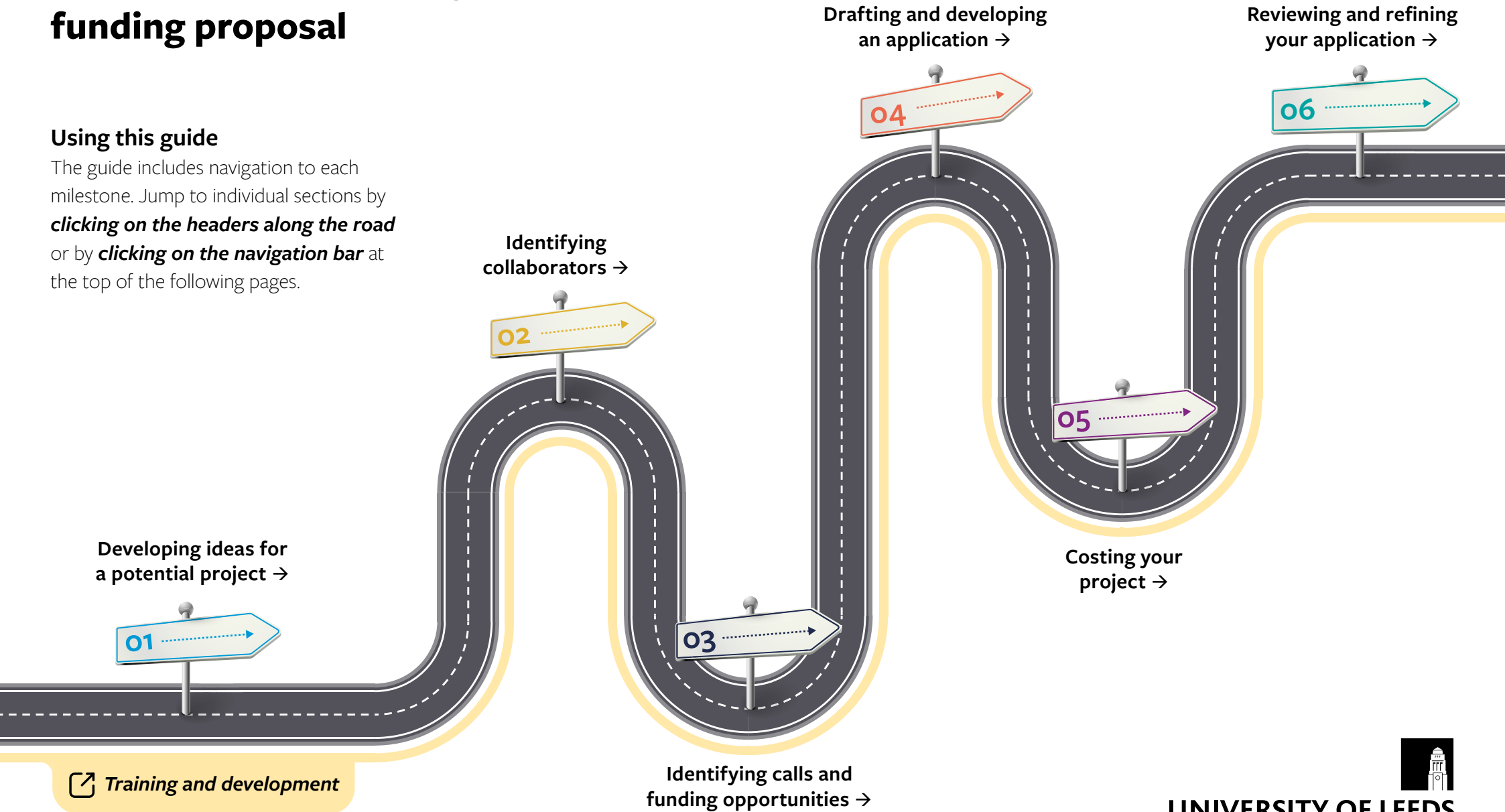# From ideas to action:
Leeds University Business School's roadmap for developing a research funding proposal

Using this guide

The guide includes navigation to each milestone. Jump to individual sections by **clicking on the headers along the road** or by **clicking on the navigation bar** at the top of the following pages.

Developing ideas for a potential project →

01

Identifying collaborators →

02

Identifying calls and funding opportunities →

03

Drafting and developing an application →

04

Costing your project →

05

Reviewing and refining your application →

06

Training and development

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

🏠 Home | @ Contact

| Developing ideas for a potential project → | Identifying collaborators → | Identifying calls and funding opportunities → | Drafting and developing an application → | Costing your project → | Reviewing and refining your application → |

Leeds University Business School's Faculty Research and Innovation Office has created this guide to give you an overview of everything involved in developing and submitting a research funding application.

