# **Navigating the Landscape: A Researcher's Guide to Crafting Impactful Project Proposals in Morocco (2024-2025)**

## **I. Introduction: Charting a Course for Research Success in Morocco**

**A. The Evolving Moroccan Research Ecosystem**

Morocco has demonstrated a sustained commitment to advancing its research and innovation landscape, recognizing these domains as crucial engines for national development. Historically, evaluations of the national research system, such as one conducted in 2003, acknowledged the presence of well-trained human resources and high-quality laboratories but identified a significant gap in translating research outputs into tangible innovation.1 This recognition spurred the development of various national strategies aimed at bridging this divide. For instance, the "National Strategy for the Development of Scientific Research to 2025" and the "Maroc Innovation" plan, both launched in 2009, sought to enhance coordination among research actors and diversify support mechanisms for research and development (R&D).1

This long-term strategic vision has continued to evolve, adapting to new challenges and opportunities. The OCP Foundation, a significant actor in the Moroccan R&D sphere, underscores that investment in research and development is a "strategic lever for bringing about structural change and creating impact".2 This perspective is reflective of a broader national understanding. The recent launch of major initiatives, such as the Programme National d’Appui à la Recherche, Développement et l’Innovation (PNARDI) for the 2025-2028 period 3, signals a renewed and updated impetus. This continuity, paired with periodic strategic adjustments, indicates a dynamic policy environment. Researchers must, therefore, remain attuned to the latest iterations of national priorities and funding programs, as these reflect the country's ongoing efforts to optimize its research ecosystem for greater societal and economic benefit.

**B. The Imperative of Strategic Alignment and International Excellence**

Successfully securing research funding in Morocco hinges on a dual imperative: proposals must clearly demonstrate alignment with the nation's strategic priorities while simultaneously meeting rigorous international standards of scientific excellence. Funding bodies increasingly emphasize this combination because it ensures that publicly and privately funded research not only contributes to solving national challenges but also maintains a quality that allows for international collaboration and recognition.

The Programme National d’Appui à la Recherche, Développement et l’Innovation (PNARDI) 2025-2028, for example, explicitly aims to "reinforce l'excellence scientifique dans plusieurs secteurs stratégiques".3 This phrasing itself encapsulates the dual requirement. Furthermore, Morocco's participation in international collaborative programs, such as the Long-Term Joint EU-AU Research and Innovation Partnership on Sustainable Energy (LEAP-SE), underscores this point. Such programs focus on achieving "goals of mutual benefit based on a balanced and cooperative approach" and "strengthening the impact of R&I-supported activities for the well-being of society in Europe and Africa".5 Participation and success in these ventures demand research that is both strategically relevant to national and regional needs and scientifically sound enough to be competitive and collaborative on an international stage. The PNARDI 2025-2028 itself is described as marking a "strategic turning point...placing scientific research and innovation at the core of its sustainable development strategy" 6, further highlighting the importance of research that serves Morocco's developmental goals.

Consequently, researchers are tasked with a dual mandate. It is not sufficient to propose scientifically brilliant research if it is disconnected from national needs; conversely, a project that is strategically aligned but lacks methodological rigor or originality is unlikely to secure funding, particularly when international partnerships or standards of excellence are invoked. Proposals must therefore construct a compelling narrative that articulates both the scientific merit of the research and its potential contribution to Morocco's overarching objectives.

## **II. Understanding Morocco's National Research & Innovation Landscape**

**A. Key National Strategies and Visions**

Morocco's research direction is guided by several high-level policy documents and national visions that collectively shape the priorities for funding and development. Understanding these frameworks is crucial for researchers aiming to align their work with national imperatives. Key among these are the "National Strategy for the Development of Scientific Research to 2025," the "Maroc Innovation" strategy, and the "Vision for Education, 2015–2030".1 These strategies have consistently emphasized the need to develop domestic demand for innovation, foster stronger linkages between public research institutions and private enterprises, and introduce innovative funding mechanisms to support the research-to-market pipeline.1

More recently, the New Development Model (NDM) has provided a comprehensive framework for Morocco's future, and the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation (MESRSI) is tasked with implementing aspects of the NDM relevant to its mandate, particularly by improving the labor market relevance of higher education programs and strengthening the governance of the higher education and scientific research sectors.7 This implies a focus on research that can lead to job creation, economic diversification, and enhanced societal well-being.

Furthermore, Morocco's significant commitments to addressing climate change have also shaped its research priorities. National strategies such as the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), the National Sustainable Development Strategy for 2030, and the National Climate Plan (NCP) for 2030 heavily influence the research agenda.8 These plans prioritize the decarbonization of key economic sectors (energy, transport, industry, agriculture), a substantial increase in the share of renewable energy sources, and the promotion of sustainable development practices across the board.8 Such ambitious goals inherently require significant research and innovation.

The interconnectedness of these national strategies is a key feature of the Moroccan policy landscape. Research priorities are not formulated in isolation but are derived from, and contribute to, broader national development, educational reform, and environmental sustainability goals. For example, a research project focused on developing new solar energy technologies would align not only with specific energy research axes but also with the climate goals outlined in the NDC 8, the innovation objectives of "Maroc Innovation" 1, and potentially the NDM's emphasis on sustainable development and economic resilience.7 Researchers who can demonstrate an understanding of these interlinkages and position their projects at the confluence of multiple strategic threads are likely to craft more compelling and impactful proposals.

**B. Morocco's Strategic Research Axes for 2024-2025**

Identifying the specific thematic areas prioritized by the Moroccan government is paramount for researchers seeking funding. These strategic research axes are often explicitly stated in national program calls and reflect the country's most pressing challenges and opportunities.

For the 2024-2025 period, and extending into the near future with programs like PNARDI 2025-2028, several key themes emerge consistently:

* **Water Management:** A critical priority given Morocco's water scarcity challenges.3 This includes research on water resources management, desalination, wastewater treatment and reuse, and irrigation efficiency.
* **Phosphates and their Derivatives:** Focusing on extraction, treatment, and valorization, reflecting the economic importance of this sector and the drive for value addition.3
* **Health:** Encompassing public health, disease prevention, biotechnology, and pharmaceutical innovation.3
* **Food Security:** Addressing agricultural productivity, sustainable farming practices, aquaculture, and food processing.3
* **Renewable Energies and Energy Transition:** A major focus, including solar, wind, and green hydrogen technologies, as well as energy efficiency and storage.3
* **Human and Social Sciences (SSH):** Increasingly recognized for their role in understanding societal transformations, contemporary challenges, education, and cultural heritage.3
* **Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation:** Cross-cutting theme covering impacts on various sectors, resilience strategies, and decarbonization efforts.8
* **Advanced Technologies, Industry, and Digital Transformation:** Including aeronautics, automotive industry, logistics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and cybersecurity.9

While these represent a core set of recurring national priorities, it is crucial for researchers to consult the specific documentation for each funding call. For example, the PNARDI 2025-2028 program highlights water, phosphates, health, food security, renewable energies, and SSH.3 The PHC Toubkal program, fostering Franco-Moroccan collaboration, lists a broad range of themes including aeronautics and automotive industries, transport, logistics, advanced technology and AI, health, environment and quality of life, natural resources and renewable energies, agriculture, fisheries and water, education and training, and SSH.9 The CNRST-FRQ (Quebec) program is more focused on health sciences and climate change adaptation/water management.10 The Ministry of Industry and Commerce has specific calls related to the development of industrial and technological clusters.11

This demonstrates a general strategic direction complemented by program-specific targeting. The broad themes announced under large national initiatives like PNARDI provide a good overarching framework. However, for a targeted application to a specific call, such as PHC Toubkal or a CNRST bilateral program, the priorities detailed within that particular call's documents will be the definitive guide for demonstrating thematic alignment.

