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VOICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Grantsmaking for Early Career Researchers

Unice Goshomi

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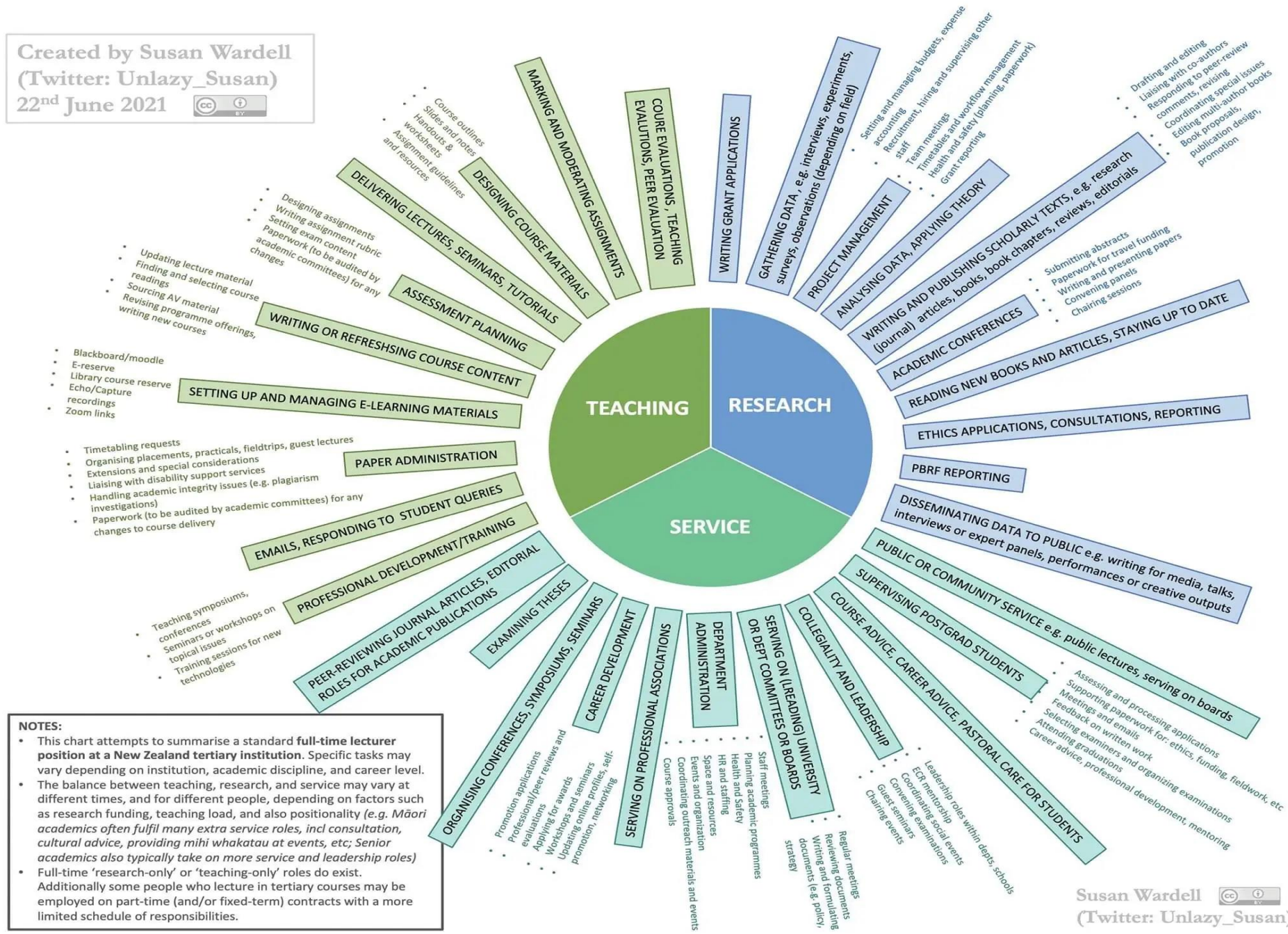
Session Objectives

Objectives

1. To discuss why grant writing is important
2. provide an overview of grant criteria
3. To discuss tips for success
4. To consider writing a grant application

ACADEMIC LIFE: WHAT DOES A "LECTURER" DO?

