

Grant writing and project management tips for ECRs

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1. Get on first name terms with your research officer

Most University Schools and Research Centres have a research office and an officer whose job it is to link research funding schemes with people in their team who might be able to apply for those funds

Introduce yourself, tell them what kind of research you do and sign up for email lists, grant information sessions, grant readership schemes

2. Consider your funding options

Fund yourself -> Fellowships e.g., DECRA, NHMRC emerging leaders fellowships.

Developing or testing a theory or process -> Australian Research Council

Doing this with industry partners -> Industry funding, ARC Linkage or NHMRC partnerships

Any intervention (including music / arts-based programs) -> MRFF or NHMRC

Population-specific funding schemes e.g., Dementia Aust, Diabetes Australia, Australian Rotary, Million Minds mental health research

Hospital foundation small grants

State Gov health grants

Arts Council partnerships

Examples of funding I was awarded as an ECR (Postdoc and then Lecturer in 2010)

Year	Title of Completed Grant or Contract	Granting Agency	Amount \$000	Chief Investigators	Percent and Nature of your Contribution
2011	Monitoring change in psychosocial variables during residential rehabilitation for substance use disorders (Logan House project)	Alcohol and Drug Foundation of QLD	32	Dingle	100%; liaison with ADFQ and research supervision of PhD student / RA
2010	Clinical Indicators of Alcohol Detoxification and Treatment Trial	Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation	20	Dingle & Loxton	70% wrote the grant application and leading the research project with statistical advice from Dr Loxton
2008-2010	Innovative brief treatments for alcohol dependence	UQ Postdoctoral Fellowship (Women .5FTE)	20	Dingle	100%
2006	APS Theory into Practice grant	Australian Psychological Society	5	Dingle	100% design and implementation of project; reports to relevant agencies.

Don't underestimate the value of a small grant!



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

UQPsychology



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

SCHOOL OF MUSIC



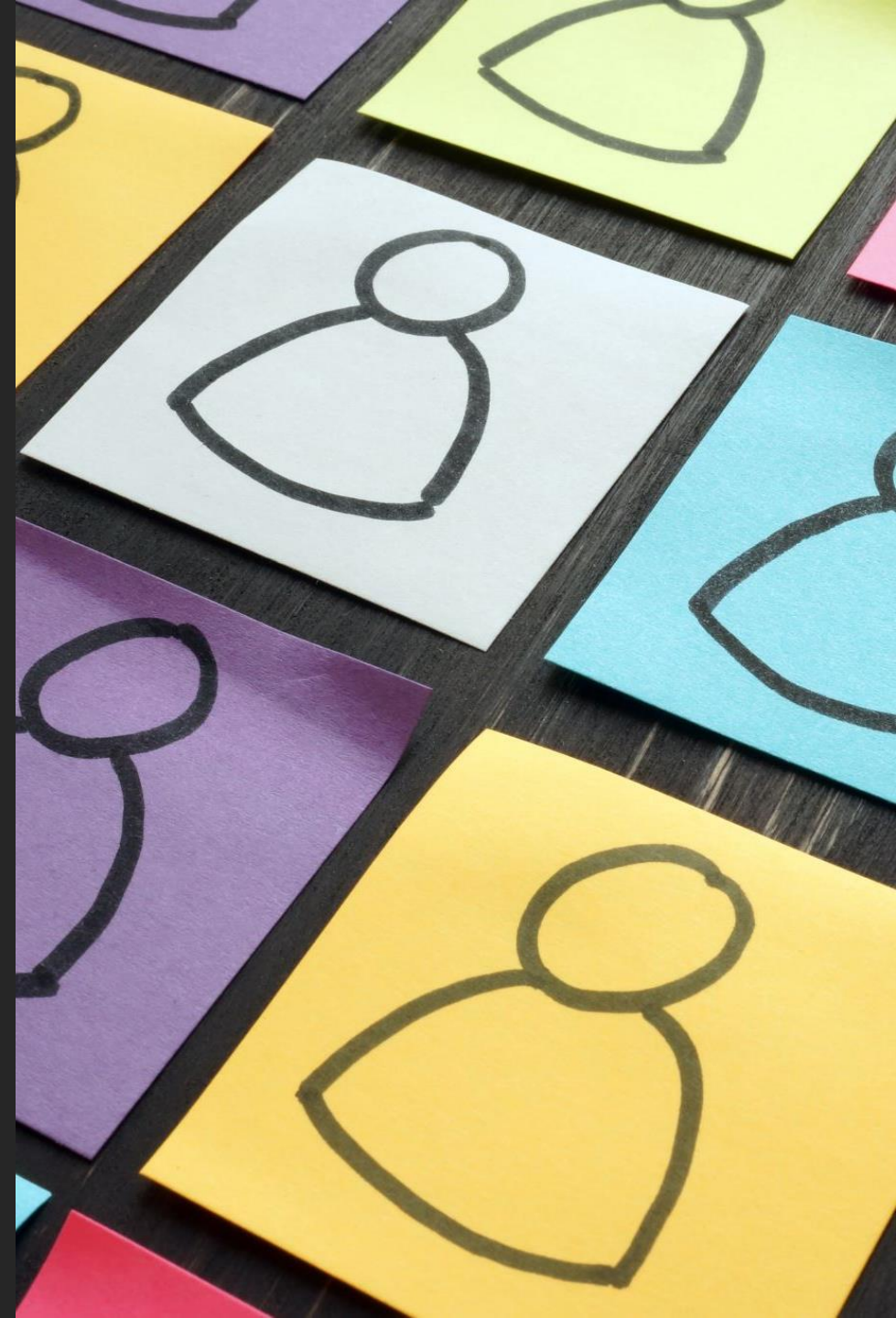
3. Read the instructions carefully!

