Core Elements	Format	When to Write
Abstract/summary/ introduction to case for support	A few hundred words that you should write at the end of the whole process and with great care	3rd stage
Objectives	A list of bullet points that explain what you expect to achieve by the end of the project	3rd stage
Research question and/or hypotheses	The question that your investigation will answer. This is usually supplemented by a short list of hypotheses or sub-questions that each relate to a phase or element of the study	1st stage
Background/ literature	A concise, introductory section to your case for support that provides evidence that the question is important and introduces the sub-questions, hypotheses or phases of the research project	2nd stage
Plan of investigation	The main section of your case for support that provides a detailed account of your research methods and analysis in a way that shows how you will answer the question	1st stage
Dissemination	How you will communicate project findings	1st stage
CV	A list of the relevant achievements of a member of the research team. The collection of CVs of the research team must provide evidence that the research team is competent to conduct the project (see Chapter 1)	2nd stage
Budget	A list of all the costs associated with the project, calculated and broken down according to the funding agency regulations	1st stage
Justification of budget	A summary of why each resource is necessary	3rd stage
Non-academic dissemination	Identification of user groups and non-academic beneficiaries and what you will do to involve them and communicate your findings	1st stage
Bibliography	A list of the publications cited in the grant application	3rd stage
Timetable	Graph, table or GANTT chart showing what happens when during the project	3rd stage
Appendices	Technical or legal requirements and attachments	3rd stage
Ethics/compliance	Evidence to show the project will be conducted to accepted standards	2nd stage

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HOW FUNDING AGENCIES MAKE DECISIONS

Summary

This chapter explains how most funding agencies assess research grant applications and decide which ones to fund. It describes the four stages of a typical evaluation process and discusses the requirements that a research grant application must meet in order to succeed in each stage. Chapters 8 to 11 discuss how to write applications that meet all of the requirements.

The *What They Want to Hear* Tool at this end of this chapter helps you find information on how a particular funding agency evaluates applications.

Introduction

Funding agencies usually try to achieve two different kinds of aims when they fund grants. First, they want to invest in the best research, which means considering the importance of the question and the quality of the project.

Secondly, they support the agency's aims in funding research in the first place. These aims vary according to the status of the agency, its stakeholders and where its funds come from.

Some funding agencies expect all grant applications to address all their aims. However, it is also common for agencies to have a range of schemes that emphasise different subsets of their aims. The application process may be tailored to emphasise the aims of the relevant scheme. For example, capacity building is often supported by specific schemes for Fellowships, which often include extra elements, such as interviews.

In order to meet these various aims fairly and efficiently, agencies develop complex systems for evaluating and ranking the many high-quality applications received. This system is used by most major funding agencies and has specific implications for the way that you design and present your project proposals.

This chapter describes this process, which consists of four stages.

Stage 1: Application template

You carry out the first stage by fitting your original research idea to the funding agency's application template. The template demands particular types of information in a particular order. It also asks you to replicate, summarise or expand very similar information in a number of places across the template.

Used well, the template helps you to advance a powerful argument in favour of your application and to reinforce it several times. Used blindly, the template weakens your argument and dissipates its force.

Stage 2: Referees' reports

A copy of your application is sent to each of a number of researchers with expertise in its topic or methods. These 'expert referees' are asked to summarise and to evaluate your application. Depending on the funding agency, you may be offered a chance to respond to referees' reports before the next stage. Some agencies reject grants that get low scores from the referees without sending them to the next stage.

Stage 3: Designated member presentations

Your application and the referees' reports are sent to members of the grants' committee a few weeks before they meet. A grants' committee may receive over 100 applications for each meeting.

At the grants' committee meeting, one (or more commonly two) of the members give a short verbal presentation on the merits of your proposed research project. The presentation sets out what you propose to do and assesses its feasibility and its importance, and usually ends with comments on the referees' reports and a recommendation to the committee about its score.

