

UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship Information Note - Preparing your application.

Prepared from the Shared Insights Workshop, 19 March 2024

Introduction

This short resource is a “crowd sourced” document co-created by organisers and attendees at FLF Insights workshops. These were attended by over 200 research support professionals and led by Sara Shinton from the FLF Development Network (also Roving Panel member for the FLF selection process), with Elsa Fouragnan (FLF), Mel Buckley and Matthew Freeman from UKRI.

The aim of this document is to provide prospective applicants to the FLF scheme with prompts to help them prepare an effective proposal. In addition to these prompts we encourage prospective applicants to

- Read the UKRI applicant guidance which is extensive and provides comprehensive advice
- Talk to FLFs in your organisation (we’ve included some links at the end of this document to blog posts from existing FLFs if you are a “first generation applicant” for your organisation) <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/guidance-for-future-leaders-fellowships-applicants/>
- Use the UKRI database of FLFs to identify FLFs in your research area who you might know through your research networks

Add: talk to your host organisation EARLY in their application to understand local demand management deadlines and processes. Refer to the Additional Information on the UKRI website where useful guidance is provided:

<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/future-leaders-fellowships-round-8/>

Please note that some of these questions are related to the application process whilst others are to help you sense check whether this is the right scheme and right time for you. It is NOT mapped against the application form and includes advice to prepare for the interview and reviewer response.

GOOD LUCK!

Dr Sara Shinton

Director, Future Leaders Fellows Development Network

<https://www.flfdevnet.com/>

Prompt Questions to help prepare for an FLF application. *Remember these aren't taken from the application form or process – they are to help you think more widely as you prepare your application.*

Research and Innovation Excellence

What evidence can you present of the innovation and excellence of your research? Why is it novel and distinctive from other work in your field?

What can you do with a FLF Fellowship that you cannot do without it? Why is the FLF relevant to your research ambitions?

This is a key concept – the FLF is an unusual award in terms of the length of award and extent of funding available. Make sure you are a good fit with the opportunity and if relevant, how it supports the novelty of your research approach. Be clear about the added value to you, to your career and your wider field.

Why you and why now? Maturity of Idea and Project

Panels will consider the maturity of the proposal, including how advanced the development of your research idea is and how well you have planned your project. This includes the development of partnership arrangements with collaborators so make sure they are explicit about what they are offering and why in their letters of support. If these are recent connections, make sure they set out why they are interested in you and your work. If you have only been guided by your previous experience and avoided seeking input from others in your area, including those in research support roles, you may create weaknesses in your proposal so it is really important to share your applications with “critical friends”.

It is evident that those applicants who have drafted a precise and considered PI response are much more likely to be successful. Take time to draft your response, do not reply in haste and draw upon your entire network across your current university and colleagues in other places to review and input to your response. As was said in one of the panels I observed, “They missed an open goal by not sufficiently answering the reviewers’ questions”.

How will an FLF fit with and boost the applicant's career trajectory?

Value added of the fellowship for the applicant is a core consideration for the panels. How will an FLF fit with and boost the applicant's career trajectory? This includes the applicant's career but also the career development of people in your team. The applicant must make the case for being “early career” especially if they have secured an open-ended contract or senior lectureship.

Panels will consider if the proposed research and project is fundable by a more standard grant. So ensure that you talk about how the fellowship and the associated project takes you forward into independence, which would not be possible through a standard grant approach.

It is essential that you explain why you are early career and therefore eligible to apply. The reviewers and panels will judge this based on the information you provide and if this implies you are established in your career without an explanation as to why you are early career, you are unlikely to progress. Time since you completed your PhD is not important, so long as the candidate meets the broader eligibility criteria as an early career researcher then it will be reviewed.

Also, do not be concerned about having had a career break. From what I observed the panel chair will highlight that one of scheme objectives is to support researchers at different career stages, including re-entering academia. In making this appraisal, review panels take into account time spent outside the active research / innovation environment, whether through career breaks or flexible working.

It is likely that your university's /company's internal demand management process will address this at the initial stage. If you are a postdoc a standard grant route may not be available but to those applicants who already have a permanent academic post, it will be considered. *A fellowship is about the person as much as the project*, so be very clear how the FLF will enable you to take a sizeable step forward in terms of your career and leadership potential. This includes demonstrating that you are a 'thought' leader in your subject area, how will you during the fellowship move the dial on the thinking in your research area and possibility across the broader research environment?

