Is it possible to send my initial grant application for quick comments relating to the targeted grant application?

Yes. The RSPO offers strategic reviews of grant proposals. We recommend submitting a draft to us as early as possible, so that you will have time to incorporate our feedback into your final proposal and possibly allow time for us to review further iterations of your application.

What is the optimal review timeline internally for an application, and who needs to review it during that time?

For a strategic review (for advice on the scope, nature, suitability and general crafting of your proposal), the earlier you submit your application to the RSPO, then the more comprehensive a review we can offer. For major ARC/NHMRC rounds, we recommend you try to submit a draft to us a minimum of 4 weeks prior to the ARC/NHMRC deadline. This will allow ample time to review and provide feedback on multiple iterations as you refine your proposal. For other smaller schemes, you should aim to send your draft to us 2-3 weeks prior to the external deadline. Strategic advisors will normally take no more than 3-5 days to respond and provide feedback (depending on workloads).

Please note that the RSPO’s service is “opt in”. You must, however, submit your proposal to the GMO for a compliance review before the external deadline. The GMO provides advice on eligibility and compliance matters related to your proposal. The GMO usually has an internal deadline of 4 weeks prior to ARC/NHMRC deadlines and 2 weeks prior to other scheme’s deadlines. Again, this allows for multiple reviews as you work on and change your proposal prior to submission to the funding body. GMO advisors will normally take 2 days to provide feedback.

What resources are available to help with budgeting for projects when completing forms.

We have a Pricing Tool to assist with putting together your budget: https://research.unsw.edu.au/unsw-research-pricing-tool. We also have a dedicated webpage for Budget Preparation, which has helpful budget guides: https://research.unsw.edu.au/budget-preparation
CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL GRANTS

What are the determinants for a successful application?

There is no silver bullet but there are principles that will give you a better chance for success. Ensuring your work is relevant and at or near the cutting edge of your field and coherently presented is a good start. Specifically with regard to the written research plan:

- Balance technicality and accessibility
- Present hypotheses and controversies, and explain how they will solve them
- Explain how the momentum of the subject demands funding now
- Show how Australian work fits into the international picture
- Back up compelling claims with evidence and others’ judgments
- Carefully temper ambitious goals with plausible approaches
- Display evidence of responsible but often daring approaches to the problem
- Many CIs are vigorous players in large international research networks
- Present excellent progress reports on previous grants

What are the differences between successful and unsuccessful applications?

See above for principles regarding successful proposals. On the other hand, unsuccessful proposals exhibit the following characteristics which should be avoided:

- Use too much technical jargon
- Make grandiose and implausible claims about outcomes
- Don’t support claims of excellence or progress with evidence
- Relate to ‘backwater’ research without momentum
- Are weakly linked into national and international research networks
- Emphasize the collection of data rather than the solution of controversies
- Set a negative or depressive tone about the state of the subject in Australia
- Contain a high rate of spelling and grammatical errors
- Often have unedited nonsense in the text
ADVICE FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

I'd like to know how to make myself look more competitive. I'd like to know how to start getting independence.

It is important to use your PhD candidature and the ECR years of your research career to publish and present, raising your profile and your reputation in your field and ensuring you develop competitive track record in relation to your peers.

Depending on the quality of your own track record, you may initially partner with others, being part of a larger team on research projects led by more senior researchers, to help you build your profile, research project management skills and reputation. This will all enhance your track record and demonstrate your potential.

In order to become more independent in managing your own research projects starting with small grants, consultancies or contract research is a useful strategy. This can also provide you with essential pilot work which will help you secure further funding.

While you are engaging in these research activities is also vital to raise your profile in other ways. Using social media - translating your research findings for general audiences through vehicles such as The Conversation (writing your own pieces and using your expertise to comment on those of other researchers in your field) and seeking out and utilising media opportunities to promote your research activities are increasingly important activities for researchers.

Are there other early career research grants to apply for, beyond the ARC (e.g. DECRA)/NHMRC? What are they? What do they require? (this question is about knowing all possible grants available to ECRs to apply for, to increase chances of a successful application).

There are early career fellowships such as the NSW Cancer Institute ECF; NSW Health ECF (new); Heart Foundation ECF. These scholarships are often in specific research fields so it is about doing research in your particular area. You should also subscribe to the MyGrants newsletter to keep in the loop of current opportunities and speak to colleagues and mentors.

As a junior researcher, what are the best funding agencies to aim for? (e.g., in terms of the ratio of effort required to likelihood of success)

A good strategy for early career researchers is smaller funding bodies such as BUPA, Rotary Health, Anthony Rothe, Diabetes Australia, Gates Foundation, HCF, Heart Foundation etc. The schemes you would be able to apply for a specific to your field of research. Obtaining research funding is a competitive field and success rates could range between <10-25% depending on the scheme. You should also subscribe to the MyGrants newsletter to keep in the loop of current opportunities and speak to colleagues and mentors.

