Loneliness & Social Isolation in Mental Health Research Network

Tips Over Tea – Funding

In November 2021 some of the Co-investigators of the Loneliness and Social Isolation in Mental Health Research Network (LSIMHRN) and Principal Investigators from some of the Plus Projects funded by LSIMHRN got together for an informal sharing of tips for getting funding. Here are the dos and don'ts that we came up with – we hope you find them useful.

What NOT to do….

Question: *"What was the most unhelpful thing you've done (or seen others do!) for a funding application (i.e. what have you regretted doing)?"*

Planning and preparing for your bid	Writing & submitting your bid	Interviews	After the decision
Being overly ambitious	Writing my dream project in impenetrable language	It was in a business accelerator context, but when asked how we would make use of follow-on funding for our tech development projects I watched a group say they would use it to go on holiday as their tech was already as good as it could be	Getting too invested, caring too much!

Applying to the AHRC when it blatantly should have been the ESRC...	Not putting in details that seemed so obvious/implicit to me - missing them out led the reviewers to question if we knew what we were doing :(		Don't get too disheartened by negative feedback - reviewers are coming from all sorts of perspectives, prejudices. Sometimes the time has not come quite yet.
Someone else put together a very good grant application, but misread the rules and used the wrong form - and the application was not then considered because it was 2 pages too long - so check rules on submission carefully!	Left it very close to the deadline to apply and then rushed the application		
Not checking the total amount in a funding call and how many projects they wanted to fund - so putting loads of work into a bid that was probably always too big and too pricey to get funded	NIHR advise that you should not leave the Summary boxes to the end as often grant peer reviewers rely on these to appraise the grant (in the panel meeting) because they may have read the full draft so long ago		
Got an expert in a relevant subject off the internet because he looked relevant and impressive, with lots of funding already, who turned out to have v different ideas about everything from the rest of us, resulting in discord throughout the study	Make sure that there is sufficient time for submission; rushed applications rarely work (unless you have a bid you can recycle).		
	Not printed it out to proofread it		
	Submitting a day late at Stage 2		

What you should do….

Question: *"What are your top tips for getting funding? What's your strategy? What's associated with success? What do you wish you'd known when applying?"*

Planning and preparing for your bid	Writing & submitting your bid	Interviews	After the decision
Looking for the right funder - not necessarily a prestigious one but one that fits. Particularly for cross disciplinary funding it can be very challenging to find the right funder.	Write the summary boxes first	Remember that being shortlisted can be a significant success - it should be presented to others as such.	Don't give up on a good idea: Persistence is key - tweaking by taking on useful feedback and if still convinced it's a good idea and others are too, then submit it again - funding could be at 3rd, 4th, 5th attempt.
Have a really mixed co-investigator team to bring lots of different valuable perspectives, and bring their own language into the application to communicate to each community reading the application.	Get peers outside your field to look through your application (well before the deadline)		
Have some feasibility study data behind you to give the funders confidence you can deliver.	Highlight your track record; evidence your ability to do further work with experience of past work. Build a team that maximises this.		
Timing is key - whether the topic is on the agenda.	Endorsements from end-users		
Modify the bid for different funders e.g. when recycling a bid.	Formatting it carefully: using bold for aims, using bullet points		

Think carefully before going for very high-status big funders - the odds may not be that great, time could be spent better elsewhere.	Left-align the text as it is easier to read than justified text for those with visual impairment		
Working with people with lived experience right from the start, in the application as well as for the project.	Proofreading		
Think what perspective is likely in reviewers e.g. a social science vs. a health funder.	If you have a series of studies planned in one grant, make sure it is clear how they inform each other or they look a bit tacked together		
You don't necessarily need to lead the whole grant - you could lead on particular work-streams (especially for European grants)	Try and have a narrative about who you are, your trajectory.		
Collaborators are essential to get right - take all opportunities to network, disseminate - may result in valuable invitations to be part of other people's grants.	Feedback from other readers. Advisory groups at the application stage, particularly comprising stakeholders		
Establish yourself by writing very short commentaries on topics that you may want funding for.	Not overpromising		
People may advise you to carve out your career as an expert in just one thing, but this can be overstated - it can be helpful to be alive to what are current	Make the scientific case, policy case, and lived experience case		

priorities, respond to the challenges and opportunities of the current context and try and apply your skills to new priorities and questions.			
Don't skimp on PPI (though can be hard to get funding for this).	Benefits of open documents to facilitate really working collaboratively		
Some people make direct approaches to funders e.g. to check the proposal is in scope.	What's the gap in knowledge, what's the research question, how will you answer the question, who cares?		