AFRICAN RESEARCHER TRAINING ACADEMY

Module 8: Unlocking Research Funds: Mastering the Art of Finding Grants and Writing Winning Research Proposals

Tuesday, 29 July 2025 | 11:00 AM to 13:00 PM

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Learning Objectives

- By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

  - Identify and evaluate suitable grant opportunities that align with your research goals, expertise and institutional capabilities.

  - Understand the different components of grant proposals and how to structure them effectively.

  - Understanding the scope of work for developing a funding proposal that meet funders' criteria.

Module Outline: 1

1. Introduction

- Team introductions; Module focus and objectives; Participant experience – poll; Grant writing challenges (Mentimeter); Reflection and alignment

2. Finding Grant Opportunities

Types of funding sources; Where to find funding opportunities

3. Finding Grant Opportunities

Eligibility & alignment assessment; Breakout: ToR review exercise; Report back on challenges

4. Developing Funding Proposals

- Proposal structure & templates; Linking requirements to content; Team roles & institutional processes

5. Budget Development & Justification

- Budget essentials; Line-item justification; Learning from successful examples;

6. Making Submissions

- Compliance documents; Packaging & timing; Submission best practices

7. Wrap Up

- Key takeaways
- Resources overview
- Next steps

Your Experience with Grant Raising

In the chat there is a link to the Mentimeter platform

We invite all of you to open your phones or laptops to participate in this exercise.

Go to https://www.menti.com/alemafizjvzo

Or menti.com and

Enter the Code: 6588 5586

Alternatively, you can scan the QR code to go to the link

Answer the two questions

Exercise

Question 1: How would you rate your experience in grant raising?

Question 2: What challenges, if any, have you experienced in grant raising?

Understanding and finding grant opportunities

Types of Research Funding Opportunities

Many types of funding opportunities are available – Focus is on Research Grant Opportunities

- **Tenders**: formal invite issued by a government body/large corporations asking service providers to submit bids or proposals to provide research services- follows government procurement policy
- **Request for Proposal (RFP):** call for proposal, does not follow procurement policy
- **Request for Quotation (RFQ):** solicits a detailed price for a research study
- **Expression of Interest (EOI):** call for individuals/organisations to indicate interest in participating in a research study. A full proposal is not required.
- **Panelist/Expert call:** invite experts to indicate their qualification, interest, and the charge rate to serve in a panel.

Where to look for funding

- Tender bulletins
- Donor/Institutional websites
- Platforms that list research calls. - Funds for NGOs, Research Professional, eTenders
- Media advertisements
- University Research Grant Offices
- Business Development Programmes
- Referral via networks

What are other ways of finding opportunities?

- *Share your views in the chat*

Who are typical research funders?

Share your responses in the chat

Types of funding sources

- **Public Sector -** Government entities
- **Private Sector -** Corporate Social Investment, research aligned to business interest (CSI)-e.g Banks
- **Non-profit entities (NGOs)** - e.g. Black Sash Trust, Gift of Givers, Tshintsha Amakhaya
- **Philanthropy organisations** – e.g. Nelson Mandela Foundation, DG Murray Trust, Trevor Noah Foundation
- **Regional Institutions** – e.g. Southern African Development Community (SADC), African Union Agencies
- **International donors** – e.g. Mastercard, International Development Research Centre
- **International institutions** - e.g. United Nations Agencies, World Bank, ILO
- **International Government Agencies** – e.g. UK Foreign Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO, UK), European Union (EU), Government Embassies

Evaluating a ToR/Call for Proposal

Getting to know the Terms Of Reference (ToR) (1)

- **What are ToRs and their primary purpose?**
- Define the **complete project framework**: requirements, expectations, scope, and deliverables for the study
- Serve as your **project blueprint**: establishing objectives, roles, responsibilities, evaluation criteria, and available resources.
- A **good ToR** provides clearly detailed parameters for
  - **Project rationale**: Why the study is needed and for whom
  - **Clear objectives**: What the study intends to accomplish
  - **Methodology requirements**: How the work should be conducted
  - **Team specifications**: Who should be involved and their qualifications
  - **Timeline and milestones**: When key deliverables are expected
  - **Resource parameters**: Budget and support available
- **Why ToRs are Your Strategic Advantage:**
- **Project Blueprint:** Provides complete project scope and expected outcomes
- **Evaluation roadmap:** Details exactly how proposals will be assessed and scored
- **Risk mitigation:** Ensures full alignment with funder expectations before you invest time and resources
- **Therefore, ToRs are your competitive intelligence for success…**

International Labour Organization

Request for Proposals (RFP)

Request for Proposals (RFP): Scoping study on Child Labour in Agric
Africa

The ILO DWT/CO in Pretoria requests any interested National or Internati
(External Collaborator) to submit a **technical and financial proposal** (in
undertake the above assignment.

**Deadline: 31 January 2024 23:59 South African Standard Time and prop
be sent to the following email:** lpc_pry@ilo.org

Terms of Reference

1. Background and rationale

In many countries child labour is mainly an agricultural issue. Worldwide seventy per ce
child labour, 112 million children in total, are in agriculture. And for over three quarters
5-11, agriculture is underscored as an entry point to child labour.[1]

Getting to know the Terms Of Reference (ToR) (2)

Funding entities issue ToRs to strategically select partners who can deliver quality results while minimising risk and maximising value

ToRs create a competitive, structured process that ensures fair evaluation and optimal resource allocation.

- Why ToRs are Non-Negotiable for Tender Success

🎯 Strategic Alignment: ToRs reveal the funder's true priorities and pain points-

- Enable you to tailor your approach to their specific needs.

📋 Compliance Assurance: Missing ToR requirements = automatic disqualification.

- Ensure you meet ALL eligibility and technical criteria.

🏆 Competitive Advantage: Understanding evaluation criteria helps you craft winning responses.

- Allows strategic resource allocation to high-scoring sections.

💰 Resource Optimisation: Prevents wasting time on unsuitable opportunities.

- Enables accurate budgeting and timeline planning.

