



Maternal and Perinatal Trials Toolkit

Tips for writing grant submissions

General advice

Read the instructions - then read them again!

Make sure that the assessors know that your project is at the cutting edge of research in that area. If you don't tell them they may not know.

Keep the grant **exciting, realistic and simple** – all at the same time! Write so that that someone who knows little about the subject can read and understand it easily.

Don't fill the projects with ideas that are thrown in for fun and not developed. The project needs to be simple and achievable.

If you are experienced at winning grants, you can submit two, but if you are not yet a grant-holder, only put in one grant with yourself as Chief Investigator in any one year.

When you have written your proposal **get someone unrelated to the project to read it**. Do they understand it? What do they think of it – tell them to be tough and honest. If they raise problems, sort these out before your submit so that the assessors do not find them. Again, it is your responsibility to make the submission understandable – so rewrite it until it is!

Hypothesis

Have a good hypothesis that is supported by the latest thinking and debate in the area. This may require a systematic review or at least a systematic approach to what is known and not known. However 'me-too' projects won't get funded.

State the hypothesis in the first couple of lines. Make sure people reading your submission know what you want to do right from the start. Don't make the assessors wade through pages of background before they find out what you intend to do.

Style and presentation

Remember that many assessors will know nothing about your area and even the primary spokesperson may not be very familiar with it. It is your responsibility, not theirs, to make the submission understandable.

Set out the proposal clearly and don't fill the whole page with dense script. Use 12 point font.

Can a busy person get enough of your full message in 5 minutes?

Include enough detail

Set out the details about each aim separately and clearly.

You will need to be able to **demonstrate that you can do what you propose**. Many projects fall down because the proposal is unable to convince assessors that the team could make the new techniques work or that they could recruit the necessary participants to a trial, for example. Prior data are very useful. You need to **provide evidence** that you can recruit, that you can do the tests. If you do not have the skills, are you working with colleagues who do? Are they co-investigators?

Present your methods clearly. Obviously these must be something that you and your team can do.

Always have power calculations that are clear and easily understood. If you don't know how to do these calculations, find someone who does. Stating a sample size without justification gives the impression that you don't know what you are doing. Your submission will be reviewed by statisticians, so make sure your statistical methods and calculations are appropriate and correct.

What NHMRC panels are looking for

When reviewing grants, the assessors will use the following headings: Significance, Approach, Feasibility, Track Record, Budget, Questions for applicants. Have you covered all of these clearly in your proposal?

Significance: Succinctly explain possible/probable/definite clinical significance of the projects and its outcomes - grants are judged on their potential significance to the health of the community. However do not overplay this and if of no immediate clinical significance but of genuine basic physiological or cell biology interest, say so rather than trying to put a clinical relevance spin on it which is clearly false.

Track record: This is EXCEPTIONALLY important. If you want to be a successful grant applicant in the future, you must publish, publish, publish! Your publications must be in the 'best' journals with the highest impact factors. Don't just send them to the local journal because it is easy.

- Committees are often impressed by plenary lectures to invited international meetings, so if you have done this, tell them.
- In the end, money will be allocated to those who will be most likely to succeed.
- Be honest with publications – you will be found out! Do not list unrefereed publications or trivial letters. Some assessors delight in looking up these things.
- In your track record, explain what you have done and why you may have some gaps or be a bit thin – heavy clinical load, had three babies, been dean of the medical school. If things have changed, explain how. Only put down the important things.

Budget: Do not cut this to the bone. Don't overclaim but don't leave anything out that you might need. If you explain clearly exactly why you need more than one person, or high expenses e.g. high cost of supplies) you stand more chance than if you give only vague justifications. It is particularly important to justify the number of staff you request.

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