Writing ARC Linkage Grants

Emeritus Professor Bruce Johnson
Overview

- Aims of the ARC Linkage scheme
- Why Linkages?
- Selection criteria – unpacked
- Case Study
- The writing process
- Insights from the other side of the fence – A Reviewer’s set of reflections
Aims

The objectives of the Linkage Projects scheme are to:

- support the development of research alliances between universities and other organisations to address problems and promote national economic, commercial, social or cultural benefits

- encourage the growth of a national pool of world-class researchers to meet the needs of the broader Australian innovation system
Why Linkages?

- Long term – 2-5 years
- Generous – e.g., recent project $480,000 over 3yrs
- Address issues that matter
- Impact on policy and practice through engagement with partners
- Success rates 30-35% compared with 18-20% in other schemes
Selection Criteria

- Investigators: 25%
- Project Quality and Innovation: 25%
- Feasibility: 20%
- Benefit: 30%
Investigators (25%)

Collective quality of team – ‘track record’

- Competitive publication record (at least 3-4 pubs per year for >10yrs)
- Good citation rates (dreaded metrics)
- Publications align with topic of application
- Recognition – invitations, awards, media
- Past success
- Impact (increasingly)
Project Quality (25%)

1. Significance and Innovation

- Address a significant ‘problem’ or issue
  - Relevance to partners
  - Advance knowledge
  - Make an impact – practical, tangible outcomes
  - Benefit society
    - ECTs’ transition to the profession
    - Student behaviour at school
    - Quality of sexuality and relationships education
    - Refugee students’ schooling experiences
- Innovative, ‘different’, new ‘take’ on problem or issue
Project Quality (25%)

2. Approach and Training

- Well developed conceptual framework
- Design, methods & analyses well integrated and linked to the aims of the project
- Intellectual content and scale of the project equivalent to a PhD
Feasibility (20%)

(Used to be PO commitment & Research Environment)

- Supportive, high quality research environments within universities & Partner Organisations
- Evidence of genuine commitment by POs to the project and to working collaboratively
- 'adequate' cash and in-kind contributions by POs
Benefit (30%)

- Clear benefits to POs
- Develop ‘strategic alliances’ between Universities and other organisations
- Maximise economic, environmental and social benefits to Australia
- Value for money
Case Study

Refugee Student Resilience Study

How schools foster refugee student resilience

Johnson, Baak, Sullivan & Slee

ARC Linkage
$610,000 ($430K + $180K) + $369,000 in-kind = $979,000
2018-2020 + likely extension to 2021
Evolution of a project

- 2002: Johnson & Howard – Muslim refugee student resilience (Discovery application – unsuccessful; lack of expertise in refugee studies; lack of language skills)

- 2014-15: Johnson, Baak, Sullivan, Slee, Dobson, Soong, & Black – What schools do to foster refugee student resilience (Discovery application – unsuccessful; team roles unclear; research approach too complex; ‘resilience’ undertheorised and misunderstood by reviewers)

- 2016-17: Johnson, Baak, Sullivan & Slee – How schools foster refugee student resilience (Linkage application – successful; team roles clearer; research approach better explained; strong PO commitment – see Assessors’ reports)
Assembling the team

- Complementary strengths and track records
  - Baak: refugee studies (recent PhD; active in the field)
  - Johnson: studies in human resilience (20yr history)
  - Sullivan: policy analysis and enactment studies (2 previous ARC Linkage projects)
  - Slee: the foremost international scholar in inclusive education

- Evidence of previous successful collaboration (e.g., Behaviour at School Study; edited book)
Engaging Partners

Align project with POs’ strategic priorities:

- SA DECD: *Wellbeing Framework for Learning & Life*
- Qld DET: ‘promoting equality and access to quality learning experiences’
- CESA: ‘we value: respect for the dignity of each person; inclusivity of those at the edges; and sensitivity, justice and compassion’
- Brisbane Catholic Education: ‘we educate young people to contribute to the formation of just, peaceful, inclusive and reconciling communities’
- Australian Refugee Association: seeks better outcomes for learners from refugee backgrounds
Engaging Partners

Approach them with a proposal:

- Target senior executives who are responsible for implementing identified strategic priorities (it helps if you know them or have worked with them previously)

- Explain the aims and benefits of the ARC Linkage scheme; emphasise collaboration