- **Go/No Go Framework for informing your decision to pursue the opportunity ToR**

Key questions to consider	Yes	No
Is there a fit between the donor and your institutional priorities?		
Is there an existing relationship with the client?		
Do you meet their minimum criteria?		
Is there sufficient time to write the proposal?		
Who are you competing against?		
What is motivating the call for proposals?		
Do you have the right resources?		
Can you effectively meet their evaluation criteria?		
Do the project timelines align with your capacity		

WHAT ELSE?

❌ WITHOUT ToR Analysis: Wasted time, poor alignment, rejection
✅ WITH ToR Mastery: Strategic targeting, competitive advantage, success

Unpacking the eligibility criteria and institutional capacity considerations: A check list

Before you start preparing the proposal, Ask these critical questions:

📋 Eligibility Verification

✅ **Research Alignment:** Does your research expertise match the focus area of the Call?

✅ **Institutional Status:** Is your institution eligible? *(e.g., R1 universities only, emerging researchers, specific geographic regions)*

✅ **Career Stage Requirements:** Do you meet experience thresholds? *(e.g., PhD + 5 years, early-career researchers, senior scholars only)*

⏱️ Feasibility Assessment

✅ **Timeline Reality Check:** Can you deliver quality work within their timeframe? *(e.g., 18-month study with 6-month interim report)*

✅ **Budget Constraints:** Does the funding cover your actual costs? *(Note: salary caps, indirect cost limitations)*

✅ **Team Expertise:** Do you have required specialists? *(e.g., statistician, local partners, specific methodological expertise)*

📝 Administrative Requirements

✅ Submission Logistics

- Format: Online portal vs. hard copy submission?
- Deadline: Realistic given your schedule?
- Authorisation: Institutional approval required?

✅ Supporting Documentation

- CVs, institutional letters, reference letters, ethics clearance, budget justifications

- **If ANY critical requirement is unmet → Consider alternatives. If you can demonstrate strong alignment → Proceed strategically**

Unpacking the eligibility criteria and institutional capacity considerations: Criteria for evaluating Bids

competition commission south africa

Private Bag X23, Lynnwood Ridge
0040, South Africa

The evaluation is based on functionality, which will be evaluated using the following criteria and points:

Evaluation Area	Evaluation Criteria	Minimum points	Maximum Points
Project Manager's experience and expertise (in conducting secondary/desktop research)	The Project Manager qualifications - Minimum Honours in Economics, Public Policy, Agricultural Economics, Development studies, Econometrics, Marketing, Accounting, Risk Management = **10 points** **Noncompliance with the above = 0 points**	10	10
	A master's or PhD qualification in Economics, Public Policy, Agricultural Economics, Development studies, Econometrics = **5 points** Bidder to submit copies of the Project Manager qualifications	5	5
	The Project Manager with minimum 5 years' experience in conducting secondary / desktop research. Experience in food value chains and agriculture will be an added advantage. Experience with SMMEs as a target group will be an added advantage. - Minimum 5 years' experience conducting secondary/ desktop research = **10 points** - Minimum 5 years' experience in conducting secondary/ desktop research in agriculture and food value chains = **12 points** - Minimum 5 years' experience in conducting secondary/ desktop research with SMME as a target group = **12 points** - Minimum 5 years' experience in conducting secondary/ desktop research in agriculture and food value chains and SMMEs as a target group = **15 point** - Above 5 years' experience in conducting secondary/ desktop research in agriculture and food value chains and SMMEs as a	10	20

5.	**Experience in managing projects of similar nature.** 1 (Very Poor) = No evidence that bidder has undertaken and managed projects of similar nature. 2 (Poor) = Bidder has successfully undertaken and managed less than five (5) projects of similar nature. 3(Good) =The Bidder has successfully undertaken and managed five (5) to nine (9) similar projects. 4(Good) =The Bidder has successfully undertaken and managed ten (10) to fifteen (15) similar projects. 5(Very Good) = The Bidder has successfully undertaken and managed over fifteen (15) similar projects. The team exceeds the qualifications requirements.						15
	TOTAL						

Unpacking the eligibility criteria and institutional capacity considerations: Criteria for evaluating Bids

Criteria when assessing the bids	Scoring 1-10
Relevance of methodology (budget cost-effective, feasible, relevant, detailed, quality management)	
Quality of research design and workplan	
Provision of documentary evidence (financial statements, profile etc.)	
Service provider profile and experience	
Qualifications and experience of team, including criteria for field workers	
Risk management plan and assessment of mitigation plan with emphasis on Covid 19 risks posed	
TOTAL SCORE	

References	The Bidder must submit two (2) signed Contactable Reference letters confirming (i) successful project completion in conduction secondary/desktop research, (ii) the duration of the project and/or contract; (iii) Contact Person for Reference with Contact Numbers such as telephone and email address Two or more signed Contactable Reference Letters = 10 points. *Noncompliance with the above = 0 points* (Only Reference letters from current and previous clients will be considered, not PO or Appointment letters) *CCSA reserves the right to conduct due diligence in terms of the reference letters submitted*	10	10

Eligibility	To be eligible for funding the: • The principal investigator must be based in a research/academic institution in one of the countries eligible for this call for proposals. These countries are: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda and South Africa. •
Other important information	The team must include at least one policy-maker currently working in the health system at the national or subnational level whose role must be clearly identified in the proposal. • 50% of the core research team must comprise female researchers. • The proposal must put forth a modelling approach that makes the link between a health systems intervention and service delivery related outputs and/or health outcomes towards addressing one of the two overarching questions outlined above.

Evaluating the ToR: Group exercise

Exercise questions: (Breakaway 10 min) Report back what challenges (5 mins)

- You are a researcher assessing whether to pursue a funding opportunity. Your task is to systematically evaluate the ToR to determine eligibility and make a well-informed strategic decision. Consider your own expertise, research interests, and your institution's capacity.
- Reflect on whether you meet the eligibility criteria and whether the opportunity aligns with your skills, resources, and strategic goals.

