



3.1.3 Becoming a PI

If I form the seed of an idea, think of something ...I don't want to not be the principal investigator ...it doesn't make sense ...if I have a good research idea I should be able to apply for funding to fund that research idea ...and I do want to have my own lab where I'm the principal investigator and we are doing neat things.

As this quote from Regina illustrates, many researchers seek funding and become Principal Investigators (PIs) in order to pursue ideas they find highly interesting. And, most universities provide support through Research Offices and officers to help you prepare and submit your proposal. But, once you have the grant – what next? Many new PIs are surprised at the amount of additional work that accompanies funding. Budgeting, reporting to funders, and recruiting and managing staff are typical new tasks that first-time PIs may feel ill-prepared to face. Trudi approached these challenges with a positive mindset. She saw becoming a PI as an opportunity to grow as a researcher, hone her abilities and enhance her future career opportunities.

So, managing people, dealing with different sections of the Department...like ...Finance ...as the Principal Investigator ...more responsibility ...I know that I need the experience and I want the challenge of being the Principal Investigator ...And ...really the best way of doing [some management] is to manage your own research project, to be the Principal Investigator, so if I can show that I'm capable of bringing money into the Department or the Research Centre and managing that project and managing a research assistant and administrator, then I just make a better case for moving up the pay scale, and also, just generally, on my CV, so when I come to apply for jobs, I'll have that experience under my belt.

Nevertheless, you may want to consider Brookeye's comment:

One important thing for me is that I want to maintain my own research program, so I don't want to be [only] a manager yet, I don't want to be an administrator of students, so I have certain things—two or three projects that I work on that I don't hand over to students.

Things to be mindful of

It is often a long time between submitting a proposal and hearing the outcome. So, when a bid is successful, it is important to take time to assess your current situation.



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1. Review your winning proposal. Does it need updating in light of your thinking since it was submitted? Remember that any major deviations from the proposal will need the funder's approval!
2. Will you be working with a team?
 - a. If you need to hire research assistants or administrators, be sure to follow any institutional requirements for selection and management of staff.
 - b. Think carefully about the skills required by team members. Can you invest time in training or do you need people to act independently from the start?
 - c. What kind of leadership are you comfortable with? Do you imagine working with team members as equals or in a more hierarchical way? What responsibilities can you realistically delegate? What is your responsibility to help team members develop their careers?
3. Accurate financial projections, tracking and reporting are critical to any research project.
 - a. Review your proposal budget and make any adjustments to reflect any modifications to the original plan and variation in costs.
 - a. Establish a robust financial system that will be institutional and funding body requirements. Even if you don't manage it yourself, it is important to keep track of how the money is managed.
4. Communication strategy: Review your proposal's communication strategy, is it still appropriate? Are any new journals, conferences or websites available as dissemination points? How have the opportunities for social engagement and impact evolved?

One grant is not enough

Getting your first grant is an exciting moment, but once that research is underway you need to think about future funding to support your long-term research plans. Successful PIs recognise the importance of maintaining a steady stream of funding and often involve themselves in multiple funding bids. Here, Barbara describes the situation she found herself in after several years:

So I have a[council] grant this spring and then I have applied for another ...I should hear any day ...[and] I have a small grant to go back to [field site] this December from [a scholarly organization] and I'm also on another grant ...I'm a co-applicant for that one.

Each funding success results in increased commitments. As Barbara discovered, it is important to be realistic when taking on responsibilities:

This afternoon I'm going to a meeting with a colleague who ...wants to put me on a grant ...she is doing and I'm on three grants already—maybe four—and ...I probably shouldn't [but] I know ...I'm going to say yes because ...it is going to sound so exciting and ...I have a lot of difficulty saying no ...[but]you can't ...say yes just because you were asked ...so ...if I say yes to something else, I'm going to



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have to get rid of another thing ...try to make it more of zero sum game, I can't add more things on right now.

If you find yourself in this situation, explore some of the strategies in work-life balance: How do you spend your time?; Is it urgent or important?; Getting a balance.



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