Impact and Strategic Relevance

How does your research relate to the UK Innovation Strategy?

Reviewers are asked to comment on the strategic relevance and impact of your research, so look at the UKRI strategic themes <https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/our-vision-and-strategy/ukri-strategic-themes/> It's also worth being familiar with other UKRI strategies and Action Plans including People and Teams, EDI and Public Engagement and Sir Paul Nurse's RDI Landscape Review. *In what ways would you make an impact through the Fellowship?*

Think about who will benefit from your work. Are they represented in your partners' list? Have they helped you to shape your approach (especially if your benefits are to users, patients, or communities)? Previous examples of co-creation will strengthen your application – remember that the process includes a firm commitment to DORA, so non-scholarly outputs are valued.

What partnerships do you need in place to deliver on the aims of your Fellowship?

Make sure that a complex partnership includes clear governance plans and indicates what each partner brings and gains. Ask them to reflect this in any letters of support (best to draft them if they are happy so you can guarantee consistency with your proposal.)

How would you maintain and develop these and other partnerships over the 7 - 14 years (full-time or part-time)

Ask partners to be clear about their commitment to you in their letters of support if they will be available to you throughout the duration of the fellowship.

Applicant and Personal Development

What is the step change you want to achieve with your career and how will the FLF support this?

Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years' time from now?

This fellowship should be seen as a career boost, incremental research development falls outside this remit. Also think about how you will develop during the fellowship – your credibility and reputation will need to grow, so think about how you'll work on this and what opportunities you will need. This should be central to your discussions with your host who should tailor their letter of support to align with your leadership trajectory and think about what opportunities, resources and connections they can provide to help you.

Do you wish to be full-time (4-7 years) or part-time 8-14 years)? And why?

Note that the FLF scheme encourages and support applicants who wish to work part-time, This prompt is about you understanding what's best for you, not implying that you'll need to justify a preference for PT working (because you don't!)

How would you maintain your commitment and momentum during those 7-14 years?

Identifying goals throughout the life of your fellowship will help demonstrate your momentum but also help reviewers judge how you see yourself developing. Again, try to align these with your host support if relevant.

In what ways do you consider yourself an Early Career Researcher?

This is a vital question. The UKRI guidelines are inclusive and not based on outdated definitions of ECRs in terms of time served. You should explain in your application why you are an ECR which may include a change of direction, the development of an interdisciplinary research strategy or a change of sector. <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/guidance-for-future-leaders-fellowships-applicants/expert-review/>

What does leadership mean to you [and your host organisation]? How do you evidence this?

This is a chance to think about your personal leadership values and how you want to lead your research team. How have these values influenced the way you've

developed others and yourself? Have you played any role in research culture work you could mention?

Ensure you maximise the support available from your university when applying and highlight what support will be available to you and your team when you are successful. Including detail on host support will enhance the proposal. Highlight specific support for fellowship holders but also what is available to support the postdocs and students on your team.

What career development activities do you intend to build in?

And cost! Although the FLF Development Network will provide a huge range of training and development, you could think about activities that will support your team and those that will help you with research specific goals. Support for your team is a critical aspect of your leadership and has been given greater emphasis in later rounds of the FLF scheme.

Team and Community

What are your and your research team's training development requirements during the Fellowship?

Make sure this is tailored for you. Don't just write that you'll do the standard organisation training – explain why this is the right fit for you and what benefits it will convey. Although the FLFDN's remit is extensive, your local training offer is important and is an opportunity to build a local network. You should also be aware of the local training available to the team you would build through the FLF - your students, postdocs, and technicians. Be sure to cost any development that isn't available within your host institution – specialist technical training or conferences.

How have you developed others?

Think about informal opportunities you've had through your career to develop others – supervision, mentoring and training.

Have you considered your mentorship? Why are they the best mentors for you nationally or internationally?

Although you'll be offered mentors by the FLF Development Network, approaching potential mentors as you prepare your application is helpful as they can provide letters of support and may demonstrate how you will be supported to develop specific skills or knowledge missing at the time of application. Your choice of mentors should also demonstrate your independence if this could be seen as a risk (continuing to work closely with a former PI or supervisor.) The Development Network can provide mentors for specific challenges in the future.

Are you making best use of existing FLF Fellows or peers internally or externally?

Critical friends who understand the fellowship scheme are vital as you prepare an application. They can help review sections of your proposal, connect you with potential partners, collaborators or allies and may be able to help with mock interviews and preparation.