Phase 1: Individual Assessment (2 minutes) Each participant receives a ToR and completes a Quick Eligibility Scorecard:

- Research alignment (1-5 scale) Does your expertise match the ToR focus area?
- Institutional capacity (1-5 scale) Can your institution meet all requirements?
- Timeline feasibility (1-5 scale) Is the project timeline realistic for quality delivery
- Resource availability (1-5 scale) Do you have access to required resources/team?
- Total Score: ___/20

Phase 2: Small Group Analysis (8 minutes) Groups of 3-4 compare scores and discuss:

- What made you say GO or NO-GO?
- What critical information was missing from the ToR?
- What would make this opportunity more attractive?
- What are the biggest risks you identified?
- What would give you an edge over other applicants?

Developing a Funding Proposal

Best Practices and Common Pitfalls for Each Proposal Section

Introduction: The Funding Imperative

- In research, great ideas are essential, but **funded ideas are transformative**.
- Funding is the key that unlocks research **independence, leadership, and impact**.
- The Opportunity - The NRF alone invested over **R1.1 billion** in research and innovation last year.
- The Challenge - How do you persuade funders that your project is the one to back?
- Today's Goal - To demystify the process and provide practical skills for writing winning proposals.
- Our Aim - To help you turn your compelling research vision into a funded reality.

Agenda - From Blank Page to Winning Proposal

- **Our Goal:** To master the art of writing a compelling research proposal that is clear, feasible, and directly aligned with a funder's priorities.
- **Part 1: The Anatomy of a Proposal:** A deep dive into the core sections, from the Abstract and Problem Statement to the Budget and Dissemination Plan.
- **Part 2: Strategic Writing:** We will cover the best practices and, crucially, the common pitfalls to avoid in each section of your proposal.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: The Golden Rules of Grant Writing

- The single most important rule: **Answer the question the funder is asking.**
- Think of the Call for Proposals as your **exam paper**, *not just a suggestion box for your ideas*.
- Every call is designed to meet the funder's specific strategic goals, priorities, and mission.
- The most common mistake is writing the proposal you want to write, instead of the one the funder has asked for.
- Your proposal must explicitly mirror the call's **language, structure, and evaluation criteria**.
- Perfect alignment makes your proposal easy for reviewers to understand, score highly, and ultimately, to fund.
- What is the key difference between a traditional academic proposal and a funding proposal?
- Research funding proposals tend to be more stringent and require a higher degree of specificity than academic proposals.
- Why is specificity important in a funding proposal?

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: The ABSTRACT: Your Project's First Impression

- **What It Is:**
- A powerful, self-contained summary of your entire project, typically 250-300 words.
- It is often the first, and sometimes the ONLY, section a reviewer reads in detail.
- Its job is to grab their attention and communicate the entire value of your project concisely. It must encapsulate four key elements:
  - The research **PROBLEM** or gap.
  - The main **OBJECTIVE** or research question.
  - The **METHODOLOGY** you will use.
  - The anticipated **SIGNIFICANCE** and **IMPACT**.
- **Best Practices:**
  - Be Specific & Confident - Use clear, declarative language. Instead of *"I hope to look into..."*, write *"This study will determine..."*.
  - Stay Jargon-Free - Write for an intelligent, NON-SPECIALIST REVIEWER. Avoid acronyms or overly technical terms that would require a deep dive into your specific field.
  - Mirror the Proposal - The abstract must be a perfect miniature of your full proposal. Every key component you mention in the abstract must be explained in detail later.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: Abstract - Avoiding Common Pitfalls

- **Common Pitfall 1: Vagueness & Grandiosity**

- This is the most frequent mistake made by early-career researchers. The abstract makes big promises with no specific details, using buzzwords instead of substance. This confuses reviewers and undermines your credibility.
- *Weak Example:*
  - *"This research will investigate the economic challenges facing entrepreneurs in South Africa. It will utilise innovative, mixed-methodologies to create a paradigm shift in understanding the informal sector and will provide groundbreaking solutions for poverty."*
- **Why it's weak:** Which challenges? Which entrepreneurs? What specific methods? What paradigm? It is all promise and no concrete plan.

- **Common Pitfall 2: Mismatch & Missing Funder Requirements**
- The abstract introduces ideas not found in the main proposal, or it omits key components required by the funder. This signals carelessness.
- **Practical Tip:** Always check the funder's guidelines.
- The U.S. National Science Foundation requires separate statements on "Intellectual Merit" and "Broader Impacts" *within the abstract*.
- The South African NRF will look for alignment with national priorities or evidence of human capacity development (student training). Ignoring these is a fatal flaw.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: From Weak to Winning Abstract

- The key is to replace vague statements with concrete, verifiable information.

Vague & Weak	Specific & Strong
"investigate economic challenges"	"determine the extent to which mobile money enhances financial resilience of spaza shops in Soweto"
"innovative methodologies"	"a quantitative survey of 300 owners and 30 in-depth qualitative interviews"
"solutions for poverty"	"evidence base for policy recommendations targeting financial inclusion"

Key Takeaway: Your abstract is your project's elevator pitch. Make every single word count.

The **INTRODUCTION**: Setting the Stage & Stating the Problem

- **What It Is:**
  - This section sets the stage for your entire proposal. It introduces the research topic, provides essential context, and must achieve three critical goals:
  - Establish the **significance** of the topic (why it matters).
  - Clearly define the **Problem Statement** – the specific gap in knowledge or practice your research will address.
  - Present the central **research questions** that will guide your study.
- **Best Practices:**
  - Be Precise - The problem statement is the heart of your proposal. Pinpoint the exact issue in one or two clear, unambiguous sentences.
  - Be Persuasive - Provide just enough background to convince the reviewer that this problem is important and that your research is timely.
  - Be Coherent - Ensure your research questions and objectives flow logically from the problem you have identified. Everything must connect.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: Successful Approaches Problem Statement

- **The Funnel Approach:** Start with the broad context, narrow down to identify a specific gap in the literature or practice, and then present your focused problem statement.

- ***Example using the Funnel Approach:***

Broad Context

- The informal economy is a cornerstone of employment in South Africa, with millions depending on small, township-based enterprises. While the national adoption of mobile money has been rapid, offering potential for financial inclusion, a critical gap exists in our understanding of its tangible effects at the micro-enterprise level.

