

NHMRC ECFS: IDEAS TO BLUEPRINTS

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BACKGROUND TO ECFS

Funds outstanding researchers

- High achievers and all-rounders
- Seeking out future heroes
- People who want to have a full time career in research

The best possible researchers to fund in the future

- Quality
- High chance of success

Aim of the fellowship:

- To discover new things and to push the boundaries of science; innovative, new, exciting, UNIQUE.
- If overseas: what are you going to learn and bring back?

MORE INFO

Fast track to independence

- Choose where you go; 'creating' your position

Very competitive

- Require time, commitment, planning and attention to detail to be successful

Let people know of your plans!

- "It take a village to raise a child."
- Your fellowship application is like your baby

NHMRC ECFS

Internationally competitive

- No one on your panel will necessarily know anything about the science of your project. But your successes (CV) will translate across the science.

Strong environment

- Smart attracts smart. Higher quality of people, higher quality your postdoc.
- Which lab: e.g. postdocs, lack of postdocs, paper quality, science quality.

PLANNING FOR YOUR POSTDOC

- **Can you prove yourself with a different group, group leader and environment?**
 - Looked well upon by funding organisations
 - Do an internship or lab visit beforehand. Best if you have a paper independent of your PhD supervisor.
- **Don't wait until you've submitted your big paper or thesis**
 - Part of multitasking in science
- **Identify your skills and strengths**
 - What can you learn, and what can you bring back to Australia or bring forward into your next position?

THE PROCESS STARTS DURING YOUR PHD.

Building your CV

- Be the person who ticks all the boxes
 - First and middle author papers (mostly 1st)
 - Mentoring and training students
 - Contribute to scientific societies
 - Conferences – attending and organizing
 - Wider community outreach
 - Teaching experience
 - Awards, travel grants, scholarships,
 - Invited talks, collaborations

Look at criteria and previous applications to make sure you can tick all the boxes – takes planning

TRACK RECORD

- **Determination, visibility, track record, mentor**
- **Publication record:** alignment with what you've done and where you're going. Tells a story.
- **Strong research environment.**
 - Must add to your current skillset.
 - Increases the chance of publications and collaborations.
 - Project should be suited to your strength and your environment.
- **Demonstrate independence**
 - papers outside of your lab group are very helpful
- **You are moving towards independence.**
 - If there's a hole in your track record, explain why.

ENVIRONMENT

Choosing your lab

- Funding, mentor, quality of science
- Go to where the leaders in your field are.
 - This is the only lab in the world that can support the project that I will do.

Overseas postdoc → coming back and bringing something unique

- ADDING to what we have in Australia

PROPOSAL STRUCTURE: LINEAR + LOGICAL

Make it simple

- Write for your spokesperson < panel < reviewers
- Spell everything out. Tell your story multiple times. Clear boxed aims on the first page. Make it pleasing to the eye

Subheadings:

- General methods
- Aims: boxed, on first page, and make clear
- Research questions that now need to be addressed → place the intro and supporting data into context
- Finish each experiment section with what you hope to find/what will you show? Make sure your reviewers understand the outcome.
- Figures: not too complex, don't waste space. Tells your story multiple times. Nature quality!

PROPOSAL STRUCTURE

- **Use headings to break up the text.**
- **Clearly state hypothesis and aims**
 - Refer back to these in the research plan to reinforce what the grant is about.
 - **MAKE SURE AIMS ARE NOT INTERDEPENDENT**
- **Have a clear timeline.**
- **Outcomes and significance are very important**
 - Panels have clinicians. Show how the basic research will feed into something that is therapeutically important.

PROPOSAL STRUCTURE

- **Convince the panel you're doing something novel and important.**
- **Show ability and enthusiasm (without going overboard)**
- **Be honest in your application**
 - Overstating/lying is the worst thing you can do
 - Acknowledge if something is more complex than your explanation
- **Review your grant as a skeptic. Get as many people as possible to review it for you + GMO/RSPO**
- **They're looking for reasons NOT to fund you – don't give them one. Make it bulletproof.**
 - Prove you're worth funding.

PROPOSAL STRUCTURE

Prelim data

- Can be helpful, not essential, but focus on what hasn't been done yet

Emphasize “relative to opportunity”

Build a rapport with the person reading your application

- Be clear + concise
- Make it easy for them to understand and review

THINGS THAT WORKED FOR ME.

I promoted my career.

- Not so much about the project, more about me, who I wanted to be.

I want to be the expert in...

- I am going to the place where they have all the techniques I need to get there
- It is the best place in the world for me

I explained how my project was going to make me the top in my field

- I didn't overstate
- Safe parts and risky parts

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

I had a lot of rejections in the first year (not just NHMRC)

- Its is common. Don't get discouraged.
- Focus on restructuring your grant, collecting and taking on as much feedback as possible, and building your CV. Grit and perseverance in this situation (and in general) is really important.

Sometimes, you need a practice run

- Specific skillset required to write a grant.
- Again, apply ASAP (practice makes perfect). Don't be discouraged.

PLANNING WAS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

I planned A LOT. Groundwork was key.

- I talked to the experts at the GMO + RSPO, looked at previous applications and talked to people who I knew had been on NHMRC ECF panels to get the insider advice.
- I had a first draft of a brand new application 6 months before it was due. I had over ten people review it before I submitted (professor, senior lecturer, postdoc and phd level).
- I attended as many of these types of training seminars as possible. Picked up tips and tricks from a wide range of backgrounds and types of researchers at many different levels.

BE POSITIVE AND PASSIONATE

... I will advance the field of...

... I will develop a...

... highlight YOUR expertise, environment and mentor

... my mentor has contributed to the field by...

... I can learn from my mentor because...

How supported are you? Are you in the best environment?

WHEN, not IF.

- Be positive that you're going to get it! Language is a weapon.

QUESTIONS

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