Created by Susan Wardell
(Twitter: Unlazy_Susan)
22nd June 2021



NOTES:

- This chart attempts to summarise a standard **full-time lecturer position at a New Zealand tertiary institution**. Specific tasks may vary depending on institution, academic discipline, and career level.
- The balance between teaching, research, and service may vary at different times, and for different people, depending on factors such as research funding, teaching load, and also positionality *(e.g. Māori academics often fulfil many extra service roles, incl consultation, cultural advice, providing mihi whakatau at events, etc; Senior academics also typically take on more service and leadership roles)*
- Full-time 'research-only' or 'teaching-only' roles do exist. Additionally some people who lecture in tertiary courses may be employed on part-time (and/or fixed-term) contracts with a more limited schedule of responsibilities.

Susan Wardell
(Twitter: Unlazy_Susan)

Introduction

- Grants are monetary donations from government and non-government agencies
- “grantmakers” — to suitable organizations.
- Grants are not loans
- Endowed grounded on specific requirements and intended use.
- Without grant funding, most organizations would struggle to achieve their mission and gain visibility.
- Hence knowing how to write a grant proposal so essential.

Why Write a Grant

- Primary reason:
  - To have the funds to answer important research questions for the benefit of a specific community or population

- Secondary reasons:
  - Academic career advancement
  - Experiential learning
  - Provides opportunity for multi-disciplinary working

Academic Writing versus Grant Writing: Contrasting Perspectives

Academic Writing	Grant Writing
Scholarly pursuit:	**Sponsor goals:**
Individual passion	*Service attitude*
Past oriented:	**Future oriented:**
Work that has been done	*Work that should be done*
Theme-centered:	**Project-centered:**
Theory and thesis	*Objectives and activities*
Expository rhetoric:	**Persuasive rhetoric:**
Explaining to reader	*"Selling" the reader*
Impersonal tone:	**Personal tone:**
Objective, dispassionate	*Conveys excitement*
Individualistic:	**Team-focused:**
Primarily a solo activity	*Feedback needed*
Few length constraints:	**Strict length constraints:**
Verbosity rewarded	*Brevity rewarded*
Specialized terminology:	**Accessible language:**
"Insider jargon"	*Easily understood*

R. Porter (2007) Why Academics Have a Hard Time Writing Good Grant Proposals. The Journal of Research Administration. Volume

