

Practical Tips for Practitioners Starting to Bid for Funding



Dr Helen Hooper, h.hooper@northumbria.ac.uk Northumbria University
Dr Richard Thompson, r.l.thompson@durham.ac.uk Durham University

There is no 'secret to success' for securing funding, but we have always been asked for exactly this advice whenever we have been successful in a grant application. We did a thought experiment - if we could travel back in time and meet ourselves just before submitting our first grant applications- what advice would have been useful? Here are some practical tips which may help you avoid some of the mistakes we have made.

Internal and final deadlines

- Check the submission deadline time, as well as date!
- Get to know your institution's **internal review and approval processes and timescales**. You will need to build any approval time into your project development.

Project development

- Read the **terms and conditions** of the scheme carefully. If you do not (fully) qualify to lead a bid, could you collaborate with someone who does qualify? Being a co-investigator on a successful bid, beats being the principal/lead investigator on an unsuccessful or ineligible bid and will help establish your track record to qualify as a principal/lead investigator in the future.
- **Collaborate**. Regardless of your role as lead or co-investigator, as well as spreading workload, supportive teams bring together breadth of expertise, offer brilliant development opportunities and are more enjoyable than working solo.
- Develop your project in a field that you are **highly motivated** by - you will likely have to work on it in your own time at some point.
- Be **realistic about project timescales** and think longer-term about when your project will occur with reference to the project completion deadline. Usually you will have to include a project plan/schedule explaining how your project will be successfully completed by the deadline, and it is useful to include date ranges during which different aspects of the work will be completed. There could be several months between project submission and project start;
 - o Delays in review of applications can occur if larger than expected number of applications are received by the awarding body; Recruiting research assistants, especially if they have to be externally advertised via HR can be a lengthy process
 - o If internal ethical review and/or Health and Safety Risk Assessments are needed before data collection begins, then sufficient time should be allowed
- **Avoid undervaluing** your project. Ask for **all the funds that you require** to do the work within the constraints of the awarding scheme. Check what the awarding body does and does not fund (this will vary) and think comprehensively and realistically about what you need to successfully complete your project. This might include the cost of research assistance, equipment or materials, external/internal services, travel and subsistence, dissemination costs, incentives or compensation for research participants etc.





Detailed proposal

- Read the **assessment criteria** carefully. If there is a list of assessment criteria, then make sure you make it as easy as possible for a reviewer to see how your application meets them. E.g. if there are 5 assessment criteria, can you structure your application to have 5 sections, each with a relevant subheading?
- Get some **critical feedback** on your **draft** application **before submission**. Useful feedback need not be from an expert in the field and it may be useful to confirm if your ideas are 'clear' and make sense to a lay person.
- **Word count** is important and varies between awarding bodies. Online application forms may prevent submission of over word count applications; Applications significantly under the word count are more likely to be rejected as they often lack the level of detail or explanation that reviewers need to fully understand the project or how it meets the assessment criteria.
- Review **projects previously funded by the awarding body** and incorporate relevant work into your application for example, explain how your award builds on previously funded research and/or addresses a gap in what has been previously funded.
- **Know the relevant literature**. You will need to demonstrate in your application what is new or different about what you are proposing to do. What **new knowledge** will **you** generate?
- Think about the **impacts** that your work will achieve. Highlight how your work is generalisable beyond your service/department/ Institute and/or discipline area to explain who will be impacted by your work and what change will be achieved- how will practice or understanding be enhanced?
- **Disseminate your findings**- who are the relevant audiences within your own Institute and externally- and what is the most effective way to communicate with them? Presenting your work at the [Practice and Research Network Spring Showcase](#), the [Annual Conference](#) or writing a [Community Knowledge Exchange](#) article will allow you to disseminate your work across an active and collegiate national network of employability practitioners.

If at first, you don't succeed...

- Last- but not least- you will need to be **resilient**. Even when you are confident your idea is novel, impactful, meets the assessment criteria and that you have 'done everything right' in your application, it is quite likely you will be **more unsuccessful than successful**; Competition for funding is fierce and decisions can be marginal. Ask for feedback and take the opportunity to **learn from rejection** and improve your next submission.

Find out more about ASET's annual [research funding](#) schemes and previous projects ASET has funded

Hooper, H. and Thompson, R. (2025) *Practical tips for practitioners starting to bid for funding*, part of the Community Knowledge Exchange series published by ASET, the Work Based and Placement Learning Association, available online to ASET members

