

Guide to writing a fellowship application/proposal

The following are general tips for writing a proposal. Many of the suggestions and comments are excerpted directly from documents from online sources. These suggestions have been abridged and consolidated with other recommendations within the same topic. Please see the bibliography if you wish complete information from the source documents.

The sections following these tips provide a guide for writing a proposal.

1. READ THE APPLICATION FORM AND TAKE IT SERIOUSLY.
2. PAY ATTENTION TO THE GRANTING OBJECTIVES AND CRITERIA.
3. WRITE CLEARLY. Long sentences, complex phraseology and jargon do not reflect scholarship. Applicants may be penalized for their lack of ability to communicate clearly.
4. DON'T TRUST YOUR COMPUTER SPELL CHECKER. Use a dictionary e.g. vale and veil have two different meanings.
5. BE SUCCINCT. More is not better.
6. AVOID AMBIGUITIES. If objectives of the project/training are too vague or general, the reviewers will have no way of accurately assessing the feasibility of the proposal.
7. PACKAGE THE MATERIAL WELL. It is absolutely vital to format the application to be easy to read. Have reasonable margins and break up the text into paragraphs.
8. BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF. Can you meet your objectives in the time frame allotted?
9. HAVE YOUR APPLICATION CRITICALLY REVIEWED BY COLLEAGUES OR A FACULTY MENTOR.
10. SPEND TIME ON THE APPLICATION. Don't pull the application together hurriedly at the last minute. This lack of preparation will be evident in the presentation.

Writing a Fellowship Proposal

Your proposal need not be long but it must contain objectives, goals and information on your background or credentials.

A fellowship proposal is essentially a persuasive argument for why your project/proposed training deserves to be funded. Fellowships, in general, are highly competitive and are judged by an anonymous fellowship committee. You must develop a highly persuasive and polished argument that will convince the reader that your proposed project will make an important contribution to the field of obstetrics and gynaecology, to the mission of the funding group, to your career goals and that it deserves to be funded.

Remember that the sponsor (in this case the SOGC) views grants as investments in an improved future for the profession, for the individual trainee and for the target patient population.

The written proposal must be clear, well organized, well-focused and accurate. Many proposals are rejected because they contain good ideas poorly written. You cannot assume that you will be automatically funded if there are only 3 applications for 5 potential grants.

A short proposal is more challenging to write than a long proposal. You must anticipate and answer the major questions that the sponsor will be asking as your proposal is read. Each sentence must carry significant and relevant information.

Concise Introduction to the Proposal

An ideal way to begin a proposal is with an introductory paragraph that presents a clear and concise statement of the major goals of the project/training as a whole. Writers should link their need for funding and their proposed work/training/project with the sponsor's intent of the fellowship: this is especially important in applying for funds earmarked for special groups e.g. international work, aboriginal health, teen health.

Candidate's Relevant Background or Qualifications

It is important to include some of your strongest qualifications or preparation for the project in the proposal itself. Use this section to convey a sense of your commitment and enthusiasm for the project/training. If there are no instructions, the following items should be addressed:

- 1) How the project/training fits in with long-term career goals of candidate;
- 2) Special background or skills or preparatory work for the project (languages or skills to be mastered, prior fieldwork/practice (this may be important for applications in International Women's Health));
- 3) Capacity of the proposed training environment in which your project will occur to meet the educational and support needs in order for you to successfully complete your project;
- 4) Any other evidence of your promise to carry out the project successfully.

Contacts

You must contact key people for help planning your proposal before you start writing. In essence, you must do your homework if you are going to be successful. Some of the issues which you should consider:

- 1) Contact an individual who has been successful in a previous competition for information on necessary steps or pitfalls to avoid (this is especially important if you are contemplating an international placement).
- 2) Do some research on the institution or the individual under whom you wish to work. Have an ongoing dialogue with the individual to ensure that your objectives are similar to his or hers.
- 3) Use the experience and knowledge of your university faculty to help you in developing a project/training program with measurable and attainable objectives.

Objectives Statement

Your objectives specify the outcome of your proposed training/project, including the end product(s). When sponsors fund projects, they are buying your objectives. It is extremely important to state your objectives clearly. Your objectives should be

Specific – indicate precisely what you intend to do through your training/project

Immediate – indicate the time frame during which a current problem/work schedule will be addressed

Measurable – indicate what you would accept as proof of project/training success
Practical – indicate how each objective is a real solution to a real problem/training need
Logical – indicate how each objective systematically contributes to achieving your overall goal(s)
Evaluable – indicate what experience you must gain, how much change has to occur for the project to be effective

Each of your objectives should meet at least two or three of these six criteria.

Writing tips for Objectives Section

List your specific objectives in no more than one or two sentences each in approximate order of importance. Don't confuse your objectives (ends) with your methods (means). A good objective emphasizes what will be done and when it will be done, whereas a method will explain why or how it will be done. Include goals (ultimate) and objectives (immediate) statements.

Wording

Even in competitions that are judged by people in your own discipline, you cannot or should not assume that they are fully knowledgeable about the specialized topic for which you are requesting funding. The safest course is to provide enough background so that both generalists and specialists will view the background as a logical part of your argument for funding. Avoid jargon, abbreviations, acronyms or unnecessary technical terms. If you use abbreviations, then define them when used for the first time.

Formatting tips for proposals

Make the display pleasant and attractive. Use appropriate type size, font and margination.

Bold Type. Bold type is easier to read than underlining, italics or all capital letters as a means of creating emphasis.

Headings. Headings and subheadings act like a table of contents placed directly in your proposal text; that is at a glance they reveal the main ideas and the organization of your proposal to the reader.

Ragged Right Margins. A ragged right margin is easier to read than one that is right justified because the proportional spacing slows readability. It is easier for the reader's eye to track from the end of one line to the beginning of the next line when the right-hand margins are jagged.

Type style. If type style is not specified, consider using serif typefaces (Times Roman and Courier) for the text of the proposal and sans serif typefaces (Arial and Universal) for titles and headings. Sans serif typefaces will stand out from the body of the text.

White space. Use white space to break up long copy. Judicious use of white space breaks your proposal into smaller, manageable chunks of information. Even a simple use of white space between paragraphs helps the mind to see the information in that paragraph as a unit.

Appended documents. Make sure that all required documents are included. This includes letters of reference, letters of confirmation from the institution/preceptor where the training/project will

take place, Human Ethics Committee approvals if the proposal includes human research subjects. If allowed, include material that is supportive but not integral to the contents of the application. Do not include documents if they are not required.

Does your application

- 1) Clearly establish who you are?
- 2) Describe your goals and objectives?
- 3) Establish your credibility/interest in the project topic area (aboriginal women's health, international health)
- 4) Lead logically to measurement of your objectives?

Bibliography

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4. The Art of grantsmanship by Jacob Kraicer, University of Western Ontario, www.med.uwo.ca/physiology/courses/survivalwebv3/grantsmanship/content.htm

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