The presenters, like all committee members, are researchers, but they may not know much about your field. They probably spend between 30 minutes and two hours reading your proposal and preparing their presentation. They probably make presentations on several applications at the same meeting. They always use the referees' reports to help understand and assess your application.

Stage 4: Committee discussion

Taking this presentation as a starting point, the grants' committee has a brief discussion about your project. Most committee members have read no more than the short project summary. The committee scores your project. Once all the applications have been scored independently, these are compared and a ranked list is discussed. At this stage, three things happen.

- Grants in special priority areas (such as applications from junior, previously unfunded investigators) may be given a small boost to their score to help them rise up the rankings.
- Minor adjustments may be made to the ranking if there is a consensus that the ranking based on the scores does not correctly represent the relative merits of the application as discussed. 'We all said X's proposal was very high quality but we seem to have scored it just below Y's, which was rather dull.'
- The committee may discuss how much money they have available and how many grants this will fund and where in the ranked list the cut-off is likely to fall.

Each stage of this four-stage process presents threats and opportunities. The rest of this chapter discusses how the assessment process works in more detail. It describes the properties that a grant application must have if it is to resist the threats and exploit the opportunities inherent in each stage of the assessment process.

Why funding agencies give grants

The application process is designed to fulfil the aims of the funding agency. It allows them to make a decision on the basis of whether funding your grant application is likely to fulfil their aims in a cost-efficient way.

The first aim of funding agencies is usually to invest in the best research. At the simplest level, this requires them to consider whether the grant application offers a realistic promise of an answer to an important question. In order to decide upon this point, decision makers must judge whether your application makes and justifies four key propositions:

- The *importance* proposition: this proposal asks an important question.
- The *success* proposition: this project is likely to answer the question.
- The *value* proposition: the likely gain from this project is worth the resources requested.
- The *competence* proposition: the applicant and team are competent to carry out the project as described.

In addition, you may identify further propositions that relate to funding agency criteria or the nature of your research. For example, you may also need

to convince decision makers that your institution will provide an appropriate research environment. Alternatively, the way that you disseminate results to non-academic audiences may be crucial.

The guidance for applicants provides the criteria used to test how well your proposed project justifies these propositions. Meanwhile, the application template is designed to help you present the relevant information. The guidelines for referees and grants' committees, which may be in the public domain, dictate how that information is assessed.

The way that a funding agency translates the four key propositions into specific evaluation criteria is dictated by the overall mission of the organisation, the fundamental reason why it funds research. A funding agency mission tends to include variable mix of the following four broad aims:

1 Health, economic or social benefit

The UK government's main justification for investing in academic research derives principally from the health, economic and social benefits that flow from the projects it supports. It is not alone in this. Agencies funded by other governments and a vast number of organisations, often with charitable status, exist to fund research that provides direct health, economic or social benefits.

While projects are scrutinised for their scientific excellence, theoretical significance is of secondary importance to the potential practical outcomes. Decision makers need to be sure that all funded projects meet the mission of the funding agency and applications must clearly demonstrate how their research serves this purpose. Dissemination activity, user engagement and practical outcomes are of particular importance.

2 Promoting scientific excellence in a particular range of disciplines in a particular geographical area

National research councils, funded by central government, usually have this type of remit. They are likely to cover a broad subject base. Applications from different fields, using different paradigms, will be judged alongside each other. In order to succeed, applicants must propose projects that have resonance outside their immediate discipline. In addition, to be successful an application will need to explain its importance in non-specialist language.

3 Advancement of a discipline or field

Learned societies and academies that exist to promote a particular subject area or group of subject areas will often include 'advancement of the discipline' in their remit. Many of these organisations provide small grants, which are funded by membership fees and subscriptions. Applicants can be more confident that referees and committee members will apply within-discipline criteria. However, researchers who occupy the fringe of their discipline or work in less fashionable areas may have less chance of success.

