

The Five Levels of AI Capability

1 Ask. 2 Instruct. 3 Train. 4 Connect. 5 Hand over. Levels 1 and 2 are AI curious. Levels 3 to 5 are AI capable. You don't need to climb all five. Just move up one.

My level today, 1 to 5:

My next level:

Change your settings first

Tick the tool you use once you have changed the setting. Settings checked 27 October 2026. Menus change often, so check again before you start.

- [ ] **ChatGPT:** Settings > Data Controls. Turn off "Improve the model for everyone".
- [ ] **Google Gemini:** Settings > Keep Activity. Turn it off, or use a Temporary Chat.
- [ ] **Microsoft Copilot:** Profile > Settings > Privacy. Turn off model training on text and on voice.
- [ ] **Claude:** Settings > Privacy. Turn off "Help improve Claude".

The safe upload checklist

Before you upload anything, tick all four. Any no? Don't upload. When in doubt, leave it out.

- [ ] It is publicly available, such as council grant guidelines.
- [ ] I would pin it on a community noticeboard.
- [ ] It contains zero personal information: names, addresses, phone numbers, emails, photos.
- [ ] It contains zero financial details: bank accounts, statements, salaries.

> The OAIC recommends not entering personal information, especially sensitive information, into publicly available AI tools.

Your answer to the Module 1 question

Is your project ready for a grant, and is your group ready to use AI safely? Answer in one or two sentences.

Exercise 2. The Plain-English Summary That Will Make Any Grant Guidelines Clear

Before you begin

You have 10 minutes. Use the Quick Response Grants guidelines PDF you saved, or any public grant guidelines. Stuck? Pair up and share one screen.

Step 1. Open your tool and upload the guidelines

☐ ChatGPT ☐ Google Gemini ☐ Microsoft Copilot ☐ Claude

The guidelines I uploaded:

Step 2. Use this prompt

> **Prompt.** "Summarise the key funding priorities, eligibility requirements and assessment criteria from these grant guidelines in simple English suitable for a community group with volunteer leaders."

Step 3. Record what the summary told you

Streams, amounts and dates:

> **Example answer, illustration only.** A small grants stream up to $[amount], open all year, and a larger annual round that opens once a year.

What it funds, and what it won't:

> **Example answer, illustration only.** Funds community programs and equipment. Won't fund wages beyond the project, or activities already finished.

Assessment criteria and weightings:

> **Example answer, illustration only.** Community need and benefit carries the most weight. The budget and the activity plan come next.

Step 4. Check one thing against the original

AI can miss or invent details. Find one point in the original guidelines and note the page.

What I checked, and the page number:

Example answer, illustration only. The summary said quotes were optional. Page 6 says two quotes are needed for any item over $1,000.

Optional, translate it. "Rewrite this summary in [LANGUAGE] using simple everyday wording that a community volunteer would understand." Have a fluent speaker check anything you submit.

Privacy. Grant guidelines are public documents, so they are safe to upload. Don't add anything about your members to the chat.

Exercise 3. The Grant Decoder That Will Show You Which Funder Fits and What They Assess

Before you begin

About 10 minutes across Lesson 2.2. Bring your sentence from Exercise 1.

Step 1. Find the right funder (Grant Idea Card, Step 4)

Use Bayside's grant search: bayside.vic.gov.au > Community grants > More grant funding opportunities. Search your idea's key words.

Possible funder	Why it could fit my idea	Opens or closes

> **Example answer, illustration only.** Bayside Quick Response Grants. Small amount, open all year, suits a pilot term of our second playgroup session.

Step 2. Choose one stream to decode

- ☐ Bayside Quick Response Grants
- ☐ Bayside Annual Community Grants
- ☐ Another funder from my search

Step 3. Eligibility and deal-breakers

> **Prompt.** "What are the specific eligibility requirements and deal-breakers for this stream in these guidelines? What makes applications ineligible?"

Who is eligible:

Deal-breakers to watch:

> **Example answer, illustration only.** We need an ABN or an auspice partner, current public liability insurance, and the activity must happen in the council area.

Step 4. How you will be assessed

Find each weighting in the guidelines and write it in. Then note how your idea meets it.