**C. Principal Funding Institutions and Their Mandates**

Navigating the Moroccan research funding landscape requires familiarity with the key institutions responsible for setting priorities, managing funds, and implementing programs. These organizations form a collaborative ecosystem dedicated to advancing national research and innovation.

* **Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation (MESRSI):** This ministry serves as the central governmental body responsible for formulating and overseeing national policy in higher education, scientific research, and innovation.1 It plays a pivotal role in strategic planning and is a major co-funder of significant national programs, including PNARDI.12
* **Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique et Technique (CNRST):** The CNRST is a key operational arm for implementing research policy. It manages a wide array of national research programs, supports research infrastructure, and facilitates international scientific cooperation.3 The CNRST is often responsible for the practical aspects of calls for proposals, including dissemination of information, reception of applications through its dedicated platform (  
  masharie.cnrst.ma 16), and the administration of funded projects. It is a core partner in the PNARDI initiative.12
* **OCP Foundation:** As the philanthropic arm of the OCP Group (a world leader in phosphate products), the OCP Foundation is a major private sector contributor to R&D funding in Morocco.2 Its investments often align with areas related to sustainable agriculture, food security, resource management, and broader socio-economic development, reflecting its commitment to leveraging R&D for societal impact.2 The OCP Foundation is a crucial partner in co-funding and shaping the PNARDI program.12
* **Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique (UM6P):** This relatively new university has rapidly emerged as a significant institution in the Moroccan research and innovation ecosystem. With a strong focus on applied research, innovation, and entrepreneurship, UM6P often collaborates closely with the OCP Foundation and governmental bodies like MESRSI and CNRST on strategic research initiatives, including PNARDI.12
* **Ministry of Industry and Commerce:** This ministry also plays a role in fostering innovation, particularly by supporting the development of industrial and technological clusters. It launches specific calls for projects aimed at bringing together companies, startups, research centers, and training institutions to collaborate on innovative projects with high value-added potential.11

A notable characteristic of the Moroccan research funding landscape is the prevalence of collaborative funding models for major initiatives. The PNARDI program, for instance, is a strategic partnership involving MESRSI, the OCP Foundation, CNRST, and UM6P.3 This collaborative approach signifies a national strategy to pool diverse resources, expertise, and perspectives to address complex challenges and maximize the impact of research investments. For researchers, this implies that proposals demonstrating an understanding of the varied interests of these stakeholders—ranging from academic excellence and human capital development (MESRSI, CNRST) to innovation, industrial application, and socio-economic valorization (OCP Foundation, UM6P, Ministry of Industry)—may be viewed more favorably. It also highlights the interconnected nature of the funding ecosystem, where multiple actors contribute to shaping and supporting the national research agenda.

## **III. Spotlight on Major Funding Opportunities (2024-2025)**

**A. The Programme National d’Appui à la Recherche, Développement et l’Innovation (PNARDI) 2025-2028**

The PNARDI 2025-2028 stands as a cornerstone of Morocco's current efforts to bolster its research and innovation capacity. Its recent launch and substantial budget make it a primary focus for researchers across various disciplines.

1. Overall Objectives, Budget, and Strategic Focus

Officially launched on April 7, 2025 3, PNARDI is a strategic partnership between the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation (MESRSI), the OCP Foundation, the Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique et Technique (CNRST), and Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique (UM6P).12 The program's overarching ambition is to "reinforce l'excellence scientifique dans plusieurs secteurs stratégiques" 3 and to "mobilize national expertise...around high-impact scientific projects".6

With a significant total budget of 1 billion Moroccan Dirhams allocated over four years (2025-2028), equally co-funded by MESRSI and the OCP Foundation 6, PNARDI aims to achieve several key objectives. These include strengthening national research infrastructure, nurturing and supporting young scientific talent, stimulating innovation and facilitating technology transfer from research labs to practical application, and ultimately, maximizing the socio-economic impact of research outcomes.13 This comprehensive approach indicates a commitment to enhancing the entire research and innovation value chain.

2. Detailed Look at Sub-Programmes

PNARDI is not a monolithic funding stream but is structured into distinct sub-programmes, each designed to cater to different stages of research, development, and innovation, as well as different segments of the research community.13 Understanding these distinctions is crucial for applicants to identify the most appropriate funding window for their projects. The initial calls launched under PNARDI include:

* **IBN AL BANNA (Research & Development):**
  + **Target Audience:** This sub-programme is designed for confirmed teacher-researchers and established researchers.16
  + **Project Types:** It supports a spectrum of research activities, including fundamental research, applied research, and experimental development.16
  + **Allocated Budget:** The total envelope for this call is 100 million MAD.16
  + **Objectives:** Key aims include strengthening the linkages between research activities and the national economy, supporting the training of doctoral students through research projects, and promoting the valorization and dissemination of research results.16 This sub-programme is identified by CNRST as "Appel R-D1 – Sous-programme 'IBN AL BANNA'" 16 and generally focuses on "Recherche et Développement".13
* **IBN BATTOUTA (Young Researchers):**
  + **Target Audience:** This stream specifically targets young researchers who are at the early stages of their independent careers, typically defined as having less than five years of experience after obtaining tenure.16
  + **Allocated Budget:** The total envelope for this call is 20 million MAD.16
  + **Objectives:** The primary goals are to provide seed funding to help young researchers initiate their research programs, strengthen their scientific and technical skills, and facilitate networking opportunities.16 A mandatory requirement for projects funded under this sub-programme is the involvement of at least one doctoral student, emphasizing its role in research training.16 This is identified as "Appel JC1-R-D – Sous-programme 'IBN BATTOUTA'" 16 and is "pour les Jeunes Chercheurs".13
* **NEFZAOUIA (Technology Transfer):**
  + **Target Audience:** This sub-programme is aimed at project leaders whose research has advanced to a stage where it demonstrates high potential for practical application, valorization, and commercialization.16
  + **Key Condition:** A critical eligibility criterion is that the proposed technology or innovation must have reached a Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of 3 or higher, indicating that proof of concept has been established.16
  + **Allocated Budget:** The total envelope for this call is 80 million MAD.16
  + **Objectives:** The focus is on supporting the maturation of technologies, bridging the gap between research and market, fostering the creation of research-based start-ups, and promoting open innovation practices.16 This is identified as "Appel TT1 – Sous-programme 'NEFZAOUIA' (Transfert Technologique)" 16 and is "pour le Transfert Technologique".13

This multi-faceted structure of PNARDI demonstrates a strategic intent to address various needs within the national research ecosystem, from foundational discovery and talent development to the translation of research into socio-economic value. Researchers must carefully assess the nature of their project, its stage of development, and their own career profile to select the most relevant PNARDI sub-programme. Applying to an inappropriate stream could significantly diminish the chances of success.