Before the funder gives you money…

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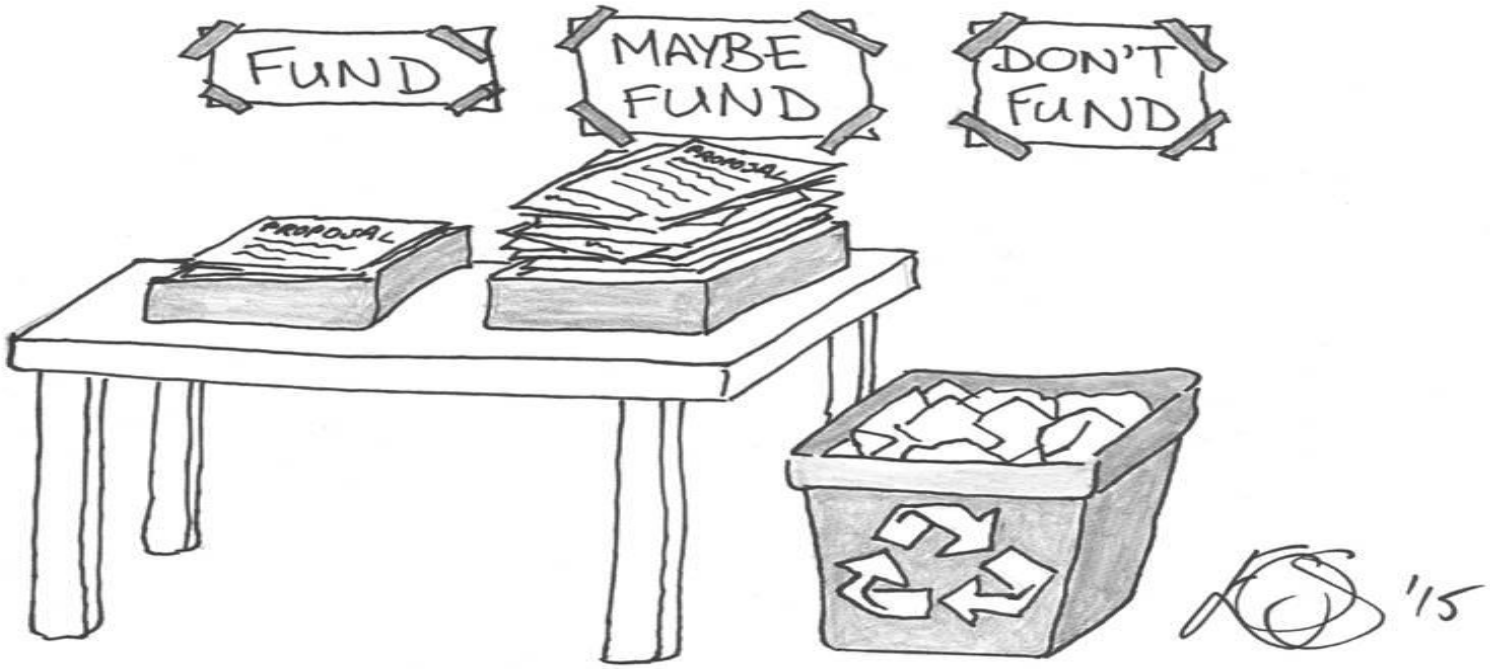
Quality of the proposed research	• Is the proposed research innovative? • Can it contribute significantly to the state of knowledge in its field? • How does the proposed research compare to established programs?
Impact of the proposed program	• To what extent will it enhance infrastructure for research and commercialization, like networks and partnerships with industry? • What are the potential impacts on technology commercialization? • Will the results be disseminated broadly to enhance scientific and technological understanding?
Path to success	• Are the costs reasonable? • Are the time and resources dedicated appropriate to the program? • Is the management plan appropriate? • Are there any issues that might prevent the successful execution of the program?
Alignment with commercialization	• Does the proposed research topic meet goals of aligning research with industry needs? • What is the likelihood of a commercial application of the research results?

Grant Writing is tough



Review panel categories.

- Bear in mind that the majority of grant applications get rejected
- Often you are comparing excellent applications with outstanding ones
- Example:
  - Recent Grant Call
  - Applications 199
  - Shortlisted 27
  - Funded 6

General Principles

- Read the ‘Call for Applications’ carefully
- Check your eligibility
- Make sure you have enough time to put application together
  - At least 6 months, if not longer
  - Draft, re-draft and re-draft again
  - Get your draft peer-reviewed
- Make sure you have the expertise and track record
- Ensure you have the support of an appropriate team

Need for evidence

- Ask yourself:
  - Is this an important community problem to those who would use the evidence generated?
  - Will the evidence generated add to the current body of knowledge?
  - Will the study lead to improved practice and welfare
    - And in a reasonable timeframe?
  - Will the study have a high impact on ‘target group’, the public and/or healthcare workers?

