

# SDS Page: Short Discussions for Students Page

## Top Ten Tips to Increase Your Chances of Getting a Fellowship

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Securing a fellowship as an early career researcher can be key to a long-term career in academia. But with such high competition for research funding, it is important to understand how to increase your chances of being successful. I have put together ten tips that may help you when you next apply for funding.

### 1. Decide what you want

Spend some time looking for schemes you can apply for. Do you have someone in particular in mind you want to work with? Do you want to spend some time overseas? What expertise do you want to gain? For fellowships, timing is critical. Have honest conversations with mentors/senior researchers about your track record and when you should (and shouldn't apply). Fellowship applications can be very time-consuming so your time may be better spent getting papers published or obtaining preliminary data if you are not quite competitive yet.

### 2. Understand the scheme

Once you have decided which scheme you want to apply for, it is time to get information from the grant agency. Read the guidelines and eligibility criteria carefully. Tailoring your proposal to the interests of the funding body is critical.

### 3. Pick the right research environment

Think of the best research environment to do your proposed work. Do they have the right facilities available to you? Does the fellowship guidelines mention that a move to a new institution would be looked upon favourably? If so, you may want to consider moving if your circumstances allow you to do so. Is your supervisor an expert in the field you want to research? Does the project involve good mentoring and training arrangements? You need to be able to justify why the work should be done at your chosen institution.

### 4. Publish or perish

You do need to have a publishing track record to be competitive for fellowships. Try to wrap your PhD and postdoc results into papers whenever you can. Aim for first author papers so you can show your reviewers that you can lead a research project. Although getting middle author papers through collaborations shows reviewers that you have valuable skills or techniques that are sought after. Remember that publication is not just a numbers

game; quality and impact on the field are also important. When you are putting a proposal together, highlight that you have published in the area you are proposing and you are playing to your strengths.

### 5. Network, network, network!

Increase your profile by attending national and international conferences. If you haven't already done so, check out the SDS Page article from the August 2016 issue titled 'Conference survival guide'. Present your work either as a poster or an oral presentation and apply for prizes and awards. You will also get to know new people who may be valuable mentors or future supervisors! In such a competitive environment, pursue every opportunity you can because you never know where it may lead.

### 6. Build your CV

There are number of ways to improve your CV, including supervising/mentoring students and being a member of professional groups/societies like the ASBMB. It also looks good if you have had some media and community engagement. This shows that you are contributing not only to your scientific community but also the general community.

### 7. Sell yourself

Sell your career vision and highlight what sets you apart from other candidates. You may want to look through successful grant and fellowship applications to get ideas on how to sell yourself and your science. Securing a research fellowship award is a highly competitive process and you must demonstrate your potential to become an independent future research leader.

### 8. Clear proposal

My biggest tip is to start early! You want to communicate your ideas clearly in a polished proposal with well-defined aims. Use diagrams to emphasise your point. It is also key to understand your audience. They may not necessarily be experts in your field so minimise the use of jargon. Make it as easy as possible for the reviewers as they usually a number of applications to look at and you can be quickly 'eliminated from the race' if your proposal does not stand out. The 'why', 'how' and 'impact' should be obvious.

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## 9. Review

Have people from varied backgrounds provide feedback. Plan time to develop your ideas and refine your application based on the feedback received. In addition, most institutions have a grants office that can help with your application, including getting the right sign-offs and they will often submit the application on your behalf.

## 10. Perseverance is key

If at first you don't succeed...try again! Most people are

not successful the first time they apply for a fellowship. Receiving the dreaded email about not being successful and not being given a reason as to why you weren't awarded one is always hard to swallow. You start to think whether your application was competitive at all and whether it is worth your time applying for it again. If you do decide to apply again, make sure you evolve your idea to make your proposal even stronger. Also think about other schemes you can apply for. Learning how to cope with rejection is a key part of growing as a researcher!