**3. Thematic Priorities, Eligibility, and Key Dates for PNARDI Calls**

* **Thematic Priorities:** The broad thematic priorities for PNARDI include water, phosphates (extraction, treatment, and valorization), health, food security, renewable energies, and Human and Social Sciences (SSH).3 However, applicants should consult the detailed call documents, typically available on the CNRST submission portal (  
  masharie.cnrst.ma), for any further specifications or nuanced priorities within these broad areas for each sub-programme.
* **Eligibility:** The PNARDI calls are generally open to the entire Moroccan scientific community. Project coordinators must be affiliated with eligible institutions, which include Public Universities, Higher Education Establishments not under the direct authority of universities (EESNRPU), Public Scientific Research Establishments (EPRST), and Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique (UM6P).13 A crucial administrative requirement is that submitted projects must be formally validated by the head of the applicant's host institution and must comply with the institution's intellectual property policies.16
* **Key Dates:** The PNARDI 2025-2028 program was officially launched on April 7, 2025.3 For the initial calls under the IBN BATTOUTA, IBN ALBANNA, and NEFZAOUIA sub-programmes, the deadline for the submission of applications is  
  **July 31, 2025, at 16:00 (Moroccan time)**.13

**B. Other Significant National Calls**

Beyond the flagship PNARDI program, Moroccan researchers can explore a variety of other national and bilateral funding opportunities. These often cater to specific thematic areas or collaborative frameworks.

* **CNRST Thematic and Bilateral Programs:**
  + **CNRST/CNR Italy (2024-2025):** This bilateral program supports collaborative research projects between Moroccan and Italian teams. Eligible Moroccan entities include public universities, public higher education establishments not under universities, public research establishments, and private universities or establishments recognized by the state or established through public-private partnerships.14 The submission process typically involves providing a paper copy of the proposal to CNRST.14
  + **Partenariat Hubert Curien (PHC) Maghreb (2025):** This program aims to foster research collaborations within the Maghreb region. For the 2025 call, a priority theme identified is "Towards a multicultural and sustainable Mediterranean space, facing challenges related to: climate and energy changes; water sciences and the maritime economy; innovation and business competitiveness".15 Submission often involves the Campus France platform for partners in involved countries.
  + **Partenariat Hubert Curien (PHC) Toubkal (Franco-Moroccan, 2025/2026):** This well-established bilateral program supports the mobility of researchers and doctoral students, particularly those in co-tutelle (joint PhD supervision) arrangements between French and Moroccan institutions.9 It prioritizes the emergence of new scientific collaborations and aims to help research teams valorize their work. The submission process is typically led by the French partner via the Campus France platform, with the Moroccan partner subsequently sending a copy of the submitted proposal to CNRST.15 While the deadline for the 2025 call was in early 2024 (e.g., February 22, 2024 for French partners) 15, results for the 2026 call are anticipated by mid-July 2025, with projects starting in February 2026.9 Researchers should monitor CNRST and Campus France announcements for the next cycle.
  + **CNRST-FRQ (Morocco-Quebec) (2024-2025):** This collaborative program with the Fonds de recherche du Québec focuses on specific themes: Health sciences, and Adaptations to climate change and water management.10 The maximum funding contribution from CNRST per project is 1.5 million MAD. The deadline for the 2024-2025 call was September 30, 2024.10
* **Industrial Cluster Initiatives:**
  + **Ministry of Industry and Commerce Call for Industrial and Tech Cluster Projects for 2025:** This initiative seeks to provide financial backing to projects that establish or strengthen industrial and technological clusters. The goal is to promote governance structures that bring together companies (including startups), research centers, and training institutions to collaborate on innovative projects generating significant added value.11 Both new initiatives and existing clusters (even those having received public support for over eight years) are eligible to apply. The deadline for applications for the 2025 call is July 24, 2025.11

The existence of these diverse funding mechanisms, ranging from large-scale national programs like PNARDI to smaller, more focused bilateral calls and sector-specific initiatives, indicates a varied landscape of opportunities. While major programs attract significant attention, these niche calls may offer valuable avenues for researchers with specific collaborative interests or thematic focuses, potentially with different competition dynamics.

**C. Leveraging International Collaborative Funding**

Moroccan researchers are also encouraged to participate in broader international collaborative funding programs, which can provide access to additional resources, expertise, and networks.

* **LEAP-SE (Long-Term Joint EU-AU Research and Innovation Partnership on Sustainable Energy):**
  + This is a significant six-year program co-funded by the European Commission under Horizon Europe, aimed at fostering a long-term research and innovation partnership between Europe and Africa in the field of sustainable energy.5
  + The first transnational joint call for proposals under LEAP-SE was planned for 2025, with a second anticipated for 2026. The indicative budget for the 2025 call is approximately €10 million from national/regional funding agencies, supplemented by a €3.5 million contribution from the European Commission.5
  + **Consortium Requirements:** Projects applying for LEAP-SE funding must be submitted by consortia with a specific structure: at least two independent legal entities from two different European Union Member States or Horizon Europe-associated countries, *and* another two independent legal entities from two different countries in the African Union. Furthermore, each consortium must include at least one partner from the institutional research sector (e.g., university, public research center) and at least one partner from a commercial company, hailing from the participating countries.5
  + **Thematic Priorities:** The call focuses on seven identified multi-annual roadmaps and LEAP-RE thematic priorities, including: Assessment of Renewable Energy Sources (RES) and integration of RES in sustainable energy scenarios; End-of-life and second‐life management and environmental impact of RE components; Smart stand‐alone systems; Smart grids (different scales) for off-grid application; Processes and appliances for productive uses (e.g., in agriculture, mobility, industry); and Innovative solutions for priority domestic uses (such as clean cooking and cold chain).5
  + **Project Types and Duration:** The LEAP-SE Joint Call 2025 will fund basic research, applied research, and experimental development projects with durations ranging from 12 to 36 months.5

International programs like LEAP-SE present excellent opportunities but come with specific and often complex requirements regarding consortium composition. The stipulation for a balanced representation of EU/Associated and African Union countries, along with the mandatory inclusion of both academic/research and commercial partners, means that Moroccan researchers interested in such calls must engage in proactive and early efforts to identify and build suitable international and cross-sectoral consortia. Success in these programs often depends as much on the strength of the partnership as on the scientific idea itself.