4 Building research capacity

Any funding agency that includes strong training elements or offers schemes such as fellowships and studentships is interested in research capacity. Decision makers must be sure that awarding the grant helps build the research base in a particular geographical area (such as the European Union) or discipline (such as biomedical science). If you apply for one of these schemes, you must show how you do this beyond the published outputs of the project.

The application process ensures that you include information that allows the funding agency to judge your work against a specific set of criteria. These are designed to allow judgements based on both the primary aim of research quality and the broader set of secondary aims described above.

Each funding agency and scheme has its own idea of what makes research 'important'. Consequently, the way you make and justify your four key propositions changes according to the funding agency you target.

In order to understand the agency's own criteria, read all the guidance fully and include:

- Homepage and 'About Us' sections of the agency website
- Guidance for applicants for the specific scheme
- Guidance for peer reviewers and evaluation templates, if published
- Scoring and weighting systems, if published

The guidance may be articulated in slightly different ways throughout the website and the evaluation template and scoring system will give you some insight into the relative importance of different criteria.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What makes a project 'important' or 'significant' to this funding agency and scheme?
- Which criteria have most importance?
- Is every criterion formally assessed or are some used as 'tie breakers'?
- Does a project have to score highly against each criterion or are some 'either/or' options?

The next example helps you understand the impact that a funding agency's individual criteria should have on the way you develop potential projects and write your application documents.

AGENCY-SPECIFIC CRITERIA

The following lists of key words and phrases are taken from the websites of three major funding agencies. It is clear that, while a researcher may be eligible to apply to all three agencies, the type of research that the three agencies support is very different.

Leverhulme Trust (charitable trust, all disciplines, UK and developing countries)[20]

Outstanding personal talent – compelling ability – personal vision – wider cultural well-being – surmounting the barriers between the traditional disciplines – work involving notable challenge – significance – excite those working at some distance from the immediate subject area – ability to judge and take appropriate risk – one individual's vision or aspiration – refreshing departure from established working patterns – curiosity – personal development

National Institutes of Health (government agency, public health, US and international)[21]

High scientific calibre – relevant to public health needs – address the scientific mission of the NIH – significance – important problem – effect – adequately developed, well integrated, well reasoned, and appropriate – original and innovative – investigators appropriately trained and well suited – scientific environment – institutional support – protection from research risk – inclusion of women, minorities and children

European Research Council (European Commission funding agency, all disciplines, open to member states)[22]

Intellectual capacity and creativity of Principal Investigator (PI) – ground-breaking achievements and publications – establishment or consolidation of independence – commitment to project – ground-breaking nature and potential impact of the research – important challenges at the frontiers of the field – ambitious objectives – possibility of a major breakthrough with an impact beyond a specific research domain/discipline – feasible

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[20]www.leverhulme.ac.uk (last accessed 20 October 2011)

[21]http://grants.nih.gov/grants/grant_basics.htm (last accessed 20 October 2011)

[22]http://erc.europa.eu/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.display&topicID=498#fields (last accessed 20 October 2011)

For more detail on how to find this sort of information about your target funding agencies, please refer to Appendix 2.

The evaluation process ensures that decision makers apply the right criteria. Consequently, it is essential that every research grant application you submit exploits the opportunities and avoids the threats posed by the four stages. The first stage involves fitting your grant application to the funding agency's application template.

Stage 1: Application template

In order to provide a level playing field and promote efficient decision making, funding agencies must ensure that:

* All applicants provide the required information
* All applicants provide the same quantity of information
* Referees and committee members can identify each category of information quickly

This is usually achieved by standardising the document in which you write your grant application. In practice, this means that you often have to fill in a lot of forms and follow a set template for each element of the proposal.

If the agency receives its funding from government sources, the application documents are more likely to be long and complex. In contrast, a charity may expect applicants to describe a large project with an elaborate design in a few paragraphs, especially if it operates an outline application stage. Either template presents considerable challenges. Failure to respond appropriately to these challenges is the first 'threat' posed by the template.

