

## Top tips for writing a research proposal

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### Planning and preparation

- Everything takes longer than you think it will. No matter how simple it may seem to pull together a project, there are a lot of different steps involved in submitting a proposal, some more time-consuming than others.
- Plan your application and take your time, don't rush it. Make sure you've got all the paperwork required. For example, some funding calls require specific letters of support from university administrators or mentors.
- It's good to talk! Speak to the funders, we're here to help. Ask us questions to make sure you are on the right track. Read through guidance and eligibility criteria carefully. We don't want you wasting your time applying for an inappropriate scheme.
- Create a collaborative network within your organisation and beyond. Look for inspiration to help pull together an idea that's worthy of being funded. The wider the range of ideas you can expose yourself to, the more interesting concepts you'll come up with.
- Speak with your grants office, mentors and colleagues who have served on funding panels. Get involved in grant writing at an early stage, if only as an observer. Find out how senior colleagues get ideas together, assemble teams and put an application together.
- Make sure you have the support of your institution, and that all the necessary resources will be made available should you be awarded funding.
- Take the time to carefully review and understand the process and evaluation criteria for the specific call you would like to apply for. This can help you identify potential weaknesses in your proposal and address them before submission.
- Finally, join the call webinar on the specific call you would like to apply for. These are organised to explain each GACD funding call and are a great opportunity to learn about the topics open for funding and to ask questions. If you cannot join a webinar, make sure to check the recordings.

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### Building a consortium

- The people involved are just as important as the project you're proposing. Provide evidence that the team can deliver the work and a return on the funder's investment. Do you have the right people and representatives from the appropriate research communities?
- Build a strong and multidisciplinary consortium. A consortium should be composed of partners from different countries bringing together complementary expertise in research. It should also bring innovative solutions to tackle global challenges. The involvement of research organisations, public authorities and civil society organisations are often critical for GACD projects. Use the 'find a collaborator tool' and your networks to find the right project partners.
- Take into consideration the human resources and skills required for the implementation of the project beforehand, and design a plan to avoid delays if the proposal becomes eligible for funding.
- Make sure everyone's role is clear- GACD now require a diagram of the workplan; so, it should be easy for reviewers to see who is responsible for each work package, and if they have the appropriate expertise to carry out that part of the project.
- Consider providing any additional cultural or social context for your work, such as around the justification of the budget in your particular country/countries, or in terms of workload.

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### What to think about when you are writing your proposal

- Your proposal will be reviewed by independent experts working in the field, as well as board or panel members with a variety of specialisms. They're smart people but they're also busy!

- Provide a clear rationale for what you're doing and why you're doing it. Create specific aims and well-defined criteria to quantify success and keep it concise. You want to make it as easy as possible for them to understand what you're proposing to do and why this is important.
- Explain the intended consequences of your work. Who could benefit in the long term? How can you increase the chances of reaching those beneficiaries?
- Even if your proposal doesn't directly address economic or societal impact you should be able to explain the pathway that links your work to improving human health. Embed the potential impact of your research throughout your application.
- Provide enough preliminary data to validate the approach you've selected and reassure the panel you've identified a signal that's worth pursuing. If you don't have preliminary data, consider what other published work you can use to support your approach.
- Be focused. You're selling an idea to an audience, make sure it's an exciting idea taking on a serious challenge. Identify a hook, the key feature that your proposal hangs off, and then tell a convincing narrative linking each experiment to your main aims.
- It's also a good idea to acknowledge weaknesses in your proposal but explain why it's still worth pursuing. This shows reviewers that you fully understand any limitations in your approach.
- What could go wrong? What will you do to minimise this risk? What are your contingency plans? This shows you've thought through your application and provides confidence you'll be able to deliver your proposed research.

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## Budgets

- Remember all funders are looking for value for money. Don't overinflate your costs or ask for unnecessary items.
- Balance your budget- make sure that the costs match the workloads and remember to explain differences in salaries and local contexts.
- Don't underestimate how much things will cost!

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## Final checks

- Many research organisations have 'mock' internal funding panels. If yours does, take advantage of it. If it doesn't, look to get opinions from a mentor or a senior colleague.
- Getting your proposal read by a peer who has not been involved in drafting the application can also be extremely valuable. If they struggle to follow the key objectives, or what the potential impact will be, then it is likely that reviewers will also struggle.
- Proofread, spell check and stick to specified formats. Remember the little things count! Presentation, punctuation and grammar set the tone for how people feel about your work. They really do matter. If English isn't your first language, see if you can get a native speaker to look through your proposal.