Competitive grant writing – ECR training

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Helen Griffiths

h.r.griffiths@surrey.ac.uk
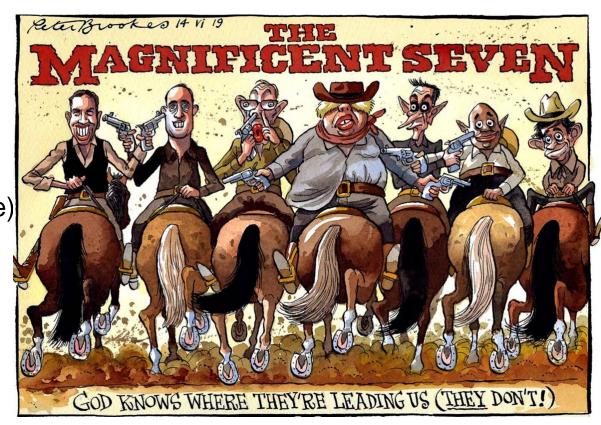
Plan for the Sunrise School

1. Preparing for grant success – ECR

2. Working with and in the UK (Richard Siow) …

and 3. after BREXIT?

(Andreas Kontogeorgos, UK Research Office, by phone)

A successful grant has convinced the funder that the proposed research…

» is focussed, addresses an important question and fits within the funders strategy

» can feasibly deliver new be world-leading discoveries and/or have significant impact

- Is timely
- Is led by the best team of investigators
- Is being carried out in an excellent environment

1. Be informed about the landscape

» What are the emerging hot topics?

» Who is your competition?

» What are the most appropriate funding sources and when are their deadlines?

» Review your proposal against any published selection procedures and criteria

» Understand the interests of potential panel members

Be strategic in your pitch

2. Get in touch with the funders

» Call or visit them.

» Establish that you have understood what the funders are looking for.

» You may also pick up on helpful clues about priorities.

» Talk to people who are known to you and have been successful with the same funder

» It could set you apart from the crowd; especially useful if there is a selection round before applications are sent off to reviewers.

3. Perfect the sales pitch

» Write a really strong abstract

» Grip the reader with the first sentence (ideally placing your proposal in the big picture)

» Make sure the proposal forms a coherent story

» Ensure that the described research will contribute towards the overall goal.
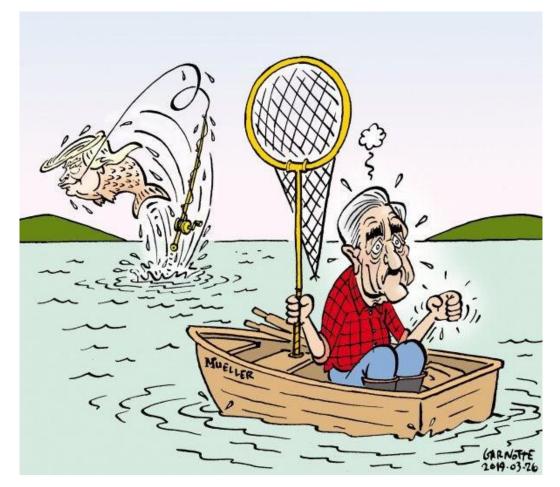
» Tell the readers about you

Grab the attention of reviewers

4. Formulate a strong hypothesis

» Having a strong hypothesis will prevent your application to be seen as either 'a technique in search of a problem' or 'a fishing expedition'.

» Be clear about the problem and your solution.

5. Describe your scientific approach

Be clear on the methodology you intend to use

» Explain why you have chosen your methodology and make its use and applicability clear.

Put in detail

» A high level of detail will convince reviewers you are an expert in your field and have thoroughly thought through your proposal.

Be realistic

» A significant factor you will be judged on is whether the scope of the proposed research is appropriate for the time available, what the results will reveal and whether your costings are realistic.

6. Show your ability to plan

» Include a Gantt chart, showing the different strands of your research and decision points mapped across the time available.

» Map out your future career goals and be clear about how the grants fund that you are seeking will take you there

https://www.vitae.ac.uk/

7. Present preliminary data

» Preliminary data that you have collected yourself will show
- You have the technical ability and technology available
- You can generate and interpret the data required; and
- That your proposed approach works in reality.

8. Edit, edit and edit again

» The word limit is generally restrictive - edit the proposal over and over again - every word counts.

» Make sure there it is free of spelling/grammatical mistakes – your reviewers need an easy read.

» Establish your own peer review circle to help you

As there are likely to be many applications, not following the guidelines may be seized upon as a reason to dismiss one with a minimum amount of work.

Start small

» Start with applications for funding for travel, conferences, equipment.

» Being successful here is evidence of your ability to write persuasively.

» You will be able to include small grant successes in your CV

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- Is timely
- Is led by the best team of investigators – grow your CV
- Is being carried out in an excellent environment – build your collaborative network

Volunteer to get involved with regional, national and international activities

» Be ambitious!

» Volunteer/apply to organise panels or even conference symposia.

» Join committees within your institution or region.

» Become an active member of SFRR-E.

All of these things will help grow your CV and experience.

Philipa Shaw PhD student

Be proactive about gaining experience and be collaborative

» Demonstrated experience of co-working and collaboration is highly valued

» Several research councils expect that doctoral researchers will undertake experience outside their host lab.

» Many societies offer funding for international travel.

» Work with a lab that helps you with a new technique and publish – they may be future collaborators

» COST and RISE programmes may help

REDOXIT
Cross-sectoral and international experience

» RISE programmes support for the exchanges between institutions in the EU Member States and Associated Countries covers only intersectoral secondments.

» Eight people exchanged for a total of 24 months over four years

» Three PhDs awarded

» One MSc awarded

» Three employed in industry

» Two papers published to date

» Three further papers in preparation

» One follow-on grant in submission

https://www.surrey.ac.uk/redoxit

Why build your network?

» they keep you informed - of interesting developments, forthcoming opportunities, good practice, etc.

» they save you time - you don't need to reinvent wheels, you can learn how other people have done things

» they provide support - and we all need this from time to time from like-minded folk

» they help you with your career - in all sorts of ways.

Network effectively at conferences and online

» Always aim to present a paper

» Sit next to someone you don't know e.g. at the conference dinner and now – socialise!

» Plan which conferences to attend because of networking potential.

» Identify key researchers who you want to meet.

» Build relationships and follow up

» Online networking examples include blogs, e.g. LinkedIn, Mendeley, Twitter

https://twitter.com/sfrr_europe