

## **“Tips and Tricks” for success in obtaining NHMRC funding**

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### Panel members:

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### Top Tips for Success:

1. If > 1 grant, aim for different GRPs by topics, teams etc.
2. Match methods and skills. If using new methods be on top of them.
3. Get experts to help you write your grant but, equally importantly, get non-experts to read your grant and make sure they ‘get it’! Do this early, as everyone is busy writing their own grants.
4. Look through examples of successful grant and fellowship applications for ideas on how you can ‘sell’ yourself and your science. These should be available from the Grants Office at your institution.
5. Clarity! Make it easy for the assessors/reviewers. There will be clinicians, academics and researchers reading your grant, often after hours, so your message should be simple and easy to read. Make sure major points from your grant, such as your aims, stand out and that the grant is well set out. The Why? How? and Impact? should be obvious and covered in the first page. Use clear diagrams to emphasise your point.
6. For those who primarily use animal models, include a ‘human’ sub-aim. This can be as simple as validating expression profiles in human samples.
7. Resubmit applications that were unsuccessful in the previous rounds. Do not give up! Most grants are unsuccessful the first time. Listen to your assessors (do not dismiss their comments), address any concerns raised and carefully re-write to clear up any misunderstandings.
8. Design your project to address one of the biggest problems, challenges or unknowns in your field. Simply proposing to study an interesting model or your favourite gene/protein, that might be important for a particular process, won’t cut it. Think about the big picture.
9. Don’t overlook the importance of the synopsis and key words.
10. Utilise the ‘Relative to Opportunity’ where appropriate. Be very explicit as to what the career interruption was and, most importantly, how this has impacted on you and your research output.
11. Feasibility! Good grants are often simple but have good science and researchers involved are within their ‘comfort zone’ so the project is more likely to be deemed achievable to reviewers. Demonstrate that you have published in the research area that you are proposing and you are playing to your strengths.
12. If branching out from your core research area, find good collaborators that are strong in that field.

13. Present good, strong pilot data. This will help with Point 11.
14. Try to learn to love the grant writing process! It takes up a lot of your professional life and should be viewed as an opportunity to sell an idea that you are passionate about.
15. Maximise your track record – Publish, Publish, Publish!
16. Utilise important conferences in your field (e.g. SRB Meetings) to make your research area known to potential grant assessors/reviewers and grow your reputation. Also great for finding collaborators and referees.
17. Make sure your budget is realistic but also gives value for money. For example, don't claim for a postdoctoral position when a technician or research assistant could competently do the job.
18. Don't underestimate the 'power' of power calculations! This helps demonstrate feasibility, justifies the number of animals being used and assures the assessors that results obtained will be statistically valid.
19. Have honest conversations with mentors/senior researchers re your track record and when you should (and shouldn't) apply for specific grants and fellowships.
20. Get lots of advice from people who know your project and are supportive but, just as importantly, get advice from people that you know will be critical (and perhaps even scare you a little...).
21. Make sure you have a Google Scholar Account and up-to-date university profile page. This is particularly important for fellowship applications.
22. Start preparing early and thinking about the people you want to build your team.
23. Understand the scheme you're applying for and make sure that you are eligible.

#### Top Things to Avoid:

1. Avoid overly pushing translation to the extent of not being believable. Don't try to disguise basic research as translational. Discovery research and fundamental science is funded by the NHMRC. Be clear about why the fundamental research you propose is necessary.
1. Avoid having weak team members, relative to opportunities.
2. Avoid having subsequent Aims highly dependent on earlier Aims.
3. Avoid aims that are too general.
4. Do not expect your assessors to simply trust that you know what you are doing or that it is a good idea to do it. Be explicit and give detail about what you want to do and how you are going to do it and why it must be done. Clearly state why your proposed experiments are the best possible for addressing your hypothesis and why you and your team are the best possible people for the job. Do not be vague or ambiguous at any point in your application.
5. Don't underestimate the rebuttal process. Try not to be too defensive and address important points raised as thoroughly as possible.
6. Don't leave grant writing to the last minute (see Point 22 in 'tips')!
7. Don't assume the reviewer is an expert in your field and knows the specific jargon/acronyms. Panels can have very broad areas of expertise.
8. Don't try and second guess what the panel wants.
9. If unsure of a particular methodology, don't include it. You must know the techniques that you are proposing to use and their potential limitations (see also Point 2 in 'Tips').
10. Don't try and be a 'square peg in a round hole' (see Point 11 in 'Tips').
- 11. Don't give up!**