



# SSHRC PROPOSALS

## 41 Ways to Annoy the Committee

### SSHRC Instructions on Preparing Descriptions of Proposed Research, Budget and Other Required Material

(Information from various university web sites, SSHRC and The Art of Grantsmanship by Jacob Kraicer)

#### General Presentation

Descriptions of your proposed research, budget and other required material should be attached to your grant application printout as additional pages. Please ensure your attachments are presented according to these specifications:

- ⇒ Typed or word processed, single-sided, on 8 1/2" x 11" (21.5 cm x 28 cm) white paper.
- ⇒ Single spaced, with no more than six lines of type per inch.
- ⇒ Body text in a minimum 12 pt font or 10 characters per inch.
- ⇒ All margins set at a minimum of 3/4" or (1.87 cm).
- ⇒ Your name appears within the set margins at the top corner of every page.
- ⇒ Pages numbered consecutively following the last page of your application printout.



#### 1.1 FIRST PAGE/TITLE PAGE

Fill in completely and accurately and ensure that all signatures are obtained (up to 10% of applications have something missing from this page!).

- ⇒ The **TITLE** of your project is important.
- ⇒ It sets the **first impression**
- ⇒ It is often used, with the Abstract, to route the application to the appropriate review committee(s) and reviewers.
- ⇒ It should be descriptive, specific and appropriate, and should reflect the importance of the proposal. But it should not be so specific as to require changes with each renewal (it helps to maintain the same title for renewals). One way to achieve this is to have a two party title; the first general and the second more specific).



#### 1.2 ABSTRACT/SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL—*Maximum one page*

THE ABSTRACT SHOULD SERVE AS A SUCCINCT AND **ACCURATE DESCRIPTION** OF THE PROPOSAL EVEN WHEN IT IS SEPARATED FROM THE APPLICATION. **IT MUST STAND ON ITS OWN.**

The one page summary **must be written for a general audience.** It will be used to publicize your research if you are funded. Ideally you should be able to

The one page summary **must be written for a general audience**. It will be used to publicize your research if you are funded. Ideally you should be able to state the character and purpose of your proposed program of research in the opening sentence. Use the abstract to pitch the argument for importance and originality—this is usually a missed opportunity. Get the committee excited. In the one page summary you must clearly describe the following elements of your grant in general language:

1. The purpose of the research.
2. The hypotheses, objectives, approaches, research plan.
3. State specific aims.
4. The context for the research—describe concisely the research design and methods.
5. The expected impact/significance of the research.

Do not cut and paste from your introduction. Use the summary to locate your work in your field.

- ⇒ This is probably **THE MOST IMPORTANT** section in your application
- ⇒ Take it seriously. **Write it last**. Work on it extensively after the bulk of the proposal has been fine-tuned. It is the first part that is read, and this sets the first impression. It **MUST** be understood by both experts in your field and by “generalists”.
- ⇒ The primary reviewer(s) read the entire application for which they are responsible, but others on the review committee may only read the abstract. The abstract may be the only part of the application that is read by all the members of the grants committee who are not primary reviewers, even though ALL members have to give their independent scores (given equal weight to the score of the primary reviewer(s)).
- ⇒ Review committee members often study the application (and prepare written reports, if required) weeks or months before the meetings. They then quickly review all the abstracts just before the meetings in order to recall the essentials.
- ⇒ Make reference to how the proposal is directly related to the mission and objectives (themes) of the agency to which application is to be made.
- ⇒ Great way to locate your work in your field.
- ⇒ Tell why the proposal is unique, important, significant, and worth supporting.
- ⇒ Stay within the allotted space, but it is not necessary to fill this space.



## Program of Research

Use the following headings, describe the program in enough detail, to allow informed assessment by qualified assessors. Applicants may want to address the comments they received from the adjudication committee or assessors on a previous grant application. However, the current committee will not be sent the earlier application and they are not bound by the comments and recommendations of another committee.



### 1.3 PROPOSED RESEARCH—Detailed Description—*Maximum 6 pages*

Write your proposal in clear, plain language. Not all committee members will have an intimate knowledge of the subject matter of all proposals, so avoid jargon and highly technical writing. Try to anticipate and answer any questions that assessors or adjudication committee members could raise. Have your draft read by a colleague and/or a grants facilitator for suggestions on how to strengthen your proposal.

your proposal.

Start with the 'punch line' and then go on to expand and extrapolate—never the reverse.

### 1.3.1 Objectives

- ⇒ Begin with the stated hypothesis, and tie this in with the long-term objectives.
- ⇒ Convey the scope of your project, and establish in principle how the work you intend to carry out distinguishes itself from work carried out by others in the field.
- ⇒ This distinction can then be expanded upon in the section on 'contexts' in which you establish in more detail how your work will fit within the immediate as well as more general intellectual context.