You may find that fitting your project into the required format is very frustrating. Failure to overcome this frustration could be fatal. You may think that the template demands a great deal of information about irrelevancies while giving you insufficient space to describe crucial aspects of the project. Chapter 8 and Appendix 2 provide help and advice on how to understand different template formats and complete them efficiently.

Application templates are designed to get the information the funding agency decision makers need. Your frustration is a sign that either you find it difficult to give them information that they need or you want to give them information that they do not need. This is the first and most important threat posed by the application template. Failure to give them what they need will lose you the grant. Insistence on giving them information they don't need is also likely to be damaging.

Scrutiny by the funding agency secretariat is the first hurdle that your application must cross. The secretariat will check that each grant application:

- Meets funding agency and scheme eligibility criteria
- Contains all the required components in the required format
- Is reviewed and assessed according to set procedures

After submission, this group will check your application and return it if it fails to meet the required format.

Just fitting your project to the funding agency template is a considerable task for many applicants. In the struggle to meet word counts, justify costs and produce all the necessary annexes, it is easy to forget that the grant application document also has a job to do. It must communicate the four key propositions of *importance, success, competence* and *value*.

You must also communicate, by direct and indirect means, that your project meets the explicit and implicit criteria for the relevant funding agency.

Moreover, this communication has to be done in a way that suits the working conditions and expertise of the decision makers. The advantage of the application template is that, used properly, it gives the opportunity to communicate exactly what you need to in exactly the way that is best for the evaluation process.

Stage 2: Referees' reports

A number of 'expert referees' will be asked to provide independent reports on your application. Your second challenge is to ensure that your application document impresses these individuals and helps them to score it highly against the funding agency criteria.

In order to do this, you must understand more about the likely abilities and limitations of the expert referees. In brief, you should never take 'expert' to mean that referees are particularly knowledgeable about your individual research area or sympathetic to it.

Choosing referees

Potential referees are chosen in a number of ways. Common routes include a standing Peer Review College, academics cited in your project proposal or your own direct nominations. Regardless of the method by which they are chosen, there are some general truths about referees that you should bear in mind:

1 Referees can be hard to recruit and the people who accept the job of refereeing your proposal may not be the most appropriate for your project.
2 Even appropriate experts may not be sympathetic to your approach or methods.
3 Over-enthusiastic and highly sympathetic referees may well be taken less seriously.
4 Referees' identities are protected. This protection is designed to allow them freedom to express opinions that may be unpopular with the reader (you). It may make them

feel that they can unleash petty rivalries that are normally kept in check. There are two aspects to this:

- Colleagues that praise your work 'to your face' may express a different view of it under the protection of anonymity.
- The funding agency will discount reports that appear to be excessively negative or motivated by spite.

What referees do

The referees will provide a detailed evaluation of your application and grade it according to a particular set of criteria. They are not generally paid to do this and are given a limited period of time in which to do it.

Their motives for agreeing to undertake peer review may include personal career development or curiosity about what is going on in their field.

Whatever their reasons, reviewing your application may be an unwelcome extra task as the deadline approaches. They will probably want to get through the job as quickly as possible. Consequently, you need to make it easy for them to do a good job quickly.

For this reason, your application must be clearly written and easy to read. It must provide enough background material for the outsider and provide evidence that your project meets the funding agency's criteria.

If your application is hard to read or understand, your referees will not be able to do their job easily. If you have failed to include enough information about your research methods, project management, dissemination or why you need particular resources they will be unable to score it highly.

Peer review criteria

Referees have clear guidance on how to assess your application. They are usually expected to provide their comments and grading on a form provided by the funding agency.

As an applicant, you can often access the referee's form from the funding agency website. Familiarity with the assessment criteria before you start writing helps you to focus on communicating the four propositions.