The Gap

- Specifically, prior research has focused on mobile money for person-to-person transfers, largely overlooking its role in the operational resilience of small businesses facing economic volatility.

The Precise Problem Statement

- Therefore, the central problem this research addresses is the unexamined relationship between mobile money adoption and the financial resilience of spaza shops in Gauteng.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: Introduction - Avoiding Common Pitfalls

The Unfocused Problem

- The introduction rambles around a broad topic without identifying a specific, researchable problem. A frequent mistake is stating a general societal ill instead of a knowledge gap.

Weak Example

  - *"Poverty and unemployment are major problems in South Africa's townships. Many people run small businesses to survive, but it is very difficult for them. This research wants to look at the economy in these areas and help find solutions for these struggling entrepreneurs."*

Why it's weak

- "Poverty exists" is a condition, not a research problem. It's too broad, lacks a clear focus, and doesn't define a gap that can be investigated.

Exaggeration & Inconsistency

- Making exaggerated claims that your research will "solve" a major social issue or "completely transform" a field. This sounds naive to reviewers. Another critical error is promising to answer questions in the introduction that your methodology section doesn't actually address.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: From Weak to Winning Introduction& Problem

Vague & Weak (The "Societal Ill" Approach)	Specific & Strong (The "Research Gap" Approach)
"Poverty and unemployment are major problems..."	"A critical gap exists in our understanding of [mobile money's] tangible effects at the micro-enterprise level."
"This research wants to look at the economy..."	"The central problem this research addresses is the unexamined relationship between mobile money adoption and financial resilience..."
"help find solutions for struggling entrepreneurs"	"This will provide an evidence base for policy recommendations targeting financial inclusion."

Key Takeaway: Your introduction must convince the reviewer that there is a specific, important, and researchable problem, and that your study is perfectly designed to address it.

What It Is?

- A literature review is not just a summary of articles. In a funding proposal, it is a TIGHTLY WRITTEN critical synthesis of only the most RELEVANT existing scholarship that constructs a compelling argument for why your research is necessary. Its purpose is to:
- Situate your project within the current body of knowledge that is aligned to the salient aspects of the call.
- Demonstrate your familiarity with the field's key debates and findings.
- Provide a rationale for your chosen approach and convince funders that your work is original and not duplicative.

Best Practices:

- Be Focused & Selective: Do not include everything ever written.
  - Select key works (theories, empirical studies) that directly relate to your specific research questions.
- Be Critical & Analytical: Do not just report what others have said.
  - Synthesise, compare, and critique to identify patterns, contradictions, and debates.
- Be Current: Show awareness of recent findings from the last few years, as well as the foundational, seminal works in your field.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: The Literature Review – Success & Pitfalls

SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES

- **Organise Thematically, Not Chronologically:** Structure your review around central themes or debates, which is far more effective than a study-by-study synopsis.
- **Example (Post-Apartheid Urban Planning):** Instead of listing authors who wrote about cities, structure your argument with thematic sections:
    1. *The Enduring Legacy of Apartheid Spatial Planning in cities like Johannesburg.*
    2. *Policy Interventions Since 1994 (e.g., RDP, Breaking New Ground).*
    3. *Contemporary Debates on Gentrification vs. Inclusive Development in areas like Woodstock (Cape Town) and Maboneng (Johannesburg).*

    The Identified Gap from the literature: *A lack of research on the socio-cultural impact of urban regeneration on long-term residents.*

- **Remember, a lot of funding calls for research arise from a recognised gap in the literature.**

COMMON PITFALLS

- **The "Unconnected Laundry List":** The most common error. Simply stringing together summaries of studies ("Author A found this. Author B found that.") without analysing or connecting them to your own research question.
- **Ignoring Key Works or Debates:** Omitting seminal studies or conflicting viewpoints makes your review seem one-sided or, worse, poorly researched.
- **No Explicit "Gap":** Failing to conclude the review with a clear statement of what is still unknown and, crucially, how **your study** will address that specific gap.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: The Literature Review - From Weak to Winning

Topic: Vaccine hesitancy in rural South Africa.

Weak Approach (The "Laundry List")	Strong Approach (The "Critical Synthesis")
Just a list of facts Cooper (2021) found that complex social phenomenon is linked to vaccine hesitancy. A study by the HSRC (2022) showed low trust in government healthcare in the Eastern Cape. DFRLab (2020) looked at historical distrust from the apartheid era.	*Synthesis* While national studies point to complex social phenomenon as a key driver of vaccine hesitancy (Cooper, 2021), a focus on digital sources overlooks deep-seated issues of institutional trust. Research highlights particularly low confidence in government healthcare in rural provinces like the Eastern Cape (HSRC, 2022), often rooted in historical inequities (DFRLab, 2020). *The Gap* Therefore, a critical gap remains in understanding how local community health workers can effectively bridge this trust deficit at a grassroots level, an approach this study will investigate."

Key Takeaway: A strong literature review is an argument. It must lead the reviewer step-by-step to the inescapable conclusion that your research is the logical and necessary next step.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: The METHODOLOGY: Your Blueprint for Discovery

What is it?

- *This is the cornerstone of your proposal. It is the detailed, step-by-step blueprint that explains exactly how you will conduct your research. It must describe:*
  - Your overall **RESEARCH DESIGN** *(e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods)*.
  - Your specific **DATA COLLECTION METHODS** *(e.g., surveys, interviews, archival research).*
  - Your **SAMPLING STRATEGY** *(Who, How Many, How They Will Be Selected)*.
  - Your **DATA ANALYSIS PLAN** *(How you will make sense of the data)*.
- The goal is to prove to the funder that your project is feasible, rigorous, and scientifically sound.

Best Practices

- Be Detailed & Specific - provide enough information for another researcher to understand your process. Avoid ambiguity.
- Justify Your Choices - for every choice—your design, your sample size, your methods—explain *why* it is the most appropriate way to answer your research questions.
- Ensure Alignment - explicitly link each research objective to a specific method. Show the reviewer precisely how you will answer each question you posed in the introduction.

Clearly link methods to objectives and justify the 'why'.

