Making Successful Grant Applications

How to Sell Yourself

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Recently Appointed Academics in Physical Chemistry Meeting

research**support**services
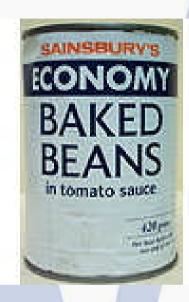
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Summary

- Selling your ideas and yourself
- Funding schemes and sponsors – instructions
- Some recommendations and observations – threads /cohesion
- Research support – what is available?

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Philosophy of Approach - Buying and Selling

The manufacturer is applying to have its beans accepted by you. It is saying "Pick Me"

Assessment Criteria: Quality (Novelty, Taste, Appearance), Impact, Track Record, Value for Money

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Funding Agencies

- **Research Councils**
  - AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC, STFC
- **EU FP7**
  - Cooperation, Ideas, People, Capacities
- **Charities**
  - Leverhulme, Royal Society, Wellcome, CRUK, BHF
- **Industry**
- **Government departments and other agencies (NIHR)**

All different – scientific, commercial, political drivers. Most staffed by helpful people. Plan your own agenda

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Types of Project

- Fellowship
- Research (1st) Grant - lone/multi researchers?
- Travel / Conference
- Network
- Equipment
- Symposia / Workshops

Plan well ahead - deadlines, look at websites.
Need to be clear about the evaluation criteria

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Proposals – Lay Out

- Detailed layout varies across agencies but much of the basic content is the same. Common elements
  – Form (including budget)
  – Track record with/without CV
  – Research environment
  – Background / Importance / State of the Art
  – Aims / Objectives / Hypothesis
  – Programme and Methodology
  – Management
  – Pathways to Impact / Impact Plan / Beneficiaries
  – Justification of Resources
  – Work Plan

Read the instructions. Follow suggested layout. Cohesion

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Observations – Lay Out (1)

> *Never, ever forget the customer.*

- One column or two
- Never use font / margin size below minimum specified
- Avoid large blocks of continuous text. Proposal should be easy to read, split into sections of manageable size.
- Can mix font styles, font sizes on headings for emphasis or to increase readability
- Tables / Diagrams – reasonable size, check numbers, can be very useful
- Attention grabbing opening section – summarise background, aims, impact in ca 3 sentences
- Boxes with "take home" messages

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Observations (2) – Track Record

- Need to show you can deliver the project
- Initial thumbnail sketch of yourself - highlights
- Describe research achievements and their impact as well as work done. Relevance to the proposed project
- Publications, independence, initiative, leadership
- Support assertions with evidence
- Also include paragraphs on CIs, collaborators, named post docs etc

Regularly review track record – strengthen if weak (fellowships)

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Track Record

- Publications and conference presentations
- Collaborations / research visits initiated and resultant papers
- New lines of research enquiry originated and implemented
- Evidence of creative thinking and major challenges overcome
- Project management and supervision experience - outcomes
- Teaching experience
- Workshops / conferences organised or co-organised
- Awards or prizes
- Fellowships or other funding applied for and won
- Examples of career mobility.
- Outreach activities – communicating with non-academic audiences eg schools

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Observations (3) - Background

- Show good grasp of literature – include some of your own stuff as well as others – link to TR?
- Explain gap in knowledge and why important to fill it (now). Answer the question "So what?"
- Explain why your proposal is timely and novel and worthy of investment
- Preliminary results useful but use with care

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Observations (4) - Objectives/Methodology

- Use Aims / Objectives as the structure for the Methodology and Work Plan, should follow from gaps in Background
- Methodology – structure follows Objectives. Explain and justify approaches and what you will do. Must have convincing plan.
- Risk - identify high risk steps and how risk will be managed
  - Preliminary results, literature precedent, collaboration, Plan A, B, C, no critical high risk step at the start
- Project management
  - Describe roles of all participants including collaborators
  - Milestones / decision points / deliverables (Work Plan)

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Observations (5) - Resources

– Consider carefully what you need – don't be greedy or cheap. Itemise classes of consumables, give examples of conferences

– Think what the sponsor can afford

– JoR - ensure each cost line item included, detailed and <u>justified</u>

– BBSRC / EU / Leverhulme cut requested budgets, EPSRC doesn't

You can't go back for more if the money runs out.   You have flexibility in how you spend the money

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Observations (6) - Impact

- Increasing emphasis from RCs / always important for EU and industry
- Increased involvement of users in RC proposals (Industry, Government, other researchers)
- Who will benefit, how will they benefit, what will be done to ensure they do benefit
- Need a credible plan, build on existing initiatives
- Communication with public - having/using existing infrastructure is useful

Many referees sympathetic if you don't perceive all possible avenues for impact. Don't make extravagant claims

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Observations (7) - Letters of Support

- Must show commitment, added value for collaborator or company, value of contribution
- Must be real support and preferably enthusiastic
- Very important for referees
- Avoid a standard letter.
- Write it yourself or suggest content?
- Leave enough time

Why a partner, what will be got out of project, how involved in proposal preparation, what will be contributed

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Observations (8) - Refereeing

- Funder's refereeing process – be familiar with it
- If you can choose your referees:
  - Someone who will give a fair, well-informed assessment
  - Not your mates
  - Avoid conflicts of interest – not same institution, recent collaborator, or beneficiary
- Refereeing process
  - Expert referees selected by Funder (college and yours)
  - Receipt of referees' comments
  - Response to comments (stay calm, seek help)
  - Panels (EPSRC) or Committees (BBSRC/EU)
  - Attend mock panels and get involved with real ones

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Research Support

- Within Universities
  - Different at different institutions
  - Internal refereeing and mentoring
  - Help with budget and content
- Within Funding Agencies
  - Usually staffed by knowledgeable, helpful people
  - Will advise on rules and regulations
  - Some funders or related agencies run workshops
  - Many websites have useful information

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Research Support

To help with all facets of preparing research grant proposals

- Advice on Eligibility

- Advice/assistance on preparing proposals – lay out, content, wording, writing, timing. Can't help with the science

- Undertake project costings - FEC

- Help with electronic proposal submission systems

- Help with navigation through the University approvals process

- Advice on which funding agency to approach and how

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And Finally…..

- Threads
- Selling
- Time

Allen's axiom – when all else fails, read the instructions

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