

*MRC-NIHR Methodology Research
Programme – panel member perspectives*

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Structure of this talk

- Introduction including personal ‘credentials’
- Main issues, including dos and don’ts for grant applications:
 - Generally
 - Methodology Research Programme (MRP) Panel
- Conclusions – personal reflections
- Questions

Introduction – panel experience

- Chair of MRC-NIHR MRP Panel 2007-2014
- Member/Chair of panels for NIHR, MRC, HCRW, HRB (Ireland), Marie Curie etc, mostly applied HSR but including (methodological) SWATs
- Chair of MRP Advisory Group 2018-
- Comment/internal peer review on applications (grants, fellowships & promotions) and participate in ‘mock interviews’ on both sides of the table

Personal experience as 'PI'

- Limited, and historical!
 - Mostly 'de facto' rather than formally pre-planned, and to varying degrees all effectively 'joint PI'
 - Two applied HSR trials; one (pre-MRP) Methodology study; one NIHR Research Fellow after my SI Award
 - Much more often lead quantitative methodologist for large multidisciplinary trials/programme grants/infrastructure funding (e.g. CLAHRC)
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Main issues

- Define PI
- Portfolio options
- Issues for grants generally
 - clarity, clarity, clarity ...
- Issues specific to MRP

Definitions and portfolio options

- Define 'PI'
 - CI/PI
 - Joint leads ('horizontal' or 'vertical')
 - Lead for substantial component of very large grant (programme/infrastructure)
- Methodological or applied
- Conventional is fine, and so is a mixed economy

General issues for (clarity of) grant applications

- Abstract for general/lay audience
 - Write clearly, with clear-cut distinction from scientific abstract in language, presumed knowledge, jargon ...
- Be clear about what you will actually do, not just why the issue being addressed is important
- Be realistic about timescales and personnel needs, don't just go for the maximum time/costs

Grant applications generally (ctd.)

- Ensure appropriate expertise in team
 - Where they are from is less important than why they are needed
 - Sufficient PI time is crucial
 - Specific issues for NIRGs (e.g. you must clearly lead within your area of expertise)
- Avoid having too many co-applicants with (too) small contributions

Grant applications generally (ctd.)

- Focus especially on the Abstract and Case for Support, with the following most important:
 - What specifically will be done
 - Why each element is important, including how it fits into your overall plan and schedule
 - When will it be done and with what resource
- All sections need attention, but some will be seen as more remediable than others

Methodology Research Programme – specific issues?

- Mostly nothing very different from those applicable generally, but features to note are:
 - Methods development and methods into practice
 - Highlight notices
 - Crucial to give full methodological details including precisely how they will be applied
 - Be aware, though, that MRP covers methodology generally, including in its membership

Conclusions – personal reflections

- Be less concerned about ‘conventional’ avenues than playing to your own strengths and interests
- Don’t be dissuaded from pursuing PI status of one kind or another by others’ narrow perspectives
- Do persevere, recognising that success can take many forms!

Conclusions – personal reflections (ctd.)

- Strike the right (personal) balance between ambition and realism, even if just in terms of grant source/size and timing
- Peer review experience is invaluable, committee work (e.g. grants/ethics/TSC) even more so; the ‘chicken and egg’ aspect of this is ameliorated by ...
- ... a mixed portfolio (in all dimensions), which in any case always seemed a good plan to me!