The peer review criteria vary from agency to agency and from scheme to scheme. However, they usually include some of the following:

- Importance
- Contribution to the agency's declared priorities
- Originality, timeliness and novelty
- Contribution to theory, knowledge or methods

- Capability or competence of research team and/or institution
- Appropriateness of design and methods
- Value for money
- Outputs, dissemination
- Likely health, economic or social benefit
- Risk
- Career development and training of project staff
- Project management

If you understand the agency's priorities, you can make sure you highlight how you meet them throughout your application document. In achieving this, the guidance for referees and committee can be as useful and important as the guidance for applicants. The next example shows how this sort of information helps focus your research grant applications.

▬▬▬▬▬ EXAMPLE 7 ▬▬▬▬▬

SCHEME-SPECIFIC CRITERIA

This case study illustrates the usefulness of the scheme evaluation form and/or selection criteria while developing an application. This extract from the guidance of an Australian Research Council scheme[23] shows both the evaluation criteria and the weighting given to each item, as follows:

All Australian Laureate Fellowships Proposals which meet the eligibility criteria will be assessed using the following selection criteria:

Investigator (40%)

Consideration will be given to the candidate's research opportunities and performance evidence relative to their level of achievement:

- research output and achievement
- potential to undertake ground-breaking research
- outstanding leadership ability
- potential to leave an enduring legacy
- contribution to national and international public policy debates and initiatives

Project/Program of research activity (30%)

Innovation

- are the project aims and concepts original and innovative?
- will new methods, technologies or theories/ideas be developed?
- how does the research program enhance innovation in Australia?

[23] www.arc.gov.au/ncgp/laureate/laureate_default.htm (last accessed 20 October 2011).

Approach

- are the conceptual framework, design, methods and analyses adequately developed, well integrated and appropriate to the aims of the project?

Significance and national benefit

- does the research address an important problem?
- how will the anticipated outcomes advance the knowledge base?
- is there a contribution to public policy formulation and debate?
- what is the potential of the research project to result in economic, environmental, social and/or cultural benefits for Australia?
- what is the potential for the research to contribute to the National Research Priorities?
- will this research sustain or enhance international research collaboration?

Mentoring/Capacity building (30%)

- potential to build world-class research groups/teams and/or centres over the term of the proposed project
- exceptional ability to supervise postdoctoral researchers and other early-mid career researchers
- record of successful postgraduate supervision, where applicable
- exceptional leadership and organisational ability to ensure the development of scale and focus in research
- ability to attract financial resources to enhance research capacity

If your target scheme publishes specific evaluation criteria in this detail, you can ensure that your application contains evidence that allows a high score against each of these points. For more detail on how to find this sort of information about your target funding agencies, please refer to Appendix 2 and see Chapter 9 for more information on how to generate the right arguments and evidence.

Stage 3: Designated Member presentations

The final decision on whether or not to fund your grant application will be made by the grants' committee.

Some funding agencies have highly specialist grants' committees, devoted to a single discipline. Other funding agencies have no disciplinary remit and grants' committees with predominantly lay memberships. Consequently, it is useful to understand the composition of the relevant committee before your submit your application. However, in general:

- Committee members are unlikely to be specialists in your subject
- Committee members will have very little time to prepare for their meeting
- Each committee meeting may deal with over 100 applications

How the committee operates

Most committees cope with the lack of time and expertise by using a 'Designated Member' system. Each application is assigned to two committee members, whose task is to understand it and present it to the rest of the committee, along with a recommended score and a summary of the referees' reports.

Although attempts are made to give applications to committee members whose research overlaps with the proposed project, this is not always possible. You cannot assume that anyone on the committee will have a good understanding of your research area.

In any case, each committee member absorbs an enormous amount of specialist information in advance of the meeting. The Designated Member who presents your grant to the committee may also present many others. In order to succeed at this stage, your application document must:

* Be easy to read, especially to 'speed-read'
* Be easy for a non-specialist to remember, understand and summarise (this helps the designated committee members prepare his or her verbal presentation about your project)
* Make it easy for readers to reconstruct the essence of your proposal and communicate how it meets the four key propositions to a group of non-specialists
* Provide an 'at a glance' overview of your project for the rest of the committee

Stage 4: The grants' committee discussion and ranking

After each presentation there is a brief discussion. The application receives an overall score. When all the applications have been scored, they are ranked in order of their scores and prepared for a final decision.

