

# Opportunities for Researchers

NPG

10 September 2014

15.10 - 15.40

# Insights from the Committee Room

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Tate

# Some History

- 1) British Academy / Charitable Trusts  
Small scale; individual grants
- 2) HRB – a transitional phase; subject committees; a research committee
- 3) AHRB – a replica Research Council
- 4) AHRC – a full RCUK council; some individual support; much larger sums; more collective; more directed and commissioned research; strategy

# Decision-Making

- Peer-Review – to collect expert opinion, broaden range of consultation, lends confidence and authority to the process
- Committee Decisions guided by peer-review
- Public body transparency (declared interests, etc)
- Judgements are invariably balanced and fair (some ignorance, little prejudice)

# Standard Features

- The rules of the scheme are drawn up
- There's a call and there are submissions
- Office process and preliminary decisions
- Preliminary paper-work phase for committee members
- A Chair; an officer represents the funder
- Stage 1 and Stage 2 decisions
- Outcomes based on a mix of quality assessment (and scoring), judgements on resources and strategic issues

# The rules of the scheme ...

- Rules not set by the committee – often they have little room for manoeuvre
- Rules may have to be explained to the committee
- Funders direct money in certain ways for their own good reasons – be aware
- Schemes change – AHRC slowly normalising the balance between directed and open calls

# Office process and preliminary decisions

- Be aware of the rules
- Deadlines (contingency planning)
- Word-lengths (don't cram extra words in)
- Applicant status, age, etc (get it right)
- Repeat submissions (be careful)
- Multiple submissions, etc (be careful)
- All these hurdles can reduce the numbers of applicants that come to the committee

# Preliminary phase

Typically -

- the paper-work (or digital version) reaches the committee members well before they meet
- they read and assess individually and submit scores without consultation
- There are multiple readers for each

# Decision-making

- Chair will rehearse the key criteria
- A document may set out the preliminary scores
- Lead assessors rehearse main features and gives a view
- The second assessor responds
- Committee discussion leads to grading
- Final discussion on overall outcome

# Guidance Points 1

- Understanding the funders needs –  
This is always vital, especially with strategically directed schemes
- Don't hesitate to get advice from the funders
- Peer review – who are you writing for?  
Who are you trying to reach? Think about possible tensions between the academy and the cultural sector

# Guidance Points 2

- Applications must meet the rules
- Be on time (build in contingency timing)
- Perfect presentation – spelling, names and titles, accurate arithmetic, multiple proof-reading, institutional sign-off, supporting letters, etc
- It has to be a good read; write less rather than more; be clear and concise; never over-claim

# Guidance Points 3

- What are the committee looking for?
- What choices do they have within the funder's rules?
- Interesting and worthwhile - innovation is often important
- Play to the strengths of your institutions and applicants
- Address the scheme or funder's strategic needs if you can

# Guidance Points 4

- Use the cultural sector's powerful leverage in respect of the "impact" agenda (our web sites too); the cultural sector can reach audiences that academics cannot
- Cultural sector is increasingly good at partnership work (including international) – exploit that
- Don't undervalue our spaces and our collections

# Finally

- Don't expect to win every time
- Don't sulk if they say "No"
- Use feedback on failed Stage 1 applications to try again
- Use feedback and re-processed content on failed Stage 2 applications to try again