AMBS Grant Writing Toolkit

2018-2019

AMBS Research Grant Writers

Contents

Introduction

The purpose of this toolkit is to guide researchers when writing grant applications. Whilst much of the guidance brings together advice from UKRI and its funding councils, the principles and approaches detailed are highly transferable across different funders.

In addition to this toolkit, further support is available from the School's Research Grant writers who can assist researchers during grant writing by:
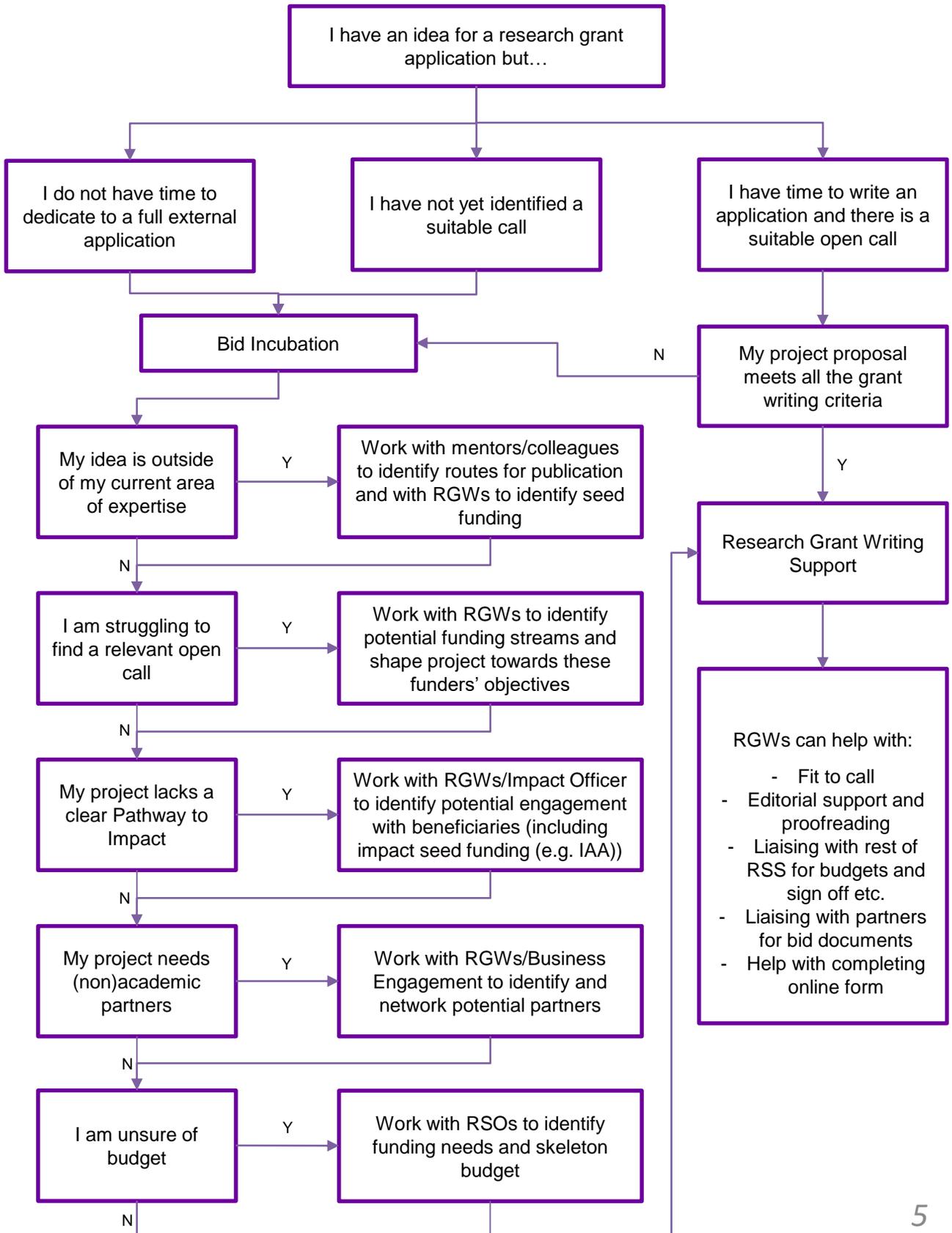
- Ensuring fit between funding call and the grant at all stages of the application writing process (e.g. advising if certain parts of the project need to be emphasised in order to meet the demands of a call)

