Biotext

Effective grant applications

Grants are highly competitive. Meeting the technical requirements of a grant application is important, but it's usually not enough to make your application stand out. This guide includes tips for each section of your grant application to improve your chances of success.

Title

The title should refer to the most important aspect of the research. This will help your proposal stand out from the others.

Example

Use:

- A new method for diagnosing disease X based on the interaction of gene product A and mechanism B

Instead of:

- Understanding how gene product A affects mechanism B using methodology C.

In this example, diagnosing disease X is what matters the most, so it is listed first. As far as possible, use plain English terms for the scientific ideas in the title.

Summary

This is the first section the reviewers will see. Clearly describe what is proposed and make them want to read more. Make sure the importance of the project is immediately clear. Without clear evidence that the research is important and useful, it will not be funded.

Using plain English, the summary should cover:

- the problem and its importance
- how your project addresses the problem – make sure that the reviewers can see that you have a good idea or existing evidence to base your work on
- how your project builds on your previous work
- what impact your project will have.

Aims

Research projects will often have one overarching aim, with several supporting objectives. These describe what your research intends to achieve.

Aims and objectives should be broad enough to demonstrate the tangible impact your research could have, but narrow enough to be achievable.

State your aims clearly and succinctly. Do not confuse aims with methods. Your aims should be a statement of what you are trying to achieve, not a summary of your methodology.

Example

Use:

- We aim to determine the effect of breast implants after mastectomy on long-term survival in breast cancer patients.

Instead of:

- We will study data from the 1993–1998 Breast Implant Surveillance Study and use Cox proportional hazards models to estimate hazard rate ratios for survival time.

Don't write your aims and hypothesis as if you know what will happen.

Example

Use:

- We aim to determine whether compound A is more effective than compound B in treating disease C.

Instead of:

- We will show that compound A is better than compound B in treating disease C.

Background

Sections on the background provide an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the field and the place of your project within it.

The background to your research includes:

- the problem that it addresses
- the other research that is being done in the field (including your own preliminary data)
- references.

Methods

Clearly describe and justify your research plan. Dividing it into sections that match your aims can help show the assessors that you have planned the experiments to address your aims. Include how you will evaluate your results.

Visual elements

You may want to include graphs or diagrams in your application. Ensure each figure adds value – they should add something not already captured in the text. Make sure the data points, legends, labels and any other text is large enough to be legible.

Researchers

The reviewers want to know that you have the skills, commitment and resources to carry out the proposal. They also want to know why it should be you and not somebody else.

Include any information that positions you and your team as the best people for the research. This could include having:

- a new idea or novel approach
- already made advances in the field
- team members who are leaders in the field
- a unique collaboration
- unique equipment.

Budget

Present a reasoned and defensible budget, not a wish list. Describe why each item and staff member is necessary for the project. Don't include funding for 'miscellaneous' items.

Check the guidelines carefully – for example, do not ask for travel costs if the guidelines state that travel will not be funded.

Timeframe

Most granting bodies want to see a timeline of what you plan to achieve during each year of the proposed project. Make it reasonable, and ensure that it matches the time commitments from personnel.

Outcomes and significance

Do not repeat the information you have already given about the importance of the proposal.

Your description of the outcomes and significance of the research should cover:

- the specific outcomes of the project – the new knowledge, techniques or products you will produce
- the impact of your research – this may be scientific (advancing knowledge or technologies), economic, health related, social or environmental
- the size of the impact – for example, in terms of a dollar value or number of people affected, in an Australian context, if possible.

When writing a grant application:

- follow the guidelines exactly – noncompliant applications will not even be considered
- make your proposal interesting
- make your proposal easy to read – a dense writing style and incomprehensible jargon or poor grammar will not help your cause
- it is better to submit one strong grant application than many weak ones.