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## Completing and Submitting an Application

### Completing the Application Form

The application form is colour coded.

 The blue sections contain the **standard information**.

 **Applicants** complete the application form using the white sections. The pages will expand to take the information entered.

 The **assessor** will complete the yellow sections.

On the first page of the application form applicants are asked to provide details of availability for assessment.

When considering an application submission date please bear in mind that assessors will make every effort to arrange an assessment date between 6 and 8 weeks after the application has been received. Any special requests regarding the assessment should be included on the application form, e.g. if the only day of the week that all staff are in work is a Wednesday then make a request for the assessment to take place on a Wednesday.

To ensure the assessor has an understanding of your Social Firm applicants are asked (on pages 1 and 2) of the application, to provide some basic information, such as number of years trading, and to provide a brief description of:

- the particular focus (type(s) of severe disadvantage) of the Social Firm;
- the size of the Social Firm (number of staff and locations);
- the main products and services;
- the customer focus;
- any quality standards the firm has already gained.

## Responding to Questions

It is important, when responding to individual questions to relate answers to the criteria as well as the question. For example Question 6.1 asks for information to demonstrate that, 'employment practices seek to go beyond the minimum legal expectations etc. Responses to this question should also demonstrate that staff know and understand the importance of legal compliance (Criteria 6) as it relates to them.

As the application is completed applicants will see that some of the evidence supplied is relevant to more than one criterion (as shown in the Good Practice Guide). Similarly, evidence supplied in responding to one question can partially answer another question. Cross referencing to another answer and then showing how the information meets the particular question and criterion is fully acceptable.

Some questions ask for examples of practice. Examples should be taken, where possible, from activity that has taken place during the last six months. Where this is not possible note the date of the example given and explain why a more recent example is not available.

## Additional Evidence

Explain on your application form:

- what additional information is being sent with the completed application and why, e.g. to which question(s) it relates;
- what other information/evidence will be available to the assessor at the assessment visit and to which question(s) it relates.

## Submitting the Application Form

All applications, together with any supporting information, must be made electronically. Additional evidence should be supplied either by hyperlink or as attached documents. Hard copies of information sent electronically should be made available at the assessment visit.

Completed applications should be emailed to [info@starsocialfirm.co.uk](mailto:info@starsocialfirm.co.uk)

On receipt of the application and the fee an assessor will be nominated and the application passed to them.

## The Assessment

### Preparation

Assessment visits will normally be expected to take place between 6 and 8 weeks after applications have been submitted. Applicants should expect a call from an assessor within 10 working days of submitting an application to make the introduction and agree a mutually convenient assessment date. If you do not hear from your assessor please inform the Star Social Firm administrator by emailing [info@starsocialfirm.co.uk](mailto:info@starsocialfirm.co.uk).

There are a number of things you can do to help the assessment visit run smoothly.

### Information

- Explain on your application form:
  - what additional information is being sent with the completed application and why, e.g. to which question(s) it relates;
  - what information and evidence will be made available to the assessor at the assessment visit and to which question(s) it relates.

- Before the visit all the documentation should be put together in one place so that it is easily accessible. Having this information in the quiet room that has been set aside for meetings is ideal. Your assessor might make contact for clarification on some points and ask for additional pieces of information to be made available during the assessment visit. Remember to include these on your checklist.

#### Availability of Staff.

- Check with staff if there are any dates (in the 6-8 weeks following submission) when an assessment would not be possible.
- It is essential that the person who has led on the Star Social Firm application is available during the assessment visit and that other key staff members are represented. It is not essential to have a board member present but ensure that one (preferably the chairperson) will be available by telephone.
- The assessor will probably ask in advance of the meeting, to see particular people during the assessment visit. Check that these people will be available on the assessment day. If they will not be available suggest alternatives and check that these are acceptable to the assessor.
- Please note that the assessor may also want to talk to other members of staff not requested in advance of the visit.

#### Meeting Space.

- Organise a quiet meeting room that will be available throughout the assessment visit. This will facilitate both the meeting with key staff and any individual meetings needed.