- *Example (Mixed-Methods Study on Land Reform in Limpopo):*
- A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design is chosen for this research. This approach is justified as it allows us to first identify broad statistical patterns and then explore the rich, lived experiences behind them.

Clearly delineated quantitative and qualitative components.

Phase 1 (Quantitative)

- A structured survey will be administered to 400 beneficiary households across two major land reform projects in the Limpopo province to quantitatively assess economic outcomes (income changes, crop yield, market access).

Phase 2 (Qualitative)

- Drawing from the survey data, 20 households demonstrating high and low economic success will be purposefully selected for in-depth, semi-structured interviews. *This phase will explore the 'why' behind the quantitative results*, focusing on factors like community dynamics, gender relations, and access to state support services.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: The Methodology: Pitfalls & From Weak to Winning

Common Pitfalls

- **Vagueness or Superficiality:** Using statements like *"we will use qualitative methods"* with no further detail. This is a major red flag that suggests a lack of clear planning.
- **Method-Objective Mismatch:** Proposing a method that cannot possibly answer your research question (e.g., using a small, non-representative focus group to make claims about the entire country).
- **Ignoring Contextual Relevance:** *This is a critical pitfall noted by the NRF.* Using survey instruments, theories, or models designed in Europe or North America without first validating their relevance and appropriateness for a diverse South African context (e.g., accounting for language, cultural nuances, or socio-economic realities).

From Weak to Winning

- **Topic:** Effectiveness of Community Policing Forums (CPFs) in Pretoria.

Weak Approach (Vague & Unjustified)

- We will do interviews with CPF members and the police in Pretoria. We will also look at crime statistics to see if the CPFs are working.
- (No detail on design, sampling, analysis, or 'why')

Strong Approach (Specific & Justified)

- **(Design)** This study employs a comparative case study design to assess CPF effectiveness in two contrasting Pretoria policing precincts: a high-income area (e.g., Brooklyn) and a township area (e.g., Soshanguve).
- **(Analysis)** We will conduct 15 semi-structured interviews per site with CPF leaders, residents, and local SAPS officers (total n=30), selected via purposive and snowball sampling.
- **(Sampling)** Interview transcripts will be analysed using thematic analysis in ATLAS.ti.
- **(Triangulation)** This data will be triangulated with official crime statistics for the two precincts from the last five years to compare reported crime trends with community perceptions of safety.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: The DISSEMINATION & IMPACT PLAN - Maximising Your Research's Impact

WHAT IT IS

- This is your strategy for sharing research findings with relevant audiences. It goes beyond academic tradition to include:

  - Academic Channels - Peer-reviewed journals and conference presentations.
  - Non-Academic & Public Outreach - Policy briefs for government, workshops for stakeholders, community presentations, and media engagement.

- It demonstrates how your research will create tangible impact and may be referred to as **"KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION"** or **"KNOWLEDGE MOBILISATION"** by development-focused funders.

BEST PRACTICES

- Tailor the Format to the Audience - A journal article is for academics; a policy brief is for government; a community workshop is for local stakeholders.
- Be Specific and Concrete - Name your target journals, conferences, government departments, or community organisations.
- Integrate into the Project - Your dissemination activities must appear in your timeline and be accounted for in your budget (e.g., costs for open-access fees or printing reports).

SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES

- Develop a multi-channel plan that connects specific outputs to your project's goals and key audiences.

Example (Research on urban food security in Tshwane):

- Academic Impact - "Submit one peer-reviewed article to *Agrekon* on the economics of urban farming. Present findings at the annual conference of the Society of South African Geographers."
- Policy Impact - "Develop a policy brief on supporting urban agriculture for the City of Tshwane's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the national Department of Social Development."
- Community Impact - "Co-host practical workshops with community gardening groups in Mamelodi on sustainable soil and water use. Create a visual guide on accessing municipal support, translated into Sepedi."

Common Pitfalls

- The Generic Statement - Simply stating *"Findings will be published and presented at conferences."* Reviewers see this as insufficient and a sign of poor planning.
- Ignoring the Funder's Mission - Focusing only on academic outputs when applying to a funder like the NRF, which values societal impact, or a development agency that requires a clear plan to influence policy.
- The Unrealistic Plan - Promising an overwhelming number of outputs (e.g., five top-tier journal articles from a one-year grant) that reviewers will immediately identify as infeasible.
- Forgetting it Exists - Overlooking the dissemination section entirely, a critical mistake as many funders explicitly evaluate your plan to use the research results.

From Weak to Winning

- *Topic: Documenting the intangible cultural heritage (oral histories) of a community in Marabastad, Pretoria.*

Weak Approach (Generic & Vague)

- *"We will write papers about our findings and share them with interested parties. We will also make our research available online."*

Strong Approach (Targeted & Impact-Oriented)

- Outputs for Academic Audience - "One article in the *South African Historical Journal* on memory and place. Anonymised transcripts to be deposited in a university digital archive, as per our Data Management Plan.
- Outputs for Community Audience - "Create a community-owned digital archive of the stories. Host a public 'story-sharing day' event for participants and their families at a local venue.
- Outputs for Public Engagement - "Collaborate with the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History on a temporary exhibit or a public lecture."

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: The TIMELINES: Your Project's Roadmap to Completion

What It Is?

- The timeline, or work plan, is a visual schedule that outlines the sequence and duration of every activity in your project. It is your roadmap from start to finish. Its purpose is to demonstrate to funders that your project is:
  - Well-planned - You have thought through all the necessary steps.
  - Manageable - The workload is broken down into logical phases.
  - Feasible - Your goals can realistically be achieved within the funder's specified timeframe.

Best Practices:

- Use a Visual Format: A simple table or a Gantt chart is the industry standard. It is far clearer and more professional than a paragraph of text.
- Be Realistic Do not underestimate how long tasks take. Build in buffer time for common delays, such as participant recruitment or administrative processes.
- Align with Your Proposal - Your timeline must be a perfect mirror of your methodology (every task included) and your budget (costs align with the timing of activities).
- Include Milestones - Clearly mark key deliverables or progress points (e.g., "Ethics Approval Obtained," "Data Collection Complete," "Draft Report Submitted").