### 1.3.2 Context

- ⇒ Answer the three important questions, (1) what will be learned as a result of your project that we do not already know, (2) why is it worth knowing, (3) how will we know the conclusions are valid?
- ⇒ What are the specific projects, studies and items that will be undertaken in order to fulfill the long term objectives. Put them in logical and sequential order and indicate priorities.
- ⇒ Situate the proposed research in the context of the relevant scholarly literature.
- ⇒ Explain the relationships/relevance of the proposed research to your ongoing research. If the proposal represents a significant change of direction from your previous research, describe how it relates to experiences and insights gained from earlier research achievements.
- ⇒ Explain the importance, originality and anticipated contribution to knowledge of the proposed research.
- ⇒ Describe the theoretical approach or framework (if applicable).

*Note: In explaining the importance, originality and anticipated contribution to knowledge of your research, do not forget to relate this to more general advances in your discipline that your research might make possible, as well as to the relevance your research might have for communities outside the academic world. This connections should be in addition to the anticipated contribution to knowledge your research will make within your own field of specialization. Making these points clearly at this stage can help to set up convincingly the section on 'Communication of Results.'*



### 1.3.3 Methodology

- ⇒ Describe the proposed research strategies/key activities, including methodological approaches and procedures for data collection and analysis, that will be used to achieve the stated objectives.
- ⇒ Justify the choice of methodology and explain the specific instruments or procedures to be used. For example, if you plan to conduct interviews, specify the type of interview to be conducted, the nature of the questions, etc. It is equally important to explain how the data will be analyzed (i.e. techniques to be used and why these techniques are appropriate) so that the committee can clearly understand what real contribution will be made to the advancement of knowledge and is not left with the impression that the proposal is essentially a data-gathering exercise.

*Note: As well as explaining and justifying methodologies more narrowly conceived (which **is** important), this section can be used to: make a clear distinction between work already completed and work remaining to be done; establish a very clear and specific timetable over the three-year period of the grant in terms of*

*between work already completed and work remaining to be done; establish a very clear and specific timetable over the three-year period of the grant in terms of what work will be done, when (and where) - this should be as detailed as possible; establish clearly what work will be done by whom—this is particularly important in terms of establishing the need for graduate research assistants, as well as for Research Time Stipends for yourself and co-investigators.*



#### **1.3.4 COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS**

Outline plans for communicating research results:

- ⇒ Within the academic community (peers, through refereed journals and other appropriate channels); and
- ⇒ Outside the academic community (practitioners, policy makers, etc.)

*Note: This can also include the intention to give papers at conferences. In this case, be very clear about why you have chosen the conferences that you have, the year or years in which you have chosen to go to them, and the benefits that will accrue, either in terms of adducing feedback from various intellectual communities as you approach the task of writing up the final drafts of your research, or in terms of effectively communicating final results to various communities. Committees do not like to fund conferences in the first year and don't put too many in.*



#### **1.4 LIST OF BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

Attach a list of all references cited in your review of relevant literature. SSHRC asks that you only include references for works you have actually cited in your research grant proposal. Do not provide a general list of readings in the field.

*Note: The committee may use your reference list to select external peer reviewers, so be careful.*



**1.5 DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PLAN AND PREVIOUS OUTPUT** *Maximum four pages* - This is your opportunity to make sure that you have communicated all the information about your project. Use it to your fullest advantage as this section is very often not used well.

##### **1.5.1 Description of Team** (if applicable)

Explain why a team approach is appropriate for the proposed research by:

- ⇒ Describing the roles, responsibilities and contributions of the Principal Investigator and each co-investigator and/or collaborator on the team. Make sure that each role is clearly defined.

*Note: for team applications, each individual member's record of research achievement will be evaluated and weighted in proportion to their involvement in the proposed research program)*

##### **1.5.2 Training** (Role of Students)

Clearly describe the specific roles and responsibilities of students and research assistants, indicating the duties they will be undertaking and how these will complement their academic training. Students have to be contributing to the project. The tasks must be level appropriate so think about the role they will play. Never leave blanks in the application.

##### **1.5.3 Previous and On-Going Research Results**

Summarize the results of your most recent and on-going Research Grants

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### 1.6 BUDGET JUSTIFICATION—Funds Requested from SSHRC— *Maximum two pages*

Using the categories listed on the funds requested from SSHRC page, explain how you will use the funds in each budget category to achieve the objectives of the proposed program of research. For example, under the Student and Non-student salaries categories, explain why these people need to be hired to meet the objectives of the research. Applicants are reminded of SSHRC's mandate to provide research opportunities for students. Note that budget costs for research assistants or associates who are not students must be fully justified in terms of the needs of the research. If a budget is well costed and explained the committee will probably fund it. If a budget comes in underfunded they will probably reject it.

### 1.7 COMPETITIVE QUOTES

If you are budgeting for contract consultants under "Professional/technical services" for amounts in excess of \$25,000 you must append two independent cost quotations.