There is very little time for in-depth consideration of the relative merits of applications. Each project gets a few minutes of discussion and there is not much opportunity for one committee member to break down the resistance of colleagues and alter the fate of your project.

However, take advantage of the fact that the whole committee will discuss and score your application, even though most of them will only have glanced at it briefly. You must make it possible to get a strong and favourable impression of the logic and organisation of your project from a few hasty glances during the discussion. Your application must be speed-readable.

The jobs of the referees and committee members are rather different. As discussed in the previous section, referees operate as individuals and evaluate your project in isolation. The referee makes a decision about the quality of your application without reference to competing projects. Armed with your application document, a form and some guidance, each referee grades your application and writes a report on it. The referees' reports are sent to the grants' committee with the application documents.

How far the designated members can use their own judgement and override the opinion of referees varies according to the particular funding agency. However, a skilful operator on the committee can undermine even a well-written report from a true expert. At the very least they can discredit the opinion of referees who have done their job poorly.

Preparing for the committee meeting

Committee members have a tough job both as individuals and as a group. As individuals, they assess a pile of applications with their associated referee's reports and lead discussion of them at the committee meeting. They must have a passing acquaintance with the other applications that come before them and contribute intelligently to the ranking process.

They are less likely than referees to be specialists in your area and have even less time to consider your project. As successful academics, they do not want to look like fools by giving a confused or inaccurate verbal précis of your work and its likely importance. They will also be reluctant to go out on a limb to support you when their colleagues want to trash you. Unlike the referees, they do their part of the job under scrutiny of their peers.

Your application document must give them the evidence they need to make claims in its favour, especially if they wish to challenge the conclusions of the referees. It must also provide the at-a-glance overview that allows every committee member to feel able to comment intelligently about why your project seems important.

The next example demonstrates the essential similarities (and crucial differences) between two research funding agencies' decision-making processes.

EXAMPLE 8

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The following table illustrates the way in which grants' committees operate using two specific examples of UK research councils, the Biotechnology and Biosciences Research Council (BBSRC) and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

There are significant differences between the two. BBSRC committee members are involved in the initial choice of referees and may discount their assessments. In contrast, EPSRC panel members are not involved in the choice of referees and are explicitly directed not to re-review proposals in the panel meeting.

However, in both cases, committee members have a two-week period in which they must:

- Become familiar enough with their assigned proposals in order to lead a discussion on them
- Prepare to discuss every proposal that comes before the committee
- Contribute to the final ranking of every application that comes before the committee

	BBSRC[24]	EPSRC[25]
Allocation of proposals	Each application normally assigned to at least two committee members ('Introducing Members'). Each Introducing Member will usually present between eight and 15 applications at each meeting.	Every proposal is allocated to two speakers responsible for leading a discussion based on the input from expert reviewers. Each panel member is assigned as a speaker for a number of proposals.
Choice of 'Designated Members'	Assignments based on scientific expertise and balance of workload.	Assignments align with speakers' expertise if possible.
Role of panel	Introducing Members comment on the appropriateness of the referees nominated by the applicant, and suggest additional referees before the peer review process starts.\n\nReferees reports are obtained for the assistance of the committee. Although the committee takes into account their comments, they do not form the sole basis for its decisions.	Speakers are not involved in the choice of referees.\n\nThe panel does not re-review proposals; panel members are appointed to represent the collective views of the expert reviewers and to bring the benefits of their general experience in science and engineering research.
Timing	Committee meeting members are sent all the paperwork relating to every application at least two weeks before the meeting.	Panel members are sent all the paperwork relating to every application two weekends before the meeting.
Pre-meeting tasks	Introducing Members are asked to send their preliminary assessment to the office in advance of the meeting.	Speakers are asked to send in their initial proposal gradings before the meeting.

