Top Tips for Writing a Successful Grant Application

Suggestions from Supervisors

- Have a clear, crisp, concise, and novel hypothesis
- Ensure there are very clear aims, both in the short and long term

- Make sure your Case for Support is hypothesis-driven and your hypothesis, and predictions from the hypothesis, are clearly stated
- Keep the introduction short: provide only sufficient background for your hypothesis and objectives to be understood by the funding review panel
- Make sure the objectives (three is a good number to have) are not interdependent: i.e. that objective 2 (or 3) does not depend on the outcome of objective 1 (or 2)
- Base achieving your research objectives on application of innovative techniques, or innovative combinations of established techniques, that others might then use
- Include sufficient preliminary data/illustrations to inspire confidence in the review panel that the proposed research is feasible and the objectives are achievable
- Show you have considered what could go wrong in the research proposed (risk assessment) and how you would rectify it
- Show you have thought through what the alternative outcomes of the proposed research are and what they will tell you, and what future research they will lead to
- Allow time for two or more experienced colleagues/peers to comment critically on your proposal and then act on their recommendations
- Expect even your best proposals to fail: many funding bodies have a failure rate of 80-90%: it doesn't mean it's a bad proposal. Pick yourself up, dust yourself down, and start again.

- When deciding on aims for your proposal try to come up with aims that are not contingent on another aim being successful. If all are reliant on each other and something fails you're stuck!
- Get as many people as possible to read your proposal and give you feedback. Since more and more funders ask for a lay abstract or summary having non-scientists read it is imperative. As scientists we get caught up in technological language and forget some words are not widely known/understood. Get your parents, siblings, friends and significant others to read it and help you explain your project in an understandable way.

- Make sure that a reader unfamiliar with the topic will quickly appreciate what the overall aim of the work is.

- Be explicit about the questions you are addressing
- Reviewers are busy people, make it easy to read
- Avoid jargon and acronyms!! Reviewers may not be from your field
- Use all available space in the form, e.g. justification or resources, pathways to impact etc.

- Talk to successful grantees of the same scheme and get their proposals, if possible.
- Take time to develop ideas - creativity cannot be forced.
- Talk to many people about your ideas. This will generate a lot of useful feedback, and weaknesses get exposed early. Some people are scared to share their ideas, and I recommend this is a fear that needs to be overcome.
- Use short paragraphs (1 idea per paragraph) and put the most important information in the first sentence of each paragraph. Stressed evaluators often read only the first 1-2 sentences in each paragraph, and the proposal should be written in a way that the essential story is conveyed anyway.
- Write the proposal for the reviewers, not yourself.