4. WRITING YOUR PROPOSAL

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Incubator Awardee Training Program
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Writing Your Proposal:
Back to Basics
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• The key ingredients of a good grant proposal

• *Ingredient # 6:* The bones of your proposal = 5 Key Statements
Key Ingredients

1. Explicit link to funder
2. Easy language
3. White space
4. Upside-down triangles
5. No silly mistakes
6. Clear “messages” = 5 key statements
Key Point

• A lot of the work happens *before* you begin writing:
  – Determining exactly what you want to do
  – Stating exactly why your project is important
  – Defining exactly how your project fits with the funder’s priorities
  – Deciding exactly what to include in your proposal

• This is the *conceptualization* of your work

• It involves *thinking* not writing
More time thinking = less time struggling with writing
Having thought about things like...

- Problem
- Strategy
- Customers, Users, Payors
- Value Proposition
- Financial Sustainability
- Monitoring & Evaluation
- Path to Scale
- Etc.
The heavy lifting is over. Now the writing begins...
1. Explicit link to funder

- An effective proposal makes it clear to the reviewer that the project matches the funder’s priorities
- Read request for proposals and instructions carefully
- Re-read the instructions and highlight:
  - Keywords the funder emphasizes or uses frequently
  - Statements that match your project’s focus and goals
2012 Medicine in the Media Course

Thank you for your interest in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) 2012 Medicine in the Media course. The deadline for submitting applications for the 2012 course has passed. Please join our mailing list if you would like to receive information about the 2013 course.

Questions? Email medmedia@od.nih.gov

About the Medicine in the Media Course

The NIH Office of Disease Prevention (ODP) presents an annual training opportunity to help develop journalists' and editors' ability to evaluate and report on medical research. The course examines the challenges and opportunities inherent in the process of communicating the results of medical research to the public. It stresses an evidence-based approach and re-examines common beliefs about medicine. Participants leave with a better understanding of how to interpret and evaluate research findings, how to select stories that hold meaning for the public, and how to place a science story in its appropriate context.
Links to Funder

• Read about other projects the funder has supported
• Make notes of how your project fits with the funder’s stated priorities and requirements
• Incorporate these notes into your grant proposal, especially in any “summary items”
  – Covering letter, abstract, executive summary, conclusion
• Use the keywords the funder uses
The Challenge

USAID, the Government of Norway, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Grand Challenges Canada, and DFID have joined together to launch Saving Lives at Birth: A Grand Challenge for Development, to find the tools and approaches to help the mothers and newborns during their most vulnerable hours.

We seek groundbreaking prevention and treatment approaches for pregnant women and newborns in poor, hard-to-reach communities around the time of delivery.

This is the period when the majority of maternal and newborn deaths occur and the population that has been the most difficult to reach.

We seek innovative ideas that can leapfrog conventional approaches in three main domains: (1) technology; (2) service delivery; and (3) “demand side” innovation that empowers pregnant women and their families to practice healthy behaviors and be aware of and access health care during pregnancy, childbirth and the early postnatal period, especially the first two days after birth.

Seeking Breakthroughs

Significant breakthroughs in innovation often come about when new ideas and disciplines are applied to long-entrenched problems. New technologies and approaches transform insurmountable development challenges into solvable problems. To harness this ingenuity, we encourage partnerships that bring together diverse expertise from non-traditional partners. And to foster sustainability, we encourage the private sector to bring their expertise and experience to bear on these problems.

Key Features

- A brief application.
- Rapid turnaround time. We aim to select grants within 5 months from the proposal submission deadline.
- Opportunities for shared learning and collaboration among innovators, funders and other public health experts.
- A review process designed to identify potentially groundbreaking ideas that show great promise.

What We’re Looking For

Interventions that:

- Increase access to primary health care for women and newborns by at least 30%;
- Substantially improve the quality of care as measured by health outcomes; and
- Lead to improved and sustained healthy behavior.

