Grants and Fellowships for Early Career Researchers

Grant and fellowship schemes offer funding for dedicated research or research-related activities such as conferences, travel, or impact development.

Most schemes are highly competitive and only some are available to early career researchers. The process is mercurial, varying by the interests and whims of fluctuating aims, finances, and evaluators.

This tip sheet offers a quick overview of grants and fellowships for early career researchers including the four main types of funding schemes, where they are advertised, deciding whether to apply, the application process, and general tips.

Four main types of funding schemes for early career researchers:

1. *Personal research fellowships*

Funding, including income, for a researcher to deliver proposed research and research-related activities, e.g. visits, public engagement and impact, or conferences.

2. *Research projects*

Funding to deliver a proposed set of research and research-related activities, often collaborative or interdisciplinary, and typically including income for involved researchers.

3. *Conference organisation*

Funding for costs of a proposed event, e.g. hire fees, speakers' travel and accommodation.

4. *Travel*

Funding for research-related travel, e.g. to conferences or institutional visits

Particularity:

Funding schemes are highly particular, since each funder has a unique remit informing its schemes.

Your application should be highly tailored to these particularities.

- Funding schemes will vary in e.g. duration; amount; purpose; focus; deliverables and activities required; eligibility requirements including residence and qualifications; allowable use of funds; application, evaluation, and reporting processes; and restrictions on locations of activity.
- Each funding scheme will have guidance documents which detail its particularities. *It is crucial that you read these documents carefully* to be sure that you are eligible for the funding, apply correctly and with an application suitably tailored to the scheme, and eventually work within the guidelines.
- Note many schemes require involved support from researchers or institutions. Be sure to secure any required support and specified evidence of it.

How to find funding schemes:

Sign up for philosophy announcements, including funding calls: Philos-L; PHILOSOP

Sign up for research funding alerts: https://www.researchprofessional.com/0/rr/Help/Funding/S_Search_Tips/Opportunities_Alerts.html

Peruse the BPA list of major UK funding bodies and their ongoing schemes:

Search regularly for jobs, including postdoctoral fellowships: UK jobs; Phil Jobs; Jobs in Philosophy

Deciding when and where to apply:

Funding applications vary from light tough to highly involved. In the current climate, success in securing funding is an inessential but highly attractive feature of a philosophy job candidate.

Carefully weigh the time commitment in applying, your chances of success, and the impact on your job and career prospects if successful. Note that many schemes require institutional support. In these cases, you must work with an institution, often far in advance, to prepare your application.

Some things to keep in mind:

- You may rely on antecedent relationships or contact established researchers to propose funding applications requiring support. Pitch the core research questions and shape of the project, but be flexible, highlight benefits to them, and expect to do the bulk of the work.
- Many early career jobs are teaching-focused and funding schemes provide time to develop and publish existing research. This can be vital, since a track record of publishing success is expected of successful job candidates.
- Many postdoctoral research fellowships involve project-specific research and administrative support, e.g. conference organisation. Be sure that you are willing to do what is required.
- Receiving an especially prestigious or lucrative funding award can be decisive and lead almost directly to job offers or permanent employment, but remember that such schemes are resource-intensive and highly competitive.
- Conferences and travel applications are often less competitive and time-intensive. Success shows capability of writing successful bids and allows networking while on the job market.
- You can pitch the same proposed research or activity to multiple funders, but be sure to tailor your materials to the particularities of each funder and scheme. For each potential scheme, consider whether you can present yourself and your research as needed.
- Funding schemes often allow start dates within a restricted range. When possible, apply far in advance, with proposed dates that may help you avoid employment gaps.

Application and evaluation process:

The application and evaluation process will vary for each funding scheme. Typically but very generally, this will include:

1. A "call" during which interested applicants can apply for funding until a set deadline.

Note that some funding schemes have "open calls" or "rolling" deadlines.

2. Applicant submitting requested documentation, often through a dedicated portal.
   Requested documents vary highly. Among further requested documentation (e.g. writing samples or particularised statements of support), schemes will almost always require at least (1) a CV and (2) a scheme-specific application document involving, *among other things*, a brief description of the proposed research and related activities, a timeline, and a breakdown of costs.
3. Application review.
   Review is usually conducted by committee, often of non-specialists and involving multiple rounds winnowing the pool of applicants. You will sometimes be invited to submit further documents at further rounds, to answer further questions, respond to questions raised, or to give interviews or presentations. *Attend carefully to details of the review process, so that you write for your intended audience and are prepared for any potential further requests.*
4. Award decisions delivered to both successful and unsuccessful candidates. Though you may be able to respond to concerns during the review process, you typically won't receive feedback on unsuccessful applications.
5. "Post-award" phase of implementation, reporting, and closeout of the scheme.

Different funding schemes will have different requirements to ensure that you are delivering what you promised. Some funders care more about reporting than others; some pull funding if reports are not submitted as requested; some supply more funding as needed or to extend the research in new directions; some may become permanent jobs if conditions are met. Always adhere to the conditions of awarded funding.

General tips:

- Many schemes have a specific box for explaining your ideas in everyday language. This is often the box that busy evaluators will read first. It needs to both capture attention and accessibly explain the proposal. Make polishing this box a top priority.
- Carefully consider the evaluators at each stage of the process. This is almost never (just) philosophers, so present your ideas as accessibly and with as little jargon as you can. If at all feasible, ask a non-philosopher to read your documents or listen to a presentation.
- Be sure to carefully identify and address the intended funding purpose. Aim to show that giving *you* the money will further the objectives of the funder and the particular scheme.
- Avoid multiple or overlong messages, but ask listed contacts for needed clarifications on particularities including timescales, criteria, or requested documentation.
- Consult the funded activities of previous award recipients on funders' websites and, when possible, any available successful applications to your targeted scheme.
- Always submit requested documentation for each stage of the process on time, in the format requested, and through the requested mechanism.
- Be realistic in what you propose and how much it will cost. While it is good to be ambitious, aim to convince your funder that you can deliver what you promise.
- It is easy to get lost in the details solicited in the requested documentation. You must attend to the particularities and criteria, but stay focused on the centre of the proposal. What is the big idea? Why is it important? Why should *this funder* give *you* the resources?
- Lay out exactly what, when, and how you will do what you propose with as much specificity as you can. If you propose to deliver published articles, for example, identify when and how you will research for them, when and how you will write them, when and how you will edit them, and when and where you will submit them.
- If you are applying for conference or travel funding, it is wise to solicit and report in-principle agreement from participants or hosts in advance of your application.
- It is not unusual to propose research already partially completed, but avoid the impression that funding will merely support time to see existing research through to publication.

- If you are invited to reply to reviewers at any evaluation stage, ensure that you have understood and respond directly to the points raised, respectfully, and constructively.
- If you are invited to present to reviewers at any evaluation stage, ensure that you stick to the brief and to your allotted time, being equally courteous and respectful to everyone present.
- Get advice and be in regular contact with supervisors and mentors throughout the process.