Each section includes:

- A description of what is involved at that stage

- An overview of what colleagues in the Business School have said about this part of the process

- A summary of training and development opportunities

- Links to helpful resources.

As part of the "Improving Research Culture Through Addressing Inequality in Research Funding" project, we spoke to over 20 colleagues in the Business School in May and June 2023 to find out what their experience of applying, or thinking of applying, for research funding was. This guide includes a summary of the recurring opportunities and barriers that were mentioned.

Keep an eye on the weekly events e-bulletin, sent by the Faculty Research and Innovation Office, and visit the Business School's Training and Development section on the SharePoint site and the Northern Advanced Research Training Initiative (NARTI) website, to sign up for relevant training events and workshops when they are available.
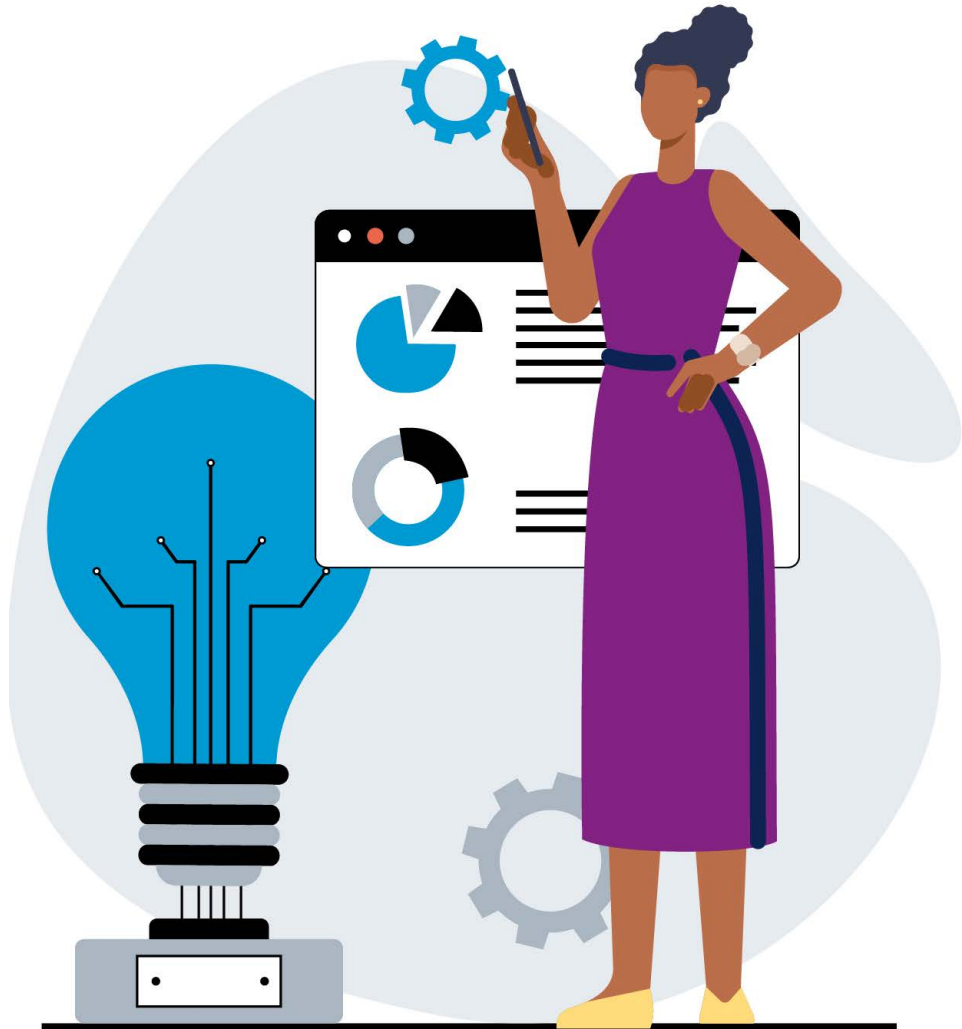
Why apply for research funding?

Applying for research funding can:

Encourage you to expand your network and conduct novel, frontier research

Help focus your research ideas – you need to clearly define what your research is trying to achieve and who will benefit from it

Give you access to resources you wouldn't normally have, enabling you to deliver a larger-scale project e.g. money for research assistants, access to large datasets, support for events with stakeholders, travel for fieldwork and conferences

Help you with high-quality research outputs – research has shown positive correlation between research funding and publication quality as well as quantity

Help with your career progression and promotion as funding is often an important component of research expectations.