**Table 1: Overview of Key Moroccan & Relevant International Funding Programmes (2024-2025)**

| Programme Name | Lead/Funding Body(ies) | Key Thematic Areas | General Eligibility (Moroccan entities) | Indicative Budget/Funding per Project | Key 2024-2025 Deadline(s) | Primary Submission Portal/Contact |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **PNARDI 2025-2028: IBN AL BANNA** | MESRSI, OCP Foundation, CNRST, UM6P | Water, phosphates, health, food security, renewable energies, SSH | Public Universities, EESNRPU, EPRST, UM6P | Part of 100M MAD total envelope for call | July 31, 2025 | https://masharie.cnrst.ma 13 |
| **PNARDI 2025-2028: IBN BATTOUTA** | MESRSI, OCP Foundation, CNRST, UM6P | Water, phosphates, health, food security, renewable energies, SSH (focus on young researchers) | Public Universities, EESNRPU, EPRST, UM6P (PI <5 yrs post-tenure) | Part of 20M MAD total envelope for call | July 31, 2025 | https://masharie.cnrst.ma 13 |
| **PNARDI 2025-2028: NEFZAOUIA** | MESRSI, OCP Foundation, CNRST, UM6P | Water, phosphates, health, food security, renewable energies, SSH (focus on tech transfer, TRL≥3) | Public Universities, EESNRPU, EPRST, UM6P | Part of 80M MAD total envelope for call | July 31, 2025 | https://masharie.cnrst.ma 13 |
| **CNRST/CNR Italy 2024-2025** | CNRST (Morocco), CNR (Italy) | Varies by call (check specific call text) | Public univ., public higher ed., public research est., recognized private univ./est. or PPP | Varies by call | Check CNRST for specific call deadline (submission via paper copy) 14 | cooperation@cnrst.ma 14 |
| **PHC Maghreb 2025** | CNRST & regional partners, French Ministries | Climate/energy, water/maritime economy, innovation/business competitiveness | Moroccan research institutions | Varies (mobility, small projects) | Check CNRST/Campus France (annual call) 15 | Campus France / CNRST 15 |
| **PHC Toubkal 2026 (Franco-Moroccan)** | CNRST, French Ministries (MESR, MEAE) | Aerospace, AI, health, environment, energy, agriculture, SSH, education | Moroccan research institutions | Varies (mobility, joint projects) | Next call likely late 2024/early 2025 (2025 call deadline was Feb 2024) 9 | Campus France / toubkal@cnrst.ma 15 |
| **CNRST-FRQ (Morocco-Quebec) 2024-2025** | CNRST, Fonds de recherche du Québec | Health sciences, climate change adaptation & water management | Moroccan research institutions (joint with Quebec PI) | Max 1.5M MAD from CNRST | Sept 30, 2024 10 | Check CNRST/FRQ websites 10 |
| **Industrial and Tech Cluster Projects 2025** | Ministry of Industry and Commerce | Industrial and technological innovation, cluster development | Consortia of companies, startups, research centers, training institutions | Government financial backing (varies) | July 24, 2025 11 | Ministry of Industry and Commerce 11 |
| **LEAP-SE (EU-AU Sustainable Energy)** | European Commission, National/Regional African & European funding agencies | Renewable energy, smart grids, productive/domestic energy uses | Consortia: min 2 EU/Associated + 2 AU countries (incl. academic & commercial partners) | Part of ~€13.5M total envelope for 2025 call | 2025 Call (check LEAP-SE website for specific deadline) 5 | LEAP-SE specific portal 5 |

This table provides a consolidated overview, but researchers must always consult the official call documents for the most accurate and detailed information.

## **IV. Crafting a Winning Research Proposal: A Step-by-Step Guide**

**A. Foundational Elements: Adhering to International Standards**

The pursuit of "scientific excellence," a recurring theme in Moroccan research funding calls 3, necessitates that proposals are built upon foundational elements recognized and valued globally. These components are critical for demonstrating the quality, rigor, and potential impact of the proposed research.

1. Defining a Clear Research Problem, Aims, and Objectives

A compelling research proposal begins with a clearly articulated research problem. The project title should succinctly indicate the core subject of the investigation.18 The proposal must then clearly define its overarching aims: What is the research trying to achieve? What is its primary purpose? This section should explicitly address a gap in current knowledge, seek to test or refine a theory, or aim to prove or disprove a specific hypothesis.18 A focused statement of aims is essential. As advised for Horizon Europe proposals, outlining the overarching goal of the project, followed by specific objectives, the underlying concept, methodology, and the expected impact, provides a strong initial framework.19

The objectives are the specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) steps that will be undertaken to achieve the broader aims.18 These objectives should be presented in a logical sequence, where the completion of one may be necessary for the commencement of the next.18 This logical breakdown demonstrates a well-thought-out research plan.

2. Conducting a Comprehensive Literature Review and Identifying Gaps

To justify the proposed research, a thorough background section, underpinned by a comprehensive literature review, is indispensable.18 This section serves to provide context for the research topic, demonstrating to assessors that the applicant possesses a strong understanding of the current state of knowledge in their field of interest. It should cover key theoretical concepts, summarize significant studies and their findings, and acknowledge notable researchers who have contributed to the existing landscape.18

Crucially, the literature review must do more than summarize existing work; it must critically analyze it to identify specific gaps, unresolved questions, or limitations in current understanding that the proposed research intends to address.18 This establishes the necessity and originality of the project.

3. Developing a Robust and Innovative Methodology

The methodology section details the "how" of the research. It should describe the proposed mode of research, whether it involves quantitative data collection and analysis, qualitative field research, experimental design, computational modeling, or a mixed-methods approach.18 For international funding bodies like the NIAID, the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses must be "well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the Specific Aims of the project".20 This includes presenting strategies to ensure a robust and unbiased approach, identifying potential problems, outlining alternative strategies, and setting benchmarks for success.20

Innovation in methodology can also be a strong point. This might involve applying existing methods to new contexts, developing novel analytical techniques, or combining approaches in a unique way. It is also advisable to consider diversifying the research plan to ensure that actionable results can still be obtained even if the primary hypothesis proves incorrect.21

4. Articulating Expected Outcomes, Impact, and Dissemination Strategies

A strong proposal must clearly articulate its expected research contribution and potential impact. This involves explaining why the research question or hypothesis is worth investigating and how the current body of knowledge is lacking or falls short.18 Applicants should detail how their research will extend an area of knowledge, apply theories to new contexts, solve a specific problem, test a theory, or challenge an existing one.18 The proposal should convincingly argue that there is a genuine gap and that the proposed research will generate new understanding or information, highlighting its innovative and original aspects.18

The "expected impact" is a critical evaluation criterion for many funders, including those under Horizon Europe.19 This impact can be multifaceted: scientific (advancing knowledge, opening new research avenues), societal (benefiting society, advancing desired societal outcomes, as emphasized by NSF's Broader Impacts criteria 22), and economic (contributing to innovation, competitiveness). The proposal should also outline a clear plan for disseminating the research findings, which may include publications in peer-reviewed journals, presentations at national and international conferences, policy briefs, or public engagement activities.

These core elements—a clear problem statement and objectives, a comprehensive literature review identifying a genuine gap, a robust and potentially innovative methodology, and a clear articulation of expected outcomes and impact—form the universal pillars of any strong research proposal. Moroccan funding agencies, particularly when emphasizing "excellence scientifique," will rigorously assess proposals against these internationally recognized standards.

**B. Tailoring Your Proposal for Moroccan Contexts**

While adhering to international standards of scientific excellence is fundamental, securing funding in Morocco also requires a deliberate and explicit tailoring of the proposal to the national context and priorities.

1. Explicitly Demonstrating Alignment with National Strategic Axes

Proposals must go beyond generic statements of relevance and clearly demonstrate how the research directly addresses Morocco's declared national strategic axes. This involves referencing the specific priorities outlined in national strategy documents (such as those discussed in Section II.B, derived from sources like 3) and, most importantly, in the text of the specific call for proposals. It is advisable to use keywords and terminology found in these official documents to signal clear alignment.23 The proposal narrative should explicitly state which national priority or strategic research axis the project contributes to and explain the mechanisms through which this contribution will be achieved. This demonstrates that the applicant has not only understood the funder's priorities but has also designed the research with these in mind.