Scientific Rigor is Critical

The study design should answer the research question proposed

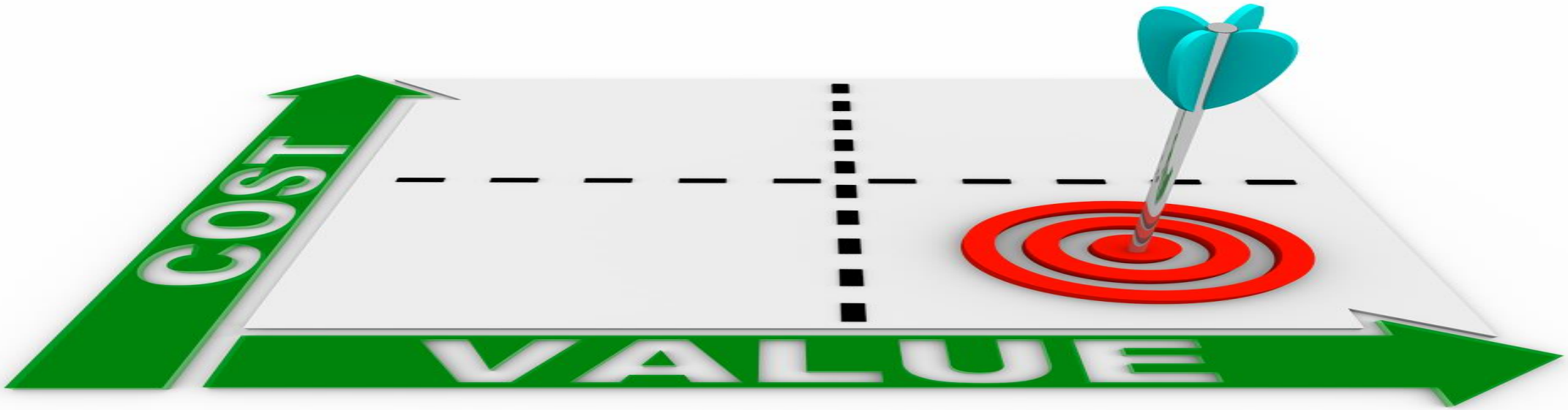
The proposed study should be feasible and deliverable

The team should have the necessary skill mix and experience to carry out the study

The project management plan needs to be sound

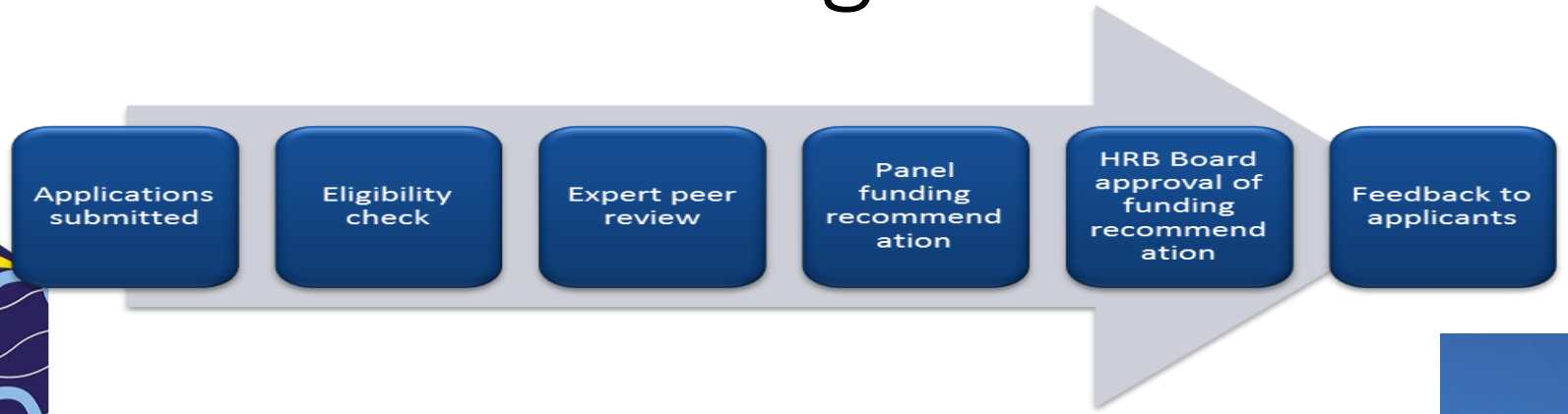
Value for money

- The costs are reasonable and commensurate with the proposed work
- The costs of the research can be outweighed by the benefits