Common research funders:

- **URKI: UK Research and Innovation**
  UKRI brings together seven disciplinary research councils, as well as Innovate UK and Research England. The seven research councils are:
  - **AHRC**: Arts and Humanities Research Council
  - **BBSRC**: Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
  - **ESRC**: Economic and Social Research Council
  - **EPSRC**: Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
  - **MRC**: Medical Research Council
  - **NERC**: Natural Environment Research Council
  - **STFC**: Science and Technology Facilities Council

- **BA: The British Academy**

- **Horizon Europe**
  The European Union's key funding programme for research and innovation which will run until 2027

- **Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

- **Leverhulme Trust**

- **Nuffield Foundation**

Home | Contact

Developing ideas for a potential project → | Identifying collaborators → | Identifying calls and funding opportunities → | Drafting and developing an application → | Costing your project → | Reviewing and refining your application →

Glossary

Co-I: Co-Investigator. Also referred to as *project co-lead (PcL)* by UKRI.

FRIO: Faculty Research and Innovation Office.

Je-S: An online electronic system used by research councils for the submission of grant applications. It is being phased out by UKRI during 2023 to be replaced by the Funding Service, which all UK Research Councils will be using eventually.

NARTI: The Northern Advanced Research Training Initiative – a network of 17 university business and management schools specialising in advanced methods, specialist subject and professional skills training, and led by the University of Leeds.

NGO: A non-profit organisation that operates independently of any government.

OD&PL: Organisational Development and Professional Learning – the University of Leeds' organisation and professional development practice team providing a range of services in learning, leadership, and development for staff and postgraduate researchers.

PI: Principal Investigator. Also referred to as *project lead (PL)* by UKRI.

Pivot-RP: A searchable database containing active funding opportunities for all disciplines and project types. It includes a wide variety of funding types, including national and international opportunities – some available only to University of Leeds researchers – all in one easy-to-search tool.

Pre-award: Refers to activities that take place as part of the application development process e.g. developing a budget, preparing the submission in the funder's format, seeking feedback, and ensuring all approvals are in place.

Post-award: Relates to the support that is in place to manage the finances once an award is made. Both the pre- and post-award teams are based in the FRIO. Visit the Business School's SharePoint site to see how the pre-award and post-award teams can help you with your funding application.

RA: Research Assistant.

Researchfish: Web-based facility through which the Research Councils and some other funders collect information on the outcomes of the research they have supported. Submission of this information is a condition of Research Council awards.

RIS: Research and Innovation Service at the University of Leeds.

SharePoint: The Business School's intranet.

Vitae: A non-profit programme that supports the professional development of researchers.

Some of the websites included in this glossary and elsewhere in the report are run by third parties. The University of Leeds is not responsible for the content on these external websites.

Home | Contact

Developing ideas for a potential project | Identifying collaborators → | Identifying calls and funding opportunities → | Drafting and developing an application → | Costing your project → | Reviewing and refining your application →

Developing ideas for a potential project

Overview
The first stage in developing a research funding proposal is coming up with an idea that you want to develop into something tangible and deliverable. This may be an idea based on a gap you've identified in the current literature or perhaps it is the next step from your previous research.

Your idea may be based on a response to a funding call (see section 3 for more information about funding calls) or something that you want to develop in response to a question or problem posed by governments, an NGO, or a charity, for example. It may be something that has been identified through a conversation with business practitioners that relates to a need to address a knowledge gap within their organisation.

The FRIO offers a range of internal research support schemes. This includes the Challenge Fund (funding to support the preparation of large-scale, collaborative grant applications) and the Small Research Grant Scheme (funding to support activities that may include preparing an external research funding application). You may find other schemes helpful for your research funding development activities, even if this is not the primary objective of the support scheme - for example, the International Visiting Staff Fund supports the costs associated with inviting international visiting researchers to the Business School. Such visitors could become collaborators as part of your research funding application.

We appreciate it can be a substantial leap for colleagues to go from no previous external funding experience to holding an external award, so these internal schemes not only provide resources to strengthen developing external applications, but they also give the award holders an idea of what it's like to manage and utilise awarded funds in a set period. The internal schemes give an opportunity for academics to write a small-scale application, thinking about how they can articulate their ideas in a clear way and identify what resources are needed to undertake the work.

