University of South Wales
Prifysgol De Cymru

How to write a successful research funding application

Research Office

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Winning a research grant is not easy and writing a proposal always carries a distinct element of risk.

This guide will help you to improve your chance of success by carefully targeting the right funding body with the right ideas and structured proposals. The Research Office funding team are available to help with support, advice and information. Please e-mail: **researchoffice@southwales.ac.uk**

1. Identify the problem that needs researching, and how to solve it

The first stage in writing a successful grant application is to identify the problem and to propose a way to solve it through research. Proposals that are innovative or which address a 'current' problem are more likely to attract attention. Try to identify:

- What is the problem?
- How can you solve it?
- Is it innovative?
- Will the research attract attention?
- Identify who the research will have impact on
- Create a work-plan with milestones and objectives
- Identify partners and other disciplines from within the University and with other Universities.

2. Target the right funder

Funding is available from a wide variety of sources. These include the UK Research Councils (RCUK):

- Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
- Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council (BBSRC)
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
- Medical Research Council (MRC)
- Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)

There are also a number of charities and trusts that support academic research such as the Wellcome Trust, Leverhulme Trust, and Joseph Rowntree Foundation. When looking for the most appropriate funder, try to identify:

- What funding is available
- Are you eligible? Many funding streams are specific to a particular subject area or for specific people, for example early career (post-doctoral) researchers
- Identify the most appropriate type of funding for your idea – project grant, fellowship, network – to meet your needs
- Look for special notices - for example RCUK highlight notices - spot funding trends
- Read the small print

3. Write and refine your proposal

Writing and refining your proposal requires you to think about the impact of the research, your methodology and how you present the proposal. Adhere closely to the guidance provided by the research funder. You need to make sure that your proposal fits with their aims otherwise it won't be funded. Think about:

- Impact- Who will benefit from the project, and in what way?
- How will you make sure the impact happens (a 'Pathway to impact' or dissemination plan)
- Use peer review - ask other people to help to revise and improve the application. Think about the disciplines that it covers, other perspectives on how it will be reviewed, and how you can defuse any potential problems that reviewers may raise.
- Be clear in the way you express ideas, and use key words: 'persuasive structures' for impact. Words such as 'innovative', 'cutting edge', 'transferable', and 'impact' may help. Also think of a snappy title and acronyms- eg, WISERD
- Beware the fine detail - word counts, spelling and grammar, borders and font sizes. Showing that you care about the proposal is important. Also look out for extra pieces of information on the application form that you need.

4. Budget for your proposal

Developing a budget for a proposal is a difficult task and requires you to think about how long the project will take, how much time you will spend on the project, researchers involved in the project, equipment, travel and subsistence etc.

- Ask for a Full Economic Costing, which will give you a total cost to the university including estates and indirect costs
- Justify your resources in the application - demonstrate value for money; suitable spending on impact costs; and a well thought out use of resources.
- Include research leave and recruitment costs

5. Get approvals and submit your proposal

It is important to get approval for the application, so that your faculty and the University know how much you are applying for and what the risks are. Glamorgan uses a process called EFAS (External Funding Application System) to track your application. Without approval it is not possible to submit an application. Many funders now use electronic application systems – you will need to register for these and the Research Office will provide validation that you are a bona fide member of staff.