- Position their organisations as ‘research responsive’ organisations which are committed to better informed policy and practice

- Discuss money & 3:1 multiplier effect
Engaging Partners

- Get formal commitment
- Draft ‘letter of support’ confirming cash and in-kind support – POs modify
- Outline timelines
- Keep in touch
- Write the proposal
The Writing Process
The Writing Process

Some practicalities
Start early

- Writing good applications is a long and time consuming process
- Begin with lots of talk, discussion and debate
- Whiteboard ideas; photograph
Start early

- Appoint someone to keep good notes
- Audiotape discussions in case someone says something profound (discard if they don’t)
- Meet regularly
- Keep talking
Know Selection Criteria

- Investigators: 25%
- Project Quality and Innovation: 25%
- Feasibility: 20%
- Benefit: 30%
Each write ‘Personnel’ section

- Research Record Relative to Opportunities
  - Details on career and opportunities for research

- Recent significant publications

- Ten career-best publications

- Further evidence in relation to research impact….

- A statement on the most significant contributions to the research field
Apply strict ‘rules’

- Tell the truth
- Don’t over-claim
- Provide verification (preferably publicly accessible; check University Home Pages for consistency)
- Use consistent format and styles
- Appoint a team member to ‘police’ these rules
- Emphasise how important these sections are; fight complacency, reticence and humility
- Edit and re-draft until they are ‘right’
Appoint a Principal Writer

- Because… committees don’t write well!!

- Discuss required writing skills:
  - Clarity
  - Brevity
  - Consistency
  - Accuracy
  - Conformity
  - Rigour
  - Argument

- Appoint the ‘best’ technical writer

- Produce drafts of sections
Writing advice – do…

• Write for an ‘educated’ but non-specialist reviewer
  ➢ Explain and define terminology
  ➢ Avoid ‘in-house’ acronyms (NAPLAN, PISA, COAG)
  ➢ Don’t assume prior knowledge

• Use headers and sub-headers to break-up the text

• Use short sentences and everyday language – journalistic even??

• Use diagrams and ‘models’ to simplify and visually represent the problem being investigated
We aim to understand what young people think about school-based sexuality education and sexual wellbeing.

To find out, we will use a combination of:
- Focus group interviews
- Online surveys

We aim to engage young people in innovative ways to research and articulate their sexual needs, wants and desires.

To do this, we will train young people to be co-researchers and use:
- Photo elicitation methods
- Student focused workshops
- Social media

We aim to engage young people in the creation and application of new sexual education resources and teaching approaches.

To do this, we will apply the findings from stages 1 & 2 and use:
- Arts-based methods
- Co-design workshops
- Visual methods
Influences on Student Behaviour in Schools

External Influences
- Political
- Socio-Cultural
- Education System
- Economic
- Legal

School Influences
- Policies
- Architecture
- Community
- Philosophy

Classroom Influences
- Setting
- Student
- Pedagogy
- Teacher

Student Behaviour
Writing advice – don’t

• Don’t use exclusionary language – like overly technical terms or ‘jargon’

• Don’t ‘name-drop’ key theorists unless they are central to the study

• Don’t write too much – be parsimonious & brief

• Don’t over-cite – tell your story in your own words, simply

• Don’t fill-up the page with words – use sensible borders, paragraphs, and spaces. Save some ‘white spaces’ on the page – aids readability
Review processes

• Negotiate group norms: e.g.:
  ➢ ‘don’t kill each other’
  ➢ ‘quality counts above all else’
  ➢ ‘we are in this together’
  ➢ ‘we play to our strengths’

• Interrogate drafts – regularly, critically, ruthlessly, but constructively

• Manage emotions

• Reach consensus – ‘everyone can live with the final product’

• This takes time!!
Final Check

- Independently check every section of the application
  - Is everything included?
  - Is it consistent?
  - Does it conform with the Funding Rules (font type and size, length)

- Send it for professional editing - revise

- Submit to Research and Innovation Services
  - One person should do this as it is complicated (e.g., uploading PDFs for all team members)

- Celebrate & rest
Summary

- Strive for quality – High Distinction level
- Insist on high standards of writing
- Enforce ‘rules’ and ‘norms’
- Attend to all selection criteria
- Manage time
- Manage emotions (and egos)
- Read, check, revise constantly – until the application is ‘RIGHT’