ARC LINKAGE PROJECTS

WRITING A GOOD APPLICATION
General advice: choosing your project

• Research significance, impact and merit
  – Seek to solve problems and/or controversies
  – Focus on hypothesis-driven research
  – International context and momentum should be strong
  – Consider potential for national benefit or “translation”
  – Relevance to Partner Organisation(s)
  – Avoid pure data collection (“stamp collecting”)
  – Have preliminary data, if possible

• Be ambitious, but make sure to balance it with:
  – Feasible approaches and clear alternatives where problems are likely
  – Evidence of previous success with innovative concepts
  – Plausible claims about outcomes and impacts, especially within the timeframe of the grant
General advice: pitching it correctly

• Genre: what are you writing?
  – Not a research paper
• Audience: who will be reading the application?
  – Aim for intelligent “non-experts” or “generalists”
  – Avoid excessive jargon; define essential jargon
• When is it likely to be read? How much time is likely to be spent on it?
• Carefully read the funding rules, instructions, advice, guidelines etc.
  – The funding body is trying to “help you to help them to fund you”
• Identify selection criteria and their weightings
ARC LINKAGE PROJECT APPLICATIONS

RESEARCH COLLABORATORS & PARTNER ORGANISATIONS
Caveat

• New rules, new game ...
• LP2014:
  – Investigator(s) (20%)
  – Significance and Innovation (25%)
  – Approach and Training (15%)
  – Research Environment (10%)
  – Commitment from Partner Organisation(s) (30%)
• Changes to rules around POs
  – Australian PO required 2013; not in 2014 …
Who should be a research collaborator?

- Isn’t rocket science
- Need to cover the necessary expertise and skills
  - No duplication
  - No hangers-on
- Forms of collaborators:
  - Other Chief Investigators
  - Chosen Partner Investigators
  - “Required” Partner Investigators
  - Collaborators
What sort of contribution is necessary?

• CIs must:
  – take significant intellectual responsibility for the conduct of the Project and for strategic decisions in its pursuit and communication of results
  – make a serious commitment to carrying out Project

• PIs must:
  – take significant intellectual responsibility ... and/or
  – have the experience and capacity to provide effective supervision, support and mentoring; and/or
  – have the relevant skills and experiences to manage a similar scale research Project effectively
What sort of track record is necessary?

• Chief Investigators
  – Outstanding academic track record (considering opportunity) in relevant area(s)

• Partner Investigators
  – Sometimes academic experience; may not be assessed against same standards …
  – Good-to-excellent track record in relevant area(s) to deliver on some key aspect(s) of the project
  – Can be harder to achieve for “required” PIs – be as selective as possible, though
How different can a PI track record be?

• Potentially very different
• May include expertise in:
  – Project management and governance
  – Tech-transfer
  – Policy delivery
• Demonstrate genuine contribution
• Demonstrate need for successful delivery of project
• Be specific
How to sell an “alternative” track record

Discussion: who are your PIs likely to be?
What about someone who should be involved but doesn't have a good track record?

• Hmmm … tricky
• Don’t compromise on team … even LPs are too competitive
• ROPE considerations?
• How essential is her/his involvement?
  – Alternative CI or PI?
  – Collaborator rather than investigator?
  – Should time be spent strengthening track record in preparation for a future LP?
Other practicalities: negotiating the distribution of funding

• Discuss it up front with your other CIs

• Be realistic
  – Scale of typical awards: $115-120k average
  – Average cut: ~24%
  – But, e.g., one 2013 MQ project asked for $898,000; awarded $240,000

• Be collaborative
  – Maximise benefits and outcomes for all

• Be imaginative in how you put the funds to best use
Choosing Partner Organisations

• Why is the partnership needed on both sides?
  – Value proposition

• ARC requirements:
  – Evidence of new or on-going collaboration
  – No duplication of Commonwealth funding for the project
  – Suitable cash and/or in-kind contribution from each PO relative to size of project and PI contributions

• What types of POs?
# Types of POs: 2014 successes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Total PO contributions</th>
<th>Cash and In-kind ($M)</th>
<th>Relative Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Federal Government</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian state, territory &amp; local governments</td>
<td>44.37</td>
<td>26.10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International governments</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>50.13</td>
<td>29.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-profit</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>15.54</td>
<td>9.20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>61.08</td>
<td>36.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>25.34</td>
<td>14.90%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
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<td>86.42</td>
<td>50.90%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
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<td>13.47</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>169.77</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of Partner Organisations?