- Offering editorial support during bid writing (e.g. proofreading, converting parts of an earlier draft)

- Liaising with the rest of Research Services to confirm budget, internal approval and internal peer review

- Working with the Knowledge Exchange and Impact Officer for guidance on the impact of the bid

- Liaising with project partners for the relevant support information (e.g. budgets, letters of support)

- Assisting with the completion of the relevant online forms

With increasingly tight deadlines for many funding calls, it is never too early to tell us about a project idea (even if you are not yet sure of a suitable funder etc.). To contact the Research Grant Writers email research.services@manchester.ac.uk.

Research Grant Development Process

I have an idea for a research grant application but…

I do not have time to dedicate to a full external application

I have not yet identified a suitable call

I have time to write an application and there is a suitable open call

Bid Incubation

My project proposal meets all the grant writing criteria

N

My idea is outside of my current area of expertise — Y → Work with mentors/colleagues to identify routes for publication and with RGWs to identify seed funding

N

I am struggling to find a relevant open call — Y → Work with RGWs to identify potential funding streams and shape project towards these funders' objectives

N

My project lacks a clear Pathway to Impact — Y → Work with RGWs/Impact Officer to identify potential engagement with beneficiaries (including impact seed funding (e.g. IAA))

N

My project needs (non)academic partners — Y → Work with RGWs/Business Engagement to identify and network potential partners

N

I am unsure of budget — Y → Work with RSOs to identify funding needs and skeleton budget

N

Y

Research Grant Writing Support

RGWs can help with:

- Fit to call
- Editorial support and proofreading
- Liaising with rest of RSS for budgets and sign off etc.
- Liaising with partners for bid documents
- Help with completing online form

How To:
Case for Support

What is the Purpose of a Case for Support?

The Case for Support should describe the proposed research and its context, in (normally) a maximum of six A4 sides. This is to help those reviewing your proposal to understand what you plan to accomplish, and where it fits into the current portfolio of research. You should answer:

- What is the story you are telling?
- Who is the audience?
- What will you achieve and what are the risks?
- Why does it matter?
- Why now?
- Why you (and your team)?

Hints and Tips:

- Many proposals devote too much space to explaining why the research is important and too little to detailing how the research will be conducted. Therefore, it is vital that you have a full understanding of what is required, as well as knowing the various stages of the application process, so that you maximise your chances of gaining an award.

- The Case for Support is your opportunity to convince peers that your research should be funded. Write it in a clear, concise and jargon free style. Also avoid using terms such as 'could' or 'may'. Instead talk about what you will do.

- Explain what is exciting about the research to your audience, in particular your reviewers. You need to convince these experts in your own research field about the value of your project.

- Convince reviewers your proposal is original, and describe your objectives clearly and succinctly. Proposals are not rejected just because others are doing similar work, but if you fail to describe the novelty of your approach or the likelihood of success, the value of your proposal is uncertain.

- Do not leave it to the funder or your peers to ask questions; show that you have thought the proposal through, and explain how it will succeed. Potential applications might be obvious to you, but leave no doubt in reviewers' minds.

- If you know your research will produce datasets of potential value to others consider describing how they will be shared and the added value this will create.

Section	Content
Introduction	The opening paragraph is your chance to summarise for the reviewer clearly and succinctly: • What the project will achieve • Why this fits with the current call • What impact will be created • Who the audience are This should be accessible for a lay audience and make use of any key terms/language used in the call text (e.g. if the call is from a challenge fund – specifically talk about challenges).

Context	Introduce the background to the proposal topic:
	
	• What is the wider academic, industrial and/or societal context?
	• How does the project relate to past and current work in the UK and abroad?
	• What are the long term effects of the proposed research:
	    ○ Does it contribute to the health of other research disciplines; current or future economic success; future development of key emerging industries; or address key societal challenges?
	    ○ Does it meets strategic needs by establishing or maintaining unique world leading research activities, including areas of niche capability?
	    ○ How does it fit with and complement other research?

