

Building a Dream Team

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With thanks to Mary Tully and Rachael Powell for their slide deck



Does the team matter?

- Panels review and assess who is to do what
- Considered as important as the scientific quality of the application
 - Does the team have the **experience** to plan and manage the research?
 - Does the team have the skills and **track record** to effectively and appropriately conduct the research?
 - Does the team have the capacity to carry out the research?
- Collaboration provides added value to research

Step 1: Get clarity around roles and “your ask”

- Spend some time by yourself getting very clear on what the roles are in **this project** and what role you and others need to take
- This is **need** rather than **want** because it *always* has to be about the remit of the funding
 - Project funding versus fellowship funding
- How you approach people and the outcome of that approach will differ based on what asking:
 - I want you to commit to be co-PI
 - I want you to commit to leading workpackages
 - I want you to commit to advising in a minimal timeframe

Principal Investigator (PI)

- Do you want/need to lead the project?
- Are you in a position to lead it?
- Who is eligible to be a PI (and who is eligible to be a co-investigator?)
- Do you have enough experience to be a PI for the funding stream you wish to apply for?
- Do you have appropriate mentorship/support? Is the mentor's time costed convincingly?

Co-applicants or collaborators?

- Will depend on the grant awarding body
- E.g. Research for Patient Benefit:
 - Co-applicants are those individuals with responsibility for the day to day management and delivery of the project and can include patients, carers and service users. Co-applicants are considered part of the project team and are expected to share responsibility for its successful delivery.
 - Collaborators normally provide specific expertise on particular aspects of the project but do not share in the responsibility for the delivery of the project.

Lay co-applicants

- Do NIHR funding programmes require public co-applicants?
 - “No. There is no formal requirement to include a public co-applicant as part of the research team. However, where a public co-applicant is included in a study, most funders will ask for a clear description of their role and the reasons why a public co-applicant is joining the team. This should express the differences in their role from that of other members of the public involved in the study. Without this information, the presence of a public co-applicant can be seen as tokenistic.”

Lay co-investigators

- Public Co Applicants in Research Guidance - Learning For Involvement
- Published April 2021
- 13 pages, wealth of information
- Particularly research with young people

Creating the winning team – overview

- Mixing fantasy football with the goldilocks phenomenon
- Removing all politics, all constraints, all hierarchy, etc what is the best team to answer this particular question?
- Let yourself play and imagine your dream team, rather than repeating old patterns/expectations....
- Then measure up:
 - What specifically is this team member adding to the successful delivery of the grant?
- Just enough of a particular role without too much....

Who?

Deciding what skill-mix is needed for your application

- What needs to be done in your **research study**?
- What sort of person is *best* to do this work?
 - Psychologist
 - Qualitative researcher
 - Endocrinologist
 - Pharmacist
 - Etc, etc, etc
- One step further, why this particular person...

Demonstrating that team members have the skills

- Need to convince the panel that team members have the skills, experience and expertise to conduct the research
- Track record
 - Publications
 - Grants
 - PhD students
 - Etc
- But not at expense of *capacity* to do the research

Identifying potential co-applicants

- People you work with already
- People that your colleagues or the RDS know already
- People who have written seminal articles in the field
- etc
- Think about:
 - skill set, seniority, experience, capacity, availability, personality

Why?

Avoid duplication

- E.g. Three health psychologists on the application – can they contribute different skills/expertise?
- Independent contributions? E.g. one an expert on behaviour change, another leading on quantitative measurement, another leading the qualitative arm? Make clear case.
- OR all have similar interests/expertise? Need to decide which one to involve.

Team Composition*

- Needs to reflect nature of proposed work – under/over costing will be picked up by panel
- Each co-applicant needs a clearly described role – if panel cannot determine what each member is doing it undermines application
- Including senior colleagues at 1% is not well received by panel and looks suspicious
- If the PI is ‘junior’ make it clear who is performing a ‘mentor’ role and give this person a suitable %FTE.

