GRANT ACCELERATOR PROGRAM – Session #2
RESPONDING TO REVIEWER COMMENTS – REJOINDER & REBUTTAL PREPARATION

2.00 – 3.30pm Thursday 31 May 2018
ATC 210 [Advanced Technology Centre], Callaghan Campus
VIDEO CONFERENCE ETIQUETTE

➢ If you are joining us from a remote location – WELCOME

➢ May I ask you to complete login – then MUTE YOUR MICROPHONE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge and respect the Pambalong clan of the Awabakal people, traditional custodians of the land on which this campus of The University of Newcastle is situated and also acknowledge and pay respect to the other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations from which our students, staff and community are drawn.
MS KYLIE HUGO

Team Leader, Grants Strategy and Planning, Research and Innovation Services, R&I Division

The Grants Team can provides assistance to UON researchers with:

- **Research Professional** to find other sources of funding
- identifying and applying for grants and funding opportunities
- establishing successful grants and
- ensuring the smooth administration and management of research grants

Pre-award/application enquiries
E: research-applications@newcastle.edu.au

Post-award enquiries
E: research-grants@newcastle.edu.au

Research Services
T: +61 2 4921 7733
Purpose of rebuttals and rejoinders

Should I submit a rebuttal or rejoinder?

• Always submit a rebuttal or rejoinder response!

• Most grant rounds do not give you the right of reply. Use it wisely.

• Purpose is to provide clarification on any perceived deficiencies in the proposal. Your responses can make a difference if they address key criticisms, with the ability to sway the panel positively or negatively.

• A successful rejoinder or rebuttal can ultimately overcome a critical assessor report. Remember, the assessor may not see your response so respond to the comments not the person.
### NHMRC Rebuttal

#### Timelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Grants</th>
<th>Release Dates for Assessor Reports</th>
<th>Rebuttal Submission Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applications in Period 1</td>
<td>Fri 8 June 2018</td>
<td>23:59 AEST Mon 18 June 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications in Period 2</td>
<td>Fri 29 June 2018</td>
<td>23:59 AEST Mon 9 July 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Fellowships do not have a rebuttal process.
- Applicants will be notified by email when their assessor comments are available. Applicant requests for NHMRC to move applications between rebuttal periods cannot be met as allocation is based on the week in which the application will be reviewed.
NHMRC Rebuttals

Rebuttal Limitations

• You will have 10 calendar days to write your response once you receive your review comments.

• Important to raise potential concerns about assessor comments during this period. Complaints received after peer review will be difficult to address.

• Rebuttals should not include any information relevant to scheme round eligibility, as eligibility issues are dealt with via a separate process.

• The rebuttal should not propose changes to the project plan, methodology, or team membership.
**NHMRC Rebuttals**

**NHMRC Specific Tips**

- If you have pilot data that is newly published which supports questions raised by an assessor, use this to strengthen your rebuttal and justify the feasibility of your project. Provide references where needed.

- Address comments on track record. Highlight any updates.

- Address all comments from your Spokespersons as they do see your rebuttal. You run the risk of putting them off-side if you ignore their comments.
NHMRC Rebuttals

How to submit in RGMS

- Rebuttals can be submitted directly to the NHMRC (without Research Office involvement).

- The Rebuttal must be uploaded to RGMS in the ‘Rebuttal’ tab as a PDF document and is normally limited to two pages (3 pages if assessed by the Indigenous Health GRP). Adhere strictly to the formatting requirements and guidance outlined in your Rebuttal letter (usually Attachment A). Attachment B of your Rebuttal letter provides specific instructions for submitting the Rebuttal in RGMS.

- Please note that there is also an option on the ‘Rebuttals’ tab to allow an RAO to submit a Rebuttal on your behalf.
ARC Rejoinders

Timelines

• Discovery Projects 2019 – 7 to 21 June 2018
• DECRA 2019 – 7 to 21 June 2018
• Discovery Indigenous 2019 - 14 to 28 June 2018
• LIEF 2019 - 14 to 28 June 2018
• Linkage Projects - With the move to a continuous application process, there is not a fixed time for Rejoinders. The Research Office will be notified two weeks in advance of the Rejoinder opening for a proposal and applicants will have approximately one week to complete the Rejoinder after opening.
ARC Rejoinders