How have you contributed to professional bodies within your field and generally?

Having an impact in your professional networks and bodies is a great indicator of leadership that doesn't rely on having a formal leadership role. If you have published any non-scholarly outputs (through professional bodies or other routes) these are relevant – they demonstrate your leadership and could be key if engagement with other audiences is part of your research approach. Co-creation of these outputs can also demonstrate the strength and maturity of relationships. The panel's commitment to DORA is genuine but be ready to explain the value and impact of non-scholarly communications.

How are you using your networks to support your ambitions?

Are they providing expertise, mentoring, access to resources to enable you to achieve your plans. It's ok to draw on your network to support you in these ways – you aren't expected to do or have everything especially if your research is interdisciplinary or cross-sector.

Do you need access to new people and networks? Is this something your host could support?

Your application should include reference to the resources you will access to develop as a leader through your fellowship and might include a personal development plan. At interview you'll be asked about what benefits you will get from the FLF Development Network and the wider FLF community. You can learn more about us from our [website and our summary animation video](#)

How will you engage with the FLF Development Network? Tell us about the benefits you would see from the cohort approach

Those applicants who are invited to interview will be asked about how their development plans and how they will engage with the FLF Development Network, <https://www.flfdevnet.com/>. Therefore, applicants should outline their own leadership and people management development plans, not just the technical skills you will develop, this is a core criteria. For example, you should expect a question at interview about the benefits you would gain from the FLF cohort approach and Development Network.

Research and Innovation Environment

How is your host organisation the best environment for your research?

Remember this is about how your host will support you and your research. You don't need worry about how the panel and reviewers will feel about you staying in the same organisation if your personal circumstances make it challenging to move. BUT you must explain how your host will help you to develop as a leader. Also make sure this is reflected in your host letter of support and is tailored to you beyond any standard offers of training. Talk to research support and staff development colleagues about what is available to you and your proposed team. Many institutions will have tailored support for research students and staff and a few have specific programmes for fellowship holders, but be sure to talk about how you will tailor this general support to the specific needs of you and your team.

How would the EDI Policy and Procedures of your host organisation support your research and the Fellowship?

Give evidence of the EDI Policy and Procedures of your host organisation working in practice. This might include help with recruitment, inductions and networks for under-represented groups.

EDI questions are likely to feature at interview so become familiar with local (as well as national) policies and opportunities which will support you and your team. Think about how you can positively influence your research culture through inclusive recruitment, public engagement, and good working practices.

How would the Research Culture of your host organisation support your research and the Fellowship?

Give evidence of the Research Culture of your host organisation working in practice. This will vary from host to host, but look for examples of support for leaders and managers in your organisation.

[Identifying Good Practice Relating To Inclusive Selection Within The Future Leaders Fellowship Scheme](#)

Resources

<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/future-leaders-fellowships-round-8/>

<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/future-leaders-fellowships-round-9/>

<https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/guidance-for-future-leaders-fellowships-applicants/expert-review/>

<https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/UKRI-280323-Funding-Op-FutureLeadersFellowshipsRoundEight-GuidanceNonAcademicHostedApplicants.pdf>

<https://www.flfdevnet.com/resources/enabling-future-research-leaders/>

Insights from FLFs

A number of current FLFs have written about their application experiences and interviews. Although the scheme has developed over the first five years, most of the advice is relevant and will help you.

<https://alison.garden.com/guide-ukri-future-leaders-fellowship-interviews/>

<https://www.alberti-lab.com/post/my-ukri-future-leaders-fellowship-application-what-is-it-like-to-sit-the-interview>

<https://medium.com/@i.jayasinghe/how-i-got-my-ukri-future-leader-fellowship-lessons-i-learned-from-being-a-new-pi-22cff0e60c60>

<http://karagila.org/2020/future-leaders-fellowship/>

<https://www.tigerinstemm.org/blog/fellowships-the-interviews>

<https://www.flfdevnet.com/2022/11/21/fellow-feature-dr-noemi-procopio/>

About the FLFDN

The Future Leaders Fellows Development Network is a UK-wide programme providing leadership and career development opportunities to Future Leaders Fellows (FLFs) and UKRI-nominated Early Career Researchers. You can learn more about our work on our [website](#) and [twitter](#) feed. In the next few months we will be making as many of our resources as possible publicly accessible and useable under a creative commons licence.