

How to apply for charity funds from livery companies?

If only it were that simple! This note seeks to answer the question most frequently put to this writer, by those charities and fund-raisers who believe there is some simple key to unlock access to the collective livery companies' charitable largesse.

There is not. The 110 independent companies each have their own charitable trust, and policy for distributing their grants. The Livery Committee has no funds (charitable or otherwise), and there is no other central pot of livery companies' charitable money. However potential applicants should be aware of the City Bridge Trust - the City of London's major charitable foundation; but this is nothing to do with the livery companies, and outside the scope of this note.

So, how should applicants go about researching how to apply for grants from the oft quoted £42M given annually by the livery companies?

First, be aware that the £42M figure is dominated by a very small number of companies (giving, say, over £2M pa) and in this writer's estimate, accounting for maybe over half of that £42M. Hence the 100 or so other livery companies are not sitting on huge endowments. Further, for many of them their giving will be committed to historic charitable obligations (typically schools) hence reducing the available charitable pot further.

Thus a letter or email to all 110 companies is likely to be a complete waste of time, and there is no substitute for research. Do not assume that the precedence order at the Livery Companies Database is a reliable guide to their relative wealth.

Many companies will be sympathetic to appeals relevant to their trade. But clearly eg the Musicians' Company cannot support every music related appeal. Whilst it may seem sensible to only approach the well known wealthiest livery companies, bear in mind the very large number of similar appeals they receive every day. Careful targeting may be the answer.

Those companies that do have significant funds will employ professional staff to deal with applicants, and hopefully contact details for them will be at their website. Hence if your research leads you to them, then a direct approach (seeking guidance) will be in order. Some will give that guidance at the website, and it would be wise to read that first. Some will offer an online application procedure.

Where no charity contact is obvious, then the correct person to approach is the Clerk. Not the Master, unless he/she is personally known to you.

Assuming you get as far as applying (and it is worth checking if there is a formal application process/form before sending a hefty and expensive pack) note that the court/trustees who approve grants are unlikely to meet frequently (quarterly might be typical). So patience will be needed, and an awareness that requests for urgent help are unlikely to be successful. Nor, incidentally, are cash requests from private individuals/students.

Livery clerks are, by their nature, approachable. But also often sticklers for detail. So a carefully and fully completed, accurate, application would be wise. And whilst all charity fund-raisers are well used to disappointment, and as this note may imply, the Livery Companies, whilst generous and philanthropic in their culture and purpose, are not (of course) a bottomless pit of charity funds.

Nigel R Pullman

24th September 2017

Was this note helpful? Do you have comment? Email nrpullman@btinternet.com