



How to write a research proposal

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Introduction

An attractively prepared research proposal is crucial for achieving sufficient resources to conduct a successful project or study. Funding agencies that sponsor research use a proposal as the basis for making their funding decisions. Some agencies request a two-step proposal; the first is a brief plan of the project, and, when accepted, a more detailed proposal has to be submitted. Funding agencies often supply an application kit that includes the forms to be completed and a specific format for organising the content of the proposal.¹ The ethics committee requires a research plan to be able to judge whether the intended project is ethically acceptable.²

There is considerable similarity in the type of information that is expected in research proposals, and in this article we will describe several of these important aspects of writing a research proposal.

Abstract

A structured written research proposal is a necessary requirement when making an application for research funding or applying to an ethics committee for approval of a research project. A proposal is built up in sections of theoretical background; aim and research questions to be answered; a description and justification of the method chosen to achieve the answer; awareness of the ethical implications of the research; experience and qualifications of the team members to perform the intended study; a budget and a timetable.

This paper describes the common steps taken to prepare a written proposal as attractively as possible to achieve funding.

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Key words

Research proposal; methodology; ethics committee; funding; budget

Synopsis

A proposal often begins with a summarised overview of the proposed research project. It should not be more than one full page stating the study objectives, sample and size, methods to be used, duration and evaluation methods.

Background to the problem

In the background section of the proposal, the researcher should make the reader aware of what has already been done and what is already known in the area. A description of how the literature search and assessment has been performed is important, as the result should be what the intended research is built upon and provide justification for the present study. It should strengthen the author's argument concerning the significance of the study, and point out how the proposed research will augment that knowledge and why this is important. Not all studies result in an immediate product or change of praxis, but may constitute a little brick in the building of something bigger, which hopefully is supported by the funding agency. The problem that the intended research will

address is ordinarily identified early in the proposal and should be stated in such a way that its importance is apparent to the reviewer, although the researcher should not promise more than can be produced.^{2–4}

The background should demonstrate the researcher's command of current knowledge in the field, forming a logical reason ending in the research question. A broad and complex problem is unlikely to be solvable or manageable and is likely to be deemed unethical to conduct. If relevant, include the possible theory applicable in the field so that the intended study can be put into a research context. Whenever the theoretical backgrounds of the study, existing knowledge, or the researcher's experience permit an explicit prediction of outcomes, these predictions should be included in the proposal.

Significance of the problem

The proposal must clearly describe how the proposed research will make a contribution to existing knowledge and why it is important. Funding bodies are interested in developing knowledge based in particular areas and not in the

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