Tips for Early Career Researchers

Early Career Researchers (ECRs) are typically beginning or emerging researchers not yet five years out of awarding a doctoral or other research postgraduate qualification.

This Guide attempts to provide a way of starting or developing a research idea as the first step in the development of a research proposal and career.

Attracting research funds relies on:

- readable, feasible and interesting project description, and
- an established or, at a minimum, a developing track record.

A common issue facing many early career or emerging researchers is the constraint of being unable to attract external funds due to a limited track record and unable to develop a track record without some funding. Think about:

- the possibility of joining a team with an established track record in a related or similar area. Work as part of a team and make use of collective expertise, knowledge and experience. This can be an excellent way of learning and doing funded research and could lead to enduring research relationships with colleagues not only within UWS but elsewhere as well. This is also important if you have spent some years in an industry position or had other academic career interruptions.
- applying for Seed Grants. Starting with a small project enables you to pilot methods and research tools such as interviews structures and developing themes or other types of analytical frameworks. It can also lead to publications as a foundation on which other research can be built.
- developing a written strategic and planned publications/disseminations program over a period of two to five years, which in the first instance may build on foundation research undertaken in a research higher degree.

Always seek advice at the earliest possible stage.

- Discuss with colleagues
- Discuss with the Research Development Team - no matter how embryonic
- An informed discussion at this time can be invaluable

WHAT TO PREPARE

Write a maximum two page document which sets out:

- some broad aims,
- a brief background or literature review of the field,
- and a research benefit statement.

This will provide a good foundation to develop specific aims and methods further or to align with the priorities of a particular funder. It will also hone skills in succinctness and clarity.

It is essential to use plain English. Think always of your potential audience. Write for the intelligent lay reader. Remember many aspects of a research submission can be tailored and even reused to meet the criteria of a specific funding agency with the help of some well-prepared background and supporting material. Having this material already prepared also helps meet increasing demands of short lead times when a funding call is announced.

AIMS

- Write down your research interests and the field they relate to
- Develop some broad aims
- Think about the object of the research
- Think about the nature of the research - basic, strategic, applied or experimental
BACKGROUND OR LITERATURE REVIEW
This section should outline the field and the relationship this has with your project aims.

- Delineate and identify the context, i.e. what has already been done in the field. This section is similar to an annotated bibliography but can also include any preliminary work that has been undertaken. Use substantive/key texts only to illustrate where your research is located and how this work will fill, build or extend any gaps in existing knowledge.
- Use subheadings to identify themes and/or other issues.
- Describe how people achieve the research objective now
- Are there any current unresolved issues in the field? Why are they unresolved or unsatisfactory?
- Include information about recent international progress in the field of the research
- Define key terms
- Cite key international and easily accessible references wherever possible.

BENEFIT OF THE RESEARCH
This section needs to provide an argument for how the research might result in economic and/or social benefits. Think about why you are doing the research. Why do it at all? Why should this be funded? Begin with:

- What are the expected benefits for the specific industry or industry sector?
- What are the expected benefits for the Australian community more broadly?
- How the research might address the National Research Priorities?

ON COMPLETION
Send a copy to a member of the Research Development Team and other colleagues for feedback and advice.