Rejoinder Limitations

• You will have **14 days** to write your response once you receive your review comments.
• Rejoinder text is limited to **5000 characters**, including spaces.
• The Rejoinder should not include any information relevant to scheme eligibility. Eligibility issues are addressed via a separate process.
• Figures, pictures, graphs or other documents cannot be included.
• Rejoinders should only draw on information already provided in the Proposal. **New information in any form, including publications, new results or methods, awards or appointments should not be included.** The Proposal is considered complete at the time of submission as stated in the Funding Rules.
• Rejoinders should not include information inadvertently left out or incorrectly entered into the original Proposal. Modifications of this sort can only be made if requested by the ARC.
ARC Rejoinders

ARC Specific Tips

• The number of assessors and reports varies across applications.

• The ARC now requires that no additional information can be included in the Rejoinder unless requested directly by reviewers. If you have new information that is positive to the proposal, find a way to relate this evidence to comments made by reviewers.

• The reviewers who wrote your assessment reports will not see your Rejoinder, therefore, write to the College of Experts as your audience.

• Rejoinders lose formatting when submitted, so set out using line spaces. One large block of text will be difficult to read and will be overlooked.
ARC Rejoinders

How to submit in RMS

- Rejoinder submission is a 2-step process, therefore you must allow the Research Office time to submit before the deadline.
- An investigator/applicant must have ‘full control’ to draft and submit rejoinders:
  1. Click the Rejoinders tab in RMS 2.0 and select the scheme round to search by Proposal ID or first-named investigator.
  2. Click ‘Edit’ to view the assessments. Enter the rejoinder text into the rejoinder field at the bottom of the page.
  3. Click ‘Save’ and ‘Close’ to exit or ‘Submit to RO’ to submit to the Research Office.
- Once the rejoinder is submitted to the Research Office in RMS 2.0, we submit to the ARC on your behalf.
- Instructions on how to view comments and submit your Rejoinder are available on the ARC website.
Final Suggestions

Creating a positive Rebuttal or Rejoinder

• This is the last chance you have to make a positive impression regarding your application. Use it as a fantastic opportunity!

• If assessors make a valid point it is OK to acknowledge this and state how you will address it.

• Go through your assessor reports with 2 highlighters to colour positive versus negative comments. Tick them off as you address them.

• Address comments as a group rather than go through each assessor report individually. This helps highlight any disparity between assessor comments.

• Ask colleagues to read and provide feedback, especially on your tone.
Questions?

Where to get further help

Contact your School or Faculty for possible peer review options.

UON Research Services

Email: research-applications@newcastle.edu.au

Website: http://www.newcastle.edu.au/research-and-innovation/resources/grants/apply
PROFESSOR JODIE SIMPSON

Deputy Head of School of Medicine and Public Health
Faculty of Health and Medicine

- Senior research fellow in The University of Newcastle’s Priority Research Centre for Asthma and Respiratory Disease and the current holder of the Australian Respiratory Council’s Ann Woolcock Research Fellowship.

- Research focuses on the inflammatory biomarkers of airways disease with a particular interest in innate immune pathways and their role in airways disease.

- Developed several important assays for the assessment of inflammatory mediators in airway secretions and continues to work on assessment of novel markers of airway inflammation.
How to respond

Professor Jodie Simpson
Faculty of Health and Medicine
Phases of writing your rebuttal.....
The Rules

- The response should address the questions raised
- This is NOT an opportunity to modify the proposed research plan
- 10 days, inclusive of weekends and public holidays
Read the category descriptors as a guide

- Scientific Quality (50%)
- Significance of the Expected Outcomes AND/OR Innovation of the Concept (25%)
- Team Quality and Capability, relevant to the application - relative to opportunity, taking into account career disruptions where applicable (25%).

NHMRC - Who are the reviewers

• 1SP – scores and reviews
  • score the applications using the Category Descriptors as a guide and prepare a Spokesperson report in RGMS for rebuttal by the applicant within the prescribed timeframe

• 2SP- scores and reviews, comments on response

• External Assessors – at least one – two is most common, does not score

1 and 2 SP then re-score after reading reviews and rebuttal

• Approximately the bottom 50% of grants are NFFC, 1SP and 2SP have a chance to “rescue” one grant
Who are the external assessors....