Solutions Should

- Be “off the beaten track,” daring in premise, and clearly differentiated from standard practice;
- Enhance uptake, acceptability and provide for sustained use;
- Enable or provide for low-cost solutions;
- Have a strong likelihood of achieving a substantial impact on one or more important adverse maternal, fetal, or neonatal health conditions;
- Be scalable in resource-poor settings;
- Be able to be monitored, measured and evaluated.
2. Easy language

- Many grant reviewers are generalists rather than specialists and/or may not be experts in the specific field of your project
- They may not have specific technical or methodological knowledge for your project
- Effective grant proposals are written in easy, conversational language
- **Write it plainly**
Easy Language

- Short words
- Short sentences
- Short paragraphs
- No jargon and no clichés
- Avoid figures of speech and idioms
- Active better than passive
Write it plainly

• Not this:
  Based upon the plethora of previous research conducted across such diverse fields as psychology, sociology, higher education, and business and our own pilot studies undertaken at the highly prestigious academy where our innovative, novel systems have been tested and validated, children enrolled over the course of our study will likely demonstrate statistically significant improvements on scores designed to test children’s reading levels, comprehensibility, reading speed, and attention spans based on psychometric testing within a year of the program being implemented, which will allow them to develop reading skills that will prepare them for middle school, high school, and university education.

• This:
  We expect children exposed to our novel reading system to improve reading performance within 12 months, which will ready them for successful advanced education.
3. White space

- Do not feel obliged to fill every space in the grant application or maximize the word limit
- Readability for the reviewer is improved with some spaces between paragraphs and sections
- Careful use of font size, subheadings, indents, and **bold*/italic*/underline* can complement the use of white space
Welcome to Grand Challenges Canada’s online proposal development resource. As part of our mandate to fund bold ideas that improve the health and well being of people in developing countries by integrating scientific, technological, business and social innovation, Grand Challenges Canada has developed resources to assist applicants with preparing their grants in response to our requests for proposals. This online resource is intended to complement the in-person workshops we offer for specific programs by invitation-only. Recognizing that we cannot reach everyone with our specific in-person workshops, we hope this resource will help researchers and innovators around the world, whatever their area of study, develop their project proposals and maximize their chances of success seeking funding. Grand Challenges Canada is committed to supporting capacity building in less developed settings. The online proposal development resource offers general advice that is applicable to grant writing beyond the specific funding programs of Grand Challenges Canada. We encourage users to view, share, and build on these proposal development resources to accommodate their needs. All content is freely available for downloading and dissemination. The online resource is divided into three parts: Previously successful applicants discuss their experiences writing grants for Grand Challenges Canada and affiliated programs. Mechanics of writing – professional writers and editors provide advice on how to effectively communicate and organize proposals for funding. Perspectives of mentors – experienced grant writers and reviewers offer their views on what makes a successful proposal and their “top tips” for grant writing.

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Grand Challenges Canada is committed to supporting capacity building in less developed settings. The online proposal development resource offers general advice that is applicable to grant writing beyond the specific funding programs of Grand Challenges Canada. We encourage users to view, share, and build on these proposal development resources to accommodate their needs. All content is freely available for downloading and dissemination.

The online resource is divided into three parts:

Previously successful applicants discuss their experiences writing grants for Grand Challenges Canada and affiliated programs.
4. Upside-down triangles

- Writing is effective when the reader knows where they are going
- The main building block of a piece of writing is the paragraph
- Effective paragraphs *begin* with a “topic sentence”
- **Note:** Academic or passive writing styles usually dictate that our paragraphs *end* with the topic sentence
Upside-Down Triangles

• More readable, and thus effective, paragraphs begin with a topic sentence

• These are like news stories:
  – Story in the first line; expand slightly on the story; give the evidence for the story; give the counter view.
Upside-Down Triangles

• Effective paragraphs are modeled after news stories

• Passive writing uses academic paragraphs
Over three-quarters of school-age children in low- and middle-income countries have been shown to demonstrate inadequate reading performance. This deficiency has the potential to reduce the possibility of children continuing in school and reaching their full developmental and employment potential. Various educational interventions have been shown to help school children increase their reading speed and comprehension – these include computer software and hardware, access to reading specialists, and specialised training for teachers and parents. But these interventions have mostly been studied in developed countries like Canada and the US. They have not been widely studied in resource poor settings outside of North America. In Indonesia, the problem of reading skill is particularly worrisome – 80% of school children may not be reading at correct levels. Because of this great need research is warranted to understand whether assistive reading systems can help school children in rural Indonesia.

