

Funding options for trials methodology research

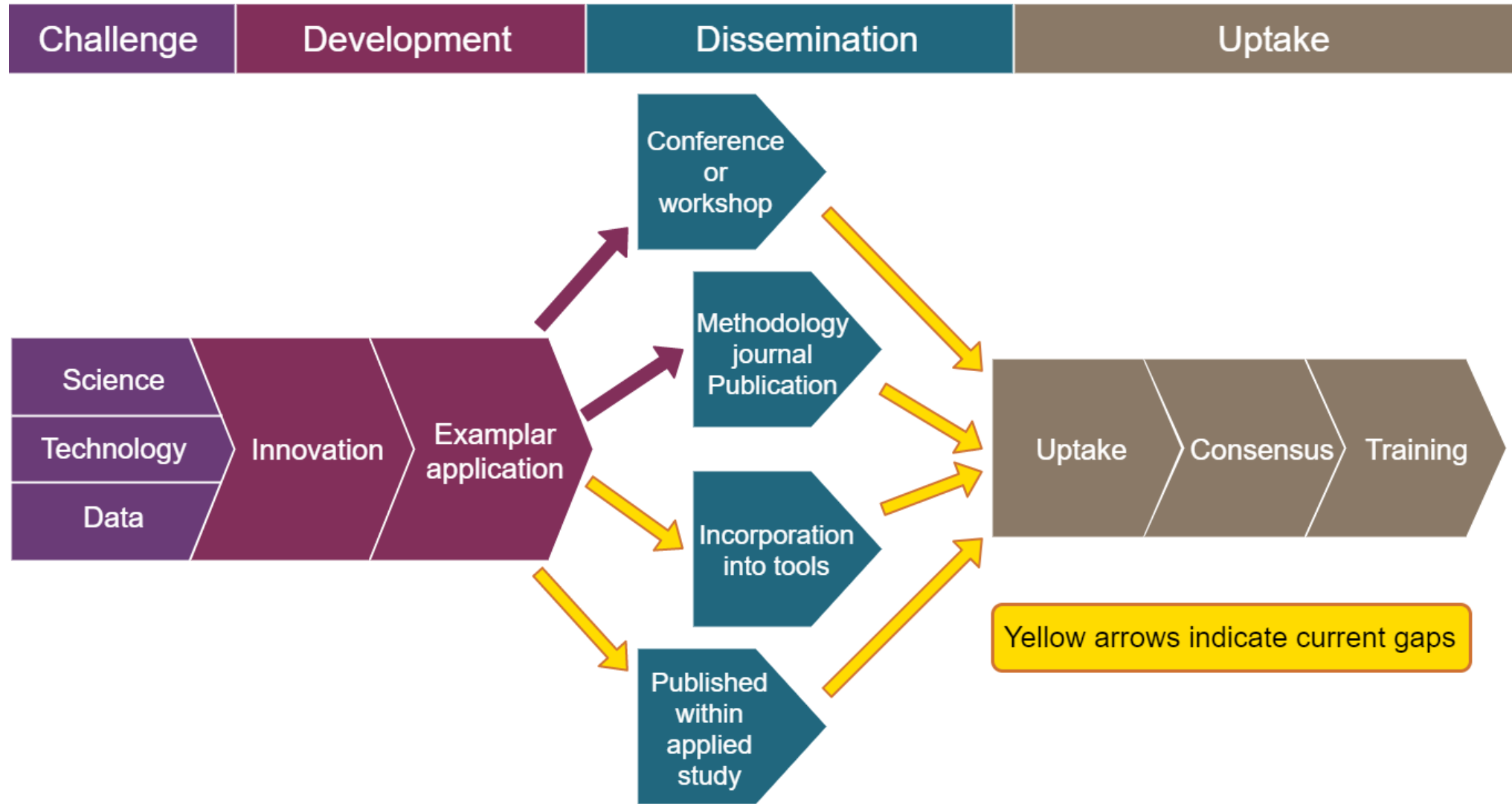
MRC-NIHR Trials Methodology Research Partnership Annual Meeting
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Think broad - several different options

- Specific methodology research funding scheme(s)
 - MRC Methodology Research Panel
- Methodological research embedded within a trial / trial programme
 - potentially funded from a range of different sources, including MRC, also small and large charities
- Trials methodology research as part of a broader programme, initiative or institute
 - e.g., BHF Centres of Excellence, NIHR Biomedical Research Centres, HDR UK sites / hubs, others
- Funding schemes for individuals from a range of different funding sources
 - BSc / MSc / PhDs / medical students – often a good option for getting started
 - Clinical / non-clinical research fellowships at various different levels
- Philanthropic funding
- Partnering with industry

Think strategically – where is the biggest need & where are the biggest gaps in methods development?



Think big – strength in building consensus behind big ideas for big funding applications

- Combine the best people, the best ideas, the best places
- Interdisciplinary
- Inter-institutional
- Across geographies
- Across boundaries: academia-NHS-industry-charity-other
- Meetings / workshops – reach consensus across the community on major new approaches needed i.e. make it a ‘no brainer’

Think strategically – know how the system works

- Be aware that the funding landscape is constantly changing – stay aware of what and where the opportunities are / might be
- Know the funder and the funding scheme – discuss ideas with them in advance if possible
- Know or find out how your application will be handled and how the process works – e.g. reviews / triage / panel
- Know or find out about your panel / board – who are they all / what is their expertise? Which person / people might be most involved in triage / decisions about your application?
- Know or find out how the funding / budget / cost model works and how it will be

Think strategically – preparing your application

- Give them what they are after i.e. ‘answer the exam question’
- Get all the application sections well sorted – it’s never just about the case for support
- Line up the right team – people you need for delivery (avoid unnecessary hangers-on), willing collaborators and supporters for meaningful letters of support, where appropriate
- Write a really clear and compelling case, using simple English
 - lay it out well, with logical headings
 - avoid jargon wherever possible, avoid unexplained abbreviations, consider putting highly technical parts in boxes
 - write it for the panel / board who make the funding decisions (informed and intelligent, but not necessarily expert), not just the reviewers – test it out on appropriate colleagues
- Cost it realistically, making time for tweaks and clearly justify costs
- Response to reviewers is a critical opportunity to expand and clarify; make time for this; avoid being arrogant or dismissive

Specific tips for MRC MRP

- Applications generally need **both** new methods development **and** compelling exemplar(s) with appropriate people on team for both
- Think about generalisability when selecting motivating / illustrative exemplars – really the best?
- Funding available
 - £4M annual budget, 2 panel meetings per year (around £2M allocated at each)
 - usually 15-25 of 25-35 applications make it past triage and 3-5 funded each round
 - range usually around £150-800K
- Some common reasons for not making the cut:
 - General lack of clarity / poor English
 - Looks too expensive without sufficient justification for costs
 - Poor exemplars or lack the appropriate additional (e.g. clinical) expertise to deliver these
 - Not enough detail/clarity on what the applicants actually propose to do
 - Unconvincing / insufficient / no plan for uptake of new method(s) for translation potential

And finally.....remember...

- Even if you have written a fabulous application of exceptional clarity with a great team, perfectly costed, wonderfully justified etc etc... we can all be unlucky...
- Resources are limited...so really good applications are generally more likely **not** to be funded than to be funded
- + the system is not perfect – although we all work hard to make it as fair as possible, poor judgements will sometimes be made by some reviewers and by some panellists or panels

So if you believe that what you proposed is really important and still needs doing, don't give up on it – try again, try another funding route, try a different angle...