- considered to be an independent reviewer for the application
- can be a national or international researcher
- chosen on the basis of their expertise in their field of research to complement the application in question but do not necessarily have expertise to cover the entire application
- will provide written assessments focusing on the key strengths and weaknesses against each of the **three assessment criteria** including appropriate queries which will then be made available to applicants for response
- will provide comment on the budget, where appropriate.
Grant review panels

- 1SP
  - speaks to the grant identifies strengths, weaknesses, career disruptions and budget
  - review the Assessor Reports for inappropriate or biased comments
  - rigorously assess the proposed budget to ensure that Personal Support Packages (PSPs), Direct Research Costs (DRCs) and equipment requests are appropriate for the project and fully justified

- 2SP
  - speaks about grant and reviewers comments and rebuttal, give score
  - ensure External Assessor(s) comments, specifically the strengths and weaknesses raised, are presented
  - ensure that the Applicant Response is presented

- Discussion and then panel scores
  - If scores are within 2 points of the SPs then the score is accepted
  - Budget discussions a score of 5.001 or greater (top half of category 5) will trigger a discussion of the budget. Except New Investigator status applications – will have a budget discussion with a score of 4.501 and above
External reviewers may not be the most expert in your field
Most of the experts on the GRP may be out of the room
Some researchers are strategic about not collaborating with everyone in their field
THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Read the reviewers comments carefully
- Send it to the CI/AI Team
- Go through and number the questions/points
- Group similar themes together to be efficient with space
- Don’t ignore the negative comments
- Don’t spend time thanking the reviewers for liking your work
- Ask a colleague to read your response
Rebuttals can make a difference

Two of the reviewers are your spokespeople

Secondary spokesperson will report to the panel on the comments – although all of the panel has access to the responses.

Try to determine what any negative comments may be about – and address them if possible - don’t ignore them – add data if you have it.
This is a well-written grant in an important and interesting area. However, I have a number of issues which prevent me being as fully enthusiastic as I would like:

1) The study is premised on the % of cells in sputum, and yet there is no study comparing what is actually happening in the airways themselves assessed by BAL or biopsies, and perhaps more importantly I don't think one can fully assess cell percentage without knowing the total and full differential cell counts. A given cell type can seem prominent when in fact its absolute number has not changed but other cell types have gone up or down in number.

4) My main problem, however, is that the study is rather circular and assumes that the hypotheses are correct rather than testing them. Thus, I would propose that the logical next step for the researchers would be to give each drug in turn to a group of typical smoking-treated COPD subjects, analyse whether the outcomes did indeed fit with the hypothesis, and then develop a protocol which assumes that the hypothesis is correct. An arm of the study could also give all medications to see if this was better in every group rather than just one medication, but that perhaps would better wait the next phase of investigation.
Thank you for a thoroughly written proposal with details presented in a succinct and concise manner.

This is a very strong proposal with aims and hypotheses that are clear and feasible. The pilot data is a major strength of the research by illustrating feasibility, strong adherence and promising results. The frequent contact with the participants is a strength as this relationship builds should improve adherence. The fact that control participants are following a similar level of engagement is also positive, as it is often believed that patients with chronic diseases can change lifestyle factors purely because they have more contacts in their life. The safety precautions put in place with face-to-face dietician and physiotherapy contact are also a strength. The fact that this project goes beyond the surface of the questions and pays deep attention to the possible ramifications of the research is applauded.
Useful resources


PROFESSOR BRETT NEILAN

Head of School - Environmental and Life Sciences, Faculty of Science

- Expert in molecular microbiology, genetic and genomic engineering and microbial chemistry

- The identification and genetic manipulation of unexplored microorganisms could revolutionise everything from polymer production to pharmacology to sun protection.

- New technology in the field of genomics has allowed scientists to begin molecular bio prospecting - looking for undiscovered microorganisms, fungi and bacteria, for utilisation in industry and medicine.

- Part of the group that first identified the genes that make toxins in bacteria and algae.

- Research program which aims to discover, characterise and produce novel microbial pathways for the utilisation of farm waste and production of valuable organic compounds. Specifically, Neilan will coordinate the researchers in Australia and internationally in order to achieve the degradation of recalcitrant farm chemicals and waste and excess fertilizer recapture.
Surprise, surprise!

