

## **A VERY SIMPLE, EFFECTIVE MOCK PANEL FORMAT**

This is a pared-down exercise that takes 90 minutes or less and can be used with a diverse range of researchers or research students. Participants do not need to bring along their own applications to work on and they do not need to do any preparation. This prevents drop out.

By the end of the exercise they will have useful insights into:

- What makes a funding application easy to read, easy to understand and convincing
- The pressures under which a grants' committee operates
- How application documents are used in the research grant evaluation process

### **You need:**

- 4-7 participants (or several groups of that size)
- A copy of one funded case for support plus abstract for each participant – these need only be broadly discipline relevant but must all be comprehensible to a non-specialist readership
- A chairperson for each group – ideally someone with grants' committee experience (any funding agency will do)
- A spare set of abstracts for each chairperson
- A watch with a second hand for each group

### **Instructions**

1. Hand round the cases for supports to the designated participants
2. Give everyone 30 minutes to read their assigned case for support and prepare a 2 minute presentation. Ask them to structure their presentation along the following lines and tell them they are allowed to support it strongly or recommend that the committee rejects it:
  - a. What is the research question?
  - b. What evidence can they find that the question is important?
  - c. What evidence can they find that the PI/research team is competent to complete the project successfully
  - d. How is the project structured and resourced.
3. At the end of the 30 minutes, the chairperson convenes

the panel and each participant has 2 minutes to present their application with a further two minutes for questions from the rest of the group.

4. At the end of this process, the chair announces that there is only funding for one aproject and that the group has two minutes to decide which they would like to fund. If necessary this must go to a vote.

### **Discussion Points**

At the end, all the groups should come together to feedback on this process and the panel chairs should compare it to a live grants' committee experience. You may wish to raise the following in your discussion:

- A 'live' grants' committee meeting will include far more applications and a larger group of committee members - each making several presentations.
- Most grant applications also include forms, appendices, CVs and budgets to digest i.e. a thick wad of paper per bid.
- Funding agencies have very specific criteria and many have very specific procedures for scoring and ranking proposals.
- Peer review reports will also be attached and these must be taken seriously. Some funding agencies do not allow committee members to 're-review'.
- Note the group dynamic – did some personalities dominate the decision-making? Were others hyper-critical? Did anyone come away feeling frustrated or depressed by the final decision? Did it seem like a bit of a lottery? Each chairperson with grants' committee experience can testify to the authenticity of all this.