How do you identify alternative funding especially when there is little hope for early career researchers in securing an NHMRC/ARC grant?

You can contact the RSPO at any time to meet and discuss funding options and ambitions.
The GMO send out a regular “Grant News Bulletin” which alerts researchers to upcoming funding opportunities. To subscribe, please see the instructions at: https://research.unsw.edu.au/grant-news. That webpage also has instructions on how to access the SPIN database; SPIN is a search engine for funding opportunities from both local and international sources. Additionally, the GMO have a webpage that is regularly updated to show current and future funding schemes: https://research.unsw.edu.au/current-funding-opportunities-schemes-now-open.

Apply to smaller funding bodies in your research field. This will enable you to show success in receiving funding, completing a project and gathering pilot data to develop an NHMRC (not as important for ARC but will contribute to your track record).

**As an ECR (level A researcher) how can I improve my chances of being funded?**

Your track record is the most important factor to receiving funding. You have to be able to demonstrate that your prior research and experience has led to the current proposal that you seek funding for; this is usually shown through your publications being relevant to/building a foundation for your current research. Your publication rate and citations should be comparable with or (preferably) exceed that of your peers at a similar point in their careers. Publications in high impact factor journals and where you are the lead author carry more weight. You should also seek out competitive sources of research funding/awards. These do not need to be for substantial amounts, nor do they need to be from government sources (i.e. industry grants or internal grants/awards are fine), but you do want to show that you have experience in applying for and being awarded research funding. Finally, your proposed research project should be innovative and novel, and demonstrate that you are a leader in your field.

Go for smaller funding bodies initially to demonstrate you can successfully complete a project in timeframe and budget and disseminate the findings. Take advantage of opportunities to be part of larger collaborative teams led either through UNSW or elsewhere. If you have the chance to be part of a large research consortium seeking out opportunities and to manage specific aspects or themes of the research, this will enhance your leadership credentials for future applications.

**What does a DECRA application require? What should my research project brief include?**

A DECRA applicant is required to be 0-5 years (or equivalent) post-PhD; be employed at an eligible organisation (i.e. university or an eligible research institution as detailed in the funding rules); and be based in Australia for at least two thirds of the duration of the DECRA. For full details of what is required in a DECRA application, please see the ARC’s Instructions to Applicants: http://www.arc.gov.au/sites/default/files/filedepot/Public/NCGP/DECRA17/DE17_ITA.pdf and Funding Rules: http://www.arc.gov.au/sites/default/files/filedepot/Public/NCGP/DECRA17/Discovery_Programme_Funding_Rules_2015.pdf (note: these documents were for the 2017 funding round and may change for future rounds).

I've heard ARC only gives funding to senior academics. So how to collaborate with others (e.g., more senior academics) on an ARC proposal? e.g., how to pitch it - does it need to seem like their project and you only have a minor role?
While for some disciplines (Philosophy, Literary Studies for example) the following characteristics do not apply, for the greater number of fields of research statistically the Discovery outcomes reflect what is often suggested anecdotally – a larger percentage of successful proposals are collaborative with a researcher at Associate Professor level or above as part of the team. While projects led by senior researchers may appear better placed for success, what assessors are interested in is the overall team research track record and how individual track records complement each other. They will also be assessing how the expertise of the entire research team has both the research and the project management expertise to successfully complete the project and arrive at the outcomes detailed in the proposal.

While it is unwise to name a researcher without any ARC experience as lead CI it is equally unwise to identify a senior researcher as lead when her/his contribution to the project is negligible.

Ideally the researcher identified as lead CI will have some previous ARC experience. It is also vital that the lead CI be the obvious intellectual leader of the project. Similarly it is essential that all named CIs (and PIs) on a project have defined roles that match their skillsets and track records. It is worth remembering that any additions to the research team designed purely to enhance the team track record will be transparent to assessors and will work against rather than ensuring success. A previous history of collaboration among at least some of the team is beneficial as is an intellectual link for others making their inclusion logical.

How many publications are needed to be competitive in qualitative health research? Does a PhD by thesis count for much in this?

This does depend on the stage of your career, if you have had any career disruptions and what is standard in your field. An ECR should be looking at 10-20 as a starting point. While any publication is always a good thing, the focus should always be on achieving first authorship. In some cases 5 quality publications are better than 10 publications in lesser journals.

In doing a PhD by thesis, you should also have publications that have been developed as part of your research. These publications will count.

