Resilience and research: experiences of applying for project funds

Professor Sheila Payne

Palliative and End of Life Care Research Group

University of Sheffield, UK

Purpose of session

- Two examples of challenging projects to get funded – testing resilience
- Principles in applying for research project funding

Challenging projects to get funded

A study of childhood bereavement services

- 8 submissions before it got funded
- Reasons for rejection:

  too medical

  not medical enough

  not a trial of an intervention

  self evident that bereavement support is a good thing or not required!

  not about ‘diseased’ children

  very few bereaved children therefore not a problem
- Finally funded by the Clara Burgess Trust

Challenging projects to get funded

A study of older Chinese people's knowledge about cancer and palliative care

- 3 submissions before it got funded
- Reasons for rejection:

  very few Chinese people in UK – therefore not an important problem

  no outcome measures

  not a suitable method – a questionnaire
- Finally funded by The Health Foundation

Principles in applying for research project funding

1. The importance of a good research question
2. Selecting appropriate methods and providing a convincing rationale for their use
3. Do a literature review
4. Do a pilot or feasibility study
5. Build a research team with all the skills needed
6. Establish access to your sample
7. Form collaborations with relevant stakeholders
8. Understanding the political and policy context
9. Ensure the proposal fits with the remit of the funders
10. Cost the study realistically
11. Respond promptly to new opportunities
12. Revise proposal in response to feedback

Designing a study

- Decide on the focus of your research ‘nurturing a good idea’
- How to develop a research question?
- Operationalising your ‘idea’ into a workable research question

Seeking research funding

- Sources of funding – selecting the right one for your proposal
- Types of funding
- Being competitive

Sources of Funding

Local

- Within your organisation
- Trust
- Cancer Network
- Charities
- Commercial organisations

National/International

- Research Councils
- Government agencies
- Pharmaceutical companies
- Medical and other charities
- Professional bodies
- European Union

Accessing Sources of Funding

- Library
- Internet
- Journals and newspapers
- Charities
- Talk to ‘friendly’ academics
- Collaboratives – CECO and COMPASS
- Your boss!

Types of funding

- Responsive
- Commissioned research
- Development of Research Skills

Preparing a proposal

Targeting your proposal

- Start with an idea, rather than a funding body.
- Try to discover as much as you can about the research priorities of your prospective funding source.
- Discuss your research ideas with the funders at an early stage.

Preparing a ‘good’ proposal

- Good and original ideas
- Search the literature
- Operationalise your research question(s)
- Be modest in your aims
- Build the research team
- Be clear about your methods
- Follow all instructions to the letter

Writing your research proposal

- An explicit title
- State objectives
- Short background
- Long and very explicit methods
- How will the research team's skills be used?
- 'Sell' yourselves – why are you the right people to do this research?
- Outcomes and dissemination
- User involvement
- Time plan

