An Early Career Fellow's Perspective on Application

Jonathan Matthews

Background

- Quantum technologies (physicist & engineer)
- Mathematics Graduate (2005)
- E&E Eng. Masters (2007)
- Physics PhD (2011)
- Postdoc (2011-2012)
- Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellow (2012-2015)
- EPSRC Early Career Fellow (2015-2020)
- Lecturer with the school of physics (2013 -)

Disclaimers

- I’m an applied physicist!
- There are more stories than mine
- I’ve not yet sat on panels
- I’ve reviewed for funding councils, but not for the type of calls that I applied to
- 1 is statistically a small sample
- My fellowship call was a “one-off”

Why apply for a fellowship?

- Gives scientific independence
- Gives (some) career independence
- Increases visibility
- Employability. Some of them let you move
- Prestigious: for you AND your institution
- For EPSRC at least, it's all about you, the applicant. That's what they are funding

Practice

- Get practice of writing grant applications early
- Read examples, good, bad and different
- Read your colleagues' (to help them and you)
- Mock interviews

Support

- A good mentor (or two)
- Colleagues willing to share proposals
- An understanding work-life balance
- Your head of school
- Your Institution
- UoB has “Research Enterprise Development office” (RED)

Might need internal competition first

Evidencing Support from the university

- You need to evidence how the university is backing you.
- E.g. Lab space? Equipment? Reduced teaching load?
- The referees will be looking for credibility and how much the institution is backing you

The right project partners

- Other academics
- Industry
- Evidence of “what” and “why” and *“how much”* in letters of support.

Know what's needed

- Know your call
- People that have succeeded previously in your call
- Find people that have been on previous panels
- Know your funding council
- Know the politics – why is the call there?

All parts of the proposal are important

- The Science part is probably the most fun bit
- It's also the key part that must be right first

- But don't let that imbalance your effort
- E.g. suggest financial part is in good shape early
- Draft weak parts early on (so you can get help!)

Know your deadlines

- The funder's deadline

- Internal deadlines: Those that need to sign-off are busy people, e.g.
  - Head of school
  - Finance team
  - Those giving you feedback

Keep developing your ideas

- Don’t wait for a call and then “fit” an idea.
- An “ideas book”. Have a mind for proposals when going about usual duties
- I sought practice
  - Full-on mock interview “exam conditions”
  - Informal opportune questioning

Identify weaknesses in your CV

- Tailor your CV to the call
- Draw out what makes you unique. E.g. in previous collaborations, what was your contribution
- Do something about the weak parts (that's where mentors can come in)

Be visible

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Referee - 101758078

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Spooky…

Know your weaknesses

- For me, the interview was my weakest
- I learnt what to expect
  - Types of questions
  - The process
- I sought practice
  - Full-on mock interview “exam conditions”
  - Informal opportune questioning

If in doubt ask the Funder

- Don’t always rely on anecdotal evidence
- EPSRC encourages contact with applicants
- Coordinate questions through your university

Meet Funding representatives

Referees

- Referees can come across as mean
- Don’t take things personally!
- Try to avoid emotion in your response
- Be concise