

Background to the Small Research Projects Initiative

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Introduction

The Small Research Projects Initiative is an annual, open competition inviting applications for research funds. It has been running since 2004. It is managed by researchers in the Scottish Executive, as part of a broad programme of research and evaluation that supports the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being.

Background to the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being

The National Programme is an integral part of the Scottish Executive's commitment to health improvement and social justice. The vision is to *help improve the mental health and well-being of people living in Scotland and the quality of life for people experiencing mental health problems*. Work is carried out, nationally and locally, to raise the profile of, and support action, in the following key areas:

- Raising awareness and promoting positive mental health and well-being
- Preventing suicide in Scotland
- Eliminating stigma and discrimination
- Promoting and supporting recovery from mental ill health

The National Programme aims to achieve these key aims in the following priority areas:

- Infant mental health (the early years)
- The mental health of children and young people
- Mental health and well-being in employment and working life
- Mental health and well-being in later life
- Community mental health and well-being
- The ability of public services to act in support of the promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental illness

Rationale for the Small Research Projects Initiative

The Scottish Executive is aware that, within the agencies and organisations that implement aspects of mental health improvement policy, there is the potential for much creative, proactive research which requires relatively modest amounts of funding. The Small Projects Research Initiative was designed to support such work.

The initiative also aims to build research capacity in Scotland, as it provides opportunities for grant holders to employ and support less experienced researchers on innovative research projects. For those with little previous experience of developing their own proposals, the guidance for applicants includes a number of points to consider, as well as web links to relevant guides to planning, delivering and disseminating research. Social researchers in the Scottish Executive's Health Department Analytical Services Division (HD ASD) also give each applicant detailed feedback on their proposal. The initiative particularly welcomes proposals that actively include people who are users of mental health services.

Funding level

The maximum amount of funding per project is £15,000, inclusive of overheads and/or VAT. The initiative can part-fund projects, but the proposed work must meet a number of conditions (specified in the published guidance).

The initiative may also be used to fund small pieces of exploratory work or feasibility studies, while the applicant seeks more substantial financial support. However, as above, the applicant must be able to demonstrate that the aims of the work and outputs meet the initiative's criteria.

Timescales

Projects funded by the initiative last between three months and a year. When planning timescales, applicants should remember that the assessment process takes two calendar months and the Scottish Executive recommends that a further month should be allowed for making revisions to the proposal and discussing contract arrangements.

Assessment process

Project proposals are assessed by researchers in HD ASD against a rigorous set of criteria (published in the application guidance) which include the following:

- If and how the proposal contributes, explicitly, to advancing the agenda of the National Programme
- Clarity and achievability of aims and objectives
- Appropriateness of proposed methods of data collection
- Appropriateness of planned methods of data analysis
- Outputs and dissemination plans
- Consideration of general and project-specific ethical, data protection and equalities issues
- Whether potential problems have been taken into account and whether appropriate strategies are in place to ensure successful completion of the project within timescale and budget
- Whether the timetable for the project and resources requested are appropriate for the work described
- Whether a detailed, appropriate cost breakdown is provided

All applications which meet the criteria are assessed by a multi-disciplinary panel, including the Director of the National Programme, the Head of the Choose Life National Implementation Support Team and other National Programme Executive Group members. Policy and analytical colleagues in Departments and Divisions outwith HD are consulted on proposals with cross-cutting relevance.

Projects funded to date

The competition has been run twice and 18 projects have been funded to date. Details relating to progress, final reports and two page Executive Summaries can be accessed electronically on the National Programme website: <http://www.wellscotland.info>.

Future plans

The competition will be run again in autumn 2006. The guidance for applicants will be posted on the National Programme website in August and applications should be received by mid-October.

Although proposals relevant to all the National Programme aims will continue to be welcomed, the Scottish Executive is now particularly interested in funding projects which focus on improving mental health and well-being and emotional literacy in the general population.

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