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: The Timeline - Common Pitfalls

COMMON PITFALLS

- The "Miracle" Timeline: Proposing a wildly unrealistic amount of work in too short a time. Reviewers are experienced and will immediately spot an over-ambitious plan.
- Forgetting the Bureaucracy: A classic early-career researcher error is failing to allocate 2-4 months for the university ethics approval process. A plan to start collecting data in week one is not credible.
- The Vague Block: Using overly broad labels like "Year 1: Fieldwork" or "Year 2: Writing" without breaking these down into specific, sequential tasks.
- Illogical Sequencing: Scheduling tasks in an impossible order, for example, planning data analysis to begin before the data has been collected and cleaned.

FROM WEAK TO WINNING

- *Topic: A two-year study on the impact of load shedding on secondary school learner performance in the Eastern Cape.*
- *Weak Approach (Vague & Unrealistic)*
- *"In the first year, I will get ethics approval and do my fieldwork in schools. In the second year, I will analyse the data and write up my papers and finish the project."*

STRONG APPROACH (PHASED & SPECIFIC)

- **Phase 1: Setup & Approvals (Months 1-4):** Finalise survey instruments; Submit ethics application; Obtain approval from the provincial Department of Basic Education. *Possible deliverable/s: Study instruments etc.*
- **Phase 2: Data Collection (Months 5-15):** Conduct baseline and follow-up surveys with learners and teachers across four school terms; Collect school-level matric pass rate data. *Possible deliverable/s: Dataset.*
- **Phase 3: Analysis & Writing (Months 16-22):** Quantitative analysis of survey data; Thematic analysis of teacher interviews. *Possible deliverables: Draft two journal articles.*
- **Phase 4: Dissemination (Months 23-24):** Present findings at the South African Education Research Association (SAERA) conference; Develop and share a policy brief with the Department of Basic Education. *Possible deliverable/s: Conference paper, policy brief, etc.*
- List all relevant and acceptable deliverables for each phase that will appear in your Gantt Chart.

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: The Timeline: Gantt Chart

A Gantt chart provides a clear, at-a-glance overview of the project flow, dependencies, and key milestones.

Example: Gantt Chart for a 12-Month Project on Water Access in a Karoo Town

Activity	Q1 (M 1-3)	Q2 (M 4-6)	Q3 (M 7-9)	Q4 (M 10-12)
Literature Review & Instrument Design	■			
Deliverables/Milestone: Ethics Submitted	✓			
Ethics Approval Period	■			
Deliverables/Milestone: Approval REC'd		✓		
Fieldwork & Data Collection		■	■	
Data Analysis			■	■
Writing & Dissemination				■
Deliverables/Milestone: Submitted Research Report				✓

- Project deliverables are one of the end-all's and be-all's of funded research, and they should be carefully identified. There should be a clear link between your research activities and each deliverable.
- Critically, in most cases, some funds will only be released upon receipt of a project deliverable.

Required Proposal Structure & Unique Requirements of Different Funders

Required Proposal Structure & Unique Requirements: IDRC

Structure

- Cover page and summary;
- Problem statement & background;
- Research questions/objectives;
- Literature/context review;
- Methodology/Work plan.

Expected results & outcomes

- Monitoring & Evaluation plan;
- Communications/Knowledge translation plan;
- Team capacity;
- Ethical considerations;
- Timeline;
- Budget (using IDRC template).

Unique

Strong focus on development impact – must show how research will influence policy/practice and benefit target groups. Gender analysis is required (project should ideally be gender-responsive or transformative). Must include indicators for monitoring progress. Open access dissemination is mandated (plan for open publications). Risk assessment and sustainability (post-project) section needed.

Required Proposal Structure & Unique Requirements: EU – Horizon Europe

Structure

Strict template divided into **3 sections** –

1. *Excellence* (objectives, relevance to call, state-of-art, concept & methodology);
2. *Impact* (expected outcomes and impacts, measures to maximise impact: dissemination, exploitation, communication);
3. *Quality and Efficiency of Implementation* (project structure, work packages, timeline/Gantt chart, deliverables, consortium roles, resources).
4. Separate forms for abstract, ethics issues, and partner info.

Unique

Must follow EU-defined headings and page limits (e.g., 45 pages).

Emphasis on alignment with EU policy goals and defined Impact Pathways. Requires a credible **impact plan** with target stakeholders and a **dissemination/exploitation strategy** beyond academia.

Consortium description and team excellence are critical (usually multi-country partnerships). Cross-cutting issues (gender dimension in research, SSH integration, open science practices) must be addressed explicitly. Evaluation is criterion-based (Excellence/Impact/Implementation each scored) – proposals are written almost like responding to an exam rubric.

Required Proposal Structure & Unique Requirements: UN Agency (e.g., UNDP)

Structure

- Executive Summary;
- **Background/Problem** analysis (context and needs);
- Project **Objectives** (goal and specific objectives);
- **Methodology/Description of Activities** (what will be done to meet objectives);
- **Work Plan/Timeline**; **Organization Capacity** (experience of applicant);
- **Monitoring & Evaluation** plan (indicators);
- **Sustainability** and **Exit Strategy**; **Budget** (often with detailed template); Attachments (org documents, letters).

Unique

Very outcome-oriented and formatted like a development project proposal. Must demonstrate how project addresses a UN development priority or SDG. **Community involvement and gender mainstreaming** are typically required sections.

Proposals often capped at ~10-15 pages. Needs clear explanation of how results will be sustained after funding (since UNDP wants lasting impact).

Often requires risk assessment (including environmental/social risks) and mitigation measures. The language is less about theoretical contribution and more about solving a problem and delivering results to beneficiaries. Co-funding or partnerships may be encouraged.

Required Proposal Structure & Unique Requirements: NRF (South Africa)

Structure

- Project Title & Abstract;
- **Research Problem** statement and motivation;
- **Literature Review** (current knowledge, gap);
- **Research Questions/Hypotheses**;
- **Objectives** (main and sub-objectives);
- **Research Design and Methodology** (detailed methods, data sources, analytical approach);
- **Expected Outcomes** and **Significance** (contribution to field and/or SA national priorities);
- **Ethical considerations** (if applicable);
- **Timeline**/Milestones;
- **References**. Budget with justification via NRF online system.