## NOTES

### Note on Recommended External Reviewers

- ◇ Give this some thought. They are often used.
- ◇ They need not be of Nobel Award stature, but they should be recognized experts in the field. Also, they should be tolerant of, and sympathetic to, your hypothesis.
- ◇ They must, of course, have an "arms-length" relation with the applicant.
- ◇ Most agencies will also honour a request by the applicant that certain named reviewers NOT be used. They will usually do this without requiring specific reasons.

### Note on Research Time Stipends

- ◇ The need for these should be established in your Methodologies section.
- ◇ Strong justification is required since this will feed into the overall impression your proposal creates with assessors and the adjudication committee.
- ◇ The Dean has to agree with this request.

### Note on Ethics Clearance

- ◇ Your proposal will need clearance from the University Ethics Committee. **before you can take up a grant awarded by SSHRC.**
- ◇ It is therefore up to you when to apply to the University Ethics Committee for clearance.
- ◇ This can be done after the proposal is submitted to SSHRC, but should be done before announcements of successful proposal are made in the spring.
- ◇ If you do not have ethics clearance by the time your proposal is announced as being successful, the award will be made conditional on obtaining such clearance.



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## ADVICE TO APPLICANTS IN THE STRATEGIC PROGRAMS

Make sure that your objectives correspond to the objectives on these programs. Strategic Grants Programs are different from the Research Grants Programs, having different objectives, criteria and funding mechanisms. Study the criteria of the specific program you are applying and try to tailor your application to correspond to these criteria. In the Strategic Programs, the *social importance of the research and its potential contribution to positive social change are very important*.

An application must demonstrate relevance of the “theme” to which it is submitted.

Strategic Programs favour a multi-disciplinary, team approach and the formation of partnerships and linkages with the “user” community, so try and team up with other researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds and set up partnerships with “users” such as community groups, business enterprises etc.

As the Strategic programs offer project funding rather than funding for broad programs of research, care must be taken to articulate the methodology and analytic framework.

It is especially important in the strategic programs to present a creative dissemination plan in which the research results are to be communicated both within and beyond the university community.



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### **41 Ways to Annoy the Committee** (with permission from Doug Peers—University of Calgary and SSHRC committee member)

The following list is taken from various submitted SSHRC applications.

#### General:

1. Insist on flying business class.
2. Tell the committee that last year’s committee members were complete idiots
3. Claim that nobody has ever done anything vaguely related to your topic before.
4. Invent your own format for providing bibliographical information.
5. Elicit the committees sympathy with tales of how badly treated you are by your home institution.
6. Apply for money to work in an archive that burned down thirty years ago
7. Ask for an \$8000 notebook when all you need is a simple word processor
8. Use the section on extenuating circumstances to bemoan your heavy teaching load.
9. Talk about how badly under funded you have been.
10. Tell the committee all kinds of things about yourself which were not requested and which are not relevant to the application.
11. Do not include anything in your bibliography that has been published in the

- requested and which are not relevant to the application.
11. Do not include anything in your bibliography that has been published in the last ten years.
  12. Misspell the names of your referees.
  13. Ignore the rules on page length, margins and spacing.
  14. Rely exclusively on your spell checker—there is considerable difference between public affairs and pubic affairs.
  15. Show up before the same committee on three different applications (as principal investigator on one and co-investigator on two others).
  16. Spread white-out liberally in the application.
  17. Ignore grammar rules.
  18. Avoid punctuation.
  19. Identify the leading figure in the field as an “idiot”.
  20. Double count publications in your CV.
  21. List publications more than six years old in the CV section of the application.
  22. Include a big name on your team but do not define her/his role.
  23. Avoid paragraphs.
  24. Fail to explain the reasons for your trips to various places or what you are looking for.
  25. Handwrite part of the application.
  26. Under publications, type “too many to list”.
  27. Add up your budget incorrectly.
  28. List Wikipedia as a publication.
  29. Tell the committee that ethics reviews are a waste of time and irrelevant.
  30. Use the application to carry on a polemical fight with your colleagues in other institutions.
  31. Ask for \$250,000 in total support.
  32. Insist that you are waiting for the science to catch up with you.
  33. Insist that there is a conspiracy (feminist, Marxist, right-wing, vegetarian, or all four) out there trying to get you—and then arrange for your external referees to back you up.
  34. Justify your application to interdisciplinary studies on the basis that your colleagues in your discipline are hopelessly out of date.
  35. Invent some new acronyms.
  36. Keep submitting the same application without taking any notice of previous committee’s comments.
  37. Employ a graduate student to help cart books back and forth from the library.
  38. Insist that you have nothing to learn from recent scholarship.
  39. Use as many acronyms as you can but then change their spelling part way through the application.
  40. Dare the committee to reject you and thereby prove that they are a bunch of hide bound bureaucrats doing Ottawa’s dirty work.
  41. Put office furniture into your budget.

