8.8: Common problems in grant applications

The amount of detail to include on the trial design is a tricky one to get right. Some forms allow only a limited space, so care is required to provide the key details concisely but clearly articulated, so that reviewers can make an informed judgement. Standard methodologies can be simply referenced. A common fault is that applicants do not discuss obvious potential problems or limitations with their study design and just hope that they will not be picked up by reviewers. This strategy rarely works, and it is better to show awareness of the issues and explain how they will be addressed.

A list of common problems in grant applications is given in Box 8.3.

Box 8.3 Common problems with grant applications

- Poorly formulated objectives.
- Too ambitious—trying to address too many questions in one study.
- Insufficient attention to previous literature on the research question.
- Poorly identified target population.
- Poor research design—inadequate attention to what specific research question is being addressed.
- Insufficient explanation of why it is important to answer this question and what impact it may have on public health practice.
- No data, preliminary results, or pilot studies to support the feasibility of the proposed approach.
- Inadequate description of the study design and procedures—derivation of sample size is often done poorly (consult a statistician!).
- Analysis methods not specified sufficiently in relation to the main objectives.
- Inadequate description as to who is doing what and when; lacking a detailed timetable for the research.
- Insufficient attention to quality and quality control.
• Inadequate allowance for data entry and analysis—often arrangements for analysis of data are not addressed at all in a proposal, other than that it will all go into a computer!
• Inadequately justified budget.
• Poorly structured; hard to follow the logic; inconsistencies.