Home

Contact

Developing ideas for a potential project

Identifying collaborators →

Identifying calls and funding opportunities →

Drafting and developing an application →

Costing your project →

Reviewing and refining your application →

Hear from our researchers

Barriers

One of the main challenges identified by the academics we spoke to was the academics' heavy workload. Colleagues mentioned that it was hard to find time and have the headspace for idea development and exploring grant opportunities. Teaching responsibilities posed additional difficulties. For example, even if they had research time in semester two, they were unable to allocate time during semester one to apply for funding if the deadline fell in that period. Those on teaching contracts also felt discouraged from applying for research funding.

We recommend speaking to your Head of Department and any mentors you have to ask for guidance, and to regard applying for research funding as a long-term plan. A lot of funders have similar deadlines year-on-year so you can plan ahead (see "identifying calls and funding opportunities" section).

Enablers

The academics we spoke to said that they found the amount of support the FRIO supplied was incredibly useful, as was the support offered elsewhere in the University. They also found the variety of support offered externally, such as by funding bodies, was helpful.

" [*The*] *Research Facilitator for instance, when I sent her my research proposal for the Leverhulme Fund, I felt tremendously supported by her.*

" *There are a lot of opportunities at the University of Leeds and, you know, a lot of networks, a lot of different funding, [...] there are a lot of opportunities.*

Training and development

Throughout the year, the FRIO and NARTI organise development sessions to bring together researchers at all career stages in a cross-department, cross-faculty and cross-institutional space. The aim of these sessions is to identify challenges and opportunities, generate new research ideas, encourage collaboration into new and existing research, and support development.

OD&PL organises a series of Research Culture Cafes. These are trusted spaces to discuss challenges and propose ideas.

OD&PL and RIS run training sessions that introduce you to the funding landscape.

Did you know...?

Staff can access a range of internal research support schemes that are helpful stepping-stones to external research funding. These include the: Challenge Fund, Climate Change and Environmental Research Fund, Small Research Grant scheme, International Visiting Support Fund, Study Leave Travel and Research Support Fund, Impact Leadership Awards and Impact and Engagement Support Funds. There are also two sources of funding available through the Leeds University Business School International Function: PGR International Mobility Fund and International Research Collaboration Fund.

Resources

- **Applying for external research funding** – FRIO SharePoint
- **Six questions for researchers** – RIS
- **Research funding and outputs** – OD&PL

Identifying collaborators

Overview

Developing a funding application, whether it is for a grant or a fellowship, isn't done in isolation. You will work with many different people, both as part of the project and also when developing the application.

Depending on the nature of the project, you will need to consider working with academics from within the Business School, academics from other disciplines and/or universities, industry partners, charitable organisations, government bodies, technicians, professional staff (e.g. staff in the pre and post-award, communications, impact, and HR teams) etc.

Hear from our researchers

Barriers

Finding researchers with similar interests proved challenging. Some colleagues noted that it was important to find people you could trust and rely on; people who would fully contribute and commit to the project.

Others said they faced obstacles with networking, either due to their own shyness or caring responsibilities, which meant they were unable to attend many events, or decreased motivation to engage with new people as their careers advanced.

Enablers

Some of our academics said they benefited from their own extensive networks for connecting with potential collaborators. These networks included colleagues from previous workplaces, conference acquaintances, individuals in research communities, and past project partners.

I think the Challenge Fund genuinely brings together new collaborations.

I had been the convener for the doctoral colloquium, and that has actually given me a bit more visibility.

Home

Contact

Developing ideas for a potential project →

Identifying collaborators

Identifying calls and funding opportunities →

Drafting and developing an application →

Costing your project →

Reviewing and refining your application →

Training and development

Throughout the year, the FRIO and NARTI organise training and development sessions with an external provider on how to strengthen your professional network. These will help you to increase your visibility through social media and other channels, build your confidence in creating and maintaining relationships, and improve opportunities for collaboration. Vitae's continuing professional development programme includes courses on 'collaborative research' and 'building your research profile'.

Did you know...?

The Business School has over 200 partner institutions across the world and is a member of the following international networks: the Worldwide Universities Network (WUN), Alliance of Chinese and European Business Schools (ACE), Alliance of Belt and Road Business Schools (ABRBS), European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and Global Business School Network (GBSN).

Resources

- **How to work in interdisciplinary teams -** Research and Innovation Blog

- **Finding common ground between academics, business practitioners, and government agencies** - Research and Innovation Blog

- **Vitae** - Continuing professional development programme

Home

Contact

Developing ideas for a potential project →

Identifying collaborators →

Identifying calls and funding opportunities

Drafting and developing an application →

Costing your project →

Reviewing and refining your application →

Identifying calls and funding opportunities

Overview
Having an idea for a research project is a great starting point, but you need to make sure your proposed topic aligns with funding calls and funders' priorities. There are plenty of national and international opportunities, and different funding bodies have different research priorities.