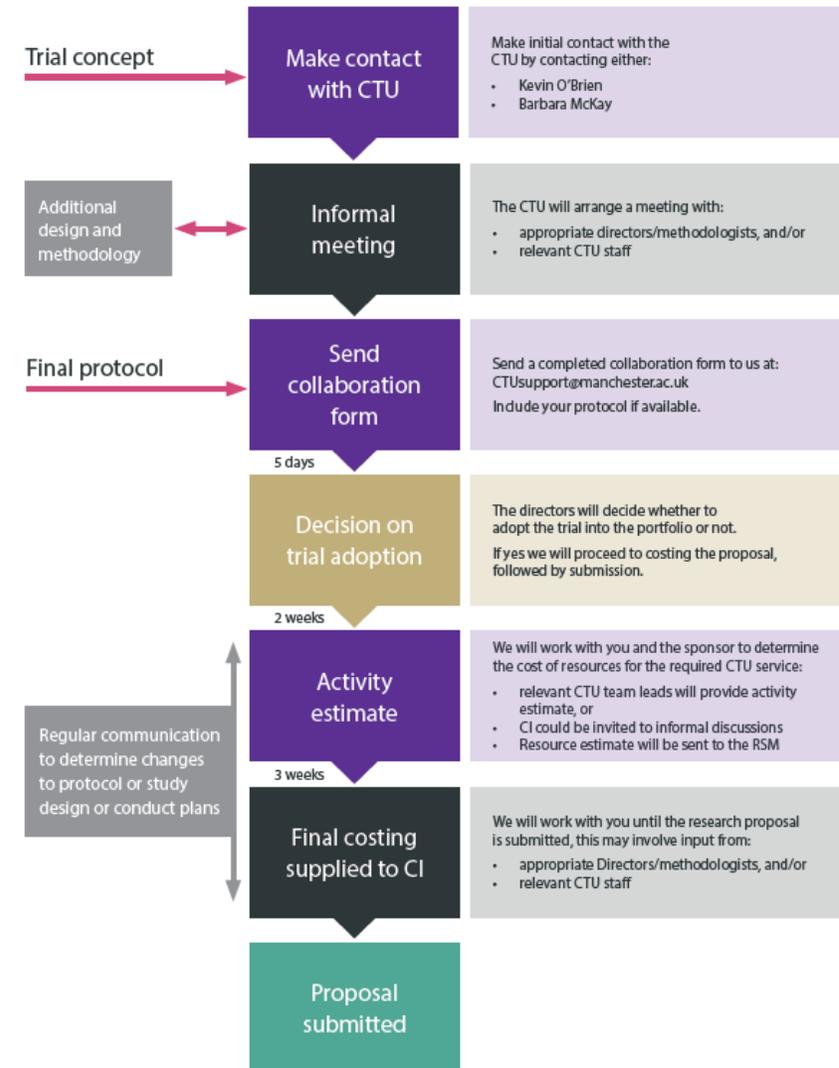
*Slide content from NIHR Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB) presentation.

When to invite co-investigators?

- Too early?
- Too late?
- Just right?
 - When you know what you want to do
 - When the co-investigator can still give advice/recommend change

Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) involvement

- Specialised biomedical research units which design, centrally coordinate and analyse clinical trials and other studies.
- Expensive, but necessary in RCTs etc



Exercise

- For your own study or for given example
 - Make a list of each 'thing' you are going to do/achieve
 - Write what characteristics/skills are needed to do that 'thing'
 - If you have a name, put it by the characteristics/skills
 - If you haven't, think about how you could find somebody
 - Now focus on each of the team members in turn – why?

What can go wrong?

- Size and make-up of the team that doesn't fit the size and scale of the research
 - Too many = very expensive study
 - Too few = unable to deliver the study
- Timing issues
- People saying no
- People saying yes who
 - Aren't actually a good fit for your team or
 - Don't actually have capacity

Other points to consider

1. What are your plans for admin support and study management support?
2. Is your employing organisation on board? Who will help with costings etc?
3. How much time will you allocate for yourself and others? Is this realistic?

Research Design Service support

- Request advice: <https://www.rds-nw.nihr.ac.uk/>
- Once registered – RDS case manager
- Help you to identify gaps in your team – where do you need additional team members?
- Help you to identify potential collaborators
- RDS support stops when funded. Need to ensure costed co-investigators have the skills to run the study.
- Come to us early!