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UNIVERSITÄT BERN
Successfully apply for grants
Tips from the Grants Office

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When does a research proposal start?
Grants Office
For questions on research funding

Head of Office

Grants Advisors
Life sci.

Grants Advisors
Natural sci.

Grants Advisor, SSH

Fin. Advisor (EU)

Experts in grant bureaucracy with scientific background
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http://www.forschung.unibe.ch/grantsoffice
Top EU Grant Writing Tips

Is there a right way to write a successful H2020 proposal?

Always keep the reviewer in mind

• reviewers‘ mother tongue is not always English

• reviewers must navigate through multiple proposals in a short period of time

• do not make the reviewers work harder

• the majority of reviewers will make up their minds very quickly
Top EU Grant Writing Tips

Important grant writing tips

Always start with a clear message
- the reviewer is interested in:
  - what is he/she reading?
  - what is the aim of the project?
- avoid long background texts in the beginning
- come to the point as soon as possible

Have a clear outline of the proposal
- outline the proposal prior to writing
- your ideas should be coherent and come together
- overall story will be smooth and clear for the reviewers
Top EU Grant Writing Tips

Important grant writing tips

Create a proposal that is pleasant on the eyes

- use headings and subheadings
- use bullet points
- do not overwhelm the reviewers with endless chunks of text

Less is more

- write clearly
- explain important points thoroughly with less words

Use simple words

- keep in mind that reviewers may not be entirely familiar with complicated terms
- wherever possible, simplify the language
Top EU Grant Writing Tips

Important grant writing tips

Avoid repetition
• repeat same expressions only if s.th. important must be stressed
• otherwise, it can be boring for the reviewers

One paragraph per subtopic
• this means shorter or very short paragraphs
• avoid long readings which can easily confuse the reviewers

Most important information first
• main focus point needs to come first

Vary sentence length between short, medium or long sentences
• structure each paragraph with sentences of varying lengths
• do not write very long and expressive sentences that are packed with information
Top EU Grant Writing Tips

Important grant writing tips - Your objective

Set the proposal aside for some time
• only proofread the proposal after a while to avoid „autopilot“ when proofreading and missing important issues

Your objective …
• … is not to describe your good project idea, but to persuade the funding source to give you the money!

• Why should they decide to give the money to you when there will be lots of other good proposals they could select instead of yours?
Top EU Grant Writing Tips

- What are you trying to do?
  - Articulate your objectives using absolutely no jargon.
  - What is the problem?
  - Why is it hard?

- What are the risks and the payoffs?

- If you’re successful, what differences will it make?
  - What impact will success have?
  - How will it be measured?

- What is new in your approach and why do you think it will be successful?

- Who cares?

- What are the midterm and final „exams“ to check for success?
  - How will progress be measured?

- What will it make a difference?
  - What impact will success have?
  - How will it be measured?
Grantwriting in 5 jazzy records

Summarising, a good research proposal is about

• clearly answering the «So what?» question,
• showing how it will shape research to come,
• structuring clearly and originally,
• make sure it can‘t be misunderstood,
• but finally also about getting lucky by trying again
Main message

Recommendations ...

... of the Grants Office

- understand what the funders wants to support with their money:
  - career funding
  - basic science
- be aware of what the evaluators are looking for
- plan your project (in advance)
- put yourself always in the mind of a very critical reviewer
- resubmit as often as possible, if needed
- get feedback from multiple sources

based on personal experience and slides but also on material and ideas freely available on the web
Successfully apply for grants

Links

How to Fail in Grant Writing: Looking for the fast path to grant rejection?

The Grant Writer's Handbook: How to Write a Research Proposal and Succeed, by Gerard M Crawley (University of South Carolina, USA) and Eoin O'Sullivan (University of Cambridge, UK).
Vielen Dank - Merci - Thank you
for your attention

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