Sharpening Your Grant Writing Approach

Rachel Cowen, Director of the Centre for Academic and Researcher Development & University Lead for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Key take home messages

- **Fastest route to failure is to not apply**
- **Believe in your own ideas**
- **Writing a grant application takes organisation and time**
- **You can’t do it on your own – tap into networks of support available**
  - Researcher development & Research Support Services
  - Grant Writing Retreats
  - Funders and their grant management teams
  - Peer support and senior colleagues expertise many of whom are grant reviewers and panel members
Believe in your ideas and yourself - beware the imposter syndrome

I’m not good enough
I don’t have enough papers
My ideas aren’t novel enough
Inequalities in academia – loss of women and minority researchers

She Figures 2018
EU Commission Infographics
Sharing your experiences.....
Developing a research funding portfolio

Contract research

Equipment grants

Collaborative/multi-centre grants

Fellowships

Project Grants

Programme Grants

Small pilot grants

Academia/Industry grants

Travel Grants

Public engagement grants

Studentships

Seminars/Conference grants

Prizes

Its never to early to start – small, internal schemes are important, Researcher Co-I strongly encouraged
Grant Success

Field of Research + Funding Body + Type of Call
Grants versus Fellowships

**Grants** – apply against all levels of researcher, Responsive Mode and Open Call, project focused

**Fellowships** – apply against peers, a ‘PEOPLE’ award provides project, salary and research leadership development

- Professorial Fellowship
- Senior Fellowship
- Career Development Fellowship
- Post-doctoral Fellowship
- Pre-doctoral Fellowship
- Career Re-entry Fellowship
- Capacity-building Fellowship
Finding the right funding partner

- Global Resources
- US and Europe
- UK Government
- Charities and Trusts
- Learned and Professional Societies
- Industry and Philanthropy
External funding search engines

http://www.researchprofessional.com/login.html

- Funding alerts
- Guidance
- Jobs

NB: Connect with the strategic funding team
https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/bmh/about-fbmh/our-structure/ps-functions/rbss/strategic-funding/
Investigate funding sources thoroughly

Check funder websites for:

- **Realistic Deadline** – 100h and at least 3 months
- Application process
- Politics & funding strategy
- Appropriateness to your field
- Competitiveness
- Success rate
- **Eligibility**
- Decision criteria
- Academic Freedom/IP
Years post PhD, eligibility criteria being loosened by funders

http://www.mrc.ac.uk/skills-careers/overview-of-research-careers/
Research Co I status – Sector working to fully recognise Research Staff grant contribution

New grant application status to recognise research staff contributions

20 Jun 2018

To support the development of researchers across different career stages, the MRC will introduce a new status to recognise the contributions of research staff as researcher co-investigators on grant applications from July 2018.

Currently many research staff do not receive the formal recognition they deserve for their contributions to writing grant applications, designing and carrying out funded research. By introducing the new status of researcher co-investigator, we are aiming to help provide them with the recognition needed for career progression.
# Internal Funding for Research Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>International Conference Fund for Research Staff (UoM)</th>
<th>Training, Visits, Workshops and Discipline-Hopping Fund for Research Staff (ISSF)</th>
<th>Research Collaboration Fund for Research Staff (UoM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Develop presentation and communication skills, have research peer reviewed. Establish networks for potential future collaborations.</td>
<td>Develop skills in a different discipline, benefitting self and home research community. Acquire new techniques and technologies as part of a wider collaboration.</td>
<td>Establish a collaborative research project with a cross disciplinary partner, leading to external funding bids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Award value</strong></td>
<td>Up to £500 per award</td>
<td>Up to £2500 per award</td>
<td>Up to £5000 per award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example expenditure</strong></td>
<td>Conference registration, travel and accommodation.</td>
<td>Course fees, travel and accommodation.</td>
<td>Travel, meeting and workshop costs. Staff and consumables for feasibility data collection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[http://www.researcher-development.manchester.ac.uk/research-staff-handbook/](http://www.researcher-development.manchester.ac.uk/research-staff-handbook/)
What do funders expect to see in a fundable grant? Decision Criteria?

High Quality Research

Place(s) Environment

Researcher(s) Track record

Project
What funders expect to see

• Clear project plan, professionally presented and justification of resources
• Good project management - steering group or management committee for larger grants
• Stakeholder involvement – policy makers, users, patients, public engagement – from conception stage
• Value for Money – strong justification of resources
• Statistical, Social Science, Health Economist expertise
• Open access statement, data sharing, data management plans
• Impact statement, creative dissemination strategy – academic and non academic communication
• IP commercialisation strategy
• Researcher training statements
• Ethics approval (Animal project/personal licences)
• Suggested referees
Write with the decision criteria in mind

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellence</th>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Quality and efficiency of the implementation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality and credibility of the research/innovation project; level of novelty, appropriate consideration of inter/multidisciplinary and gender aspects</td>
<td>Enhancing the potential and future career prospects of the researcher</td>
<td>Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality and appropriateness of the training and of the two way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host</td>
<td>Quality of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the project results</td>
<td>Appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the supervision and of the integration in the team/institution</td>
<td>Quality of the proposed measures to communicate the project activities to different target audiences</td>
<td>Appropriateness of the management structure and procedures, including risk management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity of the researcher to reach or re-enforce a position of professional maturity/independence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Appropriateness of the institutional environment (infrastructure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighing</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
All successful grants start off with an idea – share your ideas

• *Believe in your ideas and discuss them widely.*

• *Talk to mentors and colleagues and clever friends!*

• *Attend conferences and seminars within and outside your field*

• *Capture your ideas and do something with them*
To engage people in your ideas start with the “why”

http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action
Clearly sell your idea

• **Why?**
  Why is the work interesting and/or important (to someone other than yourself).