- Think about practicalities of managing project if funded – the assessors will, even if you don’t
- Follow principles for investigators:
  - Keep to minimum
  - No duplication
  - No hangers-on
- Ask yourself, what is each contributing?
Making POs effective in Project Description

• Partner Organisation commitment and collaboration
  – Evidence that each PO is genuinely committed to, and prepared to collaborate in, the Project
  – How the PO(s) is involved in the Proposal, how the Proposal fits into the PO’(s) overall strategic plan and how the Proposal is of value to the PO(s)
  – Explain how the project is likely to lead to further collaboration between the PO(s) and the Admin Org, and to develop long-term alliances

• Role of Personnel
  – What specific roles are the PIs playing?
PO Section (Part D)

• D6 Evidence of collaboration
  – Provide evidence of new or on-going collaboration between the PO and Admin Org, including details of how the Project fits into the PO’s strategic plan and how it will add value to the PO (1 p)

• D7 Letter of support from PO
  – On the PO’s official letterhead (2 pp)
  – Include a brief profile of the organisation
  – Provide details of the cash and/or in-kind contributions
  – Demonstrate (and certify) the source of its cash contribution (if a cash contribution is being made)
  – Certify that it will meet the requirements of Funding Agreement
ARC LINKAGE PROJECT APPLICATIONS

WRITING A COMPETITIVE PROJECT DESCRIPTION
Selection criteria for LP14

• Investigators – 20%
  • Primarily demonstrated in Part G
  • Also “Role of Personnel” in Project Description

• Proposed Project – 50%
  – Significance and Innovation = 25%
    • Project Description is the only section to demonstrate this
  – Approach and Training = 15%
    • Included in project description and also assessed on your Budget and Justification
  – Research Environment = 10%
    • Primarily addressed in the Project Description

• Commitment from Partner Organisations – 30%
  • Addressed in the Project Description
  • Mainly Part D
PART C – Project Description

• Most of the 50% will be awarded on your Project Description

• Only 8 pages including references

• Instructions to Applicants have 23 bullet points – address these under the headings
  – You need to have a well-thought through project before you start writing
  – Provide the ARC with the information it wants to assess your project
  – Consider the relative weightings of the selection criteria, and allocate space accordingly; but remember a decent approach section
  – Focused, succinct responses
Other strategic tips

• Recognise two levels of writing:
  – General (e.g. background, significance & innovation, national benefit etc.)
  – Technical (e.g. approach & methodology)
  – Alternative view: “the hourglass” principle for structure and level of content

• Stay “on message” in various sections
  – Keep sections clean to make it easy for assessors to score; e.g. no “background” in “approach”
Aims and Background -- 0%

- What is this project about?
- What are you trying to achieve?
- What are your aims?
  - Are the aims realistic?
  - Be clear, concise and bold
- Number and differentiate your aims, make sure these are before Background
- Make sure you review and revise as you are writing because the aims need to be consistent throughout the project
Background

• Write this section for an intelligent non-expert
• Situate your project in relation to the relevant literature
  – Identify the problems, questions, gaps, theoretical issues in the literature that your project aims to address
  – Do mention your own work where relevant, but ensure that you name all the key researchers in the field
  – Show that you know the literature, but don’t assume that an assessor does
• Mention the international context
• “Sell don’t tell” – Background sets the stage for your claims of Significance
Significance and Innovation – 25%

• What is the research problem addressed by your project?
• Why does the PO have a stake in addressing this research problem?
• How is your research innovative in the way it addresses this problem?
• What are the broader benefits (social, economic, environmental, technological) and outcomes of your research?
• What distinguishes your project from other research in the field?
Approach and Training – 15%

• This is where you say *what, how, when* and *why*, you are going to do!
• Conceptual framework and methods must be clearly articulated
  – Remember you are writing for an intelligent non-expert
  – Balance between too much detail and too little
  – “… appropriate to the aims of the proposal.”
Approach and Training II

- Include a *detailed* research plan and proposed timelines
  - Divide the project into phases and include estimated timelines
  - There is a direct link between what you say you will do here and the funding you ask for in your budget
  - Clearly explain the role of the PO in the project (substantial)
  - Include an explanation of how you will communicate within the team (quarterly meetings, weekly Skype)
Approach and Training III

• Training includes CIs, PIs, ECRs and HDRs
• MQRes allocation:

• Need to *explain* what the likely HDR project will be:
  – Separate project to achieve the PhD
  – Enhances, and is aligned with, the project in the proposal
  – Include supervision in the Role of Personnel
Research Environment – 10%

**Research Environment** means the laboratory, department, school, centre or institute within an Administering Organisation or Partner Organisation where research will be undertaken, and which provides opportunities for knowledge growth, innovation, collaboration, mentoring and student training.
Research Environment II