We propose to test and validate a novel, assistive reading systems in rural Indonesia. Assistive reading systems, which involve computer technology, reading specialists, and training for teachers and parents, have been shown to improve students’ reading performance in Canada, but they have not yet been well studied in low- or middle-income countries. There is enormous potential for novel interventions in the Indonesian school system because over 75% of children are reading at two levels below their grade and could benefit from tailored assistance that can maximize their ability to continue in school and reach their full developmental potential. We propose to test and validate a novel, assistive reading system in rural Indonesia.
5. No silly mistakes

- Most grant proposals are written for funders who hold a competition
- Most times the competition is fierce – only a small proportion of all submitted grants will be funded
- Why reduce your chances of success by making silly mistakes?
Silly mistakes include:

• Typos
• Word counts that exceed limits
• Page counts that exceed limits
• Using abbreviations that are unknown or undefined
• Not following instructions about:
  – Information to include in each section
  – The structure or headings to use
  – Fonts or other style requirements
Avoid silly mistakes

• Read instructions again carefully
• Use your colleagues, co-applicants, and/or spouse as peer reviewers
• Ask that they read your proposal to spot any typos or areas where you can cut words
• Spell out or avoid abbreviations
• *Take a break from your proposal and return to it fresh for final editing*
Ingredient #6 – the bones of your proposal

5 Key Statements
6. Clear “messages”

• Your messages form what your proposal says

• Grant applications fail when it isn’t absolutely clear what is being proposed

• If you cannot describe your messages clearly, your proposal/pitch will probably fail
Define Your Messages:
5 Key Statements for a Grant Proposal

1. Problem statement
2. Need statement
3. Process statement
4. Impact statement
5. Sustainability statement

*Each is a single sentence, contains a verb*
5 Key Statements

• The “bones” of your proposal
• To be used strategically in different parts of your proposal
• Can serve as topic sentences for individual sections
• Together can form a summary item
• Each:
  – Single sentence  - 10-20 words  - Contains a verb
– **Problem statement**: The specific issue that is detrimental to global health, is amenable to change, and that you are tackling

– **Need statement**: Combines your overall objective and rationale

– **Process statement**: Your plan and/or method of testing or developing your innovation

– **Impact statement**: The single substantial way your innovation will produce positive change

– **Sustainability statement**: How your innovation can be implemented, scaled + sustain its impact. Include financial + social sustainability.
Problem Statement

• The “why?”
• States the problem you are going to address
• If possible give some sense of importance, scale/size
• Don’t go over the top
Problem Statement

- Example

The current IV treatment regimen for bacterial meningitis is painful, risks new infection, and requires expensive hospitalization.
Problem Statement

• Example

_Unnecessary deaths result from newborn pulmonary insufficiency because traditional supply of inhaled medical oxygen treatment is costly and complex._
Problem Statement

• Example

_Pregnant women often fail to deliver in safe, equipped health care institutions because they lack reliable and accessible transportation._

_or_

_The lack of reliable, accessible, and affordable transportation limits pregnant women’s ability to give birth in institutions where proper health care is provided._
Problem Statement

• Example from health-e-net

Inequities in access to specialist cancer care create uncertainties about medical decisions that disempower patients and limit their treatment options.
Need Statement

• Your overall project objective
• Sometimes your project will have multiple goals and objectives
• But you should define an overarching statement of need in one sentence
• *What you are requesting funding for*
• Make sure it matches your statement of the problem
Need Statement

• Example

To help improve primary school children’s reading levels, speed, and comprehension, we propose a novel educational programme that combines assistive reading systems, training for teachers, and an innovative incentive scheme.
Need Statement

• Example from health-e-net

*We propose a novel use of existing resources by developing an e-platform for retrieving and sharing cancer patient data with a network of volunteer specialist doctors to provide remote second opinions.*
Process Statement

- Summarizes your plan to study, test, or develop your innovation
- High level statement of your ‘execution plan’
- States how you will accomplish the stated goals or objectives
Process Statement

• Example

We will develop a non-invasive nasal preparation of a protective antioxidant nanosome and test its efficacy in a group of 100 neonates with suspected brain asphyxia.
• Example

*Our multi-centre randomised controlled trial of the combined educational intervention package will generate policy-relevant evidence among 10,000 primary school children in both high and low-income settings.*

*or*

*To test this educational intervention package, we will undertake a multi-centre randomised trial ....*
Process Statement

- Example

*We will evaluate the feasibility and accuracy of a saliva progesterone test in predicting prematurity by randomising 3000 pregnant women from 2 primary care centres in 10 districts in rural India.*
Process Statement