How important is obtaining grant funding to career progression prospects?

Obtaining funding is very important to your career progression and to enable the realisation of your research. For that reason it is essential to be aware of the different types of funding available and how each fits specific types of research and ambitions for research outcomes. Don’t limit yourself to one scheme or one stream of funding. Think broadly and look beyond better known schemes such as ARC and NHMRC to other funding opportunities including other government schemes, philanthropic, international and industry funding. Think beyond the traditional grant funding model and also look for tender, contract and consultancy opportunities.

Can I align my research project with researchers I want to connect with (who are leaders in my research interest area) who are not at UNSW? e.g. have a supervisor/mentor at UNSW but also at another uni?

You can align your research with researchers at other universities but remember your need to be able to demonstrate that UNSW is the best place for you to do your research. So you do need to be
able to explain why UNSW is the right place for you. If you align yourself too much with external parties then UNSW as the right place will be hard for you to demonstrate.
DEFINING THE RESEARCH AREA AND SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

How do I find out whether a research area is "hot" at UNSW?

For UNSW, review the 2025 strategic plan and our research strengths document. External sponsors and funding agencies will often specify priority areas for funding.

I think my research area is not an area of strength for UNSW. What advice do you have in this case?

The quality of your research and your track record is the key ingredient for success. Alignment with an area of strength at UNSW will make it easier to write some aspects of ARC/NHMRC proposals (eg. research environment) but these sections can still be written well without any direct alignment.

UNSW has research strengths in a comprehensive range of broad discipline areas and most of our researchers should be able to find some alignment.

How do I develop a great research project/idea ready for 2017 rounds?

Developing a research project or idea does not occur in isolation a few months or even a year out from submission date. Any research project that you are seeking funding for should be a logical progression of your existing research career. The project you develop should be underpinned by your research track record – you will need to demonstrate that you have both the expertise and a record of success to respond to the challenges your project will present.

Before embarking on any submission you should consider your track record in relation to the scheme and assess whether you are competitive to apply as yet and if this scheme is the right one for you and the project along with what you want to achieve in terms of outcomes. If you are unsure about the answer to these questions seek the input of peers and mentors along with staff in the RSPO. Sometimes waiting a year and developing your track record or partnerships or focusing on a different funding scheme, or indeed funding type, will ultimately enhance your chances of success. Ensure that the expertise required to undertake the research and realise its ambitions is covered by the research team.

Once you have determined that your track record is competitive and that it and your project are suitable for the scheme you are targeting seek assistance. Do not wait until you have a draft. Contact RSPO to discuss the development of your project at its earliest possible stage. Discuss your ideas with mentors and peers both within and outside UNSW. Review successful applications (through the GMO’s successful grants library https://research.unsw.edu.au/gmo-successful-grants-library) and try to identify the ingredients that led to success. Review broadly; step outside your discipline and assess strategies applied elsewhere, considering what you may be able to adapt successfully for your application.

Once you have determined you are applying start! At a minimum is will take 3 months to develop an application but give yourself as much time as possible. This is especially true for first time applicants. At the same time set up meetings with RSPO – even if you have nothing on paper yet. We want to discuss your project with you and see drafts as early as possible. This will allow us to look at multiple iterations and help you arrive at the most polished and competitive application possible.
GENERAL APPLICATION ADVICE

Approximately how long does it take to apply for funding (i.e., how many forms need to be filled out and how many days/weeks does this take to fill out)? Also how long is the whole process (from starting to put together the application, to approval, to disbursement of funding)

The time it takes to complete an application depends on the researcher and their experience of applying for certain schemes. For ECRs, we recommend starting your application early (i.e. 3-4 months before the deadline), especially if you are applying for an ARC/NHMRC grant. Although you may not be able to complete online forms this far out from a deadline, it is a good idea to start planning and drafting your project description. For smaller schemes, you might only need several weeks (~4-6 weeks) to prepare your application.

Remember, however, that you need to position yourself competitively for a scheme before you apply. Your track record should reflect a natural trajectory to the point of applying for funding.

Depending on the funding body, it may take 3-6 months for the result of your application to be announced (i.e. the ARC and NHMRC usually take around 6 months from the application deadline to announcement of successful proposals). Disbursement of funding will either occur after a set date (i.e. 1 Jan for the year of funding for most ARC/NHMRC schemes, provided all internal paperwork is in order) or within 1-2 months, provided all paperwork is in order and agreements signed.

Can you tap into both ARC and NHMRC funding for different aspects of the same project.

You can apply for funding from both ARC and NHMRC and many researchers have careers built on funding from both agencies. You must be mindful however that these agencies have different funding remits. ARC will not fund medical or clinical research (a detailed articulation the ARC medical research policy can be found at http://www.arc.gov.au/arc-medical-research-policy.