2. Highlighting Contribution to Socio-Economic Development and Innovation

In the Moroccan context, "impact" is increasingly interpreted not just in academic terms but also through the lens of tangible contributions to socio-economic development, innovation, and societal well-being. The PNARDI program, for instance, explicitly aims to "maximiser l'impact socio-économique des résultats de la recherche".13 Similarly, the PHC Toubkal program seeks to "valoriser des recherches innovantes ayant un impact sur le développement durable, des filières et outils de production ou de transformation débouchant sur le transfert de technologie".9 The OCP Foundation also frames its R&D support as a means to "catalyze innovation, stimulate economic growth and foster social progress".2

Therefore, proposals should dedicate significant attention to articulating the potential socio-economic benefits of the research. This might include:

* Contributions to specific economic sectors (e.g., agriculture, renewable energy, industry).
* Potential for job creation or skills development.
* Development of new products, services, or technologies with commercial potential.
* Pathways for technology transfer and valorization, including potential collaborations with industry or the creation of start-ups.
* Contributions to public policy formulation or the improvement of public services.
* Addressing specific societal challenges, such as environmental protection, public health improvements, or enhanced food security.

Quantifying these potential impacts, where feasible, and outlining clear pathways for their realization will significantly strengthen the proposal. This focus on socio-economic relevance and innovation is a strong directive within the Moroccan research funding system, and proposals that convincingly address this dimension are more likely to resonate with funders' objectives.

## **V. Navigating the Nuts and Bolts: Submission & Evaluation**

**A. Eligibility Criteria: Who Can Apply?**

Understanding and meeting the eligibility criteria is the first hurdle in the application process. These criteria can vary significantly between different funding programs and calls.

* For the **PNARDI Sub-Programmes (IBN BATTOUTA, IBN ALBANNA, NEFZAOUIA)**, eligibility is generally open to the Moroccan scientific community. Specifically, project coordinators must be affiliated with Public Universities, Higher Education Establishments not falling under the direct authority of universities (EESNRPU), Public Scientific Research Establishments (EPRST), or Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique (UM6P).13
* The **CNRST/CNR Italy** bilateral program specifies eligibility for Moroccan entities including public universities, public higher education establishments, public research establishments, and also private universities or establishments that are recognized by the state or have been created through public-private partnerships.14
* The **PHC Toubkal** program is open to all research establishments in Morocco, whether they are part of a university or not. A key condition is that the host institutions of the project leaders must formally approve the project and commit to providing the necessary human and material resources for its execution.24
* International programs like **LEAP-SE** have more complex consortium-based eligibility criteria, requiring participation from specific numbers of entities from EU/Horizon Europe Associated countries and African Union countries, as well as a mix of academic/research and commercial partners.5

A common thread across many Moroccan calls is the importance of institutional backing. Eligibility often extends beyond the individual researcher to the status and type of their host institution. Furthermore, formal approval and validation of the project by the head of the researcher's institution are frequently mandatory prerequisites for submission.16 This underscores the need for researchers to secure internal support and navigate their institution's approval processes well in advance of the submission deadline. The institution, in many cases, is considered a co-applicant or guarantor of the project.

**B. Formatting and Submission Guidelines**

Strict adherence to formatting and submission guidelines is critical; non-compliance can lead to administrative rejection before the proposal even reaches scientific review.21 Applicants must meticulously follow the instructions provided in each specific call for proposals.

General advice includes using specified fonts, adhering to margin requirements, and respecting page limits.21 Proposals should follow the template structure provided by the funder, ensuring that all sections are completed appropriately and avoiding repetition.19

Submission processes vary considerably:

* For the **PNARDI Sub-Programmes**, applications are submitted electronically via the CNRST's online platform: https://masharie.cnrst.ma.16 Detailed documents outlining all conditions, templates, and guidelines are typically made available on this platform.13
* The **PHC Toubkal** program involves a multi-step process. The French partner typically initiates and submits the joint proposal through the Campus France online platform. The Moroccan partner is then required to send a PDF copy of the submitted project to CNRST via email (e.g., toubkal@cnrst.ma) and also submit a signed paper copy to the CNRST by post.15 Specific formatting, such as CVs not exceeding 2 pages and the main scientific dossier not exceeding 30 pages, is often enforced.9
* The **CNRST/CNR Italy** program has historically required the submission of a paper copy of the proposal directly to the CNRST.14

This diversity in submission methods—ranging from fully online portals to combinations of electronic and hard-copy submissions—means that researchers cannot assume a standard procedure. Each call's specific instructions must be read with utmost care and followed precisely to ensure the application is correctly received and processed. Starting the submission process well before the deadline is also advisable to manage any unforeseen technical issues or delays.21

**C. Budgeting Your Project: Rules, Best Practices, and Justification**

Developing a realistic, well-justified, and compliant budget is a crucial component of a successful research proposal. Funders scrutinize budgets to ensure that requested funds are appropriate for the proposed activities, align with eligible cost categories, and represent good value for money.

General Principles for Budgeting:

The budgeting process involves listing all planned project activities, assigning accurate costs to each, and ensuring that the entire budget complies with the specific rules and guidelines of the funding agency.25 Common budget categories include:

* **Personnel costs:** Salaries and stipends for researchers, technicians, doctoral students, etc.
* **Equipment:** Costs for purchasing necessary scientific equipment (often requires strong justification).
* **Consumables and Materials:** Laboratory supplies, reagents, software licenses, etc.
* **Travel:** Costs for fieldwork, conference attendance, collaborator meetings (often with specific limits or justifications required).
* **Training:** Costs associated with specialized training for project personnel.
* **Subcontracting/Professional Services:** Costs for services that cannot be performed by the project team (e.g., specialized analyses, consultancy).
* **Dissemination and Publication Costs:** Open access fees, costs for workshops, etc.
* **Indirect Costs (Overheads):** Institutional costs associated with hosting the research. Policies on indirect costs vary significantly, and it's vital to understand the funder's specific rules.25
* **Contingency:** A small percentage (often 5-10% of the total direct costs) may sometimes be included for unforeseen expenses, though not all funders allow this.25

It is essential to identify and exclude any ineligible expenses explicitly prohibited by the funding agency.25 For example, the PHC Toubkal program typically does not fund office/IT equipment like scanners, printers, or computers, administrative supplies, general secretarial and communication costs, fuel, or other depreciable assets.9

**Specific Budgetary Frameworks in Morocco:**

* The CNRST's general framework for research funding indicates that "Projets de Recherche Fondamentale ou Appliquée" (classified as Type A) can have a budget of up to 1 million Moroccan Dirhams, depending on the project's scope and dimension.26
* For the **PNARDI Sub-Programmes**, while specific per-project caps are not always detailed in initial announcements, the total envelopes for the first calls provide an indication of scale: IBN AL BANNA (R&D) has a 100 million MAD envelope; IBN BATTOUTA (Young Researchers) has 20 million MAD; and NEFZAOUIA (Technology Transfer) has 80 million MAD.16
* The **CNRST-FRQ (Morocco-Quebec)** program specifies a maximum of 1.5 million MAD per project from the CNRST contribution.10

Budget realism and meticulous justification are paramount. Each budget line item must be clearly linked to specific project activities and its necessity explained. Funders expect a detailed breakdown of costs, not just lump sums. A well-justified budget demonstrates careful planning and responsible stewardship of potential funds, thereby enhancing the proposal's credibility. Requesting the maximum allowable amount without a clear and detailed rationale for each expense is generally ill-advised.

