

Tips for success in applying to the Public Health Research programme for funding

The Public Health Research (PHR) programme has two external expert advisory Boards: the Programme Advisory Board and the Research Funding Board. These Boards prioritise and assess research topics and proposals for public health importance, scientific quality, feasibility and value for money. Both Boards provide feedback to applicants on shortlisted and rejected proposals (further details of the remits of each Board are available from <http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/boards/>)

This document aims to summarise the main areas on which the Boards have provided feedback to applicants, which can often contribute to a proposal being rejected. We would recommend that you consider these points, in conjunction with the guidance notes, when completing your application, to increase the chances of success for your application. Please read as appropriate to your proposed study question and design.

- **Justify why your research question is of public health importance**

The first stage in the assessment of your proposal will be on the public health importance of the research question – i.e will your research provide the evidence needed by decision makers on a prominent public health issue, and will it reduce inequalities in health? If the Programme Advisory Board does not consider that it is of sufficient importance your proposal will be rejected at this stage. Therefore it's important that you fully justify this aspect in your proposal. *(NB: this applies only to the researcher-led workstream as public health importance has already been established for the commissioned workstream.)*

- **Explain how the results could reduce inequalities in health**

Part of the PHR programme's remit is to fund research projects which reduce inequalities in health. The Board will be looking for evidence that you have considered this and how you plan to measure and report health inequalities

- **Summarise the rationale and existing evidence**

Demonstrate to the Board there is a theoretical underpinning for your research project and that there is an evidence gap or deficiency that your project will aim to address. If you are proposing a systematic review and/or an evidence synthesis details regarding the size of the available literature base should be provided.

- **Clearly describe the stage of your study**

The Boards need to be able to clearly identify from your proposal the planned development of the intervention and what stage it has reached, ie whether it's a feasibility, pilot or definitive study. If you are proposing a definitive study, please demonstrate that there is sufficient evidence from preliminary studies to justify this. If you cannot, you may wish to apply to the PHR programme for funding of a pilot or feasibility study. (The definitions we use for pilot and feasibility studies can be found at <http://www.netscc.ac.uk/glossary/>) For applications citing pilot studies, information on how the pilot has informed the proposed study and details of all the available pilot data should be provided.

- **Demonstrating how the findings will be generalisable and transferable**

The PHR programme wants to ensure that the findings of the research it funds benefits as many people as possible. The Boards will, therefore, be looking for evidence that the findings will be generalisable beyond the participant group for your study.

- **Clearly describe the intervention**

Please succinctly describe the intervention being evaluated or developed, using the four headings requested on the proposal form. If there are alternative interventions which could have been evaluated, justify the reasons for selecting your particular intervention.

- **Don't include intervention costs in the funding you request**
 The PHR programme is able to fund research costs, i.e. the costs which relate to activities that are being undertaken to answer the research questions and which end when the research ends. The PHR programme cannot, however, cover the costs of delivering the intervention being evaluated.
- **Explain the sample size calculations**
 The Research Funding Board will be considering the scientific quality of your proposal and will be looking for evidence on how you have calculated your sample size (where appropriate to your study design) to satisfy itself that your study is sufficiently powered. Experience, to date, has found that the sample sizes have been under estimated and not well justified.
- **Justify recruitment methods and assumptions** *(mainly applicable to full proposals)*
 Justify how you intend to recruit to your study. You should also consider potential retention and attrition issues, and how they might be addressed.
- **Describe the methods of analysis of health economics assessment** *(mainly applicable to full proposals)*. You should include information about your proposed methods of performing a health economic analysis or analysing economic data.
- **Consider possible adverse effects or ethical issues** *(mainly applicable to full proposals)*
 The safety and welfare of study participants is paramount to any studies the PHR programme funds. You should demonstrate that you have considered this aspect and, where any potential issues may arise, that you have a process in place to deal with them
- **Methodology** *(mainly applicable to full proposals)*. You should include specific details about your proposed methodology and why you have chosen it over other possible methods; in particular you should ensure that sufficient details regarding any qualitative methods or realist synthesis methods you intend to use are provided.
- **Ensure that you have the most appropriate team to deliver the project**
 Many projects require a multi-disciplinary team with appropriate skills and experience. The Board will review the composition of your project team to ensure that it meets the needs of your project eg a team might need to have subject experts, methodologists, practitioners and members of the public. The roles and responsibilities of each team member in relation to the project should be provided..
- **Demonstrate that you've involved members of the public in your project**
 Consultation and involvement from members of the public at all stages is expected for all NIHR-funded projects. The Board will be looking for evidence that this is planned within the project in a way that will make an effective and meaningful contribution to the research.

Finally, we acknowledge that in an outline proposal form there is a limit to the amount of information you can give us. We recommend that you make full use of the available space within the online form to give the Boards as much information as possible on which they can assess your proposal.

Further help

FAQs

On the PHR programme's website there are frequently asked questions, which we continue to develop as a source of further information about the programme: <http://www.phr.nihr.ac.uk/faqs/>

Research Design Service

For applicants based in England, the Research Design Service (RDS) is funded by the Department of Health to provide high quality methodological support for researchers applying for the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) funding. You can find contact details from your local RDS from: <http://www.nihr-ccf.org.uk/site/programmes/rds/default.cfm>