



# A Primer on Grant Writing and Management

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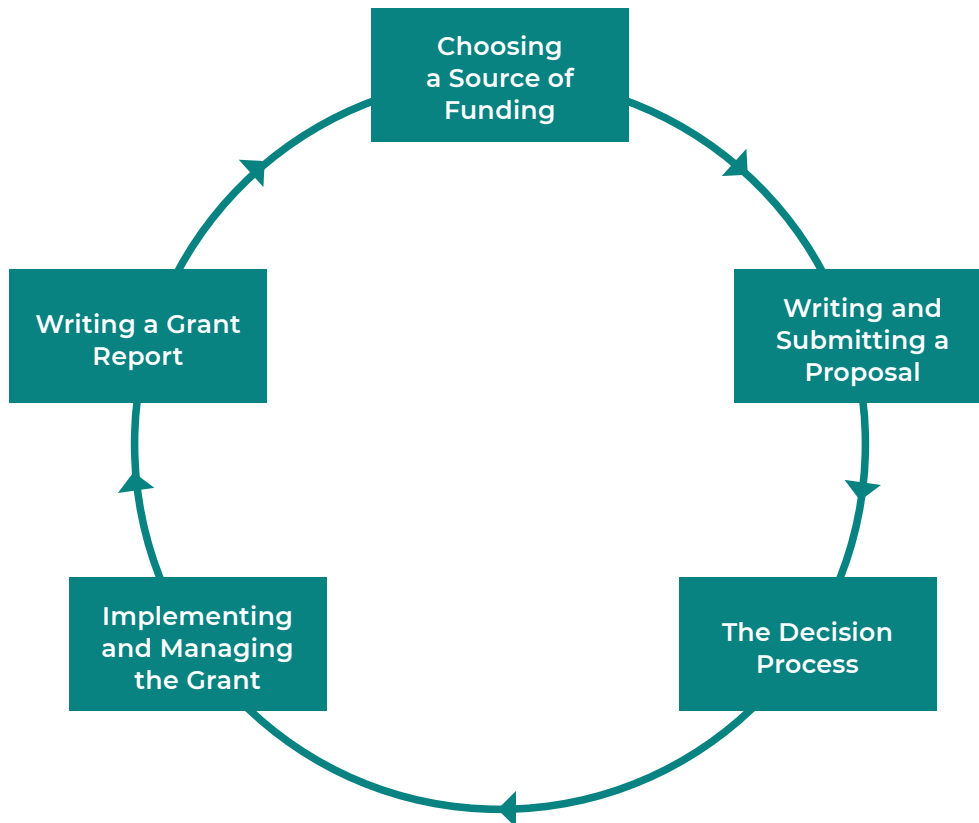
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## The Grant Cycle

The **grant cycle** is a 5-step process.

This document briefly explores each of these stages, covering the sources of funding available to researchers, the basics of writing a proposal, and more.



## The Basic Types of Grants and Proposals

Type of Grant	Description
<b>Project Grants</b>	These are <b>grants tied to the execution of a specific project</b> that has its goals and activities detailed in a grant proposal. In research, they can fund dissertations, research labs, and even multi-institutional collaborations.
<b>Equipment Grants</b>	These are <b>grants used to purchase equipment</b> that is either needed to complete a specific project or upgrade the facilities at an institution.
<b>Travel Grants</b>	These are <b>grants used to finance attending conferences, meeting with regional and international collaborators, and covering other travel expenses.</b>
<b>Scholarships</b>	These are <b>grants that cover at least part of a student's tuition fees and other educational expenses</b> , for example the cost of textbooks and stationery.
<b>Professional Development Grants</b>	These are <b>grants that provide funding for researchers to pursue training, certification, mentorship, and skill-building opportunities</b> more generally.

Type of Proposal	Description
<b>Academic Proposals</b>	These are <b>proposals university departments or course instructors may ask students to create ahead of a thesis or major project.</b> They are usually internal and serve to convince your supervisors or instructors that your thesis or project is well thought out.
<b>Solicited Proposals</b>	These are <b>proposals submitted in response to a specific call by a funding organisation.</b> They usually have a clear criteria about which fields and topics are eligible for support and often appear as Request for Proposals (RFP), Requests for Quotations (RFQ), etc.
<b>Unsolicited Proposals</b>	These are <b>proposals researchers submit to potential funders they believe may be interested in their work, without any request for a proposal</b> from the potential funder.
<b>Pre-proposals</b>	Also known as letters of intent or concept notes, these are <b>brief documents, solicited or not, that aim to attract a funder's interest</b> enough to prompt a request for a full proposal.
<b>Continuation Proposals</b>	These are <b>proposals submitted as part of an ongoing grant to request funding for further work.</b> They are usually closed and do not compete with new proposals for funding.
<b>Renewal Proposals</b>	These are <b>proposals submitted to request further funding for a project whose funding is ending soon.</b> They are usually open and do compete with new proposals for funding.