**Table 2: Indicative Budget Categories and PNARDI Sub-Programme Focus**

| Budget Category | General Considerations for Moroccan Funders | Specific Focus/Relevance for IBN AL BANNA (R&D) | Specific Focus/Relevance for IBN BATTOUTA (Young Researchers) | Specific Focus/Relevance for NEFZAOUIA (Technology Transfer) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Personnel** | Salaries for PIs, researchers, technicians; stipends for PhDs/Postdocs. Justify time commitment. | Support for PhD students integral to research objectives. Experienced research staff. | Stipend for at least one PhD student is mandatory. Support for PI's initial research team. | Staff with expertise in product development, market analysis, IP management. |
| **Equipment** | Strong justification needed for major equipment. Preference for sharing existing resources if possible. Check eligibility.9 | Equipment essential for achieving fundamental/applied research aims. | Seed funding for essential lab equipment to kickstart research. | Prototyping equipment, pilot-scale testing facilities. |
| **Consumables & Materials** | Detailed list and justification based on experimental design/activities. | Standard lab supplies, reagents, software for data analysis. | Basic lab supplies for initial experiments and proof-of-concept. | Materials for prototype development, testing, and validation. |
| **Travel** | For fieldwork, national/international conferences (often with limits), collaborator meetings. Justify necessity for project goals. | Travel for data collection, dissemination at key scientific conferences. | Travel for training, initial networking, presenting early results. | Travel for industry engagement, market research, pitching to investors. |
| **Subcontracting/ Services** | For specialized tasks not feasible in-house (e.g., specific analyses, consultancy). Clear TOR and justification. | Specialized analytical services, access to unique facilities. | May be limited due to budget; focus on core research activities. | IP consultancy, market studies, certification costs, business development services. |
| **Dissemination & Valorization** | Publication fees (open access encouraged), workshop organization, patenting costs (especially for valorization-focused calls). | Journal publications, conference presentations. | Initial publications, workshop participation. | Patent applications, development of marketing materials, participation in tech fairs/industry events. |
| **Training** | Costs for specialized workshops or training for project personnel, especially PhD students. | Advanced methodological training for team members. | Skill development workshops for the young PI and PhD student(s). | Training in entrepreneurship, IP management, business planning. |
| **Indirect Costs (Overheads)** | Check funder's policy. Some provide a fixed percentage; others require detailed justification or may not cover them extensively. | Standard institutional overheads as per CNRST/University policy. | Standard institutional overheads. | May include costs related to incubator services if applicable. |

*Note: This table provides general guidance. Researchers must always refer to the specific call documents for precise rules on eligible and ineligible costs, budget ceilings, and justification requirements for each PNARDI sub-programme or other funding calls.*

**D. The Evaluation Process: Understanding Review Criteria and Reviewer Expectations**

Once submitted, proposals undergo a rigorous evaluation process. Understanding the criteria used by reviewers is essential for crafting a proposal that effectively addresses their expectations.

General International Criteria:

Many funding agencies, including those in Morocco that emphasize international standards, utilize a common set of evaluation criteria. For example, the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) uses criteria that are broadly applicable 20:

* **Significance:** Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress? Is the prior research supporting the proposal rigorous? How will successful completion improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, or clinical practice?
* **Investigators:** Are the Principal Investigator(s) (PIs), collaborators, and other researchers well-suited to the project? Do they have appropriate experience and training? If established, do they have a record of accomplishments? If collaborative, is there complementary expertise and a good governance structure?
* **Innovation:** Does the proposal challenge existing paradigms by using novel concepts, approaches, methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions? Are these novel in a broad sense or specific to one field?
* **Approach:** Is the overall strategy, methodology, and analysis well-reasoned and appropriate to achieve the project's aims? Are strategies in place to ensure a robust and unbiased approach? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? Is feasibility established for early-stage projects?
* **Environment:** Will the scientific environment (institutional support, equipment, physical resources) contribute to success? Does the project benefit from unique features of the environment or collaborations?

**Specific Moroccan and Collaborative Call Criteria:**

* The **PHC Toubkal** program, for instance, evaluates projects based on: the scientific quality of the project and the participating teams; the interest of the cooperation and the complementarity between the French and Moroccan teams; and the prospects for structuring the collaboration or valorizing the research outcomes.9 Alignment with the program's priority themes (such as aerospace, health, environment, energy, agriculture, SSH) is also critical.24
* The **CNRST** itself, when seeking expert evaluators, looks for individuals with deep knowledge in the relevant field, significant experience in scientific and financial coordination of research projects, experience in PhD supervision, impartiality, critical analysis skills, clear communication abilities, and respect for deadlines and confidentiality.27 While these are criteria for selecting evaluators, they indirectly signal what is valued in researchers and their projects: a strong track record (publications, citations, coordinated projects, supervised PhDs), high-quality research, and professionalism.27
* For projects with a strong societal impact component, criteria similar to the U.S. National Science Foundation's (NSF) "Broader Impacts" may be implicitly or explicitly considered. These include the potential of the activity to benefit society or advance desired societal outcomes, the creativity and potential transformative nature of the concepts, the soundness of the implementation plan (including assessment mechanisms), the qualifications of the team, and the adequacy of available resources.22

The evaluation process is therefore multi-dimensional. Reviewers assess not only the intrinsic scientific merit of the proposed research but also the capabilities and track record of the PI and the research team, the feasibility of the project plan, its potential impact (both scientifically and, increasingly, socio-economically), and its strategic relevance to the funder's priorities. For collaborative calls, the strength, complementarity, and clarity of the partnership are also key evaluation points. A proposal must demonstrate strength across all these dimensions to maximize its chances of success.

**E. Key Deadlines for 2024-2025 Calls**

Meeting submission deadlines is non-negotiable. Researchers should mark these dates prominently and plan their proposal development timeline accordingly, always aiming to submit well in advance to avoid last-minute issues.21

* **PNARDI Sub-Programmes (IBN BATTOUTA, IBN ALBANNA, NEFZAOUIA) - 2025 Call:** **July 31, 2025**.13
* **Ministry of Industry and Commerce - Industrial and Tech Cluster Projects - 2025 Call:** **July 24, 2025**.11
* **CNRST-FRQ (Morocco-Quebec) - 2024-2025 Call:** **September 30, 2024** 10 (This deadline has passed; researchers should look for future iterations if the program continues).
* **PHC Toubkal (Franco-Moroccan) - for 2026 funding:** The application deadline for the French partner for the previous cycle (leading to 2025 projects) was February 22, 2024, with the Moroccan partner's submission deadline shortly after, on March 01, 2024.15 Results for projects starting in February 2026 are expected by mid-July 2025.9 Researchers interested in this annual program should anticipate similar timelines for future calls and monitor announcements from CNRST and Campus France.
* **LEAP-SE (EU-AU Partnership on Sustainable Energy):** The first call was announced for 2025, with a second planned for 2026.5 Specific deadlines for the 2025 call were not available in the provided materials but should be verified on the official LEAP-SE program website.