Make sure you address the key aims of the call and the selection criteria. Use their key words and headings to make it easy for the assessors to find the information they need to rate your application.

Give attention to each criteria in proportion to its weighting in the assessment, e.g.:

- Scientific Quality (50%)
- Significance of the expected outcomes and/or Innovation of the concept (25%)
- Team Quality and Capability relevant to the application and relative to opportunity (25%)
- May also be benefit or feasibility criteria
- May be community and consumer partnership criteria

There are videos on the NHMRC website to guide peer reviewers => this will give you an insider's view of how your application is being assessed





4. Build your team

Think about the research questions and methods, and the expertise that you need to do it.

Invite them early and make sure they are eligible for the call and have up to date track record in the relevant system (e.g., Sapphire or RGMS) and send them examples of the track record sections you need.

Better if you have an established record of successful collaboration, but not essential for all team members

Good to have some high-profile researchers in your team, but don't just 'name drop' – make sure they can make a meaningful contribution and have capacity to do this

Good to have some early career researchers (PhD stipend?) and show how your proposal will help build research expertise

5. Why does your proposal matter?

Typically, grant schemes are funded by Australian taxpayers' money, so don't frame your proposal in terms of questions you're interested in, especially if it's a niche topic

Frame it in terms of a broader issue that is of importance or potential relevance to a wider population

Your proposal is going to be competing with many other excellent proposals for a limited pool of funding so make sure your 'why' is compelling

6. Think BIG!

It's easier to convince assessors that your research will have impact if it's applied at scale, across several sites, Australia-wide or even internationally.

This is where networking through AMPS, ICMPC, GAP2, SIMMposium, and online networks can work in your favour



7. The first page is critical



Outline the problem



Why we urgently need to fix it



What's lacking in current research



Your innovative solution



What you are planning to do



Your team and their proven expertise to do this



The expected impact of the findings.

8. Body of the proposal

Expands on the key points made on page 1, adds evidence, pilot data, participant feedback etc.

Make paragraphs short and leave white space on each page so the assessors can digest the text

Use figures to show the flow of phases, stages, participants, also the GANT chart

Use a table if you have multiple measures and methods at various time points

Use references sparingly, max 1 page, preferably less



9. Time frames and deadlines

~6 months out: building the jigsaw puzzle of a grant application in **two places in parallel**: online portal and offline documents that can be circulated and edited.

Give an **early draft to readers** / grant development workshops and ask for constructive feedback

Give **industry partners** plenty of warning about letters of support and contributions

Be prepared to revise the proposal multiple times so that it makes sense and convinces people from a range of perspectives. You may get conflicting feedback from various co-investigators. Use your diplomacy skills and keep communication channels open.

~2 months out: Category 1 grants have early deadlines when **minimum data** is due to be submitted on the grant portal.

~1 month out: Internal deadline is to your institution's research office for eligibility checks and feedback

External deadline is when you or your research office submits your grant to the scheme



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

You're in good company. Most grants are given ratings, and many 'fundable' proposals don't end up funded because the pool of money isn't deep enough.