[24]www.bbsrc.ac.uk/organisation/structures/committees/committees-index.aspx (last accessed 20 October 2011)

[25]www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/apprev/panels/Pages/whathappens.aspx (last accessed 20 October 2011)

	BBSRC[24]	EPSRC[25]
Role of referee reports in committee meetings	Referees reports are obtained for the assistance of the committee. Although the committee takes into account their comments, they do not form the sole basis for its decisions.	Panels are asked not to re-review proposals but to prioritise proposals through a relative assessment of quality based on the reports of the expert reviewers, taking into account the applicants' responses to the reviewers' comments if provided.
Designated Member presentations	At the meeting the Introducing Members give an overview of each assigned application, highlighting its merits and any potential problems.	The first Speaker introduces each proposal, drawing on the reviewers' reports and recommends a grade, taking care not to re-review. The second Speaker comments on any differences of opinion they may have from the first Speaker.
Discussion	Discussion is then open to other members who wish to comment.	Other panel members may comment on the proposal and recommended score.
Final scoring and ranking	After the discussion, the Chair will agree the overall rank with the committee.\n\nThe committee will finalise the ranking, especially those falling close to the likely margin for funding. The final rank order represents the consensus view of the committee taking into account all of the assessment criteria.	At the end, the panel will be asked to agree on the ordering of the proposals, including prioritising those with the same grade and identifying the cut-off point on the list, below which it believes funding would not be appropriate.\n\nThe resulting output of the meeting is a rank ordered list.

For more detail on how to find this sort of information about your target funding agencies, please refer to Appendix 2.

Conclusion

After reading this chapter, you should know how to succeed in the peer review and committee assessment process by producing application documents that work for a variety of audiences. The secretariat, referees and assessors and other committee members have different roles and read your application in different ways. Each must find the evidence they need that your project is worthy of funding. Chapter 10 of this book will help you write applications that achieve this aim.

The Tool that concludes this chapter helps you identify the official guidance you need in order to write a fundable grant application and understand how your application document will be used during the evaluation process.

═══ **TOOL 10** ═══

WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR

In order to write a fundable application you need to know as much as possible about who will assess it, under what conditions and using what criteria.

The following information and guidance is usually available from funding agency websites or the secretariat and will be invaluable:

- Funding agency mission statement or description of the sort of research it funds. This should be easily accessed from the home page of its website
- Peer Review College and grants' committee membership lists
- Evaluation and scoring criteria for referees and assessors and/or template forms
- Programme specification document, including full details for application and assessment procedures
- Specific guidance on the content and structure of your case for support, the application form and any annexes

You should familiarise yourself with this information before you start writing. When you have a final draft, use the tests in Chapter 11 to check your application against agency criteria. It is often interesting to realise that the qualities of your project that you think are most important are not those on which it is assessed.

See Appendix 3 for more information on how to find relevant sections of funding agency websites.

SIX

HOW TO GET THE BEST FROM YOUR EMPLOYER

Summary

This chapter discusses the three-way relationship between researchers, their employers and funding agencies. It also considers research funding as an institutional revenue stream.

The *Whose Project is This?* Tool at the end of this chapter will help you negotiate this three-way relationship more effectively by showing where your employer is obliged to take responsibility for your funded research projects.

Introduction

There are at least three partners in a funded research project: the research team, the funding agency and the host institution. In most cases, the host institution is also the main employer of the project team.

The role of the host institution in funded research can cause conflict between employer and researcher. This is unhelpful as a good working relationship between these two parties is essential to the success of your project. For more information on the more complex partnerships that exist within collaborative research projects, please also see Chapter 13.

Three factors influence the potential for problems:

1 As the host institution takes responsibility for the proper conduct of externally funded research, the question of project ownership arises at an early stage in the application process. The power struggles and political issues that ensue can strain the relationship between employer and researcher.