

# Effective grant writing:

Prof. Constant J. Mews

School of Historical Studies, Monash

# My experience

- Over 20 years, I have applied for 12 Discovery grants (1 solo, rest team), 1 Linkage, and 1 International Linkage.
- Successful with 3 Discovery grants, and 1 Linkage.
- Moral: keep applying, as eventually you will succeed.
- Every grant application is a learning experience

# Is it worth applying?

- **Cost:**

the time (about 4 weeks minimum; spread over 8 weeks is more healthy)

**The benefits:**

The intellectual challenge

The sharing of ideas and drafts with colleagues

The possibility of being successful

# Grant writing as an art form

- Consider grant writing to be like writing a good journal article. It must be:
  - Original
  - Well informed
  - Snappy and interesting
- You should subsequently be able to get a journal article out of it, even if only as a preliminary announcement of research

# Understand the ARC process

Levels of readers:

- Compliance (make sure you follow the rules)
- INT (international) specialist readers (1-4 )
- OZ readers (15-25 applications)
- 2 x College of Experts (100-200 applications)
- EAC1 perhaps in your discipline, but probably not your specialty
- EAC2 not your discipline.

# Which ARC Section?

- [Biological Sciences and Biotechnology \(BSB\)](#)
- [Engineering and Environmental Science \(EE\)](#)
- [Humanities and Creative Arts \(HCA\)](#)
- [Mathematics, Information and Communication Sciences \(MIC\)](#)
- [Physics, Chemistry and Earth Sciences \(PCE\)](#)
- [Social, Behavioural and Economic Sciences \(SBE\)](#)

To find out who the panel is:

[http://www.arc.gov.au/about\\_arc/CoE\\_HCA.htm](http://www.arc.gov.au/about_arc/CoE_HCA.htm)

# To respond to the ARC process

- GET YOUR DRAFT READ BY AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE, outside as well as within your discipline.
- Best comments are going to come from people outside your area.
- Great value to cross disciplinary research groups reviewing application.

# From ideas to outcome: Three stages

- The ideas stage
- The drafting stage
- The polishing stage
- **SHARE AT EVERY STAGE**

# The ideas stage: solo or project?

- Bounce around your ideas with other people, whether you wish to apply alone or with others.
- Good solo projects as likely to succeed as good group projects, but they need to be outstanding.
- Original projects are often generated by a interesting combination of skills.

## For solo research:

- Strong track record relative to opportunity absolutely necessary, as well as an original proposal
- It is very important to share your proposal with others. (Avoid the danger of being too esoteric)

# For group research

- Create a team with good overall balance of track record for opportunity; join up early career researchers
- There is a very strong advantage to being with researchers whom you see regularly.
- Choose people you trust.
- Choose a team wisely; size can be a problem.

# Early career researchers

- There is a need for the ARC to give a fixed proportion to Early Career Researchers.
- This can be grounds for ECRs to apply solo, or to team up with other ECRs.

# The drafting stage

- Think about the 10 pages (E) first, before 100 word summary & national benefit (A), summary of relevant research record (B), budget justification (C), other projects (D)
- But a reader may go through A, B, C and D first, so these will be important in the polishing.

# The 100 word synopsis

- Although this comes up first in the form, do not draft this too early.
- Its first purpose is to attract interest, but must be informative and specific, without being tedious.
- Go for short sentences. Avoid repetitive phrases, 'This project aims to...' This project seeks to...'

# Keywords

- These are very important for identifying types of assessor the College of Experts will choose.
- Avoid too general terms, as they are of little use. Combine disciplinary categories with specific subject matter.

# The 10 pages

- [Track record relative to opportunity: 40%]
- Aims and background—GENERATES NO MARK
- Significance and Innovation – 30%
- Approach and Methodology – 20%
- National Benefit – 10%

# The title of your project

- The 20 word title may come last, and is likely to evolve. But it can help if first words of the title are more specific than general (each grant tends to be known by a few words)
- Knowing a title helps focus your project
- Do not get too hung on to particular words (not the most important thing). Don't do 100 word synopsis till end. Fix up title only then.

# Aims and Background

- Be informative, but also concise
- Avoid giving away big claims on significance when there are no marks for what you say.
- Big challenge is to get the attention of the reader, especially of EAC1 and EAC2
- Avoid over long paragraphs, and excessively technical language.

# Significance and Innovation (30%)

- does the research address an important problem?
- how will the anticipated outcomes advance the knowledge base of the discipline?
- is the research principally focussed upon a topic or outcome that falls within one of the National Research Priorities and associated Priority Goals, and if so how does it address the National Research Priority? (*not to worry if it does not*)
- are the Proposal's aims and concepts novel and innovative?
- will new methods or technologies be developed?

# Significance and innovation

- This is the crucial section. Bring in your major thoughts here about the broader implications of your research.

# Avoid:

- Excessive jargon: This is innovative because....  
This is significant because...
- Exaggerated self-importance (but do bring out significance of project)

# Strike a balance

- Strike a balance between defining a tightly controlled project, with a definite contribution, and its larger implications.
- Have clear outcomes, that are realistic but imaginative. Be careful about not promising too much, but show that you know exactly what you want.

# Approach and methodology

- Very often scholars take for granted the methodology employed within their own discipline.
- Explain your work to someone from outside your discipline.

Avoid phrases like “employs the standard methodology” —what is evident to you may not be evident to someone else.

# National benefit

- This section tends to be poorly answered. Avoid sounding as if you do not believe there is any benefit of your work to the wider community (i.e. to the taxpayers who are funding your research).
- Think not just about generic skills (clear thinking, greater cultural awareness), but specific benefits—like communication skills, capacity to communicate and absorb technical insights. Think about opportunities for training research provides.

# Polishing the proposal

- Prepare the other sections (A, B, C, D) with attention you give to E.
- When preparing publication report (B) and budget justification (C), remember that reader might not yet have read E, so it can help just to say in a sentence why your skills are relevant, and why particular items in the budget are needed.
- Find people prepared to go over your text, discussing the way the paragraphs flow.

# Budget justification

- Don't leave this to the last minute. Get assistance from Research Office in your Faculty.

Aim to be realistic in your expenses, while recognising that not everything you ask for will be granted, even if your application is successful.

# Be prepared to make bigger changes

- You may need to reduce the scope of your proposal if it is too ambitious.
- Alternatively, you may want to think about larger implications.
- If you are solo, you may think about teaming up with someone to create a more imaginative project, that you could not have dreamed up on your own.

# Allow yourself time

- Remember that it takes time for others to read your draft (and you to read their drafts).
- Allow time before the deadline.
- All comments are worthwhile.

# Tips for good style

- Read your grant application aloud, preferably to another person (not necessarily an expert).
- Convey a sense of enthusiasm and excitement about the project.
- Simplicity and clarity are vital.

- Don't take it too seriously.
- Think about the grant writing process as a vital stage in clarifying your own research, whether or not you are successful.

The more times you apply, the more likely you will be successful.

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Good luck!

# Apply to be a reader for the ARC

- The ARC is always looking out for new names to add to its database of potential INT readers.
- This gives excellent experience of other people's applications and the process of assessment.