

No guarantees: increasing the likelihood of success when applying for research funding

Leslie Hicks
School of Health and Social Care
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lhicks@lincoln.ac.uk

Shape of this talk

- Influences on funding decisions
- Preparatory work
- Focusing on bids
- Common traps

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Into the unknown

- Odds are stacked against success (“it’s a lottery”)
- Funding decisions are subject to a range of factors, the majority of which are impossible to predict
 - Proclivity of funders (and arguably, to a lesser extent, of reviewers)
 - Anticipated and preferred outcomes of the programme of work
 - Relative merits of applications



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Is anything certain?

- Some projects will be funded
- Being defeated by the process before you start will show in your writing (be suitably confident)
- Proposals which meet identified criteria will be given precedence, therefore
- **It is essential to produce a ‘fitting’ proposal of the highest standard manageable within the time-frame** (be realistic in planning)



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More certainties

- Reviewers need to be left in not one shred of doubt about **what** is to be achieved, **why** this is important to do, **how** this will be done, by **whom** and **when** (be convincing)
- It is best to make clear the above at the earliest point possible (value of the first page)



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PREPARATION

- Be opportunistic in seeking funding sources!
- Assemble a functioning team whose members have availability
- Sort out partners’ assumptions about labour/funding/involvement
- Work on roles and responsibilities



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PREPARATION

Understand all that is required by funders

- Know absolutely what is expected: read thoroughly the guidance and advice provided by the funders (especially in relation to establishing a 'case for support' and 'justification of resources')
- Discuss processes fully with research administrators - well in advance of the deadline (other UoL potential applicants, time-frame, budgeting, internal peer review)



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BID CONTENT: make reviewing an easy task for the reader

- What is the bid about?
- Provide early orientation;
 - Title needs to be crystal clear and not at all convoluted or obscure
 - Research aims and objectives need to be dazzlingly apparent
 - There needs to be an early statement about what the researcher(s) will actually do



Never/do not:

- leave the reader to dig through context and justification in order to get to what it's all about

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What's the promise?

- Why should the reviewer be bothered to share in your interest to find out more about the topic?
- Tell the reader why the research should be completed
- Give a coherent and convincing explanation
- The nub here is positive motivation 'why should this project be funded?'



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Methodology matters!

Do you have a clue about what you are going to do?

Get the balance right when giving detail to:

- Research questions - are there too many, are they obscuring the main question, are they scattered throughout the proposal, are they at all linked to data generation?

Show clear thinking in formulating the problem and your approach to it



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Fundamental basics

Get the balance right when giving detail to:

- Methods - what is the methodological basis, rather than an essay about 'what is the importance of epistemology and methodology' Show what is going to happen, to whom or what, how many/how often, when and in what order



More basics



- Discuss analysis - what will you do with data generated? (avoid simply mentioning software)
- Discuss ethics - give details of considerations (do not simply state that the project will submitted to a committee for ethical approval or that it abides by a particular code of ethical conduct)



Realistic budgeting matters



- **Accuracy:** neither under- or over- estimate costs
- **Relevant:** avoid looking as though the project is funding several holidays (too many international trips or conferences)
- **Within reason:** avoid appearing to need oodles of standard equipment
- **Credible:** £100 /€100 under the maximum sum permitted will not convince anyone

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Common traps

- Yay for the Research Fellow - they're doing all the work!
- Not explaining track records/why their lack is OK
- Not explaining what this lovely assembly of esteemed colleagues will be doing apart from coming together for a chat
- Project is beautiful but it's squeezed into a call that it doesn't fit - it will be noticed!
- Literature base is insufficient - possibly over-cites the PI's work (big mistake)
- Impact plan is poor or missing
- Bid is a cure for insomnia



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VALUE OF INTERNAL SCRUTINY

- ▶ Resist the temptation to keep your arm around your work!
- ▶ Do open up your proposal to a broad range of comments
- ▶ Rewrite until there is no room for ambiguity, misunderstanding, or the reader not connecting with the proposal's value



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