

Peer Review for SCU Grant Applications

The Southern Cross University Research Responsible Conduct Policy¹ states we will encourage participation in peer review. Our SCU Policy is closely aligned to the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research² (The Code) which also states that researchers should actively participate in Peer Review.

Peer review: Why?

SCU aims to improve the quality of applications for funding submitted to government research funding agencies for a number of reasons as follows:

- To improve our grants success at a time when competition for these funds is high and increasing
- To enhance our reputation as a top regional research university
- To support our researchers to develop their research careers by increasing the chance of individual and team grant success

The SCU Office of Research strongly encourages all applicants to undertake a peer review process prior to submitting a Complete Draft of the grant application for expert review.

Peer review aims to:

- Improve the quality of grant applications at all levels and across research funding programs
- Advance the awareness of the high standard of application that is required to win national competitive grants

Peer review: When?

To gain the most benefit from peer review, applicants need to prepare a Complete Draft of the application early in the process ie well before the SCU internal deadlines!

This is so that your draft application can be distributed to relevant peers, giving them sufficient time to provide useful comment..... and in return giving you time to amend your application in response to their comments if required.

Many grants fail because they are prepared just too late in the process, are underdeveloped, and time has not been put in to fully develop the proposal, obtain peer review and polish the grant to a competitive standard.

Peer review: What?

A peer review is an appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of your proposal / project by colleagues experienced in writing and assessing funding applications, including people both in your discipline and external to it.

¹ SCU Research Responsible Conduct Policy <http://policies.scu.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00099#s7>

² The Code

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/r39_australian_code_responsible_conduct_research_150107.pdf

Peer review is complementary to the “expert review” and “compliance review” services that are currently undertaken through the Office of Research which focus on the strategic pitch of the application and whether it is a compliant proposal (ie as per the funding body guidelines). Peer review is a review of the application from the viewpoint of colleagues who have an understanding of your discipline area (either a general understanding or an in-depth understanding.... and both viewpoints may be useful!) and of the grant funding process.

The quality and quantity of reviewers are both important to consider when seeking peer review. For Category 1 applications such as ARC and NHMRC applications, it is recommended that you obtain at least three (3) quality peer reviews of your application.

Ultimately it is your decision on how many people should review your application however the seeking of peer reviewers should be a planned and managed process, rather than a last minute request sprung on colleagues. Lining up the reviewers early in the process with clear expectations and timeframes will provide a greater chance of receiving a more considered and useful peer review.

The Office of Research does not want to introduce a centrally managed peer review process, however there is a growing expectation that participation in peer review (ie as both a reviewer and/or as a lead CI requesting cooperation from potential reviewers) is a standard process for all funding applications, unless there is a good reason for not seeking peer review.

Peer review may cover the following issues:

- Does the grant application fit the standards and scope it is being considered for?
- Is the research question clear? Was the approach appropriate? Can it be improved?
- Are the study design, methods and analysis appropriate to the question being studied? Can they be improved?
- How can the study’s innovation or originality be better presented?
- Does the study challenge existing paradigms or add to existing knowledge?
- Is the novelty described appropriately?
- Is the impact described appropriately?
- Is the proposal pitched to the appropriate audience ie the Panel making the decision?
- If humans, human tissues or animals are involved, has the need for an ethics approval been noted and is the study likely to be passed as being ethical?
- Is the application clearly written?
- How can the application be improved?

Peer review: How?

It is best to give your peer reviewer a full draft of your application (i.e. for ARC grants this would be a copy of the application made directly from the RMS so that they can see the grant in its entirety including the budget, track record, project etc. They should be seeing the application the same way that an ARC assessor or panel member sees the application and therefore all sections should be completed.)