• **What?**
  Straightforward, unambiguous, accessible
  What you propose to do. If there are clear hypotheses and aims state them.

• **How?**
  Methods, what alternatives?

• **What if?**
  What can go wrong? Potential pitfalls? Best outcome and worst outcome possible, or likely. What will follow from this work? What will success look like?

• **So What?**
  What difference will it make to the field, the wider academic community, society, is it enough of a step forward? How do you plan to drive the so what?

Prof. Mike Grant
Use accessible verbal and written language

Write it plainly:

Scintillate, scintillate, diminutive celestial body
or
Twinkle, twinkle, little star

Especially the title, section headings, outcomes and lay summary
Work on your Lay Abstract

- Along with the title it's usually the first thing read
- It needs to be punchy – depending on the funding body they may use it to triage applications and for publicity if you are successful
Bulimia nervosa (BN) is a health disorder that affects around 2.5% of the UK population and only 45% of those receiving treatment will make a full recovery. In order to better treat individuals with BN, understanding the cause and maintaining factors is of primary importance. Hypotheses have emerged that eating-disorder symptoms such as bingeing and purging may be used to deal with stress and negative emotions and that impulsivity—acting without thinking about the consequences—might be an additional risk to these symptoms. In this proposal, we plan to investigate in a set of three experiments (1) whether individuals with BN experience emotions with higher intensity than healthy individuals, (2) whether this is due to a deficit in filtering emotional information and (3) whether this deficit in filtering might increase their impulsivity and cause deficits in emotion regulation. The results of these three experiments will also lead us to evaluating the effectiveness of an innovative treatment for BN. Neurofeedback is a method that can help individuals change their own brain patterns and has the potential to help patients feel less emotional, less impulsive and more in control of their emotions, and ultimately decrease bingeing and purging.

http://gunning-fog-index.com/
Optimise your sales pitch

Are your research ideas supported?

The literature

Preliminary data

• Do you need any feasibility work to sell the idea?

• Develop aims and objectives to test hypothesis – are they clear?
Aims: What you want to achieve
Objectives: Actions you will take to achieve it
Develop the proposal outline

Reading – background information
→ Research Question/ Hypothesis
→ Aims and objectives
→ Methodology and experimental plan
→ Wider picture - impact

Pilot data

Resources and expertise
Convince them you can do the project?

Technical expertise and knowledge

Collaborators
Mentors
Sponsor

JUSTIFICATION

Resources

Facilities
Equipment
Time
Consumables
Costings

Contact Research Support Services at the earliest ideas stage

Don’t estimate costs on your own

• The accuracy of your costs could affect project start and end dates, duration; research outputs; impact; reputation with collaborators/funders
• Research Support also help with data management plans, internal grant forms, electronic grant submission systems, business engagement, IP, internal peer review
Hidden costs of research

Grant costs too expensive?
• Consider staff appointments
• Could any components of the project be removed without affecting the scientific integrity?
• Are you proposing more than is asked for?
• **Consider the scope of the project**
“A detailed well designed project plan is one of the sharpest tools available to convince a funding body to give you the resources required”

*UK Research and Innovation*
Example Gantt Chart

Reflecting work package, secondments, short stays, training, dissemination and exploitation, communication activities

| Month | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 |
|-------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Work package | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Deliverable | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Milestone | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Secondment | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Short stay (if already planned) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Training | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Dissemination and exploitation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Communication | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Other (to be specified) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
Risk analysis: What could go wrong?

- Identify the risks then prioritise them
- Probability – how likely is it to happen
- Impact – how serious is it?

Minimise, eliminate or have a contingency
Detail clear decision points and contingency planning

Experiment A

YES

Experiment B

NO

What now?
Minimum requirements for fundable applications

• Clear framework – hypothesis leading to aims and objectives - breaking it into sections
• Clear experimental design (robust stats)
• At the end of each section include
  – Statement of outcomes – milestones/deliverables
  – Risks/contingency planning
Developing a communication strategy to maximise your research impact
Where have you published and why?
Beyond Nature!
How else will you show impact?
University Opportunities
Research and Business Engagement
Enterprise and Intellectual Property
Public and Community Engagement

Academic, Economic and Societal Benefit
Consider the potential impact of your research?

Who might benefit from your research?

How might they benefit from this research?

What can you do to ensure that they have the opportunity to benefit from this research?

How might this experience enhance your career?
Ensure you engage all of your stakeholders?

- Involve
- Partner
- Inform
- Consult

Power

Level of Interest
Data management plans

Research Data Management at Manchester

HEFCE’s Open Access Policy came into effect on 1st April 2016

https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/research/research-data-management/
Further support

- Online Grants Resource
  https://www.softchalkcloud.com/lesson/serve/QhuMSoN9cxIkdV/html
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