It can be a little overwhelming, but the FRIO can help you find the right funding call to match your proposed research.

It is also important to check the eligibility criteria of the funding call before applying, both for you as an individual (e.g. if the funding is only available for staff on open-ended contracts or those who've won a particular award before) and also the institution (e.g. only universities from certain countries can apply). In some instances, there are calls where only a certain number of applications can be submitted by each university.

You will need to pay careful attention to any deadlines set by the funder and/or the University.

Hear from our researchers

Barriers
Some of the colleagues we interviewed said they found it hard to find calls that would be suitable for their research idea. Some also said that they felt overwhelmed by all the information about funding opportunities and suffered from information overload.

Enablers
All staff at the University of Leeds have access to Pivot-RP, a searchable database of external research funding opportunities from UK and international funding bodies. If, after looking through Pivot-RP, you are still unsure what funding opportunities are available to you, the FRIO can support you with this.

Training and development
The University provides information on how to use Pivot-RP (see below), including how to set up bespoke funding alerts. There are also tutorials on Pivot-RP's Pivot-RP's YouTube channel.

Did you know...?
Pivot-RP stats: There are 25,000+ active opportunities maintained, 15,000+ funders tracked, and £56B+ total value of available funding opportunities.

Between August 2018 – March 2023, staff at Leeds University Business School have submitted research funding applications involving 82 different funders, with almost a third of these being funders located outside of the UK.

Resources
- **Pivot-RP**

Home   Contact

Developing ideas for a potential project →

Identifying collaborators →

Identifying calls and funding opportunities →

Drafting and developing an application

Costing your project →

Reviewing and refining your application →

Drafting and developing an application

Overview
What you need to include in the funding application varies depending on the funding call. Funders provide advice on how to complete their applications so a good place to start is the funder's website and application platform.

Work with the FRIO to develop the application. Allow plenty of time (you will need to factor in feedback from colleagues, developing an accurate budget, seeking the required approvals etc.) and keep referring back to the funder's objectives.

You should also get in touch with your Head of Department to let them know you're developing an application so they are aware of the potential impact on workload allocations in the future, should the application be successful. They may also be able to provide feedback directly or help you identify suitable people to approach for feedback.

Hear from our researchers

Barriers
The colleagues we spoke to said developing grant applications was time-consuming. For those without experience of drafting an application before, the process seemed complex. Understanding how the costings worked was also quite confusing for some colleagues (see "costing your project" section).

Having English as a second language was also mentioned as a barrier for some. It meant that some of the nuances of the grant application were missed.

Enablers
Colleagues felt very supported by the FRIO and also the training sessions available. Some also commented that the Business School's refreshed focus on developing research funding applications alongside producing journal articles has helped improve the research culture around different research activities and outputs.

> *I've made quite a lot of use of the Grant Craft sessions. …I get a sense that Leeds offers a good level of support compared to other institutions.*

Home   Contact

Developing ideas for a potential project →

Identifying collaborators →

Identifying calls and funding opportunities →

Drafting and developing an application

Costing your project →

Reviewing and refining your application →

Training and development

Throughout the year, the FRIO and NARTI organise development sessions with external training providers, to run workshops that will help you increase your awareness of external funding opportunities, including the myths, challenges, opportunities, and latest developments, of particular funding providers. Previous training has focused on ESRC, Nuffield Foundation and Leverhulme Trust funding.

OD&PL offers workshops and sessions for all staff involved in and supporting research funding applications. This includes evidencing impact, research integrity, embedding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in proposals, the role of the research leader and track records and narrative CVs. The Research Leadership Package is designed for current and aspiring PIs, those looking to build and develop research groups and collaborations, and those taking on university research leadership roles such as Director of Research and Innovation within a school.

Vitae's continuous professional development programme includes courses on 'proposal writing' and 'research ethics and integrity'.

Did you know...?

Between August 2018 – March 2023, 173 members of the Faculty have been part of an external research funding application.

In 2021 we engaged with Grant Craft to deliver grant development training. Between 2021 and 2023, 63 members of the Faculty attended at least one of these sessions.

Resources

- **UKRI Guidance for applicants –** UKRI website. Equivalent guidance will be available on other funder webpages.