What reviewers assess on

Often two stages



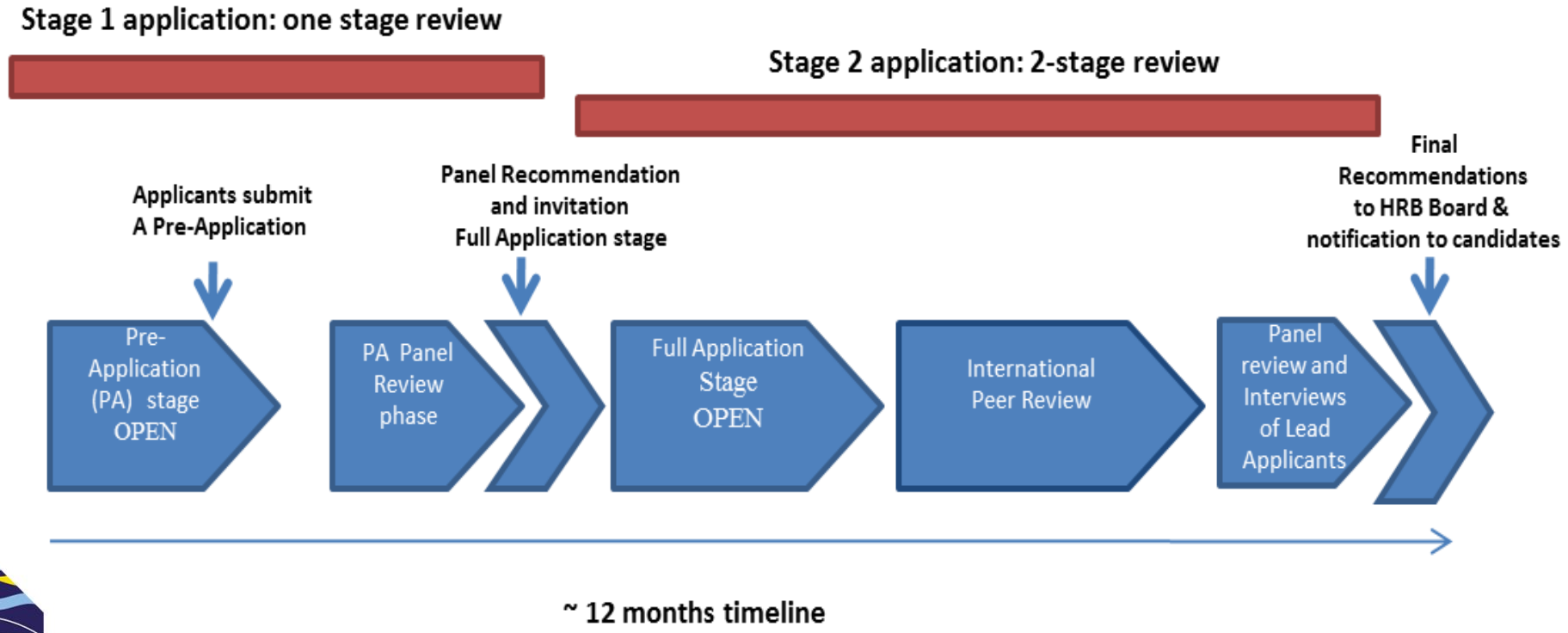
Stage 1:

- Relevance of the proposed research
- Research quality and excellence
- Strength of the research team
- Impact and sustainability
- importance

Stage 2

1. Relevance of the Proposed Research
2. Research Quality and Excellence
3. Strength of the research team
4. Impact and Sustainability
5. Capacity Strengthening
6. Community Engagement and Involvement
7. Equity of Partnerships
8. Value for money

Review at stages 1 and 2



Writing the Grant !!!!!!!!!

Does it need Doing ?

Can I do it ?

Large General Topic of Wide Interest

(Maternal Mortality, Antenatal Care)

Brief literature outline the evidence

However, researchers have not adequately addressed……

Gap in Knowledge

1. Urgent need to fill the gap, 2. You will fill this

Your Research Question

Project Specifics

Background, location, history, context, Literature Review
Methodology, Timeline, Budget

Strong Conclusion

I expect this research to improve ……

Before you start writing 1

- Understanding the grant scheme
- Partnering with the right mentor
- Ensure the scheme is applicable for your Carrier stage
- Ensure you meet the eligibility criteria
- Assembling the best team-seek advice from colleagues, potential coapplicants
- Allow enough time
- Providing a case for novelty, significance and urgency

