

How to Choose your Topic and Bootstrap your Project

Avoiding the trap of the never-ending grant application

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Overview

Choosing the Research Topic and the Funding Agency

- Reviewing your choice of research area and research topic.
- Institution and Agency

Getting Started

- Begin writing the Description of the Project
- Checking what you have written

Propositions and Project

Which of the four propositions help us choose the research topic?

- ▶ **IMPORTANCE:** The research problem is important to the funder, as defined by their remit.
- ▶ **SUCCESS:** The project offers a realistic promise of a solution
 - ▶ Research Design
 - ▶ Dissemination
- ▶ **VALUE:** The resources requested are:-
 - ▶ Necessary
 - ▶ Sufficient
 - ▶ Appropriate to the scale of the problem
- ▶ **COMPETENCE:** PI, team and institution are capable of carrying out the project.

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- ▶ **COMPETENCE** first
- ▶ **IMPORTANCE** second

Reviewing your choice of research area and research topic.

Can you cite publications that demonstrate that you have used the necessary techniques?

- ▶ If not, consider
 - ▶ Changing to an area where you have appropriate publications.
 - ▶ Collaborating with a colleague who has the techniques?
 - ▶ Applying for a training grant or travel grant to learn the techniques and publish?
 - ▶ Applying for grant funds or institutional funds for someone who has the techniques to visit and work with you?
 - ▶ Collecting pilot data?
 - ▶ Building a research team with people who have appropriate publications
 - ▶ Would you be a credible PI?

Institution and Agency

Does your institution have the basic infrastructure for research on your chosen research topic?

- ▶ If not, consider
 - ▶ Changing topic
 - ▶ Applying for a travel grant or fellowship to visit (or move to) an institution that does have the infrastructure.
 - ▶ Applying for funds to establish the infrastructure?

Does the funding agency to which you are considering applying think that research on your chosen topic is important?

- ▶ If not
 - ▶ Find a funding agency that does.
 - ▶ Find a different research topic.

Begin writing the Description of the Project

1. Describe a piece of research you want to do (a sub-project) and check that the description includes
 - ▶ What will be done, how, when, by whom, with what resources.
 - ▶ What will be discovered by this sub-project
 - ▶ How the discovery will be derived and disseminated
 - ▶ See bit.ly/UYRCuR for a checklist
2. Maintain lists of resources (applied for and existing), of research techniques, and of discoveries.
3. Check the project for completeness, coherence, feasibility, cost
4. Repeat steps 1–4 until you have a list of about 4 sub-projects.
5. Add a general methods intro and a tailpiece about dissemination
6. See researchfundingtoolkit.org/?p=340 for more detail.
7. This section should be at least 50% of the case for support.

Checking what you have written

Questions about the description of the sub-project

- ▶ Does the description of the sub-project say what kind of research activity it will involve and what new knowledge it will tell us?
 - ▶ Does it do this in a single sentence?
 - ▶ Does the sentence come at the beginning?
- ▶ Does it list specific research activities?
- ▶ Does it say who will undertake each activity?
- ▶ Does it say when the activity will be done?
 - ▶ Or does it refer to a schedule or Gantt chart?

More questions about the description of the sub-project

- ▶ Does it describe methods directly?
 - ▶ Or refer back to a methods section?
 - ▶ Or refer to published literature?
- ▶ Does it say how long it will take?

Subproject Checklist:- Resources

- ▶ Does it say what resources will be used?
 - ▶ Including staff time
 - ▶ Including the PI's time
- ▶ Does it say which resources will be provided by the institution and which by the grant?
- ▶ Does it describe the processes that will lead from the research activity to the new knowledge?
 - ▶ Does it say how the new knowledge will be disseminated?
 - ▶ Or does it say where dissemination will be discussed?

Subproject Checklist: Questions to be noted and resolved elsewhere.

- ▶ Will it be easy to make the case that the new knowledge is important?
 - ▶ Add it to the list of discoveries.
- ▶ Are the new resources going to be good value for money?
 - ▶ Add them to the list of resources to be requested.
- ▶ Are the institutional resources (including PI time) going to be available?
- ▶ Does the PI have publications that demonstrate competence in the methods to be used for research and data analysis
 - ▶ Add them to the list of competences.

Useful Checklists

- ▶ Checklists are really useful for
 - ▶ Systematic and consistent review
 - ▶ Extremely rapid review
 - ▶ Framing what could be difficult conversations
- ▶ Sub-project description <http://bit.ly/UYRCuR>
- ▶ Full Project Description <http://bit.ly/10Nr9FK>
- ▶ Case for Support 20 Questions <http://bit.ly/10Nr9FK>