

Hints for Preparing a Marsden Fund Proposal

Planning Your Proposal

Start early. You should start thinking about, and preparing for, your Marsden Fund proposal well in advance. Many of the points below cannot be achieved overnight but take months or more of planning.

Familiarise yourself with the Marsden Fund. Read through the website, particularly the documents on the [Overview of Application and Assessment](#) page. Pay particular attention to the [Expression of Interest Guidelines \(Fast-Start and Standard\)](#), [Marsden Fund Council Award Guidelines](#) (if applying to this category) and the [Full Proposal Guidelines](#). To get a sense of some of the research the Marsden Fund has awarded funding to in the past, see the [Celebrating Marsden Research](#) section of the website.

Other sources of information about the Marsden Fund include:

- Your institution's Research Office
- Successful applicants/applications
- Marsden Fund Panellists (for process information only; see [Panels](#) for lists of current Panellists)
- Mentors and/or your Head of Department

Consider whether your research is appropriate for the Marsden Fund. The Marsden Fund supports research with a discovery component. It does not support work which is purely focused on data collection or tool development where these are not addressing a research question. Also consider whether your work would be more appropriately proposed to another funding agency, such as the Health Research Council or Creative NZ.

Ensure you have a really good idea. The most important aspect of your proposal is a novel and exciting research question or aim. Marsden Fund panels seek to fund internationally leading fundamental research. Avoid proposing research which is likely to be seen as 'filling gaps'. Ensure your research question or aim is clear and focused. A statement of aims and a research plan can be drafted well before application forms have been released, and circulated to colleagues for advice.

Build your CV. A good publication record, relative to opportunity, is important. But building your CV goes beyond this:

- Applying for grants, awards and prizes, big and small, can help.
- Serving on professional bodies (such as panels, editorial boards, conference committees) demonstrates leadership in your field.
- Collaborations can improve your output and demonstrate your ability to work with others.
- Publicising your research can open opportunities.

Funding for research excellence

The Marsden Fund is administered by The Royal Society Te Apārangi, PO Box 598, Wellington 6140. Tel: +64 4 470 5799
Email: marsden@royalsociety.org.nz, <http://royalsociety.org.nz/what-we-do/funds-and-opportunities/marsden>

Know the literature. Not only will this assist you in writing a coherent, cutting-edge application but it is extremely important that you demonstrate in your application that you are familiar with recent arguments or developments in your field.

Carry out preliminary work, where relevant. This is not necessary for all projects but can be helpful in demonstrating that you have the necessary skills and commitment to your project. It can help to show that the research is viable and can provide you with interesting initial findings to base your proposal around or to hook your reader.

Choose your team carefully. The team should be capable and fit for the job. Avoid 'window dressing' the proposal with prominent academics who will not substantially contribute to the research in practice. Part of the remit of the Marsden Fund is to support the development of research skills in New Zealand. Consider how the project would contribute to this.

Plan your Full Proposal (Fast-Start and Standard applications). Plan your Full Proposal while writing your Expression of interest. Not only will this result in a more coherent EOI, but it will make it much easier to write the Full Proposal if you get invited to submit one.

Writing Your Proposal

Some General Rules

Ensure the proposal is innovative but realistic and accurate. Convey your passion while avoiding hype.

Write for a general assessment panel. Not everyone on the selection panel will be a specialist in your particular field. Write for this general audience, while providing enough information for a specialist to appreciate the depth of your thinking. Avoid aiming your proposal at a specific individual on the panel. Panellists are listed on our website, as soon as their availability is confirmed. See [Marsden Fund Panels](#).

Write clearly:

- Keep sentences short and succinct.
- Avoid jargon (necessary technical language is okay but should be defined if it is unlikely to be understood outside your specialised sub-field).
- Define abbreviations and use them sparingly.
- Avoid excessive use of 'might', 'maybe', 'could' and 'perhaps'.
- Avoid grammatical and spelling errors (get several people to proof-read your proposal).
- Avoid repetition.

Follow the rules stipulated in the Proposal Guidelines and on the CV template.

Ask people to read your proposal. This includes specialists and non-specialists.

Proposal Content

A good proposal should include the following elements:

- A **descriptive title**. Avoid a 'catchy' title that fails to actually communicate what the project is about.
- A **clearly defined research question or aim(s)**, and objectives. If relevant, a clearly stated hypothesis. The proposal should be tightly focused around this.
- **Background information** explaining:
 - why the research is important

- what other research has been done on the topic so far (avoid citing only your own work but certainly include it if relevant)
- what the novelty of your angle or approach is.
- A **research plan**, including methods which will be used.
- An explanation of **why you** (and your team, if relevant) are the right people for the job.
- An indication of intended **outputs** (for example, a book, a series of articles, conference presentations, a workshop).

Utilise the '**Roles and Resources**' section to justify your team and explain how the project will develop research skills in New Zealand. For Fast-Start applicants, stress how the project will develop you as an independent researcher.

The '**Vision Mātauranga**' section is important and, where relevant, will be taken into consideration by those assessing your proposal. Consider carefully whether it is relevant to your proposal (your Research Office will also be able to advise you). If it is, explain how your research relates to the themes of Vision Mātauranga (see the VM policy framework at <http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/science-innovation/unlocking-maori-potential>) and, where relevant, how the project will engage with Māori.

While a **budget** is only required for the Full Proposal, think about it when you are writing the EOI. What are the budget implications of the work and team you are proposing? Cost your budget realistically – panellists will spot inflated expenses. Ensure the budget coheres closely with the earlier descriptions of the proposed research and roles and resources.

Include **diagrams** only where they are useful and legible.