Academic Impact	Set out the reasons why your research matters for academia (any other impact can be briefly mentioned but should be covered in more detail in your Impact Summary and Pathways to Impact): • How will your research benefit national/international researchers in the field and related disciplines? • What will be done to ensure that they can benefit? • What collaboration is there in the project and what is the role of other researchers? Why are they the most appropriate person for this?

Section	Content
Research Objectives	This section should be framed around your main research questions: • What is your research idea or hypothesis? • Why is the proposed project novel and timely enough to warrant consideration for funding? (consider personal and societal aspects) • What are the overall aims of the project? • What are the measurable objectives by which the outcome of the work will be assessed?
Programme and Methodology	Add as much detail as possible to this section including clear milestones and indicators for success: • What is the research methodology and why is this justified? • How is the work programme set out? (tasks for each member of the research team, research to be carried out and the milestones/indicators that will be used to monitor progress) • What will be the outputs and when will they be achieved? (including links to dissemination and impact) • How will the project be managed?

How To:
Impact Sections

Impact Summary vs Pathways to Impact?

The Impact Summary and Pathways to Impact may both deal with the project's impact but they serve very different purposes. Therefore, do not cut and paste the text provided in one section into the other!

The purpose of the Impact Summary is to provide a short description of the beneficiaries and potential impacts. It may be externally published so needs to be written in non-technical language.

The Pathways to Impact document should be seen as congruous with the Case for Support. It should cover what you will actually do - activities such as networking events, workshops, publications, public engagement and training. You can design your Pathways to Impact activities so that they align and are integrated with the research.

Hints and Tips:

- Draft the Impact Summary very early in your preparation, so that it informs the design of your research.

- Remember to consider and include project specific costs relating to proposed impact activities e.g. engagement workshops or marketing materials, publication costs, etc.

- Public engagement is a popular form of impact activity. However, such activities need to place your research in the context of two-way engagement not just outreach.

- Where possible include user consultation in the planning for impact. Details on preparation for unanticipated opportunities and a commitment to include principal and senior investigator time on knowledge exchange and impact activities should also be included.

- Keep in mind the distinction between pathways to impact and impact itself; having the former does not guarantee the latter.

How to Write an Impact Summary	
Section	**Questions to Consider**

Beneficiaries and Stakeholders	• Who will benefit from this research?
	   o Who are your beneficiaries? Who is the priority?
	      ▪ Academia (Discipline? UK/International?)
	      ▪ Public Sector
	      ▪ Business/Industry
	      ▪ Third Sector – Voluntary Organisation, Charity, Social Enterprise
	      ▪ General Public
	      ▪ Schools
	      ▪ Other
	   o What motivates them/why would they be interested?
	   o What might prevent you from reaching them? Will you need to involve other stakeholders to achieve your impact goals?
	   o How can you get around that?

Economic and/or Societal Impact	• How will people benefit from this research?
	   o Types of Economic and Societal Impact:
	      ▪ Cultural
	      ▪ Commercial and Economic
	      ▪ Environmental
	      ▪ Improving Social Welfare and Public Services
	      ▪ Influencing Public Policy and Legislation
	      ▪ Operational and Organisational Change
	      ▪ Technological

How to Write a Pathways to Impact	
Section	**Questions to Consider**
Introduction	This should briefly summarise the stakeholders, beneficiaries and impacts described in the impact summary

Methods to Achieve Impact	• What will be done to ensure that potential beneficiaries have the opportunity to engage with this research?
	  o Be project specific and have very clear outcomes
	  o Describe societal and economic outputs and outcomes instead of focussing on just scientific deliverables
	  o Plan to deliver activities pertinent to the project instead of focussing on track record or routine activities
	  o Consider broader beneficiaries, likely impact on them and appropriate mechanisms for realising these potential impacts
	  o Focus on knowledge exchange and impact generation at key points of the project, rather than having all impact activities at the end
	  o Make sure activities will deliver genuine impact and are not purely for dissemination purposes

Milestones and Indicators	• What are the milestones and measures of success?
	  o Clearly set out when each impact activity will be carried out
	  o Include ways you might monitor and measure the success of your impact activities (e.g. surveys, website hits, follow-up interviews, reports, etc.)