Costing your study

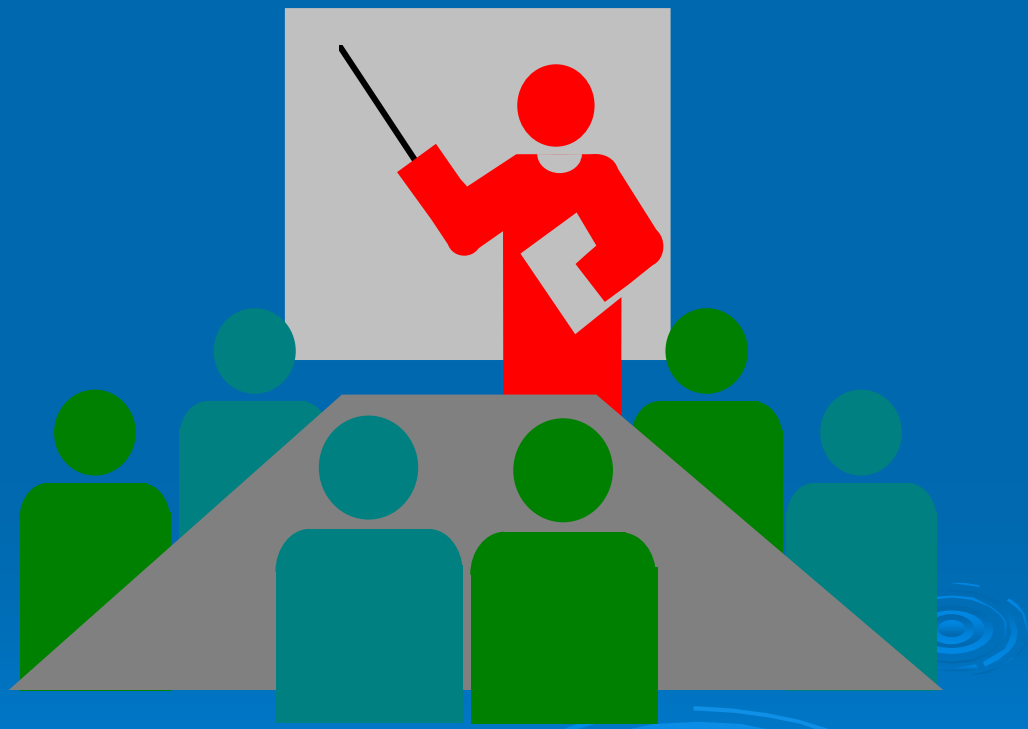
- Consult an accountant
- Include all your likely costs - staff, equipment, recurrent costs, travel, etc
- Add overheads only if this allowed (read the small print!)
- Justify all your costs in the proposal
- Do not over/under estimate costs.

The process of submitting research proposals

- Setting the research agenda
- ‘Calls for proposals’
- Outline proposals
- Invitation to submit full proposal
- Competitive tendering

How funding decisions are usually made

- Initial review
- Peer review and methodological review
- Main grant committee
- Grading of proposals
- Funding decision
- Feedback

