



Preparing an AHRC application – some useful tips

SUMMARY

- Understand the overall funding context.
- Choose the right funding scheme for your research – make sure your research meets the aims and criteria of that scheme and understand how your proposal will be assessed.
- The proposal is an argument in shorthand, it should provide a clear summary of your research - recognise that success is all about communicating efficiently, not just effectively.
- Do's and Don'ts – top tips and traps to avoid when writing an application
- Know the judges – understand how the reviewers are going to assess your application.

FUNDING CONTEXT

Writing from your own perspective

- This idea is really good
- I really know my stuff
- What matters to me matters to them – the funder's

Multiple perspectives – don't forget

- The funder's
- The discipline's (i.e. peer reviewers)
- The panel's

It is important to realise that these perspectives are constrained by the evaluation process. Understanding this context will help you to write a better proposal, one that does more justice to your idea.

AHRC's mission

Our current mission is described in broad terms in the following document titled, "[Vision and strategy 2007-2012](#)".

SHORTHAND - WRITING THE PROPOSAL

The proposal is an argument in shorthand.

This shorthand should convey:

- That you understand the field of inquiry
- That you have made a case for there being a lack of broader understanding or knowledge
- That you have explained the significance of this lack
- That you have shown how the research questions/problems follow from and if answered/solved will fill this lack
- That you have a plan for answering the identified questions/problems
- That you know what methods you will use and why they are appropriate
- That you are realistic about what is achievable within the timescale
- That you understand how your idea sits in the context of that practice – both through your own work and that of others.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF WRITING APPLICATIONS

*Top Tips in writing your application, **you should***

- Describe the issues, concerns and interests stimulating the work.
- Show that the issues, concerns and interests reflect cultural preoccupations.
- Show that the response to these stimulants is likely to be culturally original.
- Make clear the relationship between the artefact(s) to be realised and those issues, concerns, and interests – what is the research focussing on?
- Explain their likely originality.
- Indicate any knowledge, learning or insight likely to result from the programme of work.
- Provide an account of methodology that suggests a self-conscious, systematic and reflective practitioner.
- As early as possible state the idea, explain why it needs to be tackled and estimate its impact - be bold.
- Remind the reader what you have told them and tell them what you are going to tell them, in particular explain significance.
- Use simple language and language construction.
- Think of all the reasons for attacking your proposal and rebuff them.
- Bear in mind the time it takes to read an application, if you write so the reviewer can get it in one pass you will be giving them more time to consider your proposal.
- Consider a 'Plan B' to manage any risks associated with your research, if there are any – and tell the reviewers what it is.

*Traps to avoid, **you should not***

- Assume that the reader can put two and two together, rather, tell the reader what you want them to understand (explain why).
- Assume the reader knows anything about the subject. Subject specialists will be chosen to review your proposal, but panellists who will moderate batched proposals may not be specialists.
- Have too many aims or objectives - the reader won't have time to stitch loads of objectives together with methodology, outcomes etc.
- Structure the proposal so that the reader has to wait to see the significance of something said earlier, e.g. don't explain how you are going to do something before saying why you want to do it.
- Use jargon – do make it easy for the reader (i.e. reviewer) to understand your idea and why it is important.

FUNDING SCHEMES - GUIDANCE AND ASSESSMENT

Guidance

- The AHRC provides detailed guidance to applicants for each scheme in its [Research Funding Guide](#) and in the online [Je-S Helptext](#).
- Know the relevant areas of the Guide and Helptext well

If you have any questions about the content of the proposal form, the guidance notes, whether your idea fits within a particular scheme, questions about our subject remit and whether your idea sits within it or anything else, please contact a member of AHRC staff. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

For technical assistance in using Je-S and completing the on-line form please contact the Je-S Helpdesk (JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk, or tel: 01793 444164)

Assessment

- Be sure to check out Section 5: *Assessment and Peer Review* of the AHRC's Research Funding Guide, which also outlines how your proposal will be assessed.
- AHRC reviewers submit their assessments via Je-S. The form that they complete asks them to look at:
 - Quality and Importance
 - People
 - Resources and Management
 - Outputs, Dissemination and Impact
 - Overall Assessment

Guidance for reviewers on completing these sections is in the public domain and can be found on [JeS](#). That guidance, however, is structured to match up with the sections of the form as the reviewer works through it online. So whilst this will allow you to have an awareness of how your proposal will be reviewed, do please also refer to the [Reviewer assessment](#) section below.

REVIEWER ASSESSMENT

The reviewers are asked by the AHRC to read your application keeping in mind certain assessment criteria. It will help you in the assessment process if you understand what they are looking for and anticipate any questions they might have about your idea. They will be considering things like:

- Whether the proposed research is the primary consideration of the creative activity that you are undertaking.
- How the proposal stands out - it needs to be a strong idea.
- How the research methods and stages of work will bring about your aims and objectives (you will need to explain the connection).
- How the research sits in context not only with your own practice, but with other research conducted in the field.
- Timescale – can you achieve your aims and objectives in the time you have planned? Do you have the relevant skills to manage the project throughout its lifetime?
- Whether you and any collaborators have the most appropriate skills and experience to carry out the research.

- What, if any, are the risks in doing this research? What activities have you put into place or are thinking about implementing to mitigate or manage them?
- What outputs you are planning? This goes beyond any physical or artistic outputs and should also address outputs associated with documenting the process that was undertaken to carry out the research in the first place. Is there a clear rationale for appropriateness of the form this takes?
- Value for money – is the project too ambitious and runs a risk of not achieving all it sets out to do? Could the outputs be more innovative and creative? Have you justified what activities you are going to engage in and why they are important?

Contacts and Links

Please feel free to contact us on any matter relating to the criteria for this scheme, your eligibility to apply and for any help or advice you might wish to have on preparing a proposal, we are very happy to be of assistance.

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