• “Both administering organisations are high performing research centres … The partner organisations, where the actual research will be conducted, are all committed to research and evidence-based service provision…”

• *ARC applications: some tips for writing about research environment,*

Research Environment III

• DO *explain why* MQ provides a good research environment for your project by:
  – Identifying specific colleagues who will provide you with critical feedback, support, mentoring etc. which is relevant to this project
    • NB. If you have benefitted from their mentoring in the past, you should refer to this in G 11.1 (ROPE)
  – Identifying research centres or groups of which you are a member and which are relevant to this project
  – Identifying special facilities (e.g. museums, labs, technical equipment and support) which are crucial for the success of the project
Research Environment IV

• Do NOT
  – Use precious space with a lot of generic information about the University and its research aspirations
  – Mention names of prominent researchers in the University unless you actually do expect them to provide input to your project (i.e. no name-dropping)
  – Simply rely on ERA rankings to establish the quality of the research environment
Research Environment – Communication of Results

Outline plans for communicating your research

– High-impact journals – give named examples
– Conferences – be specific, named examples and why these conferences, include them in your budget
– Give strategies for communicating to end-users in the community (non-academic audience)
– Will you engage with the media?
– Do you have a non-conventional approach to disseminating your research?
Partner Organisation Commitment & Collaboration

• Contributes to the 30%
  – but the *Partner Organisation letter (D7)* and *D6 (Evidence of collaboration with the Administering Organisations and the alignment of the Project with the Partner Organisation’s strategic plan)* are crucial for the 30%
Role of Personnel

• Don’t run out of space, this is important
• This is where you explain the roles of each CI and PI on the project
  – Great opportunity to clarify what your (non-academic) PIs will contribute to the project
• Demonstrates that you are a team with complimentary skills to bring the project to a successful conclusion
  – Everyone has a defined contribution
  – Include any HDRs and their supervision
References

• Be comprehensive
• 10-point font
• The Project Description is only 8 pages, so space is at a premium – do you need all of those references?
ARC LINKAGE PROJECT APPLICATIONS

PROJECT BUDGET – PRINCIPLES
Things To Remember

• Project Budget is your financial plan
• Project Budget must be aligned with project description
• There is no second bite!
• Budget justification = *how* you came up with numbers and *why* the expenditure is necessary
• Good justification = assurance to assessor to manage and deliver your project
Your Starting Point

- Funding Rules and Instructions to Applicants
- Project Description
- MQ Enterprise Agreement
- MQ Policies and Procedures
- Internet
Level and Period of Funding (LP 2014)

- Minimum $50,000 pa, maximum $300,000 pa
- Minimum 2 and maximum 3 consecutive years
What you can ask for (LP 2014)

- Personnel costs (salaries and on-costs for project staff)
- Fieldwork costs essential to the project *incl tech and logistical support, travel and accommodation costs for CIs, Pis and research support personnel*
- Expert services of a third party
- Equipment
- Maintenance and access to infrastructure and equipment
- Publication and dissemination of Project outputs and outreach activity costs – NEW in 2014
What you can ask for (LP 2014) II

• Specialised computer equipment and software essential to the project
• Teaching relief for CIs (up to $40,000 pa)
• Travel costs incl. economy travel for domestic and/or international travel and accommodation and international, ≤$50,000 over the life time of the project, for CIs, PIs and research support personnel. **Fieldwork travel costs are not counted towards $50,000 limit**
• Web hosting and development
• Other
What you cannot ask for

- Salaries and on-costs for CIs or PIs
- Hosting of conferences and seminars
- HECS and HELP fees, fees for international students
- Capital works (refurbishments and new buildings)
- Basic infrastructure and IT
- Costs not directly related to research (e.g. professional membership fees, fees for patent applications, visas, relocation costs, insurance)
Budget building – general advice

• Your Project description is your starting point
• Initial questions to ask yourself:
  - Who is involved?
  - What activities are all of these people going to be doing?
  - What support do they need?
  - When will these people be doing these activities?
Budget building – general advice II

• Other questions we are asked
  - How much should I ask for? — Enough for you to achieve the stated aims and outputs
  - What can I leave out? — Anything that is not essential – conversely, include everything which is needed. If you are struggling with justification for an item, you probably don’t need it
  - Should I pad the budget? — NO, the assessors are really good at spotting this!
  - How much detail do I need to include? — Enough for assessor to understand what you need and more importantly why
Budget building – general advice III

• Appropriate items under appropriate headings: Personnel, Equipment, Travel
• Budget justification: clear, concise, within page limit, items in Justification should be in the same order as the budget table
• Use real amounts – rounded numbers look like guesstimates
• Provide sources for quotes (website links are OK)