- **Applying for external research funding** – FRIO SharePoint

- **How to write a grant proposal** - Research and Innovation Blog

- **My winning proposal** – Case studies on Research Professional News

- **Vitae** - continuous professional development programme

Home

Contact

Developing ideas for a potential project →

Identifying collaborators →

Identifying calls and funding opportunities →

Drafting and developing an application →

Costing your project

Reviewing and refining your application →

Costing your project

Overview

All budgets must be costed through the FRIO and approved prior to submission. The FRIO will be able to help you understand what the funder will and won't fund, as every funding call is different. For example, will the funder cover a percentage of your and your project team's time?

Some funders will only cover teaching replacement, whilst others don't offer any funding at all for existing staff time. The funder will always include this information in their funding call guidance. You should start planning your project costings early in the application process and get in touch with the FRIO as soon as possible, especially if your project team involves people from other faculties or outside the University of Leeds.

Hear from our researchers

Barriers

A recurring comment from colleagues was that understanding the financial side of a research project was difficult e.g. the true cost of staff time, what overhead costs are, what needs to be charged where.

Enablers

Help is available from the FRIO. You can speak to the pre-award team in the FRIO when you have an idea for the project and they can help guide you with the costings – you don't need to have developed a full budget before speaking with them. Previous successful funding applications are available so you can see some examples of what a project budget might include. We also recommend speaking to people you know who have previously submitted successful grant applications and would be happy to share their experience. The FRIO can help put you in touch with

other people who have experience of a particular funder or scheme.

> *…I suppose it's just the complexity. How does it work? Where does the money go? How do you allocate that?*

Training and development

Throughout the year, the FRIO and NARTI organise training and development sessions that focus on managing external grants. These sessions are designed to equip participants with best practices and essential skills in effective external funding management from a financial and project management perspective. They also help participants to gain insight into grant writing and management processes from academics at different career stages.

Did you know…?

Between 2014 – 2020, FRIO support was provided for 320 applications involving Business School staff for circa £59million of research funding.

Between August 2022 – June 2023, the FRIO finalised costings for 80 external funding applications (with lots more still in development), with a combined Faculty value of £13.4million! During this period, project costings have ranged from £1.5k to £2.94million.

Home Contact

Developing ideas for a potential project → Identifying collaborators → Identifying calls and funding opportunities → Drafting and developing an application → **Costing your project** Reviewing and refining your application →

Costings example

Here are two examples of previous costings for two different funders (ESRC and BA) which give you an idea of what an external research grant costing looks like.

ESRC (Totals Mar '22 to Aug '25)	FEC	Price	Internal
Investigators Directly Allocated (DA)	**131,907.77**	**105,526.21**	**26,381.56**
PI – 30.00% FTE	84,035.63	67,228.50	16,807.13
Co-I – 5.00% FTE	13,550.34	10,840.27	2,710.07
Co-I – 10.00% FTE	34,321.80	27,457.44	6,864.36
Investigators DA – Apprenticeship Levy	**470.44**	**376.35**	**94.09**
PI – 30.00% FTE	310.24	248.19	62.05
Co-I – 5.00% FTE	50.05	40.04	10.01
Co-I – 10.00% FTE	110.15	88.12	22.03
Salaries Directly Incurred (DI)	**76,422.68**	**61,138.14**	**15,284.54**
Admin-Grade 6, A - 20.00% FTE	16,283.51	13,026.81	3,256.70
RA 6,-YR1-12mths, R - 50.00% FTE	20,046.39	16,037.11	4,009.28
RA 6,-YR2-12mths, R - 100.00% FTE	40,092.78	32,074.22	8,018.56
Salaries DI - Apprenticeship Levy	**286.33**	**229.04**	**57.29**
Admin-Grade 6, A - 20.00% FTE	60.99	48.79	12.20
RA 6,-YR1-12mths, R - 50.00% FTE	75.11	60.08	15.03
RA 6,-YR2-12mths, R - 100.00% FTE	150.23	120.17	30.06
Consumables	**37,129.86**	**29,703.89**	**7,425.97**
Website-£5,000 to create £1,500 per annum to host	11,000.00	8,800.00	2,200.00
Grammerly software: £400 yearly x4	1,600.00	1,280.00	320.00
Otter (transcription): Per month £8.33	349.86	279.89	69.97
10 workshops to collect feedback	22,680.00	18,144.00	4,536.00
Recruitment	1,500.00	1,200.00	300.00