If your grant isn't funded, it doesn't mean it's not a good idea

Repurpose it for another scheme or publish it as a protocol paper?

Ask for feedback and see if you can address any weaknesses

Continue to collect data and build your case

Try again!





Project Management



Assemble your team (months 1-3)

Develop

If you have one or more paid positions, develop the job ads and get them approved (HR / Head of Organisational Unit) and selected asap.

Invite

Invite a steering group of researchers, end users, partner organization reps, etc, and schedule meetings in (e.g., quarterly)

Form

Form a working team who meet weekly – the engine house of the project

Co-design phase (months 1-3)

You may have aims and research questions / hypotheses but ideally you should collaborate with end-users to discuss the details of your proposed methods for promotion, recruitment, data collection, intervention, etc



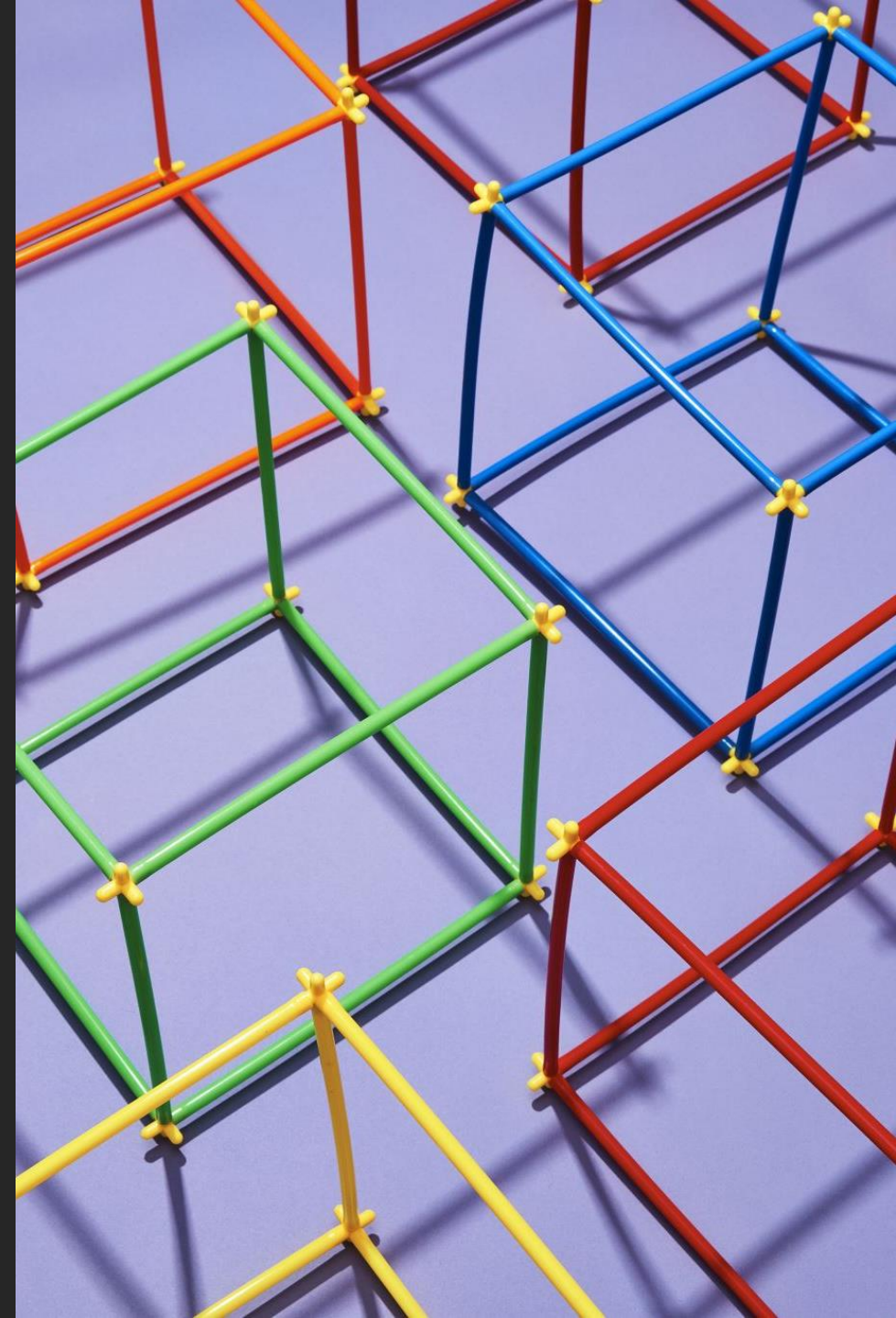
Protocol, ethics, IP, governance (months 1-6)

These are mostly done concurrently, but often different versions of the same information is required by different offices.