It is crucial to re-emphasize that while these dates are provided based on available information, researchers must **always verify deadlines on the official websites of the funding agencies or through their specific call announcements.** Funding agencies typically do not grant extensions for missed deadlines.

## **VI. Forging Effective International Partnerships**

International collaboration is increasingly encouraged and often essential for addressing complex research challenges and accessing broader funding opportunities. Morocco actively participates in and promotes such partnerships.

**A. Benefits and Modalities of International Research Collaboration**

Engaging in international research collaboration offers numerous advantages for Moroccan researchers and institutions. These include access to complementary expertise and specialized knowledge that may not be available domestically, opportunities for sharing expensive research infrastructure and resources, and the potential for enhanced research impact and visibility through joint publications and dissemination to wider audiences.5 Collaborations can also facilitate access to international funding streams and networks, contributing to capacity building and the internationalization of Moroccan research. Morocco's "politique d'ouverture" (policy of openness) actively supports the establishment of strategic partnerships.28 Furthermore, Morocco's geographical proximity to Europe, modern infrastructure, political and economic stability, favorable governmental policies towards investment, skilled workforce, and cultural diversity make it an attractive partner for international collaboration, including in research and development.29

Modalities for international collaboration are diverse and often supported by specific funding mechanisms:

* **Joint Research Projects:** This is the most common modality, where teams from Morocco and one or more partner countries collaboratively design and execute a research project. Most bilateral and multilateral calls (e.g., LEAP-SE 5, PHC programs 15, CNRST/CNR Italy 14) are structured around joint projects.
* **Researcher Mobility:** Programs like PHC Toubkal explicitly support the mobility of researchers (senior and junior) and doctoral students between partner institutions in France and Morocco, facilitating short research stays, training, and knowledge exchange.9
* **Co-supervision of PhDs (Co-tutelle):** Several programs, notably PHC Toubkal, encourage and support the joint supervision of doctoral theses by academics from Moroccan and partner country institutions, leading to a dual or joint degree.9 This is a key mechanism for training the next generation of researchers within an international context.

The strategic encouragement of international collaboration by Moroccan authorities and funding agencies suggests that proposals incorporating well-chosen and robust international partnerships are often viewed favorably. Such collaborations are seen not only as a means to secure additional funding but also as vital for knowledge transfer, enhancing research quality, and elevating the profile of Moroccan research on the global stage.

**B. Identifying and Engaging Suitable International Partners**

Finding the right international partners is a critical step. Effective strategies include:

* **Leveraging Existing Networks:** Personal contacts, connections made through previous collaborations, or recommendations from colleagues can be valuable starting points.
* **Attending International Conferences and Workshops:** These events provide excellent opportunities to meet researchers from other countries working in similar or complementary fields.
* **Searching Publication Databases:** Identifying leading researchers and groups in specific fields through their publications (e.g., Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed) can help pinpoint potential collaborators.
* **Utilizing Professional Networking Platforms:** Platforms like LinkedIn, ResearchGate, or Academia.edu can facilitate connections.
* **Contacting Researchers Directly:** Once potential partners are identified, a well-crafted email outlining the research idea, potential for collaboration, and alignment with a specific funding call can initiate a dialogue.
* **Focusing on Partner Countries for Bilateral Calls:** For specific bilateral programs (e.g., PHC Toubkal with France 15, CNRST/CNR with Italy 14, CNRST-FRQ with Quebec 10), the search for partners should naturally focus on institutions and researchers within those designated partner countries.

**C. Specific Considerations for Joint Proposals**

Preparing a joint proposal with international partners introduces additional layers of complexity that require careful management:

* **Clear Definition of Roles and Responsibilities:** From the outset, all partners must have a clear understanding of their respective roles, tasks, contributions (scientific, technical, financial), and deliverables within the project.
* **Equitable Resource and Benefit Sharing:** Agreements should be reached on how resources (funding, equipment, data) will be managed and shared, and how the benefits of the research (publications, intellectual property, training opportunities) will be distributed equitably among partners.
* **Robust Communication Plan:** Effective and regular communication is vital, especially when partners are geographically dispersed. Establishing clear communication channels, meeting schedules (virtual or in-person), and reporting mechanisms is essential.
* **Understanding Institutional Requirements:** Each partner institution will have its own internal approval processes, financial regulations, and IP policies. These must be understood and accommodated by all members of the consortium.
* **Joint Intellectual Property (IP) Agreements:** For projects with potential for generating IP, a clear agreement on IP ownership, management, and exploitation rights should be established early in the collaboration, ideally before proposal submission.
* **Coordination of Proposal Preparation:** International proposals often require meticulous coordination. For instance, the LEAP-SE program demands a specific consortium structure involving academic and commercial partners from multiple EU and AU countries 5, necessitating significant logistical and administrative effort. The CNRST-FRQ program requires two PIs, one from Morocco and one from Quebec, to share responsibility.10 The PHC Toubkal program often involves joint drafting of the scientific content, but the formal submission is typically handled by the French partner through the Campus France portal.15

The administrative and scientific coordination of international proposals is inherently more complex than for single-institution national projects. Early and transparent agreement on all aspects of the project's scientific direction, management, budget allocation, and proposal preparation tasks is vital for a smooth process and a strong, coherent submission. Failure to clearly define roles, responsibilities, and contributions from the outset can lead to difficulties during proposal development or, if funded, during project implementation.

## **VII. Avoiding Common Pitfalls and Maximizing Success**

**A. Frequently Encountered Mistakes in Moroccan (and general) Research Proposals**

Awareness of common mistakes can significantly improve the quality of a research proposal and increase its chances of success. Many of these pitfalls are universal, while some may have particular resonance in the context of specific funding calls.

* **Generic or Stereotyped Responses:** One of the most frequent and damaging errors is the use of a standardized or "boilerplate" proposal that has not been sufficiently customized to the specific requirements and priorities of the call.30 Funders can readily identify proposals that are merely adapted from previous submissions without genuine tailoring. As Horizon Europe guidance suggests, it is crucial to "fit your proposal to the topic. You should not fit the topic to your proposal".19
* **Lack of Detail and Precision:** Vague descriptions of the methodology, insufficient background information, or a superficial treatment of key sections can undermine a proposal's credibility.30 Reviewers look for well-developed arguments and clear, specific plans.
* **Misalignment with Funder Priorities:** Failing to explicitly and convincingly link the proposed research to the funder's strategic goals, the specific thematic areas of the call, or the expected impacts highlighted by the funder is a major oversight.19
* **Poor Presentation and Lack of Clarity:** Numerous spelling and grammatical errors, overly long and complex sentences, a lack of clear structure, poor formatting, or failure to respect specified page limits can create a negative impression and make the proposal difficult for reviewers to read and understand.21
* **Weak Justification:** Insufficient justification for the chosen methodology, the requested budget items, or the claimed potential impact can lead reviewers to question the feasibility or value of the project.23 Claims should be backed by evidence and logical reasoning.
* **Ignoring Evaluation Criteria:** Proposals should be written with the evaluation criteria firmly in mind. Failing to structure the narrative to explicitly address how the project meets each criterion makes it harder for reviewers to assess its merits favorably.19
* **Omission of Key Sections or Required Information:** Inadvertently omitting sections or information specifically requested in the call for proposals can lead to an incomplete application and potential disqualification or a significantly lower score.31

The prevalence of issues related to superficial customization and the use of generic templates is a particular concern.30 Reviewers are tasked with identifying projects that offer the best fit for

*their* specific program and objectives. A proposal that feels impersonal or fails to demonstrate a deep understanding of the funder's unique needs and context is unlikely to be competitive, even if the underlying science is sound. Each proposal must be a bespoke response to a specific opportunity.

