Is an ARC fellowship right for you?

...advice from a former ARC College of Experts perspective

Research & Industry Office
Faculty of Science
“Is an ARC Fellowship right for you?” is aimed at academics who are interested in applying for ARC fellowship (either during this round or in the future). The session will provide a broad introduction to the schemes and to the University of Melbourne procedures. This includes ARC goals, the assessment process and criteria for these schemes and the assessor’s perspective (ARC College of Experts and external assessors).
Proposal assessment - overview

- The peer review process is designed to be fair, thorough and transparent.
- All proposals are assessed against the selection criteria, and in accordance with the weightings for that scheme.
- Proposals are generally assigned to two types of assessors:
  - at least two General assessors (usually College of Experts members), and
  - at least two Details assessors
- ARC staff assess eligibility etc., but do not decide which proposals should be funded.
Who reviews and how is that decided?

- I was carriage 1 for about 40 DP and 15+ DECRAs (and carriage 2 for that many again, need to read all of these carefully over 3 months)
- Carriage 1 assigned 8 assessors per proposal
  - word cloud system for initial recommendations, then start searching for others
  - Conflicts, not everyone is able to assess
  - 1 week to assign 8 assessors, working fast....make it easy for us!
- RMS generates a “word cloud” of a proposal based on:
  - Proposal summary
  - Proposal title
  - Impact statement
  - FOR & SEO codes
Conflict of Interest

- In addition to institutional conflicts, an assessor may be deemed to have a COI with a named participant on a funding proposal for a number of reasons including, but not limited to, if that assessor:
  - has a close personal relationship (including enmity) with that named participant;
  - has a professional relationship with that names participant including:
    i. currently holds, or has held within the past two years, funding conjointly with that named participant
    ii. has a current application or is negotiating an application for funding that named participant
    iii. has been a collaborator or co-author with the named participant on a research output within the past four years
    iv. has been a co-editor with that named participant of a book, journal, compendium, or conference proceedings within the past two years
    v. has been a postgraduate student or supervisor of that named participant within the past five years
  - could otherwise be perceived to benefit materially from the awarding of funding to the proposal involving that named participant
# Rating and criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating Scale</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td><strong>Outstanding:</strong> Of the highest quality and at the forefront of research in the field. <em>Approximately 10% of Proposals should receive in this band.</em></td>
<td>Recommended unconditionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td><strong>Excellent:</strong> Of high quality and strong competitive. <em>Approximately 15% of Proposals should receive ratings in this band.</em></td>
<td>Strongly support recommendation of funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td><strong>Very Good:</strong> Interesting, sound and compelling. <em>Approximately 20% of Proposals should receive ratings in this band.</em></td>
<td>Support recommendation of funding with reservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td><strong>Good:</strong> Sound, but lacks a compelling element. <em>Approximately 35% of Proposals are likely to fall into this band.</em></td>
<td>Unsupportive of recommendation for funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td><strong>Uncompetitive:</strong> Uncompetitive and has significant weaknesses or more fatal flaws. <em>Approximately 20% of Proposals are likely to fall into this band.</em></td>
<td>Not recommended for funding</td>
</tr>
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What happens after reviews are returned?

- Carriage 1 and 2 started reading 3 months earlier (for me, around 45 mins per proposal)
- Score according to required distribution (hard!)
- Reviews returned, scores, comments, rejoinders, opportunity to change carriage scores, and upload.
- Wait 2 weeks (have holiday) while ARC finalises rankings, and bands (in, out, uncertain).
- 1 week before Canberra, re-read all proposals (carriage 1 and 2, and others if time) that are in or uncertain. Be prepared to speak to carriage 1 proposals, prepare budget recommendation.
What happens after reviews are returned?

Example...

Final score: Average College
(60 + 60)/2 = 60

Average External
(88+100)/2 = 94

Average both
(94+60)/2 = 77 (>70 = B)
What happens in Canberra?

- Conflict of interest, can't even see why, out of room if name on screen.
- Anonymous online voting system.

**Process:**
- First rescue proposals below uncertainty band (discrepancies, surprises), they get added to bottom of uncertainty band.
- Starting with uncertainty band:
  - Carriage 1 gives 2 min pitch to describe proposal, team, analysis of assessor scores and comments, identify bias, etc.
  - Everyone votes to shortlist or not
  - Based on number of votes, they are ordered at end of shortlist behind the clearly in.
- Then start from top of list, 2 min pitch, votes, then budget recommendation if yes.
- A proposal that was clearly in can get voted back to shortlist if concerns are raised in discussion, and its place is determined by number of votes.
- Continue until all shortlisted proposals have been discussed and voted on.
- Budget is tracked. Line is drawn when money runs out.
- A few put on reserve list.
- Recommendations to minister, and >3 month delay until announcement.

- Intense and exhausting! Please make it easy for Carriage 1 to fight for your proposal!
What aspects of proposals receive most attention?

- Track record and strong assessor reports help a lot, even if carriages don't follow it all.
- Even better is if I really understand importance.
- Without that, if I can't follow it enough to explain to college in 2 mins why work is critical, then it is average at best. Track record and "trust me, I'm brilliant" only goes so far.
- Myth that you need senior CI on DPs. Relative to opportunity, a team of young stars looks just as exciting, even more so?
- Looking for consensus in assessors, or good rejoinders that confirm suspicion of bias.
What makes a compelling proposal?

- Clear 2 min pitch that I can understand (plain language = elevator pitch, dinner party conversations)
  - find again easily (page 1 is critical!)
  - believe in (important work with clear future impact)
  - and convince a room full of broad scientists is more important than the work of their colleagues that they want to see funded!

- Balance between track record on topic, proof of concept, but not already completed and know how to do it (implementation plan only)

- Track record should have something distinguishing (medals, awards, notable co-authors) ... everyone has strong publications (B → A)
What things hurt proposals?

- Vague 100 word project summary and keywords that gives word cloud nothing to work with, so generic assessors are recommended.

- 1st page that doesn't give 2 minute pitch quickly enough ... important for assessor scores, but also for Canberra meetings when you revisit quickly (out in corridor looking ahead at list and rehearsing what to say that's convincing).

- Underselling the opportunity ... why should tax payers invest in you and your research plans? Why does it need your full-time attention? Broader benefits?

- ROPE – not excuses for lack of performance, but explaining your tremendous potential to convert the time you’d had into exceptional outcomes ... the promise of more to come if given the opportunity
Tips to improve chances? Are you ready?

- Distinguish your track record (prizes, etc. = external validation)

- 1st page pitch, practice on people, can they summarize?
  - 100 word summary and keywords should align to assessors who will understand your work, avoid vague terms in layperson speak ... the wrong assessors prevent your application rising to the top

- Proof of Concept should already have been done and refereed
  - Then comprehensive list of next steps (genuine research, not implementation only)

- Get your work known, don't let your written application be the only opinion the assessors have of you.
  - Give seminars at other universities, contribute to your research community by organizing conferences, workshops, networking, etc.
  - Bias is inevitable, so try to influence it positively.
Goodluck!

Questions?
Thank you

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Professor Kate Smith-Miles