

# **CIRAS TALK #2: GRANT PROPOSAL WRITING**

## **Planning a Grant Proposal**

**1) How does one self-assess when one is ready for that step in our academic careers where we can/should be applying for grants? At what level should our ideas and academic reputation arrive for us to hope to venture well-armed into this?**

Broadly within the international grants that come from the UK, a particular program will have one or more Principal Investigators (PIs) who lead the grant proposal, shape it, or are the main point of contact, and a lot of judgment or success will be based on the PI's ability or capacity to manage a grant. This is therefore someone senior, with experience of managing grants and big projects, and institutional/disciplinary backing of their peers. More importantly, these are the people who are responsible for the fund and will be answerable to audits and other bodies engaged in the project, even tangentially.

Secondly, we have the role of the Co-Investigator (Co-I) – supporting the PI to deliver the program. They are not the ones who are primarily communicating with the research funders but they play a big role in managing the project. Depending on the grant, of course, but the Co-I is a great role to start with if you are unsure of yourself. Here you can gain experience in proposal writing, taking on responsibilities in grant management in collaboration with others in the team. More often, you can only be in a PI position if you have previously had Co-I experience.

Depending on the scale and the size of the project, there are a number of people who are involved in the project- it could be an analyst, someone who looks at data analysis/literature review; researchers doing data collection or review, or even an expert outside your institution. So there are a lot of starting positions within the team, and being part of any will help you understand the working of the project better. You can then bring this to your grant proposal writing later on.

There are basically two ends of the spectrum. This assessment of capability depends greatly on the nature of funding and the amount of money which is being sought. For small grants, you can do the independent work all by yourself (with no other colleagues). Small scale projects could also be sort for parts of the project, such as to facilitate your travel to a place present something at a conference, pilot study or prototype etc. On the extreme end of the spectrum, where there are multi-stakeholder projects, a Government Agency, Private Consultants, or the UN Body is involved. These projects are more massive in nature and require a more capable leadership at the helm.

**2) Are there different types of grants? If so, what are they? And could you tell us whatever you can about the distinguishing specifics of each?**

International funding bodies include-

- 1) The classic, big Academic grant programs which requires a principal investigator, probably also a bunch of partners in different countries, and goals with both academic values.
- 2) The policy focused grants- These come from the non-academic institutions; for example- International Institution of Environment and Development- They fund a lot of academic research on policy outcomes.

3) Foundations and trusts- Smaller grants are available from small organizations or even universities that are less focused on developing a big project team and more focused on doing an individual research project with independent goals. For example-International Peace Research Association is a Scandinavian organization funding peace projects.

A: One useful tip I would give is to subscribe to the organizational emails where they usually circulate these call for proposal and funding opportunities.

**1) JGU Research Grants-** For small projects, this is a great starting opportunity. It's in-house and easy to apply for our faculty members and the university has been extremely generous with these grants. So it is a great means of funding small scale projects.

## **2) NGOs & Charities-**

- Organizations like Wellcome Trust, Oxfam International (mostly for humanitarian and related projects)
- Non-Government Organizations- They typically fund a lot of projects, particularly in Social Sciences.
  - Commonwealth Foundation- They focus a lot on governance, civil society, democratic values. Majority of the funds come from the UK, Canada, Australia, even India and Sri Lanka.
  - Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Public Health)- They give out institutional rewards.
  - Ford Foundation
  - Social Science Research Council (SSRC) (Based in New York)- Gives out a lot of research grants in the area of Social Sciences. It is a 'go-to' for anyone who wishes to collaborate with an American partner.
  - Seva Foundation- Mental Health Issues, Child Psychology, and related areas.
  - Aga Khan Foundation is a private, not-for-profit international development agency.
  - South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics (SANDEE)-
  - British Council- Social impact

The following are the grants from Multi-Lateral Agencies and Development Aid Agencies-

- USAID
- United States India Educational Foundation (USIEF)- Fulbright scholarship and fellowships. Enables American scholars to come to India and Indian Scholars to visit the United States.
- UKAID- Development and Growth Economics (International Growth Centre). It is directed by both- LSE and Oxford in the UK and their India partner is ISI.
- UK India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI)- JGU has won a number of UKIERI grants.

### **European Aid Agencies-**

These are a few Federal Funded Development Agencies that wholeheartedly support research ideas and projects, particularly from developing countries.

- Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)
- International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
- GIZ
- European Commission- Current Framework Programme under which European commission funds projects is called the FP8; 8<sup>th</sup> round of European commission to fund. It is also known as Horizon 2020. It lapses by the end of this year. It had a budget of \$70 billion to fund research projects. Horizon Europe is set for the next year.
- The Marie Skłodowska Curie Fellowships- Also funds projects dealing with science, law, and technology and related policy.

### **National Grants-**

- Government of India- It might be a bit challenging to get these grants as there is a regulatory hurdle there. They require an accreditation which JGU does not presently have, however, this should be overcome soon possibly by the IoE.

- Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)- It funds an organization in India which is called the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). It has a number of opportunities. It broadly divided into two-three heads.

- Major Research Grant- They are typically two years long, between 5-15 Lakh

- Minor Research Grant- They are typically 6-12 months and they have to be within 5 Lakh

ICSSR also gives grants of 50-60 Lakh over two years for larger projects, however, they are a bit more careful with these funds. Interestingly, pretty much all topics and thematic areas within social sciences are supported by ICSSR, that includes sociology, anthropology, psychology, cultural studies, media, gender studies, economics, management, etc.

- Impactful Policy Research in Social Science (IMPRESS)- It aims to encourage social science research in policy-relevant areas so as to provide vital inputs in policy-formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

- University Grants Commission (UGC) has approved a new scheme - Scheme for Trans-disciplinary Research for India's Developing Economy (STRIDE). Private universities may not be eligible for funding, however, if you have colleagues and friends who are a part of public institutions/state universities/central government universities, then you can work collaboratively.

### **3) For beginners, how do we get started with the search –looking for the institutions, funding bodies, or calls that go out for applications?**

People should generally be familiar with the funding organizations in their disciplines, check their websites for open funding calls, social media, and networking, of course, is extremely essential! Networking also helps to know when a call is about to go out, which gives you just that little bit of extra time to prepare a robust and competitive proposal. So definitely, networking does give you the advantage of time. Collaboration and networking is the prime key. Look out for people who are a part of institutions who are eligible and then you are good to go.

### **4) If you were to make a checklist, what would you put in a list that checks all boxes for the right kind of grant?**

- o Skillset and research interests – do yours and your team's match what the body is asking for; be careful not to over-commit or over-promise.

- o Time commitment and if it matches your professional development trajectory – running a grant project with timely deliverables takes a lot of your time, make sure you are in a position that where you have your priorities set and you don't burn out. Many scholars apply for several grants at the given time, and if you get more than one, you should be judicious about whether you want to bring it on your plate. While it may be a great opportunity, do you have the time and energy to carry both forward along with your other academic commitments.

- o Feasibility in terms of time and monetary requirements – this is where budgeting and timeline deliverables need to be well thought out, and you must also account for things not going to plan and the costs, in terms of time and money, for plan Bs.

- o Smaller grants are fantastic to get started – if you are able to show that you have managed smaller grants, then it builds confidence in the panel that you will be able to manage larger funds.

- o You should be convinced that it is a competitive proposal, you need to be reasonably confident of your content and the team – so choose the right people and as many as you need to get the project done.

- o The project outcomes be convincing and measurable- The donor agency should be able to see that it is a scalable idea and measurable in terms of impact assessment

- o You should be able to provide a framework of work distribution and time management

o Collaboration – you need to consider your collaborators carefully. The agency will trust the project if you are working with known collaborators that the agency is familiar with. That being said, do not go for joint grants too early, make sure you start scaffolding the small grants.

**5) If you are creating a team for the grant research, what are the key skills you would be mindful of incorporating (as general essentials)?**

Know your team players, you want to make sure that you are partnering and relying on the right people who will deliver. So knowing who you can trust is the key. Early planning will be useful for having a successful plan in the longer run.

Networking is very important. If someone has been through that process in the past, then there is a lot of important stuff that they can share with you. Understanding the mission and the values of the organization are of great significance. The call for applications would be aligned with the mission and the values of the organization. Someone who has been either a part of that organization or has been a beneficiary of grants from them would be able to articulate it in a wonderful way!

Team skills-

o Subject area expertise is extremely crucial, a fixed defined deliverable, the outcome, and a timeline.

o You need to have people in the proposal preparation stage who understand project management skills. Grant proposals are successful when they are not just prepared and planned properly, but when they are packaged properly as well. The reader should get the right information on the right page, which means, it needs to be structured properly with concrete timelines. Look out for people who have done time-bound research in the past.

o Either the PI or the Co-PI should have a good handle on the budgeting. You can have a terrific proposal, academic rigor with a great idea, however, one needs to plan the budget carefully.