Criterion	Weighting	How my idea meets it
Community need and benefit		
Clear activity plan		
Activity description		
Alignment to plans		
Budget		
Organisation's financials		

Step 5. Make a decision

☐ Go: it fits as it is ☐ Adjust: change something to fit ☐ Not this round

Why, using a criterion or an eligibility rule:

> **Example answer, illustration only.** Adjust. The grant won't fund ongoing wages, so we'll apply for a 40-week pilot with an attendance and connection survey.

Questions for the grants officer:

Bayside grants team: grants@bayside.vic.gov.au

> **AI acceleration option.** "Analyse the assessment criteria in these grant guidelines. I'm applying for [stream] for a project that [brief description, no names]. Which criteria should I prioritise? What evidence would strengthen each section? What weaknesses should I address?"

Exercise 4. The First Paragraph That Will Turn Your Idea Into a Grant Answer

Before you begin

You have 8 minutes: 2 to pick your points, 5 to prompt and 1 to share with a partner.

Step 1. Pick three to five dot points from your Grant Idea Card

> **Example answer, illustration only.** 14 families on our waiting list. Up to 20 families new to the area. Bilingual facilitator. Second weekly session for 40 weeks. Parents build local connections.

Step 2. Use this prompt

> **Prompt.** "Turn these dot points into a clear, compelling paragraph for a grant addressing [your community need]. Use active voice and emphasise community benefit: [paste dot points]"

Step 3. Personalise and check

- [ ] Every number is real and I have checked it.
- [ ] It sounds like our group, not like AI.
- [ ] No invented statistics, and no "[X%]" placeholders left.
- [ ] No buzzwords like "innovative" or "transformative".
- [ ] No names or personal details.

Step 4. My paragraph

> **Example answer, illustration only.** Families who are new to our area tell us they feel isolated, and 14 are on our playgroup waiting list. We will add a second weekly session with a bilingual facilitator for up to 20 families, so parents build local friendships and children get more play-based learning.

Your answer to the Module 2 question

Which funder fits your idea, and how do you write where the marks sit? Answer in one or two sentences.

> **Privacy.** Paste only your dot points and draft text. Keep names, stories that identify people and financial details out of the chat.

MODULE 3 · RESULT · LESSONS 3.1 TO 3.3

Verify and Get Ready to Submit

Lesson 3.1. Verify the truth only you hold

- [ ] Every figure has a source I can name.
- [ ] Nothing in the draft came from AI without my check.
- [ ] It sounds like our group and tells our real story.

Lesson 3.2. Review like an assessor: five reasons grants get rejected

Reason	Ask AI
Doesn't meet eligibility	"Check this project against the eligibility criteria. Any issues?"
Vague outcomes	"Turn this into a SMART goal with specific measures."
Unrealistic budget	"Sense-check this budget. Is it realistic for our area?"
Poor writing quality	"Rewrite this at a Grade 8 reading level."
Misses the deadline	"Create a timeline working backwards from [date]."

Your answer to the Module 3 question

How will you know your application is accurate, safe and ready for an assessor? Answer in one or two sentences.

LESSON 3.3 · YOUR NEXT STEPS

Your Closing Number

On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that you could use AI safely and ethically to write a stronger grant application for your group's next project?

My number now, 0 to 10:

My number at the start:

What changed?

This week

- [ ] Email Bayside's grants team about your idea: grants@bayside.vic.gov.au
- [ ] Read the full guidelines for your chosen stream.
- [ ] Book one hour with your committee to draft your first answer.
- [ ] Check your AI settings on every device you use.

Your finished pages

Your Grant Readiness Radar showed where your group is ready. Your Grant Idea Card turned your project into one clear sentence. Your Plain-English Summary and Grant Decoder matched it to a funder. Your First Paragraph is the start of your application.

---------- Cut here ----------

Grant Idea Card, page 3. Share Your Idea with Bayside's Grants Team

This page is optional. Hand it in only if you'd like Bayside City Council's grants team to contact you about your idea or the Annual Community Grants. Please don't include anyone else's personal details.

Group or organisation:

Contact person:

Email or phone:

Our idea in one sentence:

Funder we're thinking about:

☐ Yes, Bayside City Council's grants team may contact us about this idea.

Take today home with you

Download today's slides and the fillable version of this workbook. Scan the QR code and enter your details.

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