Writing an ARC grant – some tips / thoughts

Prof John Grundy

SUCCESS

Outline

- Should I apply for external research funding?

- Should I write an ARC grant?

- Schemes & Rules

- Key elements (ARC):
  - Resources needed
  - Track record
  - Project description
  - ROPE
  - Budget

- Some common gotchas / key issues

Should I apply for external research funding?

- Academic staff on permanent contract

  - If "research active" – YES – its part of your job!!!

    - And GETTING some $ is part of it…
  - ARC Options: DP, LP, DECRA, Future Fellow, LIEF, Laureate…

- Research / academic staff on fixed term contract

  - If want academic career – YES!!!

  - If want new contract – YES!!!

  - If want industry / R&D career – maybe…

  - DECRA, Future Fellow

- PhD student

  - For the future…

Should I apply for an ARC grant?

- Maybe…!
    - What do you want to do?
    - Which scheme best suits your needs?
    - Are you "competitive"?
    - Do you need partner(s)?

- ARC schemes are not the only ones…
    - CRC, Government, Industry, International, Consulting…
    - While "Category 1" (incl ARC) grant $ is prestigious, its NOT the only nor necessary "best" for you…
    - "All money spends just as good…" (some even better!)

Choose your scheme…

- Centres – ARC Centres of Excellence ("CoE") - < 5%

- Fundamental – Discovery
    - Discovery Projects ("DP") - ~20% success rate (!)
    - Future Fellow ("FF") – may be last round??? -~10%?
    - DECRA ("DF") - ~10%
    - DORA (part of DP) – 1.0%?? ☺
    - Laureate ("LF") – 0.5%? ☺

- Industry collaborative – Linkage
    - Linkage Project ("LP") - ~30-35%
    - Industry transformation funds – "hubs" - ?? (v low)
    - Infrastructure funds – LIEF - ?? (low-ish?)

Basic "Process"

- READ THE FUNDING RULES & read some examples

- START EARLY – 3-6 months BEFORE the SR deadline

- GET ADVICE – are you competitive??, right focus, the team needed, resources needed, right "sales pitch"…

- Project – 6, 8, 10 pages – including why, what, how, likely outcomes/impact, research environment

- Track record / ROpE – your career to date, publications, impact to date, recent / current / proposed funding; WHY you??? (Fellows especially); "Research Environment"

- Budget incl. justification

Then…

- Get it checked / reviewed;

- revise;

- checked/reviewed;

- revise;

- get it proof-read / final review / compliance check;

- get it signed off (pls give the Dean / ADR time to read!)

- cross fingers!!!

General Principles

- Its really, really competitive – what makes yours stand out??? If it doesn't, then…

- Is there a degree of "excitement" about the proposed work?

- Is it methodologically sound? A clear advance on state of the art? Solid outcomes likely (papers, impact, …)?

- An appropriate team: CI(s), PI(s), RA(s), PhD(s)

- Can a knowledgeable person understand it?

- EVERY part is critical – even if worth 20% vs 40%...

Project

- This is the bit for most focus & time/energy on – but don't let it take TOO much (as other sections CRITICAL too)

- What is new, exciting, "fundable"??? WHY should this be funded??? MUST ANSWER THIS!

- Key idea -> Research questions -> Key related work/state of the art/limitations -> approach -> plan -> personnel -> outcomes & impact

- My approach: sketch it out; think about/get feedback; focus on articulating key idea, my RQs & approach, rough plan

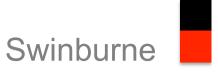- Then flesh out significance, impact, key related work

Project (cont)

- Research Environment - we have some SUT / FICT text, but need to tailor to your research focus

- Project plan – show its not half-baked but limited space for details

- I like to say for key tasks/plan items e.g. "We will build on …" to show drawing on own/PI/related work

- Be positive/promising e.g. "We will invent new …" vs "We plan to …" or "We hope to …" (!) or "Will plan to research"

- Be bold e.g. "this is critically important …" "this will significantly advance…" "this will be a major …"
    - The taxpayers don't want mediocre results ☺

Track Record

- Need to "sell" self as best you can, but…

- …you either have it or you don't

- Carefully select best 10 papers & justify (in 30 words!) – get advice!! List the rest accurately, precisely.

- Itemise key contributions to date succinctly, objectively

- Show clearly why YOU should be funded – esp for DECRA, FF!

- Can reuse this bit ☺ - BUT tailor to EACH application e.g. * items, key achievements relative to each project

Budget, Current Funding, Reports etc

- Have to give a detailed budget, rationale for requested $, list of recent/current/applied-for funding

- Ask only for what you need; don't try and "pad" out

- Carefully cost & justify – PhD, RA, equipment, travel

- Be conservative on travel! Get advice on equipment

- Include all required funding

- Provide realistic reports on current projects

Common Gotchas

- Budget problems – SR helps but CHECK CAREFULLY

- Format problems – ditto

- Invalid requests, format – these result in AUTO reject!!!

- Not strong enough track record – improve it first; get a lead/2nd CI / PI with excellent TR

- Same old, same old proposed project – get feedback; focus on "interesting" aspects; refocus

- Unconvincing/unrealistic outcomes (impact, publications)

- Inappropriate resources / "padding"

If at first you don't succeed,…

- Perseverance is an under-rated virtue!
  - Not just grants - publishing & promotions & research too!!!

- E.g. I have 38 competitive grants (plus several R&D consulting)

- BUT:
  - At least 25 rejections!! (3 LPs, 3 NERF (DP), 15 (!) Marsden (super-DP), …)
  - Including at least 3-4 recycles -> successful…

- Good luck!

- All the best!

- Start NOW!

- ASK FOR HELP!!