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# **Writing the Proposal**

## **1) Do you suggest we write to the grant panel to get a better idea about what they are looking for?**

Yes, definitely! if you write, you should definitely go through the organization website thoroughly. And quite often, if you contact the panel members, they will NOT provide you with more information as compared to the website information. This is so because, they do not wish to give any competitive advantage to anyone. But there are other units that can clarify some specific doubts you have, or answer some questions about the call.

The best people you can talk to could be- others who have been awarded similar grants. There are many organizations that fund multiple projects, so you reach out to someone at another university who has been awarded with the similar grant. You can have a formal chat with them and you will be able to see exactly what the funder is looking for.

There are a lot similar things that have to be put into each grant proposal. For instance, in the UK Research Council, there are two blind rounds of review. They are as follows-

- Administrative Checkbox (Non-Academic)
- Academic Peer Review Panel- Anonymous peer reviews

Thus, by contacting a person who has been awarded a grant by that particular funding body can tell you about the stages and the necessary processes. Also, have a look at the past proposals.

Reach out to the agency if there is an opportunity to do it, however, it is highly unlikely that you will be able to do reach out to the panel. Medium to large scale funding agencies have a very interesting 'meet' scheduled for interested parties as part of the pre-submission stage. They actually do a kick-off session, sometimes called a conference call with applicants, to answer questions from the applicants regarding the proposal. There are two benefits-

- 1) It helps you understand what's there between the lines of the document which the agency has already circulated.
- 2) More importantly, it helps you understand the nature of the competition.

## **2) What are your top tips to ensure a compelling grant proposal?**

- 1) Meet all the requirements (it is missed so often!)
- 2) Grant management and academic expertise, credibility within the team. You can prove to the funder that there are your team members who will be able to project manage even if it is not yourself.
- 3) Pay attention to the budget (it is incredibly time-consuming and it needs a lot of institutional approvals)- give time to your budget.
- 4) You need to show that you have considered risks and ethics regardless of whether you are asked to do so or not. This goes a long way in showing that you have fully considered the impact of your research.
- 5) Please map out everything you can about the objectives of the funding agency and how your proposal meets their goals (for example- what is this agency about, what kind of institutions/individuals have been awarded these grants in the past, what has been the outcome of that research).
- 6) Try to map out your own competency with the agency's mission and values.
- 7) Share details of your organizational strengths and achievements (accreditation/certifications)
- 8) Please review everything many times!!
- 9) Pay attention to the small grant opportunities.

### **3) How do you go about evaluating your grant proposal? Is it worth hiring a third party agency to do that?**

I have never done it and don't know any of my colleagues that have gone to a paid third party to review the proposal. But it may be a normal thing for different types of grants and different subject areas. I would recommend that you should rely on your peer network more for an accurate and constructive feedback.

A paid third party is not recommended. If you are a part of a university, you don't need to spend money like that. You will need the money for many different things as you go ahead. You will not involve someone else to write your paper, so why someone to review it for you. You are fortunate enough to be at a privileged place like JGU, where you have the Centre for Writing Studies. So, there is a lot of support provided to you by the university. You can even reach out to people outside your school or even outside your university if you do not have that technical competence.

### **4) What have been your learnings from any complications or failures you have faced when making the applications? In short, did you encounter any problems in the process and what did you do, or now think could have done, to overcome it?**

- Check for internal deadlines, particularly if it is a big grant. You tend to miss the internal deadlines, as you don't know about them as they are not advertised on the website or in various email chains. Personally speaking, I have lost out on grant opportunities because of it, despite having written a really extensive proposal.
- Trusting who you work with. Have high hopes and low expectations with regard to how much time you can expect your team members can put in. This is something that isn't guaranteed, particularly in overworked situations. So make sure you account for this in time and planning of the project.
- Make enough time for your budget planning as well as the writing part. Ensure you take into account things going wrong and keep a bit of a buffer fund.
- A research project is not easy to manage. You need to give it time, academically, strategically, institutionally, and administratively.
- When we got started in some of these funded projects, I rather lost focus after a few months. But a lesson learned is to not get distracted with multiple things after the funding is through. Prioritize your work and the plans.