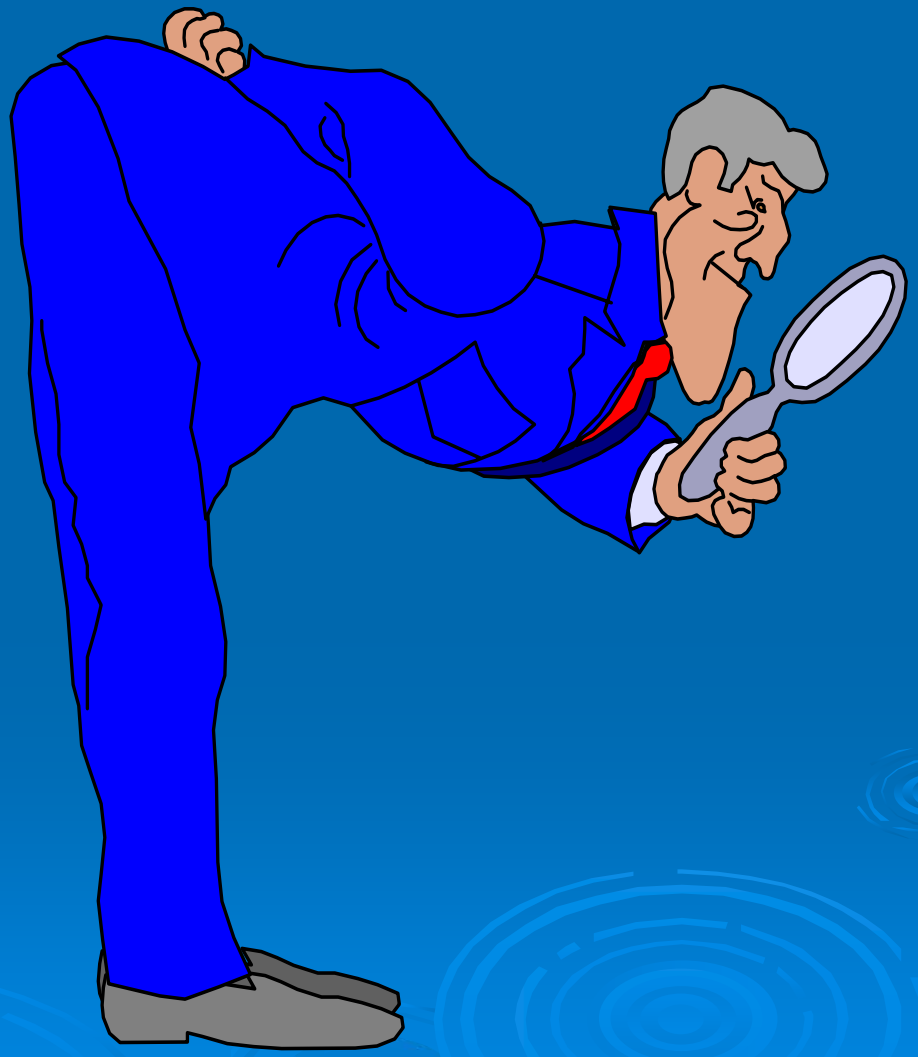


Criteria for funding decisions

- Good ‘science’
- Innovative, original and timely
- Relevance to funding body
- Appropriate methods
- Feasible in time scale
- Expertise of research team
- Evidence of user consultation/involvement
- Good value for money

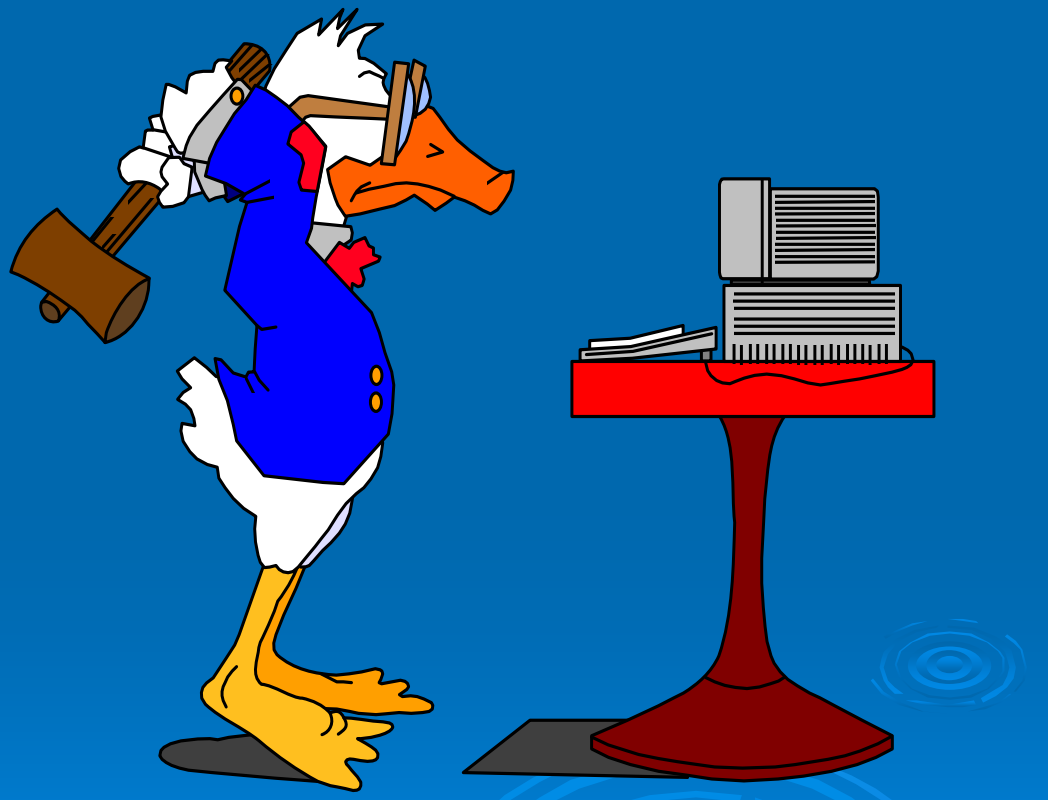
Start Small

- Start with small study
- Always do a literature review
- A pilot study - to learn about research, test the feasibility of the design, recruitment and measures.



Coping with rejection

- Ask for feedback
- Carefully consider the feedback
- Talk to independent people (not just your friends)
- Re-work your proposal in the light of the feedback



Coping with rejection

- Review
- Revise
- Resubmit

Never give up!

- Apply to a different funding body
- Add to the skills of your research team
- Add to your own skills
- Do an unfunded pilot study
- Publish a literature review