

GROWING AND RESOURCING 'GREAT IDEAS' TO MAXIMISE IMPACT

Storied accounts of practice by the Tender Bridge

TENDER BRIDGE CASES OF SUCCESS: CASE 2¹

Books in Homes is based on a simple concept: Make sure that every disadvantaged child has their 'own' books to read. Kim Kingston is the Manager, and this is her story of growing and resourcing a 'great idea'.

Books in Homes

Sixteen years ago we saw *Books in Homes* 'in action' in New Zealand. I can still see the joy on the children's faces as they received their books. We thought; why not start up a *Books in Homes* in Australia.

Getting started

In 2001, we first got our legal and tax status sorted. We wanted to set ourselves up as a not-for-profit with Deductible Gift Recipient status. This would maximise our potential to apply for a variety of grants; especially in the philanthropic sector. It actually took a year for our DGR status to be approved; there was much to-ing and fro-ing between the ATO, our pro bono solicitors, and *Books in Homes* but persistence paid off. In this first year, we also set up our Board of Trustees which is the governing body of the Foundation made up of a minimum of three people; employed an administrator to run the Programme and spoke to the then Federal Minister for Education about what we were trying to do and why they should fund us to do it. This was possible because we sought the help of many of our friends to get things started and as it happened a friend of a friend played tennis with the then Minister for Education – if you're passionate about your cause, talking about it with your mates is often the best networking because they WILL want to help!

We secured Federal funding for a pilot in 94 schools and ran the program for two terms. An independent evaluation identified the pilot as a "roaring success". By 2003, the Federal Government was funding *Books in Homes* in 50 schools in outback New South Wales. This equated to 5,000 children receiving 45,000 books of choice in that first year!

What is *Books in Homes*?

Books in Homes provides new books of choice to disadvantaged kids who typically grow up in "bookless" homes. The Programme results in improving literacy and attendance rates in participating schools.

The Process

The *Books in Homes* Book Selection Committee, is presented with 72 titles by Scholastic Australia – the publisher contracted to supply and deliver all books and materials for the *Books in Homes* Programme. This Committee is made up of professional educators from all States and jurisdictions. They meet 4 months prior to the start of each term to choose the 48 titles in 4 reading levels that will make up the *Books in Homes* Book Catalogue. A quarter of these books must be written by Aboriginal authors. A Preview Pack including all 48 books and enough Book Catalogues for each student is sent to the participating school's Librarian or *Books in Homes* Coordinator. The books are displayed so the children can pick them up and check them out prior to making their 3 choices - 3 books in each of the 3 terms. The orders are collated and sent to Scholastic, and within 48 hours sent out to the schools. Funding is sourced through grants and sponsorship for (or with) a school to enable them to participate in the Programme. To personalise the experience for the children, each book contains a printed label that states, 'This book belongs to ...' Many schools distribute the books at a special 'Book Giving Assembly' to add to the experience and to elevate the status of reading for fun. Often, the donor or sponsor is also invited to the assembly. Scholastic Australia then invoices *Books in Homes* for the books chosen.

¹ This case was written by Michelle Anderson from an interview with Kim Kingston, edited by Emma Curtin and verified by Kim prior to publication.

Books in Homes is now a national Programme with 25,000 children choosing and receiving their own books. Getting to this point and sustaining success is not easy. My advice is to step back for a moment and have a good look around at your peers and existing connections; 'look' at them again, but this time with your 'great idea' lens on. It is amazing what you will see when you really look with a specific purpose in mind. Here are two examples of what I mean:

Example 1: We run an annual fundraiser which happens to be a golf day. We happen to be golf 'tragedies'. These are great 'events' in themselves, but more than that, these days give current sponsors and donors the opportunity to meet face-to-face with the beneficiaries of their generosity. The day also often results in participants identifying other people who *Books in Homes* should connect with.

Example 2: My proposal writing is succinct. This was definitely not the case in the beginning. One of our closets mates is a Bush Poet, Murray Hartin. Now if anyone knew how to convey a persuasive message using as few words as possible, it is him. In a previous life, he was an editor of a newspaper. Murray taught me about the importance and power of the first paragraph: Capture the reader's attention, anticipate their questions, and above all make it readable. So many times we forget that using simple language does not mean the idea is simplistic. In the rest of the proposal expand and elaborate your introductory paragraph.

Finding a fund listed on the Tender Bridge and writing for success

Searching for funds is a never ending pursuit. There are over 800,000 children in schools who do not currently have their own books. The Tender Bridge makes searching for education funds easier. Last year we used the 'Hot Funds'² feature of the website and came across The Andrew's Foundation grants. One of their grants was a perfect match for a school in Victoria that needed books. The school had been participating in the Programme a number of years ago but their funding had ceased. How did we know we had a good 'fit'? We made sure before we put pen to paper that we met all their criteria. For example:

- beneficiaries of the grant had to live within a certain geographic region;
- the dollar amount requested had to fall within a certain range;
- our tax status had to match the Foundation's eligibility requirements;
- the target audience had to be disadvantaged children.

Most times, it takes one or two days to write a grant. In this case, that's all the time I had before the funding round closed! There is nothing like a deadline to focus the mind! Our grant application was successful and these children will start choosing their first tranche of books in Term 1, 2011. Sound simple? Well, yes and no. To conclude, what follows are some lessons I have learned about preparing grants over many years of trial and error.

Lessons learned

- 1 Be succinct: Don't ramble
- 2 You must be passionate about the project you are trying to get resourced
- 3 Use publically available data to support why your idea helps address a key problem or need for a group (e.g. the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) website)
- 4 If you are not clear about the funder's criteria or scope then call them (i.e. we wanted to apply to Maxi Grants listed on the Tender Bridge website. But in this case, only schools could apply not us)
- 5 Highlight value for money. This can be in social, emotional or economic terms (e.g. We buy our books in bulk and at a significant discount)
- 6 Get someone to read over your application before you submit it. [Nb. The Tender Bridge offers this service]
- 7 Grant seeking is a not a short term strategy, it can take time to find the right fit for your idea and setting.

... And my final words are:

Keep submitting grant applications! I guarantee, from first-hand experience, that many times you will miss out (even if you seem to have ticked all the boxes!). But then you WILL get one and regardless of the dollar amount, it will feel AWESOME! This is the time to ask, 'What's different about this grant to my other grant submissions?' The lesson? Refine, refine, refine.

Books in Homes is a subscriber (seeker of funds) and a resource for schools listed on the Tender Bridge website.

Their website is: www.booksinhomesaustralia.com.au

² 'Hot Funds' can be found on the Funds page of the Tender Bridge subscriber only area of the website. These are funds that will close in the next 60 days.