## Choosing a Source of Funding

Once you have identified a grant to apply for, there are a few key questions to ask yourself. These include:

1. Do the funder's interests and priorities **align with your area of research**?
2. Can you maintain your **research independence** if you accept the grant?
3. Does the funder have any **conflicts of interest** that might compromise your work?
4. Will you be able to publish **sensitive or proprietary research** financed by the grant?
5. If the grant requires you to collaborate with international researchers, are the terms of the relationship **equitable**?
6. Does the funder's work and mission **align with your values**?



## The Parts of a Research Grant Proposal

Funders usually provide detailed guidance on what to include in your research proposal and how to structure it into sections.

However, there are a few common elements found in many research proposals that researchers new to proposal writing should know.

The following section of this document introduces these sections.

### The Cover Page

The **cover page** of your proposal summarises basic administrative and financial data for the project. Including, but not limited to:

1. The **title**
2. The **total project cost or total requested funds**
3. The **principal investigator's contact information**
4. Institutional and ethics **authorisations**

Funders will usually state exactly what to include, and the cover page may be autogenerated from the online forms you fill out while submitting your proposal.

### The Project Summary

The **project summary** is like an abstract in a research article. It is a brief and selective elevator pitch that explains why your research deserves funding and support in 1-2 paragraphs. It explains:

1. **What you are aiming to do** by summarising your research questions and research objectives.
2. **How you plan to do it** by summarising the approach and methodology you will use to answer your questions.
3. **Why it is important and impactful** by providing context for your work and explaining the significance of its potential results.

### The Background and Significance

The **background and significance** usually serves as the **introduction** of your proposal, it sets the scene for your work and may include:

1. A **big picture statement** that captures what is motivating your work
2. A **critical and selective literature review**
3. A **summary of previous results and preliminary data**
4. A **clearly articulated problem statement and research question**
5. A **compelling description of the significance of your research**

## The Goals, Objectives and Hypotheses

The **research goals, objectives, and hypotheses** outline **concretely** what your research aims to accomplish. The section typically consists of:

1. The **goals or aims**. These describe what you hope to achieve in your research project and tend to be broad and far-reaching.
2. The **objectives**. These break down your goals into actionable research outcomes. They often begin with a verb, e.g. “...to investigate or determine or assess.”
3. The **hypotheses**. These state the specific conjectures or ideas that will be examined in your research. They should be specific and testable.

## The Research Design and Methodology

The **research design and methodology section**, sometimes called the research plan or approach, describes the activities you will take to pursue your objectives. It will usually include:

1. An overview and justification of your **research design**.
2. A list of the **research methods** you will use during your project.
3. A list of the **research outputs** you plan to create by the end.
4. A confirmation that you have all the relevant **ethics clearances**.
5. A **workplan** that presents a timetable or schedule of your activities.

## The Citations and References

The conventions and rules for **citations and references** are the same as for regular academic papers. In general, you should:

1. Avoid lengthy lists of unnecessary citations.
2. Include important papers in your field if they are relevant to your proposed work, as the proposal reviewers will expect to see these.
3. Follow the proposal's guidelines on citation style, and if these are not provided use the conventional style in your field.

## Resources, Equipment and Facilities

Some organisations will want to know whether the **resources, equipment, and facilities** at the institutions where you and your collaborators are based might uniquely position you to conduct your research.

For example, your proposal may seem more promising if your institution has state of the art instruments or is well known for having leading experts in your field of study.

## Personnel and Collaborators

You will usually be asked to list the **personnel and collaborators** working on your project. The list will typically include:

- Their **institutional affiliations**
- Their **contact information**
- Their **roles and responsibilities** in the project
- Brief **biographies** for each collaborator.

As a best practice, you should get the explicit consent of your collaborators before including their information in a grant proposal.

## Financial Information

Most proposals require you to submit detailed **financial information** for the project. This will usually include:

1. A detailed **research budget** accounting for your equipment, travel, lab and personnel costs.
2. A list of **other sources of funding** you have received or applied to support the proposed research project.