Summary of Resources	• What resources have you allocated to impact (staff time and other costs)?

Example Pathways to Impact	
Events	Public lecturers, public debates, exhibitions, road shows, university public open days, conferences, seminars and workshops
Press Activity	Interaction with broadcast media, press briefing/releases, press conferences/interviews, radio/TV appearance
Communications Activity	Translation of research into an accessible and tailored format for user communities i.e. policy briefings, articles within professional newsletters, journals and magazines, promotional flyers for professional conferences and events, creation of a website/web-pages, interactive media, podcasts
Collaboration	Formal financial and/or in-kind collaboration(s) and partnership(s) to enhance the application and co-production of knowledge, equipment/materials, secondment, training, consultancy, access to facilities and/or other resources
People Exchange	Formal people exchange mechanisms such as placements and secondments of research or user community personnel to enhance the application/coproduction of knowledge
Skills	Learning and development opportunities which are project specific and will enhance the economic and societal impact of the research. For example, providing long-life learning opportunities, business and financial awareness, policy and practice awareness, entrepreneurship, communications and management skills.
Spin Out Company	Through the formalisation of a formal business entity seek to make commercial use of the research. May be a corporation, a partnership, association or individual proprietorship.

Key Terms	
Impact	Impact is the fundamental change that happens as a result of an activity. It will generally occur in the long term, often after the activity has finished.
Outputs	Outputs are the direct products of your activities. Counting them helps quantify your outcomes and impact. Examples include the running of events or the number of people undertaking a training course.
Outcomes	Outcomes are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that occur as a result of your activities and outputs. Short-term outcomes should occur within 1-3 years and longer-term outcomes in 4-6 years. Examples include people improving their communication skills or organisations improving their training provision.
Indicators	Indicators are measures that allow progress towards a goal to be tracked.

How To: Justification of Resources

Cost to the proposal	Justification needed	Questions to consider
Staff – directly incurred posts		
Researcher/Technician	Justify why a researcher is needed for the proposed work and why the proposed time input is appropriate.	Is the work of appropriate scientific content or technical difficulty to warrant employing a Research Assistant (RA)? Why has the level requested for the RA been asked for?
Staff – directly allocated posts		
Principal Investigator (PI) Co-Investigator (Co-I) and Researcher Co-Investigator time	The time that the PI and Co-I spend on the grant has to be justified. A PI or Co-I cannot request time for supervising postgraduate research students, writing publications after the end of the project, writing grant applications or peer review.	How much time do you intend to dedicate to the project? Will you be doing all the research yourself? What work packages are the PI and Co-Is involved with and why? Have you factored in enough time to work with project partners, visiting researchers and other collaborators? Are you only managing the staff on the project?
Travel and Subsistence	Give a full break down of the costs in the JeS form for example how many people are travelling, where are they going and why?	If you are planning to visit people to discuss your research, you should explain why those are the right people to talk to and how they can contribute to you meeting your objectives. If you plan to attend conferences, you should comment on the advantages of conference attendance and give an indication of the number you want to attend during the grant, who will attend these and the type you want to go to – national/international/general/subject specific etc. Travel costs incurred when using facilities should be included where necessary.
Other Directly Incurred Costs	Give a description of what has been requested and why? Every item requested must be justified	You must justify the need for any equipment requested If asking for a computer, you need to explain why this is needed and also justify the cost. If you are asking for a desktop and a laptop, then justify why both are needed. You must provide a breakdown of any costs which are included for bulk items.