14 days for lead researcher to complete rejoinders in RMS (even if no assessments!)

Read, have a laugh and ignore it

Reassess when you are in a happy place

If still confused or catatonic contact research office (especially if eligibility is questioned) or an experienced mentor
The basic rules of combat

Always submit a rejoinder

5000 characters maximum but less is better

No new information (including publications, data or Nobel prizes) even if asked for by the assessor
The holy trinity and your penance

All good – thanks your father, be very brief and humble (don’t count your chickens)

All bad – highlight any positives and suggest how original your thinking is!

Mixed - These rejoinders are most common and most important for the panel
... the good

Quote positives accurately and sparingly. Don’t quote negatives!

Be positive and assertive when responding to constructive comments

Acknowledge useful comments and suggested improvements
(or mention it is outside the current scope or future work that has been considered)
Overall, the Assessors’ comments were very positive and encouraging. All assessors noted the strength and capability of the research team describing CI Neilan and Jex’s track records as “outstanding (Assessor D)” and “exemplary (A)”, while noting that PI Crosbie provides the “ideal linkage partnership arrangement within the team (B)”.

There was a strong consensus among the assessors that the project is of “high quality” and “elegant”. The proposed -omics methods were described as “cutting edge (A & B)” and their application to decipher the complex cyanobacterial bloom cycle “innovative (D & B)” and likely to provide “conclusive answers (A)” and “novel discoveries (C)”. Assessor B noted that the project will “develop a large dataset” of “significant benefit both to researchers and water managers world-wide”.
... the bad

Ignore minor criticisms

The more considered and detailed assessments are the ones to focus on.

Discredit incorrect assertions with facts and other assessments

Be factual with reference to the exact page/section in the application (as not all assessors read the grant)
We thank the reviewers for their support and constructive comments.
To address Assessor B’s concern regarding basic microscopic analysis, the PO performs weekly water sampling at the site, including chemistry, toxicity and cyanobacterial cell counts (p. 10). We are also mindful of the complex nature of the metaproteomes in these systems and have tailored our detailed experimental plan to a range of proteins, especially small bioactive peptides.
... and the ugly

Respond professionally to negative (or even emotive) assessments

Highlight (don’t crucify) assessors that are consistently off target or seemingly biased

Only ask to disregard a review in extreme situations (and get advice first)
Assessors A and D questioned the capacity to undertake the proposed research given various executive commitments. Assessor D miscalculated the number of currently held ARC projects. Neilan holds only 2 projects (not 9) while Burford holds 2 (not 5), with all but one expiring in 2017. Both CIs have a long history of holding executive positions while performing world-class research. Their ARC track records testify that 0.2 FTE per CI is adequate for a project of this scale.

Assessor C questioned Neilan’s PhD student supervision credentials, stating that they are based on “high numbers of completions with few other specific recognitions”. The quality of supervision offered by Neilan mirrors the exceptional standard and volume of research outputs generated by his team.

… plus why last author on 200 papers!
Try to be stylish even if you are dying on the inside

Start by highlighting consistent praise

Go through each section of the assessment criteria (investigators, project, infrastructure) but only if required

Prioritise what is consistently questioned/applauded

Be clear which assessor/s you are replying to.
We thank the reviewers for their support and constructive comments.
In the end it’s the panel that matters

Assessor don’t see rejoinders and comments don’t always reflect scores

The panel decides and considers all stages but they are typically not expert with your specific project

Negate excuses not to fund

Always ask someone to read assessments and check if you have responded to the significant issues
WHAT’S NEXT

Fulbright Distinguished Chair: The Journal Industry: Behind the Scenes – Tuesday 5 June 2018 [ATC 210, Callaghan Campus]

Health Professionals Research Education Program: Session 2: Research Translation and Implementation – Friday 15 June 2018 [John Hunter Hospital]

Grant Accelerator Program: Session 3: Rejected Grants – Monday 18 June 2018 [Callaghan Campus]

ECR C&E: Session 3: Table of Wisdom ECR Journey – Thursday 21 June 2018 [HMRI Cafe]

Fulbright Scholarship Applications due to UON for Feedback: Friday 22 June 2018

Innovation with Industry: Session 5: Innovation Connects – 4.00 – 5.30pm Thursday 28 June 2018 [Treehouse, Callaghan Campus]