

Putting together an ALTC grant proposal- Avoiding the traps¹

Catherine Sinclair (Academic Coordinator-ALTC Initiatives)

1 September 2009

In order to maximise the successful completion of your project it is advisable to:

- Have an effective and competent Project Manager and Project Leader.
- Obtain senior-level executive and institutional support for the project.
- Define the management structure, with a precise division of tasks.
- Build in sufficient times to develop a shared understanding and a consistent approach to the project.
- Budget to cover unexpected costs (conferences, travel, etc. but also emergent discoveries) and monitor expenditure closely.
- Plan for ongoing communication with project team members and partner institutions - Budget and schedule regular face-to-face meetings as well as other forms of communication so that relationships can be built, all can clearly understand the scope of the project, institutional cultural variations and terminologies may be understood; and to secure active commitment to the project, identify and document explicit project objectives, make joint decisions and jointly construct project benchmarks, deal with the finite timeline of project implementation and evaluate the project.
- Allow in the timeline a significant period between notification of the success of an application and project commencement to secure ethics approval (at all institutions involved), recruit project staff, for partner institutions to sign off on legal agreements, and to plan for time release of academics if they are to be involved.
- Have effective, embedded dissemination strategies in place at the outset of the project to promote the embedding of findings and outcomes, increase the uptake of project findings across the higher education sector, and lead to structural and strategic change in learning and teaching- in other words, to move beyond resource production, identification of good practice and new understanding to effecting change in learning and teaching.
- Be flexible with regard to project management, activities and outcomes.
- Continually and critically reflect on the progress of the project to regularly monitor progress (including progress against the budget) and to respond to feedback both from inside and outside the project, so that objectives can be refined or timelines and milestones be rescheduled if required.

Effective communication strategies involve:

- Clarifying the roles and expectations of all stakeholders (e.g. project team, institutional partners, reference group, university senior management, professional bodies, ALTC, students, broader academic community), and their communication requirements- All participants in the project need to know exactly what their role entails and how it fits within the team and project plan.
- Maintaining systems for regular communications with all stakeholders. Consider: Who is the target audience? What are the key messages to be conveyed? What are the best methods to provide and receive information? Who is responsible for providing information? When? How frequently? What are the associated costs? How will feedback be dealt with? How can the effectiveness of the communication be reviewed/ assessed?
- Documenting decisions and discussion.
- Agreed processes for the resolution of disagreement or conflict within the project team.

Single Institution Projects are appropriate when:

- The project involves a case study of an issue, an idea or approach of importance to the higher education sector.
- The work proposed is able to be applied within other institutions.
- The proposal includes a comprehensive and convincing strategy to ensure outcomes and project materials take into account different institutional contexts and can be applied in those different contexts.
- A comprehensive plan for dissemination to the relevant audiences is included- sharing has to be embedded in the conduct of the project.

¹ Based upon ALTC (2008) *Operational learnings of ALTC project holders*; ALTC (2009) *Resources for project teams: Communication strategies*; ALTC (2009) *Competitive grants guidelines and supporting information -2010*