#### Making the Best Use of Time.

- It is important for the applicant to work with the assessor prior to the visit, to ensure the best use of the assessment time. When the assessor makes contact agree a timetable for the visit. If you are concerned that the assessment will take longer than the suggested time (e.g. because the firm has operates from multiple sites) discuss this with the assessor.
- Assist the assessor by providing a location map and information on how to reach you. If the assessor is coming by car provide information on car parking.

Taking the time to work through these suggestions before the assessor's visit will ensure the best use of time and help the assessment run smoothly. This will assist in demonstrating to the assessor the ways in which your Social Firm meets the criteria.

### **The Assessment Visit**

The format for an assessment visit is normally:

- An initial meeting with key staff
- A tour of the business (the extent of this will depend on the size of the operation)
- Meetings with individual staff
- An examination of additional evidence
- A post assessment briefing

The outcomes that could be discussed in the post assessment meeting are explained below.

## Post Assessment Briefing

At the end of the assessment the assessor will meet with key staff to provide feedback on the findings. The outcomes, and the associated actions, are shown below.

Assessment Outcomes	
Outcome of Assessment	Action
1. The assessor is satisfied the criteria are met.	The assessor will make a recommendation for Star Social Firm status to the Star Social Firm Panel and agree a Development Plan.
2. Some minor actions are needed.	Where some minor actions are needed the assessor will agree an Action Plan and discuss a Development Plan.  Once the Action Plan has been satisfactorily completed the assessor will finalise the Development Plan and make a recommendation to the Star Social Firm Panel for Star Social Firm status.
3. Some additional evidence needs to be verified before the assessor is satisfied the criteria are met/nearly met.	The Social Firm makes additional evidence available to the Assessor within an agreed timescale (two or three days). Assuming the Assessor is satisfied:
	<b>either</b> an Action Plan and Development Plan will be provided – action as in 2 above <b>or</b> the assessor will agree a Development Plan and make a recommendation for Star Social Firm status to the Star Social Firm Panel.
4. There is work to carry out before the criteria are met and the assessor needs to discuss with SFEDI whether it is reasonable to effect this work within four weeks (time allowed for completion of an Action Plan).	Assessor discusses with SFEDI and, unless otherwise agreed, reports back to the Social Firm within 10 working days to:
	<b>either</b> agree an Action Plan and provide a Development Plan – action as in 2 above. <b>or</b> information will be provided on the work required - action as in 5 below.
5. There is significant work to carry out before the criteria are met.	The Assessor will provide information on the work required and will inform the Social Firm that it will not be recommended for the Star Social Firm at this stage. This will need to be ratified by the Star Social Firm Panel.  A re-application can be made after six months from the first application. Reassessments cost will be individually agreed.

## Assessment Decisions and Awards

### The Assessment Panel

Although Social Firms will be provided with verbal feedback at the end of the assessment visit it is important to note that the assessor does not make the final decision as to whether or not a Social Firm receives recognition.

Assessors will normally email their recommendations, the Action Plan (if there is one) and the Development Plan to the panel members within ten working days of completion of the assessment.

The Assessment Panel is made up of three people; two trained assessors who have not been involved in the assessment process and the panel chair. At present the panel chair is a SFEDI director, however, it is hoped that at later stage a member of staff from a Star Social Firm will be able to take on this role.

A staff member from Social Firms UK will observe as a part of the learning and development process.

In order to make the best use of time and resources the Assessment Panel is a virtual panel and comes together through teleconferencing. The Panel will convene within 4 working weeks of receipt of the recommendations.

The Panel chair will normally write to the Social Firm informing them of the decision (with feedback as needed) within 5 working days of the panel having convened.

Social Firms that do not meet the award standards may re-apply after six months. The fee for a re-application will be agreed individually.

### **The Award**

The Star Social Firm award is valid for two years from the date of the panel decision. Successful Social Firms will receive a specially designed wall plaque and the Star Social Firm logo for addition to the Social Firm's stationery and advertising material.

The Star Social Firm logo and the plaque will normally be sent to successful applicants within 10 working days of the panel decision to award.

Please note that Social Firms who do not reapply for the Star Social Firm after two years (or who reapply and are not successful) must return the Star Social Firm plaque (which remains the property of Social Firms UK) and can no longer use the Star Social Firm logo.