• Example from health-e-net

In an urban and a rural setting in Kenya we will design a software and an electronic system to retrieve and store cancer patient data, identify appropriate specialists, develop training modules, and connect patients and doctors remotely to generate a second opinion.
Impact Statement

• Statement of your anticipated impact
• Reflects what ‘success’ is for your project -
  *your short term goal*
• Metrics of impact can be multiple and broad, but important to state a singular way that your project will produce positive change
• Must include quantification and context

• Impact is increasingly important to funders
Impact Statement

• Example

The I-CARE programme will increase institutional deliveries by providing cost-effective, accessible, and dependable transportation for 3500 pregnant women in rural Odisha.
Impact Statement

• Example

We expect to increase the community’s hospital birth referral rate from 15 to 75% within two years, reducing the number of paediatrics HIV cases in Nyakahanga district to less than 15 annually.
Impact Statement

• Example from health-e-net

*Our pilot project will complete 50 consultations in the urban sector and 25 in the rural setting, demonstrating proof of concept of remote second opinions and generating evidence for further refinement of our business model and e-platform.*
Sustainability Statement

• States how your innovation will sustain health or development outcomes
• Includes how it can be implemented and/or applied more broadly or to other settings
• Can include financial + social sustainability
• May be a (grounded) projection into the future
• Don’t go over the top
Sustainability Statement

• Example

A highly sensitive and specific diagnostic kit for Group B streptococcal disease that is easy to use, affordable, and acceptable to practitioners would have wide application across low-income settings dealing with the growing burden of disease.

or

Inclusion from the start of the national ministry of health and medical association ensures the required collaboration for continued testing and implementation of the group B strep diagnostic kit in rural Egypt.
Sustainability Statement

• Example

*If proved cost-effective in these two health districts, the novel transportation scheme can apply to other rural settings where geographical barriers to hospitals exist, and local or national governments are receptive to private partnership.*
Sustainability Statement

• Example from health-e-net

Health-e-net can be scalable and translated to other conditions and settings because it leverages vast motivated volunteer specialists (such as the diaspora and retirees) and offers a cross subsidy business model that takes advantage of the urban-rural divide present in many developing countries.
Statement
Problem statement  -->  Grant Proposal Section
Need statement  -->  Background
Process statement  -->  Purpose/Goals
Impact statement  -->  Methods/Execution Plan
Sustainability statement  -->  Outputs/Outcomes
Scale-up
When you combine your 5 Statements what do you get?

Inequities in access to specialist cancer care create uncertainties about medical decisions that disempower patients and limit their treatment options. We propose a novel use of existing resources by developing an e-platform for retrieving and sharing cancer patient data with a network of volunteer specialist doctors to provide remote second opinions, using a business model that charges affluent urban patients premium fees that fund rural consultations. In one urban and one rural district in Kenya we develop an electronic system to retrieve and store cancer patient data, identify appropriate specialists, develop training modules, and connect patients and doctors remotely to generate a second opinion. Our pilot project will complete 50 consultations in the urban sector and 25 in the rural setting, demonstrating proof of concept of remote second opinions and generating evidence for further refinement of our revenue generation business model and e-platform. If successful, our solution can be translated to other conditions and settings because it leverages vast motivated volunteer specialists (such as the diaspora and retirees) and offers a cross subsidy business model that takes advantage of urban-rural divide present in many developing countries.
Abstract

Inequities in access to specialist cancer care create uncertainties about medical decisions that disempower patients and limit their treatment options. We propose a novel use of existing resources by developing an e-platform for retrieving and sharing cancer patient data with a network of volunteer specialist doctors to provide remote second opinions, using a business model that charges affluent urban patients premium fees that fund rural consultations. In one urban and one rural district in Kenya we develop an electronic system to retrieve and store cancer patient data, identify appropriate specialists, develop training modules, and connect patients and doctors remotely to generate a second opinion. Our pilot project will complete 50 consultations in the urban sector and 25 in the rural setting, demonstrating proof of concept of remote second opinions and generating evidence for further refinement of our revenue generation business model and e-platform. If successful, our solution can be translated to other conditions and settings because it leverages vast motivated volunteer specialists (such as the diaspora and retirees) and offers a cross subsidy business model that takes advantage of urban-rural divide present in many developing countries.
Exercise: Define your 5 Key Statements

What is your problem statement?

What is your need statement?

What is your process statement?

What is your impact statement?

What is your sustainability statement?
Good luck!

Questions?

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