ESRC (Totals Mar '22 to Aug '25)	FEC	Price	Internal
Travel	**8,360.00**	**6,688.00**	**1,672.00**
USA Conference x 2	8,360.00	6,688.00	1,672.00
Fees DI	**7,200.00**	**5,760.00**	**1,440.00**
Annual membership of XXX	3,600.00	2,880.00	720.00
Annual membership of XXX	3,600.00	2,880.00	720.00
Indirect Costs	**205,039.84**	**164,031.87**	**41,007.97**
Admin-Grade 6, A - 20.00% FTE	23,601.70	18,881.36	4,720.34
RA 6 - YR1-12mths, R - 50.00% FTE	29,502.14	23,601.71	5,900.43
RA 6 - YR2-12mths, R - 100.00% FTE	59,004.27	47,203.42	11,800.85
PI - 30.00% FTE	61,954.51	49,563.61	12,390.90
Co-I - 5.00% FTE	10,325.74	8,260.59	2,065.15
Co-I - 10.00% FTE	20,651.48	16,521.18	4,130.30
Estates	**32,329.17**	**25,863.34**	**6,465.83**
Admin-Grade 6, A - 20.00% FTE	3,666.00	2,932.80	733.20
RA 6 - YR1-12mths, R - 50.00% FTE	4,582.49	3,665.99	916.50
RA 6 - YR2-12mths, R - 100.00% FTE	9,164.98	7,331.98	1,833.00
PI - 30.00% FTE	9,623.22	7,698.58	1,924.64
Co-I - 5.00% FTE	2,084.74	1,667.79	416.95
Co-I - 10.00% FTE	3,207.74	2,566.20	641.54
Infrastructure	**297.92**	**238.34**	**59.58**
Co-I - 5.00% FTE	297.92	238.34	59.58
TOTAL	**499,444.01**	**399,555.18**	**99,888.83**

Home

@
Contact

Developing ideas for
a potential project →

Identifying
collaborators →

Identifying calls and
funding opportunities →

Drafting and developing
an application →

Costing your
project

Reviewing and refining
your application →

British Academy Small Research Grant (Totals Sep '23 to Dec '24)	FEC	Price	Internal
Consumables	**750.00**	**750.00**	**0**
Conference expenses	750.00	750.00	0
Fees DI	**9,225.00**	**9,225.00**	**0**
Casual Research asst - 50 hrs	1,200.00	1,200.00	0
Survey	8,025.00	8,025.00	0
TOTAL	**9,975.00**	**9,975.00**	**0**

The funder covers 100% of direct research costs but it is not possible to request funding to cover existing staff time and associated overheads.

Explanation of terms

- FEC - Full Economic Cost – the total cost associated with the project. More information is available on the RIS website

- Price - What the funder will pay

- Internal - The remaining element of the full cost that is not covered by the price. So, for example, with ESRC, the funder pays 80% of the FEC and the remaining 20% is an internal contribution.

Resources

- **Costing and pricing –** RIS

- **Costings checklist –** FRIO SharePoint

Home

Contact

Developing ideas for a potential project →

Identifying collaborators →

Identifying calls and funding opportunities →

Drafting and developing an application →

Costing your project →

Reviewing and refining your application

Reviewing and refining your application

Overview

Your application will go through a number of reviews and edits. Allow plenty of time for these revisions. Getting feedback from different colleagues with experience of successfully applying for external research funding will strengthen your application.

We recommend identifying a mentor and asking them for feedback, for example someone with experience of successfully applying for research funding from the same funder you are completing an application for.

There is also the Faculty Peer Review College (FPRC) for researchers applying for research funding of more than £75k. The FPRC members include: senior academic staff; academic staff who have previously successfully attracted external funding; academic staff who sit, or have recently sat, on external funding panels e.g. ESRC Peer Review College; members of the FRIO.

Sometimes the University has an institutional process for particular funding schemes (e.g. ESRC new investigator grant and ESRC research grant) so allow plenty of time for this.

When the application and project costing has gone through the revisions and been finalised, your Head of Department will be asked for their approval.

Hear from our researchers

Barriers
Some of the academics we spoke to said they were dissatisfied with the review structure and feedback system. They identified a need for improved information sharing. Some also commented that interactive training for both reviewers and those receiving feedback would also be beneficial so that reviewers can produce quality feedback and the applicants can better interpret and respond positively to the feedback.

Enablers
Our academics reported receiving valuable support from the FRIO, which offers training opportunities and provides feedback on applications. They also received assistance from other sources, such as colleagues from their departments/groups and from previous

workplaces, and collaborators within their professional networks. In some instances, the academics received help from funders, contacting them to discuss how their research might fit with a particular call or the funder's research priorities.

There is a grant application library on the School's SharePoint site which includes examples of successful research funding applications.

