



3.1.2 Getting a grant

Some things to consider

Applying for a grant can be a useful way to clarify your long-term research goals as Ginger notes:

This week I submitted a major grant application; whether or not the application is successful, writing the grant has been extremely helpful in clarifying my research agenda and renewing my commitment to move forward with my area of focus.
(Ginger)

Conversely, as Trudi points out, writing grants takes away from other important activities:

And if you're writing funding grants, you're not writing journal articles. So yeah, it would be nice to get more of a balance in that respect. (Trudi)

PhD would agree with Trudi, but also recognizes that grant writing can also be a valuable way of improving your writing skills and learning how to communicate your research to a wider audience:

I mean in terms of the grants themselves, it is a pain to write them. It throws you out of disarray for months while you are then struggling for a month or two to catch up, just to fall behind yet again. But, on the other side, it has been a really good learning process. I think the most recent grants that I have put in are definitely my strongest and so at least I am learning how to do them...it has really forced me to look at my writing in a different way to be more concise. And also because you are writing to an audience that is not going to be an expert necessarily. (PhD).

Initially, if at all possible, you should seek a more experienced collaborator to provide guidance. Trudi found this particularly helpful:

I'm about to start writing a grant with a colleague from Strathclyde that I met while working on [another project] ...He, I think, is going to be a very good mentor, because ...he said, "well you know, at this stage of your career, you should be the PI ...I'm already a professor, I've got a couple of PI things, so ...you should do it."
(Trudi)

As well, if you move countries, you should check if there are any grants designed to help mobile researchers integrate into their new contexts. CM found this particularly helpful:

When I moved, I applied for funding from the Marie Curie ...they have ...different waves of funding ...one ...is for people who are moving from one place to another
(CM)



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Also, there may be national differences in the ways in which you are required to justify your budget or demonstrate social impact so, if possible, seek advice from another international researcher about what to watch out for.

A further consideration for people moving across languages/cultures is to get feedback from a native speaker and/or resident. For example, in many English-speaking Higher Education funding systems the researcher is expected to be more present in a proposal than in some other languages/cultures. Of course, being successful cannot be taken for granted. In most cases achieving success requires resilience and persistence since you may have to apply multiple times before a grant is awarded, as Ginger was told.

We are told when we go to [funding council] workshops ...”don’t get discouraged when you apply that you are unsuccessful because most people who end up getting ...grants, ...it’s the third time that they have applied—not to say that everybody gets it after their third time; ...just don’t be discouraged—...you should still apply.”
(Ginger)

Writing a grant

To win a grant, you need more than a good idea. Your major task is to write such a persuasive argument about your good idea that you convince the reviewers it deserves funding. An important way to improve your argument is to get feedback from a range of different readers, to read previously successful and unsuccessful applications, and to seek institutional research support. In addition, you might find these two tools helpful in drafting your proposal.

The Heilmeier Catechism

The Heilmeier Catechism is a set of questions that George Heilmeier, Director of the American Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in the mid-1970’s, said every research proposal should answer. While these questions were created with science research in mind, slightly modified as below, they can nonetheless be a good way, regardless of your area of expertise, to assess the value of your own ideas in developing a research idea and creating a persuasive proposal – particularly from the perspective of social impact.

1. What is the problem, and why is it hard to answer?
2. How is it being dealt with today?
3. What is the new idea you are contributing that can make progress in dealing with it?
4. What will be the impact if successful?
5. How will the program be organized?
6. How will intermediate results be generated?
7. How will you measure progress?
8. What will it cost?

For the original questions, see <http://cseweb.ucsd.edu/~ddahlstr/misc/heilmeier.html>



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Of course, these questions provide only one means of developing and writing about your research ideas.

Moves in the English-language research proposal

While some grant agencies will provide a formal structure for your proposal, there is also a taken-for-granted but unstated structure for writing research proposals. Research has shown that there is an inherent structure in English research proposals that holds true across national jurisdictions.

Two studies conducted by Connor, one in North America and the other in the EU, analyzed English-language research proposals (as well as interviewing the authors to verify the findings). Connor found that individuals recognized the following moves as core to research proposals (and could recognize them in their own proposals). Country of origin and discipline appeared to have little influence. You can use this list generated from her research to assess your draft proposal.

- Territory: the situation in which the research is placed: there are two ways to demonstrate this – the world outside of academia, and that of the field of research
- Previous research, either by you or others
- Gap in knowledge/ problem in the territory: this explains the motivation for the study
- Goal statement, aim or general objective: what you want to do
- Means: methods, procedures, plans of action and the tasks that lead to the goal
- Achievements: anticipated results, findings, or outcomes of the study
- Benefits: intended or projected outcomes of the study
- Competence claim: this demonstrates that you/ the group proposing the work are well qualified, experienced, and capable of carrying out the tasks
- Importance claim: how the proposal, its objectives, anticipated outcomes, or the territory are particularly important or topical, much-needed or urgent
- Compliance claim (required; only in EU proposals): *this makes explicit the relevance of proposal to EU objectives, usually with highly specific reference to directives and/or the set goals of the program in question.*

Connor, U., & Mauranen, A. (1999). Linguistic analysis of grant proposals: European Union research grants. *English for Specific Purposes*, 18(1), 47-62.

Connor, U. (2000). Variation in rhetorical moves in grant proposals of US humanists and scientists. *Text*, 20(1), 1 - 28.

Use institutional resources

Your institutional research office or your local research officer can be a wonderful source of information. Check with them for examples of previously successful proposals as well as the common areas that review panels report as less well done. Lack of sufficient explanation is common when dealing with:

- Project/financial management including risk management
- Training provision
- Knowledge transfer



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In other words, make sure that you have very specific descriptions of what will be done and how.

Further resources

- [Help in writing and revising grant proposals for research funding in all academic disciplines](#)
- [10 tips for success](#)



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