

Applying for Lottery Funding - The Experience of the 'Old Bailey Proceedings On-line' Project

In many respects it is a great time to be a historian in Britain. The public demand for history, for popular televisual treatment of the past, for accessible books, and access to the manuscripts held in the innumerable archives of Britain, has never been higher. And as result of the lottery, and growing investment in the cultural infrastructure of Britain, there has never been a period in which more money was being lavished on historical research than the present. There is only one cloud on this particular horizon. The money made available for historical research and presentation is, for the most part, not coming to academic historians. Instead, it is being awarded to local government and museums, archives and charities.

Unusually for academic historians we did manage to access a small quantum of the tens of millions of pounds currently being distributed by the New Opportunities Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund. In the process, we discovered why academics have been less enthusiastic about applying than one might expect, but also some of the benefits of these sources of funding, together with what one needs to do in order to apply successfully.

The project we are engaged in is entitled the 'Old Bailey Proceedings On-line', and is currently preparing to post an electronic edition of the Old Bailey Sessions Proceedings published between 1674 and 1834. These are the printed trial accounts of all felonies prosecuted at the Old Bailey, and comprise some 25,000,000 words of text, on 57,000 printed pages. It is the largest single body of printed material detailing the lives of non-elite people ever produced, and at the end of our project will provide rapid web access, through 'key word' and structured searching, to the full texts of the Proceedings. It is also a very expensive project. The transcription of the text alone will cost some £300,000, while the marking -up and posting of the materials and associated costs will entail a further £400,000 worth of expenditure.

Initially, we hoped to raise sufficient funds through the AHRB's Resource Enhancement Scheme, but the maximum sum we could apply for was £300,000. We were directed to the New Opportunities Fund's Digitisation of Learning Materials Initiative by the Corporate Planning Office at the University of Sheffield. The NOF had £50,000,000 to distribute to create a 'People's Network' of web based 'learning materials' supporting citizenship and heritage. The size of the grants involved (and the cost of our project) forced us to take NOF very seriously indeed, and set us on a twenty month long journey, leading eventually to the award of a grant of £370,000.

The process, however, was tortuous, and substantially geared towards people working in local government and the museum sector. First, we had to make a preliminary application, including full details of management and implementation strategies, spreadsheets, and market research. Even the preliminary application was over 40 pages long, and took several months to put together. It also required that we learn the languages of central and local government - we needed to think in terms of 'work packages' and 'business plans', of 'stakeholders' and 'sustainability'. In a powerful sense, we were forced to translate our essentially academic interests and ways of working into something very different indeed. The original application was submitted in early January 2000 and was approved in June of that year. We were told that everyone who had progressed through this stage would 'in all probability' be given funding. We were then asked

to go away and produce an even more detailed business plan, and management system. After eight months further work we had completed a 47 page application and 108 page business plan, plus a range of further appendixes. In June of 2001 the final outcome of over 20 months work was announced, and we were awarded a grant, one of only 15 out of 152 awarded to a University based project.

In the interim we had also applied for partial support for this project from the AHRB's Resource Enhancement Scheme, and had been successful. There were only two real differences in the application process between the AHRB and the NOF. The AHRB application was only 14 pages long, and took 7 months to assess. For NOF, while the sums involved were larger than the AHRB could award, the details required prior to the award were formidable, and the length of time taken to assess the applications seemed long even to a historian.

For academics more interested in writing history than filling in application forms the NOF procedures were tremendously frustrating to deal with. But at the same time the possible rewards, in terms of support for a large and important project, provided an overwhelming inducement. It was also clear that as academic historians we were in a remarkably good position to apply for this fund. While the language of the application form, the lead times and the demands made by organisations such as the NOF and the Heritage Lottery Fund are intimidating, and apparently directed towards groups other than academics, it was also clear that our application was warmly received, and we were given every encouragement to participate.

The New Opportunities Fund has made our project possible - but it did and still does demand that we fit in to a new way of working. Completing the applications required assistance from parts of our Universities we didn't even know existed. Unlike the AHRB and ESRC, our Universities do not receive substantial funding for on-costs from the New Opportunities Fund, forcing us to think hard about the roles university resources play in our project. On the other hand, NOF allowed us to purchase teaching replacements to give us time to administer the project, which the AHRB did not. We have also been tied into a much more stringent system of audit and report. The NOF demands a quarterly progress report, including spreadsheets and justifications for virement that is substantially more detailed than the annual reports requested by the AHRB.

In the end, accessing lottery funding proved to be very hard work, but it also proved entirely possible, and worthwhile. The sums of money involved are huge, and if academic historians do not apply, local government and the museum sector will. And if the academy is not substantially involved, we cannot expect the projects funded to meet our needs or satisfy the standards of presentation and accuracy that professional historians require. Moreover, while the application process was at times labyrinthine, it did force us to think more broadly about the possible audiences for our project. As a result 'Old Bailey Proceedings On-line' has been designed to encourage non-professional historians to pursue historical research in greater depth, helping to create a greater synergy between the public demand for history that we know is out there, and the professional historical community supported by our universities.

**Tim Hitchcock,
University of Hertfordshire**

**Robert Shoemaker,
University of Sheffield**