> " I usually do either ask a colleague who's more experienced to take a look. Or I know with the [XXX] grant, the PI was from the University of [XXX]. So she also got somebody from her research office to take a look at it and give us some feedback as well. So you […] tend to get some sort of peer review before submitting.

> " So my colleague and I really worked on it and formulated it, but we have a third partner - she's only coming in as an expert and she will then provide the third pair of eyes that's fresh...

Training and development

Throughout the year and as part of the School's and NARTI's Training and Development programmes, the FRIO organises numerous writing retreats (online, in-person and residential) with some having a particular focus on research funding application development. Retreats enable uninterrupted and supportive time to focus on writing research funding applications and to gain one-to-one advice on proposals in-progress. They tie in well with the sessions and workshops organised through professional providers as part of the training and development programmes.

Vitae's continuous professional development programme also includes courses such as 'first-time academic leadership' that are designed to support the transition to independent research leader and guide you through the process.
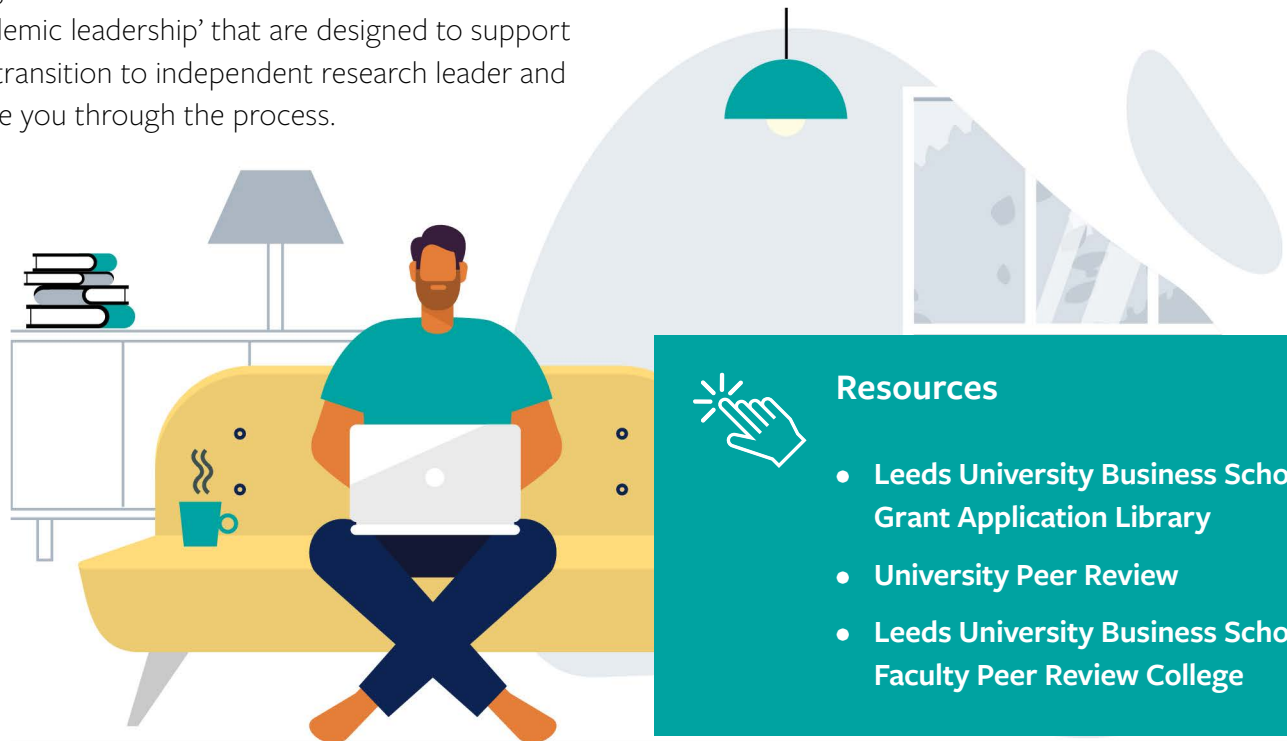
Did you know...?

As of June 2023, there are 16 members of the Faculty Peer Review College. Between them, they have been/continue to be expert reviewers for seven major funders (ESRC, EPSRC, NERC, British Academy, Leverhulme Trust, Nuffield Foundation, Royal Society), as well as several international funding bodies.

Resources

- **Leeds University Business School Grant Application Library**
- **University Peer Review**
- **Leeds University Business School Faculty Peer Review College**

If you would like to speak to a member of the Faculty Research and Innovation Office about any of the content in this guide, please contact research.lubs@leeds.ac.uk.

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