## Risks, Assumptions, Contingency Plans

In this section, you may have to describe:

1. The **main assumptions** underpinning your research.
2. The **risks** that might impact your ability to successfully execute your research project and achieve your stated objectives.
3. The **alternative approaches** and contingencies you will use to help minimise or eliminate the risks.

For example, if your research plan assumes you'll have access to an area but there is a risk of violence, how will you mitigate that risk?

## The Evaluation Plan

The **evaluation plan** describes how you will monitor your research progress, ensure activities remain on schedule, and guarantee that objectives are met.

**Measurable objectives** and a **well-developed workplan** will be useful here, since they will help you decide whether each objective is complete and identify when it should be completed by.

Your funder may also require a formal **monitoring and evaluation plan**, in which case they will likely provide you with guidelines and templates.



## Tips for Proposal Writing

Different funders will have different expectations about how long research grant proposals should be, what they should include, and how they should be organised.

However, there are a few tips below that you can use to improve the chances that you receive the grant you're applying for.

### Strengthen Your Proposal By...

- 1. Establishing the value and significance of your work**
  - Relate your research to your funder's interests and priorities
  - Explain why your work matters to science and society at large
  - Link your project's big picture significance to specific project activities
- 2. Writing a clear problem statement**
  - Define the specific problem or gap your research addresses
  - Explain why your approach to the problem is original
  - Justify why the problem is worth tackling in the first place
- 3. Adopting clear and answerable questions and hypotheses**
  - State your research questions and hypotheses clearly and precisely
  - Choose only answerable questions and testable hypotheses
- 4. Selecting methods appropriate to your research objectives**
  - Ensure your experiments and methods can achieve your objectives.
- 5. Matching your budget and timelines to the scope your project**
  - Avoid estimating costs and timelines that are not realistic for the research activities you plan to undertake
- 6. Proposing research you are well equipped to perform**
  - Limit the research activities to only those you and your collaborators have the skills and credentials to complete
- 7. Being brief and concise**
  - Keep your research proposal brief and to the point, avoid adding irrelevant information to any of the sections you are asked to submit
- 8. Editing your work and following guidelines**
  - Edit your proposal for grammatical errors and factual inconsistencies
  - Follow the guidelines strictly to ensure your proposal isn't disqualified

## Tips for Implementing and Managing a Grant

**Implementing and managing a grant** means honoring the commitments in your research proposal about **what you will do** during your project and **how much it will cost**. To make this as easy as possible you should:

1. Follow your budget and workplan
2. Get approval for any changes
3. Keep copies of key documents
4. Maintain good financial records
5. Manage different grants separately
6. Hold regular reviews of your activity and spending



## An Introduction to Grant Reporting

Using the tips described earlier to implement and manage your grant will help you with the last stage of the grant cycle: **reporting** on how you have used your grant and what you have achieved.

In general, the reports you write will fall into one of three groups:

1. Mid-project **progress reports**
2. End-project **financial reports**
3. End-project **non-financial reports**

### Mid-Project Progress Reports

Some funders may require you to give **brief scheduled updates during your project** on whether you are on schedule, what you have spent to date, and how much grant money you have left.

These reports may be expected after a certain amount of time has passed (for example, in the middle of your grant term) or after certain milestones (for example, completing data collection).

Always carefully read your grant agreement and consult with your funder to make sure you understand your reporting requirements.

### End-Project Financial Reports

After your grant comes to an end, you will need to write a detailed report on how you spent your grant money. This may include:

1. An **itemised list detailing grant expenditures**
2. A **comparison of the final costs and the proposed budget**
3. Copies of **receipts and invoices** for grant expenditures

Some organisations will ask you to return unspent and uncommitted money. Others will withhold final payment until they receive a report. Plan ahead and only commit money you know you will have access to.

### End-Project Non-Financial Reports

Research grants are awarded with the hope that their recipients will accomplish certain scientific objectives. At the end of your grant, you will likely need to report on the outcomes of your research. This may include:

1. A **comparison of the findings and outcomes of your research with the goals and objectives** in your original proposal.
2. A list of **research outputs** including journal articles, conference proceedings, and possibly public engagement activities.
3. An **explanation of remaining tasks that would benefit from further funding**, if the grant gives you the opportunity to apply for a continuation or renewal grant.

These training materials are provided as part of the Mawazo Learning Exchange, a professional development platform for African researchers. The Mawazo Learning Exchange is a programme of the Mawazo Institute, a non-profit research organisation based in Nairobi, Kenya. Mawazo's mission is to support the next generation of female thought leaders and scholars in Africa, and get policymakers and the public engaged with their research.



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