

Department of
Psychology



Grant Writing Tips: 'Crafting' the Proposal

Barbara A. Morrongiello, PhD

Professor and Canada Research Chair in Child/Youth Injury
Prevention

In Preparing the Research Proposal

Don't ANNOY reviewers:

- **Define terms and do this in lay terms, maybe provide an example if relevant to promote understanding**
- **Avoid acronyms as much as possible (e.g., CDRU, NLSCY) -**
- **DON'T overuse bolding, italics, underlining BUT format for easy identification of key information**
- **Provide SPACE + organize it well with headers [Watch FONT + MARGIN + PAGE requirements!]**
- **Acknowledge limitations and address how you will deal with them or why they are not really limitations per se or why this is just what you have to live with (best anyone could do)**

(eg, I am limiting focus to mothers only.....state why.....state why the findings will STILL be important and advance the field, etc)

****Reviewers are more likely to forgive a shortcoming IF you are aware of it and speak to the issue directly.**

Rationale

WHY is this topic important?

What still needs to be known?

What is your unique approach?

..... lead the reader to appreciate your general research focus AND how this research addresses substantive gaps in knowledge AND is relevant to Canadians (cite CA stats if you can).

- Be sure and define your terms (e.g, injury)

General Aims

List your general research aims/questions

- point form
- focus on big ideas (not details yet)

Conclude by 'waving the flag' about this research:

This is important

My unique approach

Substantive 'yield'

Excellent team has been assembled

Research Team (if applicable)

List each member

(don't forget stakeholder organizations too!)

- Their discipline?
- Unique skill set they provide?
- Mention: past productive collaborations?

Wave the 'training flag':

Can conclude by mentioning unique training opportunities for students

(interdisciplinary team, etc)

General Overview of Proposed Research

Elaborate proposed research in greater depth

- What each study will address

(Emphasize how they complement each other so it sounds integrative = a '**program**' of research)

(Keep reminding the reader what the overall yield will be)

(Mention training opportunities, as appropriate)

Literature Review

- Provide a 'selective' review to have the reader:
 - Appreciate your method and theory
 - Understand the important gaps in knowledge
 - Understand how proposed research addresses those gaps
- ** Be sure the link from the lit review to the proposed research is absolutely clear so the reader can always answer the question:**
- Why does the PI want me to know this before I read the research plan?

Specific Objectives

- Point form works well or a table or figure
- I usually number each and refer to specific individual studies so the reader links each objective with a study

1) Objective 1 (addressed by Study 1)

- Introduce any design factors (age, sex, etc) that may apply across all studies

Note that in all studies, child age and sex will be considered in the design and analysis plan

Proposed Research

- Sample Considerations:
 - Power analysis..... N per group and overall
 - Inclusion/exclusion criteria
 - Recruitment strategy
 - Explain anything particular (e.g., why mothers only)
 - Anticipating attrition? What rate (justify it)? Why?
 - Any other considerations that need explaining.....
 - Cite references as appropriate to help justify things

Proposed Research

Introduce Each Study individually:

Study 1: TITLE (a question format can be very effective)

Do mothers supervise girls more than boys?

Objective: To assess for gender differences in supervision

Participants: males and females (justify if not incl'g both)

Methods/Measures: Elaborate on methods/measures

Analysis Plan: Explain analytic approach

(Give enough detail so they know what you are doing – cite references; get a consultant, refer to your past pubs to confirm expertise if it is anything complicated)

Relevance to CIHR/SSHRC Priorities

Make your case!

Explain how your research addresses the RFA or specific priorities of the funder

Mention training opportunities too (all funders have this as a mandate!)

Knowledge Dissemination

- Be creative!
- Outline your plan for sharing your findings with the:
 - Research community
 - Key stakeholders
 - End users

THINK: 'Knowledge to Action' and explain how you will achieve this goal

Significance of the Research

Wave your flag a final time!
(I usually end with this section)

Make your case:

- This is an important topic

- This is a scientifically rigorous research program

- The team has the expertise

- The yield will positively impact CA lives (who?
how?)

Other Considerations

- **Appendix:** Anything 'essential' should be IN proposal
- **Timeline:** depending on the research this may be essential to include OR it may be something that can go into an Appendix
- **Potential Feasibility Issues:** Are there factors that might limit progress or be a concern? Directly address these in the proposal (e.g., sample size, recruitment, retainment, etc.)
- **DO NOT** ignore 'issues' you know will be raised (e.g., Why am I only including mothers?). Address these directly and justify your decisions.

- Check for **‘alignment’**:
 - Objectives should align with Lit Review sections (in that order, on those topics)
 - Analysis Plan should align with objectives (e.g., An ANOVAwill apply in Study 1 to address Objective 1. ELABORATE on Analyses to be done.
 - Summary should address: Background, Significance, Method & Aims, Expected Yield and KD/T -- and align with proposal

Other Considerations - Continued

- **Budget:**
- Justify everything and USE the agency category labels so the justification aligns with the forms
- DO NOT 'PAD' the budget assuming a % cut – reviewers will cut you (drastically perhaps)
- DO NOT try to 'underfund' a project in the hope it will be funded if you don't ask for much money

[Budget is discussed AFTER/INDEPENDENT of the scientific review]

Mentoring & Constructive Feedback

- ALWAYS get someone else to read it (ideally, not someone in your research area but someone within your discipline or outside your discipline with lots of grant reviewing experience)

(Seldom are grants reviewed internally by committee members with 'close expertise' so it is best to have it reviewed by a non-expert during the early planning/writing stage to be sure it is written at the appropriate level)

Thanks for listening !

- **Questions?**

Barb Morrongiello

Psychology Department

X53086

bmorrong@uoguelph.ca