Before you start writing 2

- Maximizing feasibility, scientific quality and innovations
- Providing evidence and data to substantiate claims
- Ensuring points of difference
- Clarifying return on investment
- Ensuring perfect presentation and formatting
- Incorporating critical feedback
- Understand the assessment process-what the reviewers are looking for
- Know your audience

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Before you start writing 3

- Be aware of the research governance issues
- Use the right to respond if applicable
- Prepare for the interview is applicable

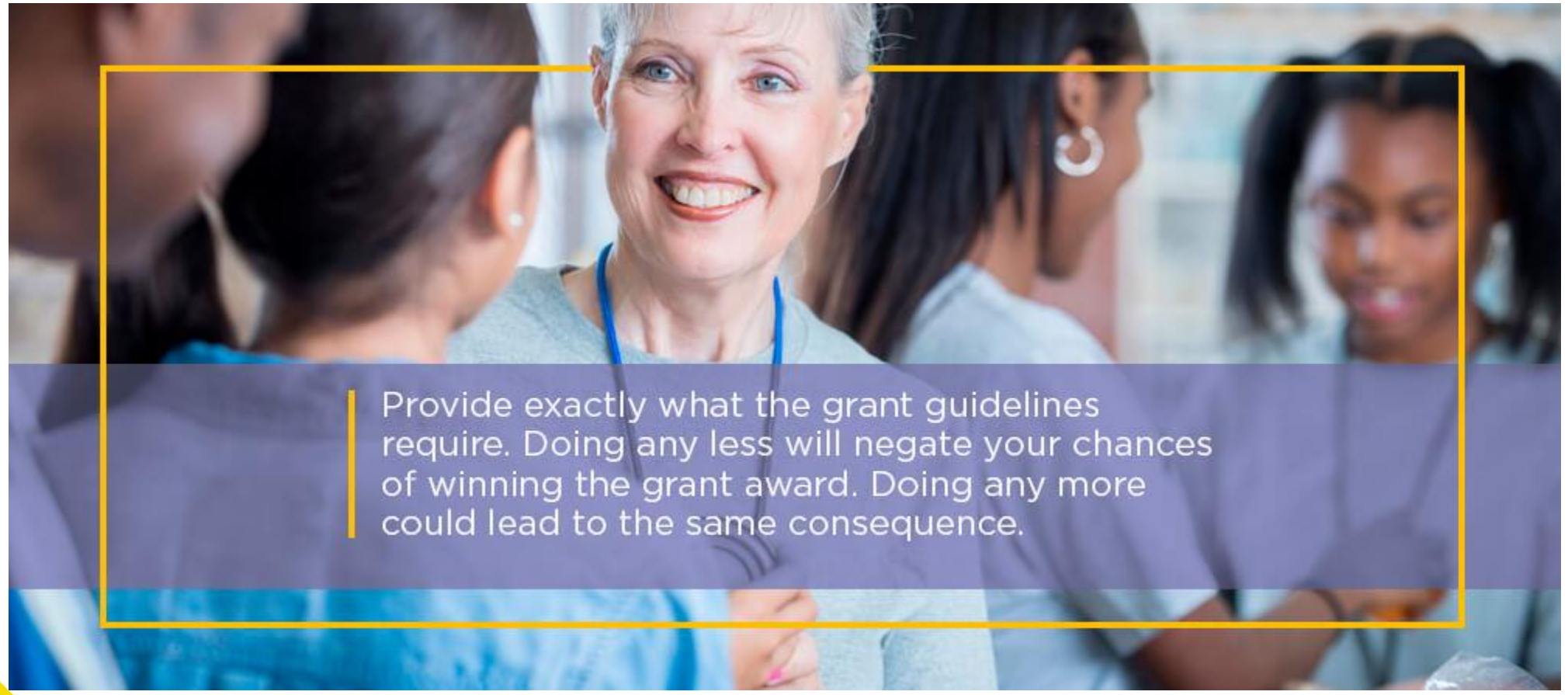
Tips to remember as you write

Bring in the right experts

Have SMART Goals

- One way to ensure an effective goal-setting process is to use the acronym SMART, which stands for:
- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Timely

