

How Hard Can It Be to Write the Perfect Grant Application?

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Outline

Funding depends on four propositions

How does the case for support make the four propositions?

The Decision Process Constrains the Case for Support

How to Make the Case for Support Meet the Constraints

How to Make the Case for Support Speed Readable

How to Make the Case for Support Easy to Read Quickly

How to Make the Case for Support Easy to Remember

Logical Structure is Easy to Reconstruct.

How to Write the Case for Support

Assembling the Description of the Project Step by Step

Writing the Background Section

Writing the Introduction

Resources

Funding depends on four propositions

- ▶ A Grant is a speculative investment in a research project.
- ▶ The Grant Application makes the case that a project deserves investment because it will solve an important problem.
- ▶ Typically the case consists of four propositions.
 - ▶ **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.
- ▶ The Case for Support must contain evidence to support these four propositions.

How does the case for support make the four propositions?

1. Explain the research question (IMPORTANCE)
 - ▶ Give evidence that it is important.
2. Describe the research project (SUCCESS)
 - ▶ Explain methods.
 - ▶ Show that the project answers the question
 - ▶ Explain what will be done with the answer.
3. VALUE proposition is supported by describing how resources are used in the project
 - ▶ Show you need what you are asking for
 - ▶ Show you have everything else
4. COMPETENCE proposition is supported by
 - ▶ Describing (and citing) own contribution to development of question and research methods
 - ▶ Citing own papers that use the research methods.
 - ▶ Application may require a separate description of the team.
 - ▶ Application may require a CV for each member

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 - ▶ They will know much less than you do about your research.
 - ▶ They will have Very Limited Time
 - ▶ They will have many other applications to consider

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- ▶ Designated members present application & recommend score
 - ▶ Committee discusses & scores: applications are ranked by score
- ▶ The case for support must be easy to remember
- ▶ And easy to reconstruct

How to Make the Case for Support Speed Readable

- ▶ Front-load each paragraph with its message (ASSERT then JUSTIFY)
 - ▶ First sentence of para ASSERTS (message sentence)
 - ▶ Remainder of para JUSTIFIES
 - ▶ This where you cite literature
 - ▶ This is how you avoid citing too much literature.
- ▶ Use simple, consistent structure
 - ▶ Question (background) has same structure as answer (project)
 - ▶ This also helps the SUCCESS proposition
 - ▶ Summary has same structure as case for support.
- ▶ Clear, consistent layout
 - ▶ Headings & Subheadings convey structure
 - ▶ Consistent terminology

How to Make the Case for Support Easy to Read Quickly

- ▶ Front-load the document.
 - ▶ Introduction gets the 'Foot in the Door' and makes the whole case very briefly
 - ▶ Pre-uses message sentences from later sections.
 - ▶ Uses exactly the same words and phrases
 - ▶ Sentences are in the same order
- ▶ Use simple language
 - ▶ Short sentences (short paragraphs; short words)
 - ▶ Consistent terminology and phrasing
 - ▶ No synonyms
 - ▶ No abbreviations
- ▶ Use simple, consistent structure
 - ▶ Question (background) has same structure as answer (methods/project)
 - ▶ Introduction sets out structure
 - ▶ Summary has same structure as case for support
 - ▶ And pre-uses message sentences

How to Make the Case for Support Easy to Remember

- ▶ Repetition
 - ▶ Important things should be said several times
 - ▶ Always use same words if possible
 - ▶ Repeat main message sentences 3 times
 - ▶ Embed tag phrases in message sentences
- ▶ Lists of no more than 4 items
 - ▶ Always use same list order when you repeat the lists
- ▶ Signposts & links
 - ▶ Link announces next list element
 - ▶ Signpost points to corresponding element in subsequent list
- ▶ Label list elements
 - ▶ Use tag phrases in labels
 - ▶ Use labels to link related elements in different parts
 - ▶ We need to know + tag phrase + signpost
 - ▶ This will tell us + tag phrase
- ▶ Create the Summary from the Case for Support
 - ▶ Re-use message sentences
 - ▶ Keep the order consistent

Logical Structure is Easy to Reconstruct.

1. Introduction 'Foot in the Door'

- ▶ Gets attention
 - ▶ Question - in the 1st sentence - and its importance
- ▶ Sets out the whole structure of the proposal in brief
 - ▶ Split question into (about 4) subquestions that "we need to know/understand/characterise.." + tag phrase
 - ▶ List project activities saying what "this will tell us" + tag phrase

2. Background 'We Have a Problem'

- ▶ States the question and gives evidence that it is important.
- ▶ Breaks it down into about 4 sub-questions - we need to know.

3. Description of the Project 'The Solution'

- ▶ General research approach/methods
- ▶ Sub-projects that answer the sub-questions in order
 - ▶ What will be done, how, when, by whom, with what resources
 - ▶ Which resources will be provided by the grant
 - ▶ What this will tell us and how findings will be derived
- ▶ How findings will be disseminated

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- ▶ Other reasons to start by writing the description of the project

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- ▶ And you can't write the background section without a detailed description of the project
- ▶ Other reasons to start by writing the description of the project
 - ▶ You can't tell whether the project is do-able until you have described it.
 - ▶ You can't tell whether the project is affordable until you have described it.
 - ▶ You can design the project by writing and testing the description.
 - ▶ You can start working on costings more quickly.

Assembling the Description of the Project Step by Step

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
 - ▶ 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 from step 1 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.

Writing the Background Section

- ▶ Write a subsection that corresponds to each of the sub-projects.
 - ▶ It should explain why we need to know what the sub-project will discover.
 - ▶ It should justify the explanation by citing literature
 - ▶ It can refer forward to the sub-project that will discover the answer
 - ▶ They should be in the same order as the sub projects that answer them
- ▶ Write an introductory sub-section that explains that the aim of the project is to answer an overall question that encompasses all of the sub-questions
- ▶ Explain, referring to literature, why the overall question is important.
- ▶ See researchfundingtoolkit.org/?p=384 for more detail.
- ▶ This section should be less than 30% of the case for support.

Writing the Introduction

- ▶ Ensure that the Background and Project Description sections are in 'assert then justify' style.
 - ▶ Find the 'message sentence in each paragraph
 - ▶ Move it to the beginning
 - ▶ Edit the paragraph so it makes sense
 - ▶ See researchfundingtoolkit.org/?p=423 for more detail.
- ▶ Copy message sentences verbatim into the Introduction
- ▶ Edit for readability
- ▶ It should be less than 20% of the total case for support.
- ▶ Most of it can be re-used in the summary.
- ▶ See researchfundingtoolkit.org/?p=428 for more detail.

Resources

- ▶ Book: The research Funding Toolkit, by Jacqueline Aldridge and Andrew Derrington, Sage 2012
- ▶ Blog: researchfundingtoolkit.org/gfol/
- ▶ These slides are available on the resources page researchfundingtoolkit.org/resources/
- ▶ Case for Support Checklist bit.ly/10Nr9FK
- ▶ SubProject Checklist bit.ly/UYRCuR
- ▶ Project Description Checklist bit.ly/R8xVoV