Check the ethics committee deadlines and meeting dates (often advertised on websites).

Pre-registration of protocol on open science framework or ANZ clinical trials registry, etc

Allow 6 months+ for projects involving more than one site, pre-existing IP, anything complicated



Training and materials

(months 3-6)


Need	If you are running an intervention, you will need to provide training to the facilitators
Prepare	Prepare manuals, slides, other resources
Schedule	Schedule training dates, book venues, arrange time for regular supervision
Promote	Promote the training to the relevant facilitators

Get your systems ready (mths 4-6)


Registration, collection of contact details? (excel spreadsheet?)



Data collection system (? qualtrics, survey monkey, redcap, etc)



Attendance or engagement records?



Training and supervision logs?

A row of wooden figures, with one red figure standing out among many white ones. The figures are arranged in a line, receding into the distance. The red figure is positioned in the center of the frame, drawing attention. The background is a soft, light blue gradient.

Promotion & recruitment (months 6+)

ONCE ETHICS HAS BEEN APPROVED,
PROMOTE THE PROJECT TO RELEVANT
MEETINGS, WEBSITES, NEWSLETTERS,
ORIENTATION EVENTS, SOCIAL MEDIA,
RADIO AND TV MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Intervention phase (mths 6-18?)



DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF
THE RESEARCH GOALS
WHEN THE
OPERATIONAL SIDE IS
BUSY



REPORT DATES



SUBMIT ABSTRACTS
AHEAD FOR
CONFERENCE
PRESENTATIONS



EARLY PUBLICATIONS
E.G., PROTOCOL PAPER,
METHODOLOGY OR
FEASIBILITY PAPER,
BASELINE DATA

Feedback loop

Give feedback to your participants and partners in a form that they can easily understand.

Fine tune procedures based on how the project is working in real world conditions





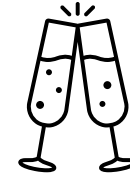
Analysis, data management, reporting

Once data are cleaned, checked, and analysed, create a data dictionary and store data in an online repository e.g., UQ RDM or OSF

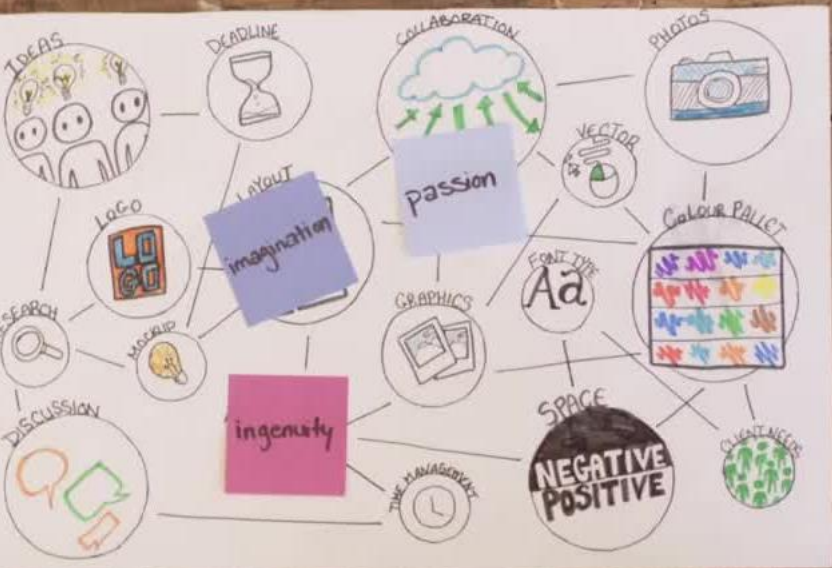
Keep backup copies of data!

Clear communication about authorship of outputs

Celebrate all the milestones



- ❑ Ethics and governance approval
- ❑ First recruit
- ❑ First cohort of intervention
- ❑ End of data collection
- ❑ Presentation of findings
- ❑ Student thesis milestones
- ❑ Publication submissions
- ❑ Project outcomes



communication
efficiency