Cost to the proposal	Justification needed	Questions to consider
Impact	Justify any resources requested to support the Pathways to Impact.	What is each item requested and why do you need it.
Other Directly Allocated Costs	In some cases, such as use of internal facilities and shared staff costs, the basis of the costing does not need to be justified, but the need for the resources does.	You need to explain what these are and why you need to use them.
Estates and indirect costs	Do not need to be justified	
Research Facilities (at Research organisations)	Only time needs to be justified	You need to explain what you are using the facility for and why you need to use this particular facility.
Pooled Technicians	For example workshop or laboratory technicians based at the University. Usually not named	You need to explain why you are using a pooled technician and justify the amount of resource requested.
Infrastructure Technicians	Cost should be displayed separately to Estate and Indirect costs in the other Directly Allocated costs box. This cost does not need to be justified.	
Exceptions		
PhD student (if allowed in call)	Justify why a PhD student is needed for the proposed work	Will a student be skilled enough to tackle the research problems, and will they in all likelihood get a thesis out of it?
Equipment over 50k (if allowed in call)	Justify all equipment over and under £50k. In calls where this is allowed, Research Councils will fund the first £50k of the cost of the equipment at 80% and the remaining amount at 100% FEC.	Why do you need this equipment for this proposed research? What will it be used for and who will be using it?

For large Surveys to be treated on the same basis as Equipment, the applicant will need to confirm that the Survey outputs will provide an ongoing resource for use by the research community and therefore contribute to the national science base. |

Development Checklist

Development Checklist:	
Have I clearly argued what will the research do, to whom or to what, and why?	
Have I clearly formulated the problem with the context of contemporary scientific and theoretical debates? Have I demonstrated the way in which my work will build on existing research and make a contribution to the area?	
Have I established appropriate aims and objectives? Are they clear and concise, do they reflect intellectual aims and practical, attainable objectives?	
Have I provided a well-thought out research design in which there is a reasoned explanation of the scale, timing and resources necessary? Am I being realistic about these? What will my research design allow me to say in the interpretation of anticipated results?	
This proposal will be subject to the critical appraisal of my peers. Am I satisfied that I have fully defended my chosen research design and made it clear why others are not appropriate?	
Have I justified why this is the best team to undertake the proposed research and given sufficient thought to the roles and responsibilities of the individuals involved?	
Have I given a full and detailed description of the proposed research methods? Is there any innovation in the methodology I am planning to use? Am I developing any new methods or using established methods innovatively?	
Have I thought about ethical issues that may arise as a result of what I am planning to do? Are there any sensitive issues or potential problems which need to be addressed? Have I fully consulted on these issues and obtained approval where required.	
Is the proposed approach to project management sensible and robust?	
Have I anticipated potential difficulties? Have I shown that I recognise these and have I discussed how they would be handled?	
Where appropriate, have I identified potential users of this research outside of the academic community; have I involved/consulted them in my planning? Have I arranged for their continuing involvement in the research process in an appropriate way?	
Have I provided a clear and appropriate knowledge exchange strategy for the research involving all interested parties including potential users of the research outside of the academic community?	
Have I outlined appropriate and creative Pathways to Impact (throughout the project) and recognised that it is important to devote sufficient resource to activities which will contribute to impact generation and impact evaluation?	
Have I fully considered all aspects of data management and addressed these in my Data Management Plan?	
Have I provided a bibliography?. Where there is genuinely little or no relevant literature, explain this fully. Panel members and referees will not assume your erudition, they want evidence.	

Sources and Further Links

Je-S Handbook - https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/Handbook/Index.htm

Guidance from Funding Councils

BBSRC Application Guidance - https://bbsrc.ukri.org/funding/apply/application-guidance/

ESRC Guidance for Applicants - https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/]

EPSRC How to Prepare a Proposal - https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/applicationprocess/preparing/writing/

Articles from Research Professional:

Grantsmanship: the basics - https://www.researchprofessional.com/0/rr/funding/know-how/start-here/2014/10/start-here-grantsmanship.html

Get the writing right for the research councils - https://www.researchprofessional.com/0/rr/funding/know-how/big-proposals/2013/7/know-how-how-to-get-research-grant-writing-right.html

How to turn your bid from fundable to funded - https://www.researchprofessional.com/0/rr/funding/know-how/Managing-your-Project/2014/6/how-to-turn-your-bid-from-fundable-to-funded.html

Pimp your language - https://www.researchprofessional.com/0/rr/funding/know-how/early-careers/2015/5/pimp-your-language.html

Information on Impact Planning:

Erasmus+ Impact+ Toolkit - https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/impact-and-evaluation

Fast Track Impact Resources - https://www.fasttrackimpact.com/resources