Guiding Writing proposal step by step for trade union researchers

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Finding a researchable problem – where?

- From reading
- From previous research
- From personal interest
- From supervisors???

- From one's workplace
- From government
- At the interface between disciplines
- Where else?

It isn't that they can't see the solution. It is that they can't see the problem

G.K Chesterton

Formulate a research problem that is

Specific

Real

Researchable

Interesting to you

It should -

Encompass the expected content

Predict the whole argument

A research problem should **not**

- Simply represent a broad area

- Expect a yes or no answer

- Allow for surprises later in the research

- Be too big for the requirements of the project

Research Proposal

What is a Proposal?

- A confidence builder, a persuasive tool
  - It convinces people with funds (who don't know you) that you are worth funding
- A contract
  - After the award, the proposal often becomes part of the contract – so be careful of what you promise.
- A plan of action
  - The proposal spells out what you are going to do and when you are going to do it.

Research vs. Project Proposals

- A research proposal emphasizes the contribution that the research will make to the field.

- A project proposal emphasizes the impact the activity will have.

- Evaluation is more usually more important in project proposals.

First Steps – Before the Proposal

1. Write a concept paper
   - Usually 2-4 pages
   - What is going to be done?
   - Why is it important to do it?
   - How will it be done and by whom?
   - How much money is required and for what general purposes?
2. Share the paper with colleagues
3. Identify funding resources

Parts of a Research Proposal

- Title (or Cover) Page
- Abstract
- Table of Contents
- Introduction
- Background
- Description of Proposed Research
- Description of Relevant Institutional Resources
- List of References
- Personnel
- Budget

of Michigan. Adapted from: **Proposal Writer's Guide By Don Thackrey,** University
http://www.research.umich.edu/proposals/PWG/pwgcontents.html

Title Page

- The format is often specified by the funding agency
- Name of organization being submitted to
- Title of the proposal
- Starting date and budget period
- Total funds requested
- Name and address of institution
- The title page should be professional looking, but do not use fancy covers, bindings, etc.

A good title

- The title is important. It should reflect the focus of your project.
- The most important words should come first.
- Avoid words that add nothing to a reader's understanding such as "Studies on…," Investigations..," or "Research on Some Problems in…"

Hints for Title Page

A good title is brief

For example, this title -

Title #1 - **The Systematic Development of a Local Initiative to Create a Learning Center for Community Education**
  can be shortened to –

Title #2 - **A Local Learning Center for Community Education**

GUIDE FOR WRITING A FUNDING PROPOSAL. S. Joseph Levine, Ph.D. Michigan State University East Lansing, Michigan, USA

.

Titles can be confusing

What is your exact meaning eg

- The effect of HIV/AIDS on food security
- The effect of food security on HIV/AIDS
- The economic effects of HIV/AIDS on food security in Botswana
- The medical effects of food security on HIV/AIDS families in Botswana
- The psychological causes of stress in HIV/AIDS families in South Africa

Table of Contents

- Very brief proposals with few sections ordinarily do not need a table of contents

- Long and detailed proposals may require, in addition to a table of contents, a list of illustrations (or figures) and a list of tables.

- The table of contents should list all major parts and divisions (including the abstract, even though it precedes the table of contents).

The Abstract

- Every proposal should have one
- In project proposals this is called the Executive Summary
- It should be written last
- The abstract should summarize the project
- It is the most important part of the proposal

Introduction (1)

- Start with a capsule statement of what is being proposed.

Introduction (2)

- You should not assume that your reader is familiar with your subject. It should be comprehensible to an informed layman. It should give enough background to enable him to place your research problem in a context of common knowledge and should show how its solution will advance the field or be important for some other work.

Introduction (3)

- Do not to overstate, but do state very specifically what the importance of your research is.

Introduction (4)

- If the detailed exposition of the proposed research will be long or complex, the introduction may well end by specifying the order and arrangement of the sections.

Introduction (5)

- The general tone of the introduction should be self-confident, but not exuberant. Enthusiasm is not out of place, but extravagant promises are anathema to most reviewers.

