NHMRC

TIPS for Preparing a Quality NHMRC Project Grant

Funding in 2015

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Tips for making sure your grant application works as a whole rather than as disconnected parts.

Your ultimate goal is to communicate that your research deserves funding - You’re the right person to conduct the research, and your institution is the right place to do it.

Ensure your project summary is complete and your budget is in synch with your research strategy. Make certain you’ve adequately addressed your project’s significance, innovation and approach.
Planning and Working Strategically

The overall importance is the reviewers’ assessment of the likelihood your project will exert a sustained, powerful influence on your research field. Even though your approaches are complex and take space to explain and sell the impact it is worth it.

Keep in mind that assessors reviewing your proposal have a limited amount of time. They will spend maybe two hours for each application. Don’t make the reader work to understand your proposal. You must convince the reviewer early on of your research’s importance.
The way to Funding

Tip #1:

Be aware of the peer-review process

Copy the Project Grant Category Descriptors (from the October 4 NHMRC Research Tracker) and keep in a prominent position as you write
Getting organised

**Plan early.** Give your idea time to develop into a work plan with pilot data and identification of the most appropriate disciplinary or interdisciplinary colleagues. Know what you cannot do and seek expertise as CIs or Alts.

**Tip #2:**

Applications with multiple CIs will benefit from an organisational description with leadership responsibilities shown.
Getting Organised

Define problems, ask questions, formulate hypotheses and design studies/experiments to test the hypotheses. **No fishing expeditions.**

**TIP #3:**
Your early discussions should show that you can recognise outcomes and how to achieve them.

Complete and **submit any manuscripts** which are essential to your project design. Aim to be *in press* by external assessment and GRP questions.

**Tip # 4:**
This should be a parallel process as track record is all-important and publication gives authority to your ideas.
Communicate

Your application has to contain precise elements sufficient to convince experts in your field but at the same time engender an excitement and even a passionate advocacy among a panel whose detailed knowledge lies elsewhere.

Tip #5:
Be as clear as possible. Keep the creativity-feasibility balance in mind and aim for a seamless story - starting with the title.
Communicate

TIP #6:

Use Sub-headings, short paragraphs and other devices (a summary outcome box) to make the proposal as easy to navigate as possible. Avoid repetition. Use acronyms to best effect. Don’t overload your proposal with historical introduction keep this to <20%, concentrating on setting up the work you propose to do.
Impact

Recognise the difference between **impact** (what will change) and **significance** (why it is important)

**Tip #7:**
Take the short and long view of “impact.” Reviewers want to know how the research you’re doing will change the field and translate into an impact on human health. Think ahead. Tell reviewers the ultimate utility of your research — even if it’s five years down the road.
Absolutely necessary as emphasis on methods without context is one of the biggest mistakes made by researchers

Tip #8:
  Use start-up funds as a positive indicator of commitment but check the balance between contributory pilot data obtained and “mission accomplished”.
Your **network and alliances** should be impressive. Co-investigators can be, but should not **only** be, impressive and reassuring. They should offer particular areas of substantive expertise, procedural talent or access.

**Tip #9:**
If the RGMS elements of the proposal do not allow this to be seen it should be in the proposal text.
RGMS & the Proposal

It is in your best interest to make sure the “supporting” parts of your proposal - Synopsis, lay summary, ethics, track record descriptions and budget work together with the proposal content and show your strategy.

Tip #10:
The synopsis is the passport document - write this last to be a true reflection of the proposal with no surprises
Budget

The budget is an additional reflection of your research strengths.

**TIP # 11:**

Do not over-inflate but if a large budget is required it should be presented in the light of the overall aims, that it is matched to the program of work and that each member of a team is integrated into the research effort.
Make your train of thought crystal clear. You know the logical connections in your head. You know why you’re doing a specific experiment/protocol.

Tip#12

Don’t forget to **tell the reviewers**. Some of what they’re evaluating is your thought process — your summary of the significance of your research and its impact.
Writing a draft

You won’t know how clear your proposal is until you draft it and have it critiqued.

Tip #13:
Circulate an early draft seeking focus and incorporation of shared ideas.
Mentoring

A good mentor will anticipate how an assessor will view your proposal. A mentor is a check on whether you can communicate your objectives and significance. A mentor who knows the system can assist in targeting your proposal to an appropriate assessor or review panel.

Tip #14:

**Use the experience of others** - In addition to a mentor, ask a reader unfamiliar with your field to read a final draft and from memory tell you what the project will do, how it will do it, why it is significant and how it is different. Be prepared to revise if these answers don't flow effortlessly.
In conclusion

You need to have the core of the proposal embedded and valid but you also need to tell a story which is compelling - has some “wow” factor - leaving no doubt that you are the ideal team to undertake this work.
Project Grants - 2013 application round

- 3,917 applications
- 646 funded (NHMRC only) – funded rate 16.9%
- 43 GRPs, 170 Assigners Academy
- GRP independent Chairs, community observers, early career observers
- Applications from a total of 73 institutions
  - 39 Universities
  - 22 MRIs
  - 12 other institutions
- 27 institutions, 0 grants; 16 institutions, <3 grants
• RGMS Part B - Project Grant applications
  ✓ “participation”, “achievements” removed – applicants should address in the attachment (“Grant Proposal”)
  ✓ including each CI’s top 5 publications
  ✓ all publications in CV component (last 5 years)

• Reducing workload on assessors
  • Improved and streamlined assessor snapshots
  • Easier access to material required for peer review
  • Increase in the “Not For Further Consideration” threshold to 50% to reduce load on GRPs