So, while you can apply to both agencies for funding within your field of research the project design, methodology and outcomes should align with the specific funding mandate of the targeted agency.

What are ARC funding criteria, and how are they applied?

The ARC’s funding criteria take into account the following:

- Investigator’s track record(s)
- Project quality and innovation
- Feasibility and benefit
- Research environment

Depending on the scheme, each of these criteria will receive a specific weighting.

As a general rule schemes that involve a Fellowship such as Future and Laureate Fellowships will involve greater scrutiny of an individual researcher’s track record than a Linkage or Discovery application.
Although the Track Record component of a DECRA proposal is worth 35% compared to 40% for Discovery, it remains a vital aspect of the application, with applicants 3-5 yrs post PhD holding the highest success rates despite all track records being assessed in relation to research opportunity.

**How do I form strategic collaborations that are likely to be funded?**

For grant funding, identify schemes and potential collaborators that are suitable for your work and complement what you are doing, particularly new methodologies or techniques.

For contract research, identify how your work answers questions or responds to challenges facing external industry or government organisations. This way you can demonstrate the value of what you are doing to potential partners and collaborators.

Consider where your former students and other UNSW alumni may now be working in identifying suitable partners.

**What type of research project is it best to pitch in grants? Whether these need to be very large and ambitious, or whether they need to be smaller, with achievable outputs?**

All research should have a well-articulated research ambition. This does not mean that the project needs to be large and, if you are applying for you first grant, it is best to make the project achievable not just from a research perspective but also from a project management perspective rather than stretching your capacity and presenting a risky proposition to the assessors. The key to any submission is that it demonstrates a clear narrative – an overarching research ambition with clear aims, a well-defined research plan and outputs that will result in outcomes and impact even if this impact is initially aspirational.

**If your research is aimed at a specific population in Australia (not the Aboriginal population), which overall is small in relation to the entire Australian population, are you less likely to be funded? And if so, what can you do to increase your competitiveness?**

If your research is on a disease that only effects a small portion of Australians but the cost to the Australian tax payer is high and your research can address this then your likelihood of funding is high. So if your research is on small populations and the impact of your research is low, then it may be hard to get funding. However if you can demonstrate that an element of your research is translatable to another group then you may be more competitive.

**To what extent is the chance of success improved if the proposed research sounds as if its results will validate something which is current government policy?**

Validating a current government policy does not correlate with funding success. Addressing issues and tackling challenges that can be demonstrated to be of national and/or international importance will increase your competitiveness. Your project needs to demonstrate what the problem is and why it needs to be addressed right now by this research team. Ultimately you will need to reflect a well-argued National Benefit but national benefit takes many forms. Keep in mind it is your peers and the funding agency panels who will review your application.

**What degree of weight do grant application assessors put on the foreshadowed usefulness of the proposed research to advocates in the field to be studied?**
The impact of the proposed research on the discipline is an important aspect of the research outcomes. If your research provides shoulders for future projects in this field (both your own and those of others) it helps enhance your competitiveness. Funding agencies like to invest in research that suggests there is more to it than just a one off project – foreshadowing what is to come and how your work resonates within the discipline and beyond are all crucial selling points.
INTERNATIONAL GRANTS

Several international grant sources do not allow to have research management fee taken from the proposed budget. What should I do about this?

We can consider this on a case by case basis. Please make early contact if your grant sponsor is in this category.

Grants Management Office: mygrants.gmo@unsw.edu.au

Research Strategy and Partnerships Office: research.partnerships@unsw.edu.au

Where can I get assistance with international grant funding sources?

Please contact us for assistance with any international grant funding sources:

Research Strategy and Partnerships Office: research.partnerships@unsw.edu.au

How can I find out about Horizon 2020 and partnerships with EU.

Most of our engagement with Horizon 2020 is via collaborative networks as it is very difficult to obtain EU funding in Australia. Please contact us for assistance with any EU proposals:

Research Strategy and Partnerships Office: research.partnerships@unsw.edu.au

CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT

I'd like to learn more about consumer involvement and obtaining funding from specific bodies related to my projects.

Consumer Involvement in your research will help to focus your research questions to the consumer perspective. Some funders will require you to demonstrate consumer involvement in your research. For example, Cancer Council grants require an informed and trained consumer to be involved during the development of the research proposal and the plan for ongoing consumer involvement in your research. The Consumer Review Panel’s score is worth 50% of your final mark.

An internet search for “consumers in research” or the NHMRC’s Statement on Consumer and Community Participation in Health and Medical Research are good places to start.