Background (1)

- This section may not be necessary if the proposal is relatively simple and if the introduction can present the relevant background in a few sentences.

Background (2)

- If previous or related work must be discussed in some detail, however, or if the literature of the subject must be reviewed, a background or literature review section is desirable.

Background (3)

- Literature reviews should be selective and critical.

  - Reviewers only want to know pertinent works and your evaluation of them.

  - A list of works with no clear evidence that you have studied them and have opinions about them contributes almost nothing to the proposal.

Description of Proposed Research (1)

- This section of the proposal is the comprehensive explanation of the proposed research

- It is addressed to other specialists in your field.

- It is the heart of the proposal and the primary concern of technical reviewers.

Description of Proposed Research (2)

- The description may need several subsections. The description should include:
  - Aims or Objectives
  - Methodology
  - Results
  - Conclusion

Description of Proposed Research (3)

- Be realistic in designing the program of work.

- Research plans should be scaled down to a specific and manageable project.

Description of Proposed Research (4)

- The proposal should distinguish clearly between long-range research goals and the short-range objectives for which funding is being sought.

- Often it is best to begin this section with a short series of explicit statements listing each objective, in quantitative terms if possible.

Description of Proposed Research (6)

- Be explicit about any assumptions or hypotheses the research method rests upon.

- Be clear about the focus of the research. In defining the limits of the project, especially in exploratory or experimental work, it is helpful to pose the specific question or questions the project is intended to answer.

Description of Proposed Research (7)

- Be as detailed as possible about the schedule of the proposed work.

- Include a schedule and calendar of events.

Description of Proposed Research (8)

- Be specific about the means of evaluating the data or the conclusions.

- Try to imagine the questions or objections of a hostile critic and show that the research plan anticipates them.

Description of Proposed Research (9)

- Be certain that the connection between the research objectives and the research method is evident.

    - If a reviewer fails to see this connection, he will probably not give your proposal any further consideration.

Description of Relevant Institutional Resources

- This section details the resources available to the proposed project.

- Include the institution's demonstrated competence in the pertinent research area, its abundance of experts in related areas, its supportive services that will benefit the project, and its unique or unusual research facilities or instruments available to the project.

List of References

- If a list of references is to be included, it is placed at the end of the text proper and before the sections on personnel and budget.

- The style of the bibliographical item itself depends on the disciplinary field.

- Be consistent! Whatever style is chosen should be followed throughout.

Personnel (1)

- The personnel section usually consists of two parts:

  - an explanation of the proposed personnel arrangements; and,

  - biographical data sheets for each of the main contributors to the project.

Personnel (4)

- The biographical data sheets should follow immediately after the explanatory text of the "personnel" section, unless the agency guidelines specify a different format.

- For extremely large program proposals with eight or more participants, the data sheets may be given separately in an appendix.

Budget (1)

- Budgets are developed according to sponsors and university guidelines. This section is an overview of common features.

- Depending on complexity, the budget section may require not only a tabular budget with line items, but may also require a budget summary and explanation or (budget justification or budget notes).

Budget (2)

- Typical divisions of a budget are:
  - Personnel;
  - Equipment;
  - Supplies;
  - Travel; and,
  - Indirect costs.
  - Other categories can be added as needed.

Appendices (1)

- Reviewers almost never read appendices - the best rule of thumb is:

When in doubt, leave it out.

Common problems found in proposals -1

- Too long
- Poor structure
- Poor language use
- Inappropriate use of technical and other terms
- Research too ambitious
- No literature review
- No integration of theory in literature review

Common problems in proposals -2

- Literature review copied
- Methodology not clear eg size of population, specific data collection methods for specific populations and purpose not set out well
- Methodology inappropriate
- No references or inadequate referencing

Group Work

- Write a concept note that will lead to a full-fledged research proposal for on agreed topic in your group:
- Clearly state:
1. Title
2. The problem
3. Conceptual thinking
4. Key literature landmarks