Unique

Evaluators look for *realistic, well-defined objectives* and a tight alignment between aims, literature, and methods. Must clearly articulate expected outputs (e.g., papers, student theses) and how these outcomes will be achieved within timeframe. Importance of **capacity building** – proposals often must state how many students or postdocs will be involved/trained. Alignment with **national strategic goals** or social relevance is a plus (e.g., how research benefits South Africa or addresses local challenges). Typically requires the PI's and team's track record (CVs) in the application. NRF also enforces formatting (e.g., section word limits) and may reject if sections like "Expected Outcomes" or "References" are missing.

Link to quiz

https://questionpro.eu/t/AB3u1wtZB3wIGB

The Anatomy of a Winning Proposal: Answers to the Quiz

1. Question: What is the primary function of the 'Introduction and Problem Statement' section in a research proposal?

- **Correct Answer (C):** To establish a compelling context, identify a specific gap in current knowledge, and pose the central research question.

2. Question: A common pitfall in the 'Literature Review' section is creating an 'unconnected laundry list'. What does this mean?

- **Correct Answer (B):** The review summarises a series of studies one after another without analysing them or connecting them to the proposed research question.

3. Question: In the 'Methodology' section, what is the most crucial element to include besides describing your methods?

- **Correct Answer (B):** A detailed justification for why the chosen methods are the most appropriate for answering your specific research questions.

4. Question: Which of the following is a common but critical error early-career researchers make when creating a 'Timeline (Work Plan)'?

- **Correct Answer (D):** Failing to allocate the necessary 2-4 months for the university's ethics approval process before starting data collection.

5. Question: What is the primary weakness of a 'Dissemination Plan' that only states: 'Findings will be published in a journal and presented at a conference'?

- **Correct Answer (A):** It focuses on academic audiences and ignores other key stakeholders like policymakers or the community.

6. Question: When writing the 'Abstract', you should avoid vagueness. Which of the following is the BEST example of a specific and effective statement for an abstract?

- **Correct Answer (B):** This study determines how access to municipal water services affects the daily routines of female-headed households in Khayelitsha.

Roles and Responsibilities in Proposal Development

Roles and Responsibilities in Proposal Development

*Multiple role players may be involved in proposal development. It depends on your **institutional protocols** for grant raising (business development) and **donor requirements***

- Researcher or Research Team – self-select or appointed by seniors in the institution, responsible for proposal development.
    - ToR may require a researcher with PHD to be the lead, consortium members, equity considerations (gender, youth etc.)
- Fundraising/Business Development Officials – identifying opportunities, assessing relevance and appropriateness, supporting the team with preparation of bids, packaging and submission
- Finance personnel – draft and finalise budgets (according to regulations) and facilitate budget approvals
- Approvers – Senior officials who sign off on the proposal – check for alignment, quality, capacity to deliver, budget sufficiency (Chief Executive Officers (CEO), Senior Leadership, Chief Financial Officer (CFO)).
    - National Research Foundation (NRF) requires a designated Senior Research Administrator (RA) to be the key contact person, to approve the proposal before submission (e.g. Deputy CEO).
- Legal/Compliance Assessors: Legal Officer, Compliance/Risk Manager – assess risks, ensure compliance. (e.g. United Nation Agencies (environmental impact,
- Ethical Reviewers Protection of research subjects, ethical considerations (research with vulnerable groups)

Research Team Capacity Requirements

2.12 Requirements of the service provider

The Service Provider should specify the number of researchers and evaluators expected to be part of the team, their areas of expertise and their respective responsibilities. Inclusion of experts with proven experience in the area of study is a requirement. The team must possess relevant qualification(s), including at least one Postgraduate Degree.

The team leader must have at least 10 years of experience including working with senior officials of national entities and government in the area of M&E. The team leader should be able to demonstrate knowledge of the NEF and should have undertaken at least three research project involving economic empowerment and development. The team leader should be able to demonstrate knowledge of the broader socio-economic dynamics of South Africa. The required expertise and experience of the Service Provider are detailed

Curriculum Vitae of Human Resources to be deployed in the project to be attached with Academic Credentials and Contactable References as follow: • 10 or more years' experience (24) • 8 - 9 years' experience (20) • 6 - 7 years' experience (16) • 4 – 5 years' experience (12) • 2 -3 years' experience (6) • 0 -1 years' experience (0)	**/24**

The evaluation consulting or firm should adhere to the following UN and UNICEF norms and standards and is expected to clearly identify any potential ethical issues and approaches, as well as the processes for ethical review and oversight of the evaluation process in their proposal. Copies of all these documents will be provided upon request and can also be access on: http://www.unevaluation.org/

ELIGIBILITY - WHO CAN APPLY

1. Researchers can work in any discipline, organisation or country, but applications must show how the proposed research will promote and advance Froebelian education and learning related to children from birth to eight years.

(1) The actors:

The "lead applicant", i.e. the entity submitting the application form (See Part II Section 1.1 of these guidelines).

The "co-applicant", i.e. the entity that will jointly implement the research project.

→ Interdisciplinary, multi-country research team.

Institutional Processes

Identification of a Funding opportunity

- Dedicated grants office (universities), Business developer(s), Individual researchers

Concept Development

- Research Team constituted and works on proposal
- May include external partners
- Allocation of responsibilities

Reviews and Approvals

- Budget Preparation – dedicated staff and approver
- Proposal Reviews internal

Submission

- Submissions for approval follow formal institutional channels and institution

Budgeting Development and Justification

What are key principles in developing budgets?

Menti code: 3193 7165

A research project without a sound budget is like a journey with no map—without it, you're likely to lose your way, your resources, and perhaps even your destination.

"It always seems impossible until it's done." (Nelson Mandela)

Key Budgeting Principles for Grant Success?

Compliance with Funder Requirements – Review, review and review!!!!

