THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Tips on writing a strong FoM SSRP application

Writing a grant application can be an overwhelming experience, especially if it's your first time! The FoM SSRP is more than just a source of funding, it provides a valuable experiential learning opportunity. Many applicants (including experienced researchers) struggle to explain their research in a clear and accessible manner, which is essential to ensure the review committee understands the importance and potential impact of your proposed project. Below are some tips on how approach your application to maximize your chances of getting funded.

Tip 1: Follow the Instructions

We cannot emphasize this enough. Read the instructions, and then read them again just to be sure! Provide the exact information requested (as indicated by the questions on the application form and/or the adjudication criteria), and stick to the word limit. For example, if a form field asks for your supervisor's department, list the department, not their division or research centre.

In general, finding creative ways to circumvent instructions like word limits (e.g.: by altering the margins, changing the line spacing, or changing the font size) is extremely noticeable, and may result in deduction of marks or disqualification of your application.

Part of following the instructions is adhering to the criteria. The adjudication criteria for the FoM SSRP is available here. This is exactly what the review committee will be looking for within each question, refer to the criteria when writing your responses to ensure you provide the information requested.

For example:

> To assist with the adjudication process, describe why you are interested in pursuing this particular research opportunity, what you hope to gain from your participation in this project and how this opportunity will contribute to you achieving your current and/or future educational and/or career goals.
>
> Please note that the review process will be blind (with review documents identified only by student number). To facilitate a blind review process, please **do not use any names, gender specific pronouns or similar identifying characteristics** in this section, including collaborators' names, author names in references etc. *Marks will be subtracted from applications not adhering to these guidelines.*

The requested information is highlighted in red. In this one question, three questions are being asked:

1. Why are you interested in *this particular research opportunity*?

   For this question, you are being asked to discuss why **this specific project** matters to you, and why you're interested in it, as opposed to any other project. You are not being asked to provide a moving story about why you became interested in research in the first place, or how this area of research benefits the world as a whole.

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It is perfectly fine to mention these things briefly if they are particularly relevant to your response, but you need to focus on why *this* project/supervisor/opportunity stands out to you.

2. What do you hope to gain from your participation in this project?
3. How will this opportunity contribute to you achieving your current and/or future educational and/or career goals?

The last two questions are fairly straight forward. Make sure you clearly address each of these in your response.

Use the available space to efficiently answer the questions that are being asked. In almost all cases (including FoM SSRP), you won't receive marks for writing style, only content. This a grant application, not an essay or a short story! It's also a good idea to make it easy for adjudicators to find the information they are evaluating. For example, if a question asks for the expected project outcomes, it's a good idea to start off with "The expected project outcomes are …".

Additionally, a useful starting point for longer questions is to split the word limit into the number of questions you are being asked. That will ensure you are devoting enough attention to each part of the question and not missing anything important.

Finally, you also need to pay close attention to any rules that are set out. In this case, don't use any identifiers in your response… unless you want to lose marks!

Takeaways:
*   Read and re-read each question carefully; make sure you address all the points requested It doesn't matter how well-written your application is if it misses the "score-able" components of the adjudication criteria.
*   Optimize your use of the word count
*   Follow the rules!

Tip 2: Demonstrate the impact of your project

Reviewers need to determine if your study plan is feasible, well thought-out, and will achieve the stated outcomes.

Ask yourself the following questions before starting your application:

1. What is the potential impact of our project and why should people care? Writing with this answer in mind helps communicate your objectives, and the importance of your work.
2. How will we design our study to achieve our stated objectives?
3. What can I reasonably accomplish during the project funding period? What will be left for me to finish?

Ensure that you describe your project in enough detail for the reviewers to clearly understand what you will be doing, why you are doing it that way, and why it is significant. Adjudicators should be able to easily understand the potential impact of your project, and why people would care about it.

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The level of detail should be enough to confirm that your approach is feasible, and make it clear why your proposed project is a worthwhile study, but shouldn't include less relevant details that don't contribute to understanding the overall significance and "structure" of the study. Bullet points are your friend in this case, since they allow for a more succinct way of presenting information.

In terms of feasibility, your goal is to clearly indicate what (and how) the proposed work can be completed in the time available, and in the case of the FoM SSRP, make it clear what will be left to complete after the funding period ends. Recognizing what is possible to achieve indicates that you understand your project and its limitations well, and can speak to the thought given to the project design.

Takeaways:
- Make sure your project is feasible. Even if it's not complete by the time the funding period is over (which for FoM SSRP is totally fine!), it is important to know exactly what will be accomplished in that time and that it will be important for the future of the project.
- Be focused with your responses and work to communicate the significance and potential impact of your study.

Tip 3: **Keep the Language Simple**

Write your application in plain English. Don't mask the context and information with jargon and highly specific technical terms. Reviewers will read your application, and while they do have a scientific background, that doesn't mean their scientific background aligns with your planned area of research. This is particularly true for FoM SSRP where the reviewers are drawn from across the Faculty of Medicine.

Write Clearly: A good way to do this is to strive to write your application in a way that a friend or family member not familiar with your work, and with a limited science background, could understand. You probably won't achieve that perfectly, but aim for it and your writing will very likely be much clearer. To test this, have your application proof-read by friends or family who don't necessarily know a lot about your area of study. If they get the gist of it, you are probably on the right track!

Takeaway:
- Don't overcomplicate your writing and make sure you're aiming to write in plain English.