

Writing Successful Research Grant Applications

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General Tips

- Know the culture of the funder
- Follow the instructions
- Know the assessment criteria
- Treat the application like an argument and present it with confidence
- Use the appropriate disciplinary concepts and methods
- Show why you're up to the task

Decide on a Project

- Should be interesting to you . . . but that won't get it funded.
- Should give you an excellent training opportunity (what research methods will you gain experience in?) and therefore prepare you for further study or related employment
- Should also “contribute to the field” – something that expands what we already know about X.

SSHRC's Criteria

- Challenge – is it important?
- Feasibility – can it be done?
- Capability – can you do it?

Challenge Question 1:

“Does the applicant situate the project as important in the big picture?”

CARS = Creating a Research Space

- Purpose of lit review in articles, applications
- 3 moves
 - the field –Wow!
 - the gap – Oh no!
 - the proposal – Hurray!

“The Big Picture” of Research Funding

- Funders looking for “impact”
- Traditionally = contribution to the field
- Now = (that, plus) contribution to society
- Therefore . . . think in terms of what’s **exciting and important** about your project . . . Why it matters to the world
- But remain a **scholar** – clearly situated in the literature

Challenge Question 2:

“How well was the research goal stated?”

- Goal = ABCD = should be clear and straightforward
- contribute to the field of A - by answering research question B - and reporting on it in publication/conference C - in preparation for future work (PhD?) at D

Research Question

- The most important sentence(s) in your application
- What important question are you proposing to answer, and why is it important that we find the answer?

Feasibility Question 1:

“How well was the methodology described?”

- i.e., what’s the plan for answering your research question?
- *“This study will test the hypothesis that early Icelanders grew flower gardens by examining pollen content of soil samples from an archaeological dig site in Gimli, Manitoba for the presence of flower pollen. Laxner’s (2001) multimodal methods will be followed: microscopic examination of soil samples, litmus testing, and DNA testing. In the first pass, I will take 5 soil samples from”*

Feasibility Question 2: “Is it methodologically sound? Is it ethical?”

- Show you’re a good scholar by using theories, concepts, and methods appropriate to your topic – interviews, surveys, document analysis, etc.
- Tri Council ethics – TCPS₂ – if any human research participants, ethical considerations important – Indigenous? Minors? Vulnerable?
- Show awareness of TCPS₂, OCAP and other indigenous research ethics

Feasibility Question 3:

“How well were the expenses, supplies, and equipment justified?”

- Importance to research plan must be obvious; e.g.,
 - “\$24 for car expenses to community at Fisher Branch”
 - “\$110 for hotel accommodation for one night in Brandon”
- DON'T pad
- DO ask for enough to carry out the research successfully
- If you will be supplementing the budget, explain from what sources (e.g., personal funds, UW funds) and how much

Capability Question 1:

“How strong were the letters of recommendation in their support?”

- Choose referees carefully
- Give them your proposal folder at least one month in advance
 - Brief info on mandate of program and selection criteria
 - Your CV/Resume and transcript
 - Reference deadline and submission instructions
 - Stamped pre-addressed envelope if mail-in required.
- Ask specifically if they can write a strong letter for you
- Politely remind – professors are notoriously busy

Capability Question 2:

“How capable is the applicant of carrying out the project successfully?”

- Shown in your CV/Resume and transcript
- Can also be played up to some extent in the project description
- E.g., research methods courses, online CORE ethics tutorial, relevant content courses, RA experience, established community relationships

General Tips:

Never . . .

- Propose a project outside the funder's mandate (e.g., SSHRC doesn't fund most health research)
- Propose too big a project – follow the Goldilocks rule
- Stray from the instructions re content or format
- Be unclear about your goals and hypothesis
- Ignore the relevant current scholarly literature
- Be confusing or vague about your methods
- Ignore ethical issues
- Ask for too much or too little money
- Fail to justify everything in your budget
- Miss the deadline – funders never give extensions
- Seem unprofessional by making grammatical and spelling mistakes

And . . . Don't go over (or significantly under) the word length and use tiny or huge font to trick the reviewers.