

## Writing a Good Grant Application

Skip to [NCRI Guide to Application Content](#)

### NCRI Guide to Application Writing



- If you are a researcher at an early stage in your career, consider applying together with a colleague who has an established reputation. Using such a stepping stone can help you to establish yourself as an independent researcher.
- Allow yourself time. Obvious though it may sound, you will also need to consider the time constraints on colleagues, patients and other stakeholders who you will be asking to input into, or review, your application. If your institution has a formal internal review process, check the timescales for this; they may require your application up to 4 weeks before the submission date.
- Ensure you are eligible to apply, e.g. some funds are available only to those in a specific career phase or those based in specific institutions.
- Study your funding source. Your application should spell out how your research would fit with their strategic and/or research priorities and, where relevant to the funder and/or your research, how it links with government policies.
- Contact the funder. Discussing your ideas directly with the funding source can yield invaluable advice. Be prepared to provide them with a concise one-page summary of your plan. Explain your project and ask how it fits with their funding strategy; this may help you to further tailor how you present your proposal.
- Read the rules and guidelines. Careless errors (missing the deadline, using the wrong layout or font size, including an appendix when specifically told not to) can mean that your application will be turned away without review.
- Read the assessment criteria if available. These can give useful pointers of aspects to specifically address in your application, e.g. if the reviewers will be assessing applications on potential impact, then include a paragraph dedicated to this.
- Research your reviewers. Most funding organisations list the members of their review panels on their website, or check the Association of Medical Research Charities member profiles. If there is a reviewer listed who is a member of your institution, talk to them about what results in successful applications to that particular funder.
- Discuss the feasibility and quality of your research funding application with:
  - Colleagues and others with experience in the field, e.g. members of the [NCRI SuPaC Collaboratives](#)
  - Health economist (would outcomes of your research have financial benefits for the NHS?)
  - Statistician (is your study sufficiently powered?)

- NHS R&D office (if you're planning on conducting this research within the NHS, will there be any issues?)
- Relevant [UK Clinical Research Network](#) (is your study feasible?)
- Patients or service users

Include their views in your application if appropriate.

- Consider involving patients or service users in your planning; this is a prerequisite for many funders. The input of patients or service users can add a valuable dimension to your application; consider including them as co-applicants or members of your advisory team.
- Ensure that you form a co-applicant team with the relevant expertise, not only considering the science of your project, but also if they can bring value to dissemination and uptake of findings.
- Study previous successful applications of colleagues who applied to the same funder.
- Be realistic. This applies to your aims, costings and timelines. Funders are very unlikely to give extensions so it pays to get this right the first time.
- Consider presentation and structure, as well as writing in plain English.
- Don't neglect your abstract (and lay abstract, if requested). This is likely to be the first bit of your grant read by the reviewers and needs to engage their interest. Some funders publish abstracts of grants they fund, so you will want it to be informative. Some recommend writing the abstract early on and revising it throughout the time spent on the bulk of your application.
- Check every detail of your application – e.g. confirm costings with your University's finance office, does your projected timeline add up etc.

## NCRI Guide to Application Content

Remember that you are effectively selling a product. Why should the funder buy your project rather than someone else's? Try putting yourself in the position of a reviewer who is not familiar with your work. What do you need to do to get their attention?

Some funders may provide a number of precise headings, and especially for electronic submission, there may be little flexibility in format. Either way, it is worth considering incorporating the following topics, dividing them between given headings in the most appropriate way. This should not be considered an exhaustive list, nor should you automatically assume that all of these topics should be included.

- The problem to be addressed
- Background/current state of knowledge
- Aims, objectives and hypotheses of your research
- Potential national and international impact and value for healthcare or commercial significance of your research
- Predicted timeline and milestones of your work
- Details of any relevant preliminary or pilot work, showing how it supports your application
- Measures taken to ensure you will not be duplicating existing work
- Publications from your group relevant to this application
- Bibliography of relevant work
  
- Research design, including, where relevant, how you will recruit your study sample and collect your data
- What interpretation will research design allow
- Advantages and limitations of method
- Evidence of public engagement in planning or research process itself
- Justification of your costings
  
- Justification of use of animals, if applicable
- [Ethical considerations](#)
  
- How have you planned to secure the skills and competencies needed to conduct your research effectively
- How will the environment you are in and your co-applicants add value to your research
- Any potential difficulties and contingency plans to deal with these
  
- How will your data be analysed
- Plans for the dissemination or application of your research
- Plans for data sharing (some funders have a policy on data sharing)

This guide is taken from the NCRI Survivorship and End of Life Care Research Grantsmanship Gateway, available at [www.ncri.org.uk/grantsmanship](http://www.ncri.org.uk/grantsmanship). The NCRI Grantsmanship Gateway is an outcome of the [NCRI Rapid Review of research into survivorship after cancer and end of life care](#), and aims to assist early career researchers in the survivorship and end of life care fields by signposting them towards expert advice on grant application development.