Give Anecdotes



Follow Guidelines

- Give precisely what the grant guidelines entail.
- Doing not as much of will negate your likelihoods of winning the grant award.
- Doing more than could lead to the same results.
- Circumvent this hurdle by ensuing guidelines to the call.
- But write convincingly and with intent.
- Depend on the backing of a experienced mentor

Editing your Proposal – A Critical Step

Before you Submitting

- To ensure clarity,
- coherence,
- and effectiveness

Strategies in editing your work

- Take a break
- Review the overall structure
- Clarify your objectives
- Trim unnecessary content
- Strengthen your introduction
- Enhance clarity and readability
- Provide evidence and support
- Address counterarguments
- Proofread for grammar and style
- Seek feedback
- Read aloud

Why do grants get rejected

Why grants get rejected 1

- Failure to demonstrate importance of the topic or new or original ideas
- Research question is ill-identified, unfocused or unsupported by preliminary data
- The study as designed will not answer the research question
- Theoretical or conceptual underpinning of the study is weak or poorly articulated
- Lack of clarity over objectives or outcomes measures
- Project is overly ambitious and not feasible within timeframe or available budget
- Incomplete or poor literature review where critical references are omitted

Why grants get rejected 2

- Research staff proposed will not deliver
- Applicant team is missing critical skills or expertise (most common omissions are statistician, clinical trialist, qualitative researcher, behavioural scientist, health economist)
- Insufficient methodological details are provided
- Intended users of a product or process are not involved in the development
- Concerns over sample size
- No discussion of possible problems/limitations and no contingency plan
- Lack of a convincing dissemination plan

Why grants get rejected 3

Career development schemes – especially at interview stage

- Lack of ownership of the project
- Lack of understanding of the methodologies to be applied
- Lack of research vision and clear career plans in
- Training and development plan not well thought out
- Lack of appropriate mentorship

Why do grants get rejected

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The most common reasons for proposal rejection boil down to a surprisingly small set of simple and familiar failures:

- Deadline for submission was not met.
- Proposal topic was not appropriate to the funding agency to which it was submitted.
- Guidelines for proposal content, format, and/or length were not followed *exactly*.
- The proposed question, design, and method were completely traditional, with nothing that could strike a reviewer as unusual, intriguing, or clever.
- The proposed area of study was not an agency priority for this year.
- The proposal was not absolutely clear in describing one or more elements of the study.
- The proposal was not absolutely complete in describing one or more elements of the study.
- The authors review of the literature indicated they did not know the territory.
- The proposed study appeared to be beyond the capacity of the authors in terms of training, experience, and available resources.
- The proposed method of study was unsuited to the purpose of the research.
- The budget was unrealistic in terms of estimated requirements for equipment, supplies, and personnel.
- The cost of the proposed project appeared to be greater than any possible benefit to be derived from its completion.
- The authors took highly partisan positions on issues, and thus became vulnerable to the prejudices of the reviewers.
- The quality of writing was poor (e.g., sweeping and grandiose claims, convoluted reasoning, excessive repetitions, or unreasonable length).
- The proposal contained an unreasonable number of mechanical defects that reflected carelessness and the author's unwillingness to attend to detail. The risk that the same attitude might extend to execution of the proposed study was not acceptable to the reviewers.

Because the probability of rejection for any given proposal is high, it is particularly important to be mindful of the items above in bold.

*As adapted from: Locke, L.F., W.W. Spirduso, and S.J. Silverman. 1987. **Proposals that Work**. Second edition. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., by the University of Montana's Office of the Vice President for Research & Creative Scholarship.*

Summary

Read carefully the guidance notes

- Ask advise from your peers, collaborators, mentor. If necessary carry out an informal peer-review.
- Ask questions to the the funder staff managing the scheme (e.g. project officer, programme manager)
- Talk to others who have succeeded in the scheme
- Prepare well for interview. Ask colleagues to help with mock interviews
- Write the application with your reviewers in mind

- https://researcheracademy.elsevier.com/research-preparation/funding/successful-research-grant-applications-getting-right

Let take up the challenges

THANK YOU