**B. Proactive Strategies to Address Challenges in the Research Environment**

Researchers in Morocco, like in many countries, may face systemic challenges. Acknowledging these and, where possible, proactively addressing them within the proposal strategy can strengthen an application.

* **Funding Insufficiency:** While national R&D expenditure has been a concern 32, researchers can mitigate this by seeking diverse funding sources, including international collaborations (as detailed in Section VI) which can bring co-funding or access to resources. Proposals should also demonstrate maximum budget efficiency and clear value for money.
* **Weak University-Enterprise Synergy:** The reported gap between academic research and industrial application 32 can be addressed by proactively seeking industry partners, especially for valorization-focused calls like PNARDI's NEFZAOUIA sub-programme 13 or the Ministry of Industry's cluster projects.11 Clearly articulating pathways to innovation and technology transfer in the proposal is crucial.
* **Researcher Supervision and Valorization Challenges:** Issues related to the supervision of young researchers and the valorization of their work have been noted.32 Young researchers should specifically target programs designed for them, such as PNARDI's IBN BATTOUTA sub-programme 13, which emphasizes doctoral training and career initiation. Highlighting strong mentorship plans within proposals can also be beneficial.
* **Limited Data Access or Analytical Issues:** Some researchers report difficulties with access to data or resources for complex data analysis.33 While the guide does not delve into specific solutions like Open Science practices or AI tools 33, proposals can highlight plans for robust data management, ethical data sharing where appropriate, or collaborations that provide access to necessary analytical capabilities.

By demonstrating an awareness of the broader research environment and showing how the proposed project is designed to navigate or even contribute to alleviating some of these challenges (e.g., a project under IBN BATTOUTA directly addresses support for young talent, potentially countering "brain drain" concerns 32), a proposal can gain additional strategic relevance.

**Table 3: Checklist for Proposal Submission to Moroccan Funders**

| Category | Checkpoint | Yes/No/NA | Notes/Action Needed |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **I. Strategic Alignment & Relevance** | Is the project title clear and reflective of the research? |  |  |
|  | Is the research problem clearly defined and significant? |  |  |
|  | Is the project explicitly linked to a Moroccan national priority or a specific strategic research axis mentioned in the call? (e.g., PNARDI themes 3, PHC themes 9) |  |  |
|  | Does the proposal clearly articulate the potential socio-economic impact and contribution to innovation in Morocco? 2 |  |  |
|  | Is the proposal tailored to the specific funder and call, avoiding generic language? 19 |  |  |
| **II. Scientific Merit & Methodology** | Is the literature review comprehensive, current, and does it clearly identify a research gap? 18 |  |  |
|  | Are the aims and objectives clear, logical, and achievable (SMART)? 18 |  |  |
|  | Is the methodology robust, well-described, innovative (if applicable), and appropriate for the objectives? 18 |  |  |
|  | Are potential challenges and alternative strategies addressed? 20 |  |  |
|  | Are expected outcomes clearly stated? 18 |  |  |
|  | Is there a clear plan for dissemination of results? |  |  |
| **III. Team, Resources & Feasibility** | Are the PI's and team members' qualifications, expertise, and roles clearly demonstrated and appropriate for the project? 20 |  |  |
|  | If a collaborative project (especially international), is the complementarity of partners and management plan clear? 5 |  |  |
|  | Is institutional support confirmed (e.g., letter from Head of Institution, if required)? 16 |  |  |
|  | Are necessary resources (equipment, facilities) available or planned for acquisition? 20 |  |  |
|  | Is the project timeline realistic and well-defined? |  |  |
| **IV. Budget** | Is the budget detailed, justified for each item, and directly linked to project activities? 25 |  |  |
|  | Are all costs eligible according to the funder's specific guidelines? (Check for ineligible items, e.g.9) |  |  |
|  | Is the budget realistic for the proposed work and within any stated limits? 26 |  |  |
|  | Are indirect cost policies understood and correctly applied? 25 |  |  |
| **V. Presentation & Compliance** | Does the proposal adhere to all formatting requirements (font, margins, spacing, etc.)? 21 |  |  |
|  | Is the proposal within the specified page limits for each section and the overall document? 21 |  |  |
|  | Are all required sections of the application form complete? 31 |  |  |
|  | Are all necessary annexes and supporting documents included and correctly formatted? |  |  |
|  | Has the proposal been carefully proofread for spelling, grammar, and clarity? 21 |  |  |
|  | Is the language clear, concise, professional, and persuasive? 21 |  |  |
|  | Is the submission being made through the correct portal/method as specified in the call? 14 |  |  |
|  | **Has the final deadline been verified and is the submission planned well in advance?** 11 |  |  |

This checklist serves as a final review tool. Addressing each point systematically can significantly enhance the quality, completeness, and compliance of the research proposal, thereby improving its prospects for a favorable evaluation.

## **VIII. Conclusion: Contributing to Morocco's Research Future**

**A. Recap of Key Success Factors**

Securing research funding in Morocco, particularly within the context of recent national initiatives for 2024-2025 and beyond, requires a multifaceted approach. Success hinges on the ability to convincingly demonstrate robust scientific merit, ensuring that the proposed research is original, methodologically sound, and poised to make a genuine contribution to knowledge. Equally critical is the explicit and clear alignment of the project with Morocco's national strategic priorities and the specific thematic areas outlined by funding bodies such as MESRSI, CNRST, and the OCP Foundation through programs like PNARDI.

Beyond academic contribution, proposals must increasingly articulate their potential for tangible socio-economic impact and innovation, showcasing how research outcomes can translate into practical benefits for Moroccan society and its economy. Meticulous adherence to all funder guidelines—from eligibility and formatting to budgeting and submission procedures—is non-negotiable. For projects involving international collaboration, the strength, complementarity, and effective management of the partnership are also paramount. By thoughtfully addressing these interconnected elements, researchers can significantly enhance the competitiveness of their proposals.

**B. The Role of Researchers in National Development**

The landscape of research and innovation in Morocco is one of dynamic evolution and strategic ambition. National programs like PNARDI 2025-2028 6 and the vision of institutions such as the OCP Foundation, which sees R&D as a catalyst for structural change and societal progress 2, underscore the vital role attributed to the scientific community.

Researchers in Morocco are not merely seekers of knowledge but are pivotal actors in the nation's journey towards sustainable development, economic diversification, and enhanced global competitiveness. By successfully securing funding and diligently conducting high-quality, strategically relevant research, they contribute directly to addressing national challenges, fostering innovation, developing human capital, and strengthening Morocco's position within the global knowledge economy. Each well-crafted proposal, each rigorously executed project, and each impactful discovery represents a step forward in this collective endeavor. The commitment to excellence and strategic relevance in research is, therefore, a commitment to shaping a more prosperous and resilient future for Morocco.

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