Grants and prizes

There is a surprisingly large amount of funding available to support medical electives. Probably the most important thing to realise when applying is that every organisation has its own agenda. Many are charities concerned with the health of a particular country, social group or a specific medical condition. Others include the Royal Colleges. ‘Subsidising medical students to spend 9 weeks eating ice-cream whilst white water rafting’ is not a common aim, and to have a good chance of getting any of these awards you need to be able to articulate why your elective is a valuable investment for the funding body. With this in mind its work considering the following before you apply : -

***a) write down 3 medical things you plan to do on your elective***

***b) why are these things important to you, both now and in terms of your future***

***c) do others benefit in any way from your proposed elective?***

**What’s available?**

Compile a list of all the funding available. Most medical schools have internal prizes available to their own students, and your undergraduate office should hold details of these. Some medical schools helpfully provide links to or lists of funding sources. This is a good starting point, but an evening spent googling permutations of ‘medicine’, ‘elective’, ‘funding’, ‘grant’, ‘prize’ is also worthwhile.

For each possibility, ask yourself ‘is there any way that what I’m doing is relevant to this organisation’s aims?’ One way of doing this is to print off a list, then use different colour highlighters for ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘maybe’.

**Applying**

Good applications are specific and are tailored to the organisation being approached. It can be useful to start by writing a large ‘stream-of-consciousness’ to begin with, and then cutting, pasting and otherwise refining it into various versions. This allows you to highlight the things that are most relevant to each funding body. Under no circumstances should you stretch the truth about what you’re doing to try to meet funding criteria. For a start, this might become problematic if you are asked to verify anything later. It’s also a probity issue. And it’s just not good form, especially when the funders are charities.

Check if any supporting documentation (e.g. letter of confirmation from the medical school) is needed, and enclose the relevant number of copies with your application.

Make sure you know the closing dates for each grant, and send your application in well in advance. Keep track of the various applications you’ve sent (being slightly obsessive, I would recommend a spreadsheet), and note down when their decisions will be made – don’t hassle them before this, although it’s fine to ask for an acknowledgement of receipt of your application. (For postal applications, enclosing a stamped addressed postcard can be useful for this).

If your applications are successful – congratulations! Most organisations will ask for a report when you return from your elective, and information on write-ups can be found in the ‘projects’ chapter. It’s also nice to thank funders for their support in the meantime.

Sadly, there’s a finite amount of money out there, so not everyone will get elective funding. If you end up in this situation, don’t despair. You may be able to adjust your budget accordingly, or investigate other options for raising the necessary cash.