

10 tips for health research

FUNDING SUCCESS

1. Do your homework

Research your funding source, read the guidelines carefully and contact the grant programme manager if you have questions. Are you eligible and within remit? Has your research question (perish the thought) already been answered, or a similar study funded?



6. Methods address the objectives

Your aims and objectives should be few and clear. Then describe methods that clearly meet these objectives - proposals often fail at this step. Keep the methods comprehensible and relevant. Explain how your outcome measures will fulfil the objectives.



2. Give yourself plenty of time

You will need several months to build a good funding application: drafting your proposal, assembling a team, getting colleagues' or RDS advice, costing, internal peer review, approvals and signatures. Set a personal submission deadline several days before the real deadline.



7. Make it achievable

Convince the funder you can deliver: you have a team, structure and timetable for managing your project, which will work like a well-oiled machine. One area where studies often fail is in recruiting enough participants, so have a realistic, evidenced recruitment plan.



3. Explain why

Why this project? Why now? Why you? What is the size and importance of the problem, and what will your study add? Most funders ask themselves these questions. Applications that shine tell the story of the right project, at the right time, done by the right people.



8. Make it understandable

Your proposal will also be reviewed by experts in other fields. You don't want busy reviewers to stop because your proposal is baffling or boring, but this is a frequent complaint. Avoid technical language in the plain-English abstract, but write in an intelligent and lively way.



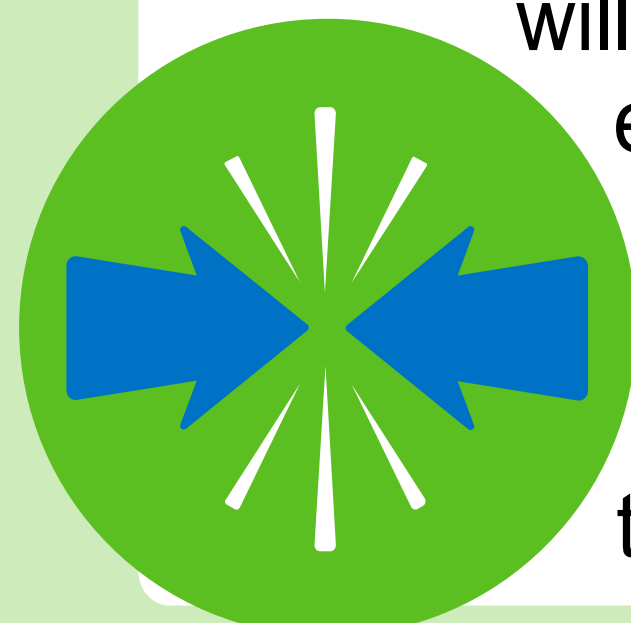
4. Assemble the right team

The lone wolf is a rarity in health research - funders usually prefer teams who bring to the table different perspectives and sufficient experience in a number of specialisms. Your team should help write the grant: specialist reviewers can tell straight away if it's lacking specialist input.



9. Impact

Explicitly state how your publicly funded research will have societal or economic benefits, or explain the pathway between your work and improving human health. The NIHR looks for evidence your research will benefit patients or the NHS within a timescale of a few years.



5. Involve patients and users

This has become an essential condition for most health and social care research. The involvement must be an active partnership between researchers and patients/public/service users. It can and should begin at the stage of planning the research.



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

Research funding is often highly competitive. To succeed you may also need to have a few failures: if this happens you should not take it personally. Take a critical look at your proposal and learn from the feedback, but don't stop believing in yourself and your ideas.

