Grant Evaluations
- observations and advice

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Background

I have been a member of FNU since 2007
› Danish Council for Independent Research: Natural Sciences
› 16 members, 2 for Computer Science/Mathematics

A large volume:
› in 2010 we received around 750 applications
› Computer Science/Mathematics had 86 applications
› total budget of 234 million DKK

Various grant instruments:
› research projects
› major research projects
› postdoc stipends
› Steno stipends
› Sapere Aude (1+2)
The Evaluation Process

Applications are screened by the staff
 › required association with Denmark
 › correct grant instrument
 › budget sanity check

Sometimes external reviews are used
 › e.g. Sapere Aude, Council members

Applications are evaluated by the subject subcommittee
 › CV, project, budget

Applications are presented for the instrument subcommittee
 › very long Skype meetings
 › ABC rankings

Applications are discussed at a physical meeting
 › mainly confirming A’s and Cs, long discussions about B’s
 › possibly reallocating funds between instruments
Evaluating an Application: CV

Quantity and quality of publications
› relative to PhD age
› parental leave is always subtracted
› your publications should be representative of your area
› avoid a "noisy" publication list

Impact
› results, citations, h-index
› you might as well directly tackle this yourself

Difficult comparisons across subjects
› Mathematics (1 publication/year) vs. Chemistry (15 publications/year)
› the Council members gain some experience

See: "How to Get a Permanent Position in Academia"
Evaluating an Application: Project

Relevance for the Research Council
› for FNU: is it *basic research* in *natural sciences*?

Originality
› new idea or approach
› clear hypothesis

Background
› state of the art
› required competences and facilities
› (international) collaboration

Plan
› background → hypothesis → method → results
› timeline, work packages (only if not contrived)
Evaluating an Application: Budget

Legality
› correct pay scales
› correct overheads for host institutions
› within limits for the grant instrument
› allowed expenses

Motivation
› relate expenses to the project
› who are actually being payed?
› what are they expected to contribute?

Budget reform 2009
› we cannot (arbitrarily) reduce budgets
› we cannot weigh in (lack of) co-financing from institutions
› this generally results in larger budgets

Universities: 44%
Hospitals: 3%
GTS (Alexandra): 20%
Companies: 0%
Typical Pitfalls

Administrative rejection
› inappropriate grant instrument
› illegal budget
› missing signatures or stamps

Missing attachments
› CVs for co-applicants
› approval from host institution
› project description

Unconvincing CV
› obscure publication list
› unclear employment status

Excessive budget
› unjustified expenses
› knowledge *can* be too expensive
Success Rates

Defined as percentage of applied funds that are granted

We have seen a steady decline since 2005
› no significant decline in Research Council funding
› increase in number of applications for all instruments
› increase in amount of funds for each grant

The decline is even greater as percentage of applications

Funds per granted application increase
› overhead reform (44%) without full compensation
› spiraling salary costs
› budget reform precludes trimming

Number of applications increases
› increased competition
› large growth in PhD production
FNU: Success Rates for Grant Instruments

Graph showing success rates for different grant instruments from 2005 to 2010.

- Postdoc
- Steno
- Projects
- Major Projects
Where Is The Money?

It is still there!
› Research Council budgets are almost unchanged
› except salaries have exceeded inflation

But more is converted to university funding
› own salaries in applications
› increased overheads

Bad news for next year
› approximately 10% drop in FNU funding
Where Is The Extra Money?

adjusted for inflation

Special programs: both government and within universities
Fewer can apply, less competition
Nice if your research fits in
Conclusion

Still lots of money in the system
› real increase in government spending
› many special initiatives fit well with Computer Science

Quality is still rewarded
› uncompromising standards in the Research Councils

PhD production has been accelerated
› siphons resources from the universities
› no corresponding increase in postdoc funding

The "lone researcher" is getting squeezed
› no research funding from the university
› dramatically lower success rates at the Research Council