- Central to budget preparation is compliance with funder requirements for eligible and non-eligible costs
- A compliant budget reduces the potential of rejection
- Provide rationale for every budget item included
- Some donors have specific budget templates or clear budget guidelines.e.g. SA Government institutions include a "pricing schedule"

➢ *E.g. UKRI (UK) required the budgets to be priced in Euros at the current rate and not exceeding limits for different categories. An extensively developed and carefully crafted proposal valued at GBP 190 was rejected due to **exceeding the budget allowed limit** for UK researchers by a mere GBP 34*

❖ Never include donor-stipulated ineligible cost items in the budget

➢ *E.g. A budget excluded the cost of toll fees and fuel for a national fieldwork study, although vehicle hire was included. The client had to renegotiate the budget with the donor, which delayed the process by 3 months.*

➢ *E.g. Alcohol was included in the dinner hosted for participants at a workshop.*

Demonstrates Project Feasibility and Realism and Justification

➢ *A university research proposal integrated its budget with project activities, clearly showing how resources would support expected outcomes. E.g. a line item for staff training highlighted the direct relationship to enhanced study implementation.*

Ensure alignment of budget line items with activities

- All activities in the proposal must be indicated in budget line items

Accuracy: Check and double-check your budget calculations and line items against proposal

Examples of Donor Budget Requirements

Only "eligible costs" can be covered by a grant. The categories of costs that are eligible and non-eligible are indicated below. The budget is both a cost estimate and an overall ceiling for "eligible cost".

The following costs are not eligible:

- Debts and debt service charges (interest);
- Provisions for losses or potential future liabilities;
- Costs declared by the beneficiary(ies) and financed under/by another project/work programme by one/several other donor(s);
- Purchases and rent of land or buildings;
- Purchases of new or used equipment;
- Currency exchange losses;
- Credits to third parties;
- Salary costs of the personnel of national administrations.

1. Our Open Call Research Grants **can** cover:

- Directly incurred personnel costs that are related exclusively to the projec
- Up to 20% of the budget may be allocated for direct activity and produc costs, such as venue hire, equipment and materials or project travel costs but please see Note above.
- Project administration where this is not already covered by other funding
- Publicity costs where these are necessary for the project's success
- Disclosure and Barring Service checks - for applications in the UK and NI
- VAT on fees where VAT cannot be reclaimed

Pricing Schedule

4. PERSON AND POSITION

PERSON AND POSITION	HOURLY RATE	DAILY RATE
--	R---------------	R--------------
--	R----------------	R------------
--	R----------------	R------------
--	R----------------	R------------
--	R----------------	R------------

5. PHASES ACCORDING TO WHICH THE PROJECT WILL BE COMPLETED, COST PER PHASE AND MAN-DAYS TO BE SPENT

-- R------------- ------------days

Key Budget Categories

Labour: Internal and External Personnel (salaries, consultants, fieldworkers, editors, administrative support)

Disbursements: Direct project costs (travel, subsistence, printing, equipment – laptops/tablets, subscriptions, IT connectivity, layout and printing)

Indirect costs: Institutional overheads

Donor ceilings – e.g. no more than 10 %

Value Added Tax

SA – 15% (only if not able to claim back)

Other costs – contingencies, Most donors won't allow for this.

"Proposals may include a contingency of up to 7% of the total budget, provided that a clear rationale is presented outlining potential risks." (European Union)

Explanatory Notes to Budget Line Items

Labour:

- Adhere to institutional/donor stipulated charge-out rates for specific team members
- Provide details of personnel time on study .e.g Intern x 80 hours on literature review
- Justify rates for consultants e.g could use DPSA guidelines for rates per qualification or experience
- Editors – R350 per 1000 words x 16000 words

Disbursements:

- Travel: Study requires travel to one site in 9 provinces x 250km per site (use Dept of Transport mileage charge rates
- Subsistence: Use institutional rates per night for determining if they qualify for subsistence (by distance away from base travel more than 250km). Agreed on per diem rates (institutional regulations)
- Equipment hire: get quotes for laptop/tablet hire with insurance cover
- IT connectivity costs: 35 fieldworkers x 8 GB per month x 3 months.
- Incentives: Explain the need for incentives and the nature of the incentive e.g. Airtime voucher for connectivity, Shopping Voucher for food etc.

Budget Non-Compliance Consequence

- Consequences of Non-Compliance: Potential Risks:
  - Grants withdrawn, penalties levied, non-eligible expenditure or future funding jeopardised

➢ *The EU withheld the final 10% of the budget at study closure due to the inability to produce copies of boarding tickets for extensive flights taken. This had been explained in the briefing session*

➢ *An international donor did not allow expenditure for flights which were paid for and not utilised due to no show or missed flights which had to be repurchased.*

➢ *A research team was awarded a grant by a national funding body for a multi-year scientific study. The budget allocated specific amounts for personnel, travel, and equipment. However, the team transferred funds between categories without the donor's approval, leading to a significant shortfall in the travel budget. Upon audit, the funding agency required justification, resulting in fines and a suspension of future grant applications.*

Proposal Submissions

Proposal Submission

Ensure you fully understand the requirements for submission

Guidelines for submission

- Vary depending on the donor and the type of opportunity
- Adhere to the donor's application forms if they are available

Submission of relevant documents

Funder may require:

- Research team CVs, Certified copies of Qualifications and Biosketches
- Institutional letter of support
- Standard Bidding Documents - for tender calls
- Institutional compliance documents – legal and financial documents
- Reference letters, details of referees, proof of similar work undertaken, copies of reports and publications

Packaging and Submission of Applications

Have a checklist of all documentation to be submitted

- Create a checklist and verify submission against the checklist

Clarify the submission approach

  - o via email, printed copy/USB
  - o Funder’s dedicated platform (e.g., NRF, EU Funding Portal)
  - o For physical submission, sign the tender submission register at the donor offices

Date and Time

- Know the submission date and time: failure to submit on time will disqualify your submission

After Submission

o Save a copy of the final submitted proposal and confirmation email.

o Track the funder’s decision timeline.

o If awarded, follow next steps (e.g., contract signing, reporting requirements).

o If rejected, request feedback and revise for future calls

Questions & Comments