

# Some tips on writing grant proposals

RSS 2017 Conference, Strathclyde, September 2017

## Session PD5: Research Funding

# Getting started

# Getting started

- Have a bright idea!
  - A good proposal stems from a good concept.

# Getting started

- Have a bright idea!
  - A good proposal stems from a good concept.
- Ask yourself
  - what you want to do;
  - what you need to achieve it;
  - where is the best place to apply.

# Getting started

- Have a bright idea!
  - A good proposal stems from a good concept.
- Ask yourself
  - what you want to do;
  - what you need to achieve it;
  - where is the best place to apply.
- Consult
  - more experienced colleagues;
  - funding opportunities emails;
  - local research and consultancy support professionals;
  - successful applications of others.

# Choosing the right funder

# Choosing the right funder

- Be prepared to
  - look around for the most appropriate scheme;
  - think creatively about how your project might be presented.

# Choosing the right funder

- Be prepared to
  - look around for the most appropriate scheme;
  - think creatively about how your project might be presented.
- Make sure you fit with
  - the aims/objectives of the particular sponsor/call/panel;
  - the sponsor's typical range of project funding.



# Choosing the right funder

- Be prepared to
  - look around for the most appropriate scheme;
  - think creatively about how your project might be presented.
- Make sure you fit with
  - the aims/objectives of the particular sponsor/call/panel;
  - the sponsor's typical range of project funding.
- Be aware that
  - success rates can vary greatly among schemes;
  - success rates can be particularly high in early years of new/highly targeted schemes;
  - some funders pre-process, e.g. EPSRC "Remit Query" form for interdisciplinary projects;
  - most funding bodies will offer advice over the phone.

# Essential basics

# Essential basics

- A good proposal is always
  - readable and understandable;
  - well-organised;
  - grammatically correct.

# Essential basics

- A good proposal is always
  - readable and understandable;
  - well-organised;
  - grammatically correct.
- You must
  - read and follow the funder's guidelines carefully;
  - be aware of the review procedure;
  - start writing well in advance of the deadline.

- A good proposal is always
  - readable and understandable;
  - well-organised;
  - grammatically correct.
- You must
  - read and follow the funder's guidelines carefully;
  - be aware of the review procedure;
  - start writing well in advance of the deadline.
- You should also
  - sound enthusiastic;
  - use positive language;
  - try to make your application stand out from the crowd;
  - begin with a clear stand-alone summary of the whole proposal.

# Think about the review process

# Think about the review process

- Remember that
  - your proposal may be 'pre-assessed' by a non-specialist programme manager;
  - all reviewers and panel members will not be experts in your field;
  - you may need to nominate suitable reviewers.

# Think about the review process

- Remember that
  - your proposal may be 'pre-assessed' by a non-specialist programme manager;
  - all reviewers and panel members will not be experts in your field;
  - you may need to nominate suitable reviewers.
- Learn what you can about
  - the sponsor's review procedure;
  - the specific criteria for proposal evaluation;
  - the reviewer's form.



# Think about the review process

- Remember that
  - your proposal may be 'pre-assessed' by a non-specialist programme manager;
  - all reviewers and panel members will not be experts in your field;
  - you may need to nominate suitable reviewers.
- Learn what you can about
  - the sponsor's review procedure;
  - the specific criteria for proposal evaluation;
  - the reviewer's form.
- Include
  - phrases you would like the reviewers to use.

# What does a reviewer want to know?

# What does a reviewer want to know?

- What
  - do you want to do?
  - has already been done in the area of your project?
  - difference will the project make?

# What does a reviewer want to know?

- What
  - do you want to do?
  - has already been done in the area of your project?
  - difference will the project make?
- How
  - does the proposal relate to the sponsor's interests?
  - much will it cost?
  - much time will it take?
  - do you plan to do it?
  - will the results be evaluated?

# What does a reviewer want to know?

- What
  - do you want to do?
  - has already been done in the area of your project?
  - difference will the project make?
- How
  - does the proposal relate to the sponsor's interests?
  - much will it cost?
  - much time will it take?
  - do you plan to do it?
  - will the results be evaluated?
- Why
  - you, rather than someone else?

# What additional information may be required?

- Justification for Resources.
- Workplan.
- Pathways to Impact document.
- CVs of students, postdocs, visitors.
- Letters of support from project partners.
- Equipment quotes.
- Host organisation statement.

# Common criticisms (1)

# Common criticisms (1)

- The proposal
  - is badly presented or incomprehensible;
  - cannot be judged on the evidence presented;
  - is a routine application of known techniques;
  - contains so much detail that all flexibility is eliminated;
  - is too expensive for the probable gain.



# Common criticisms (1)

- The proposal
  - is badly presented or incomprehensible;
  - cannot be judged on the evidence presented;
  - is a routine application of known techniques;
  - contains so much detail that all flexibility is eliminated;
  - is too expensive for the probable gain.
- The research question to be addressed
  - cannot be identified;
  - is woolly or ill formed;
  - has already been addressed;
  - is not worth addressing.

# Common criticisms (2)

- The proposers
  - seem unaware of related research;
  - are attempting too much for the funding requested and time-scale envisaged;
  - have not shown that they will succeed where others have failed;
  - appear pretentious, pompous or arrogant;
  - should be funded by their own institution.

# Common criticisms (2)

- The proposers
  - seem unaware of related research;
  - are attempting too much for the funding requested and time-scale envisaged;
  - have not shown that they will succeed where others have failed;
  - appear pretentious, pompous or arrogant;
  - should be funded by their own institution.
- The budget
  - contains inadequate detail;
  - contains items not described and justified in the narrative.

# Common criticisms (2)

- The proposers
  - seem unaware of related research;
  - are attempting too much for the funding requested and time-scale envisaged;
  - have not shown that they will succeed where others have failed;
  - appear pretentious, pompous or arrogant;
  - should be funded by their own institution.
- The budget
  - contains inadequate detail;
  - contains items not described and justified in the narrative.
- The impact
  - has not been clearly identified.

# Some final advice

# Some final advice

- Always
  - provide all requested information and answer all questions asked in the format indicated, no matter how irrelevant such requests may seem;
  - emphasise how your project is unique;
  - let as many people as possible read your proposal;
  - listen to their advice.

# Some final advice

- Always
  - provide all requested information and answer all questions asked in the format indicated, no matter how irrelevant such requests may seem;
  - emphasise how your project is unique;
  - let as many people as possible read your proposal;
  - listen to their advice.
- Be ready to
  - respond to reviewers' criticism in a well-argued and non-aggressive way;
  - be realistic about your prospects;
  - use failure in a positive way;
  - try, try, and try again . . .

# Many supporting resources available

- **Advice on Writing Proposals**  
EPSRC

<https://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/howtoapply/preparing/>

- **How to write a good research grant proposal**  
ESRC

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/how-to-write-a-good-research-grant-proposal/>

- **Writing a Good Grant Proposal**  
Simon Peyton Jones and Alan Bundy

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/academic-program/how-to-write-a-great-research-proposal>

- **The Proposal Writer's Guide**  
University of Michigan

<http://orsp.umich.edu/proposal-writers-guide-overview>

- . . .