

Grant writing tips

Version: 3 October 2022

Listed below are some considerations to take into account when preparing research grant applications. There are two key features in any grant application - the idea/research question(s) and its presentation. The research proposal itself contains:

- a central idea
- identification of interesting and focused questions
- probably needs to break these down into smaller questions whose answer can potentially be tested by experiment, observation, inquiry, etc.
- the ideas in a research proposal and the feasibility of the approach should be exposed to criticism and discussion before and during the writing of the proposal (use seminars, distribution of drafts, etc.)

Grants are usually reviewed by external referees and a committee which can yield a range of opinion. You will need to carry the committee with you by writing and explaining clearly. In an oversubscribed round, panel members will look for reasons to eliminate weak applications. You need to:

- demonstrate that some of your experiments can work
- demonstrate that you can carry them out - a pilot study/preliminary data will possibly be crucial in many cases
- have a long term vision for your research plan, with short-, medium- and long-term aims
- think about your grants well in advance - this should lead to maturity and balance
- think strategically about the research problem you want to study (eg developing collaborations where possible)

Presentation and layout can be critical

- follow the guidelines
- application needs to be clear and well laid out, with plenty of appropriate spacing
- keep to the set font size (never go below size 10)
- help grant reviewer by explaining how grant is laid out
- avoid wall-to-wall writing
- write simply, using plain English
- try and give your writing immediacy and freshness
- check spelling and grammar (indicates sloppy presentation, rush, etc.)

Methodology

- make sure research plan is logical and flows clearly
- try and place yourself in the position of a reviewer when explaining yourself - try and anticipate likely criticism

- identify key methodological/technical issues and address these clearly as you go (eg statistical power of your experiments - if necessary, get advice)
- always try and get someone else to read your grant - preferably 2 or 3 other people

Budget

- The budget will be scrutinized carefully - padding will usually be detected quickly and removed
- Please remember to include superannuation and ACC
- Please remember to include equipment depreciation if appropriate

Justification of staff expenses

- needs to be undertaken properly, not just as an afterthought
- ask for advice from experienced research grant reviewers about appropriate levels of expenditure, staffing levels, etc.

Should your application be successful, recognise that research purchaser may not wish to purchase all research you offer in your application. If you should get offered reduced money be prepared to negotiate reduced research (revised objectives).