



Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD)

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PhD Fellowships for Women Scientists from Science and Technology Lagging Countries

Recommendations for Writing a Good Research Proposal Outline

Below are some guidelines - following them does not guarantee acceptance but a good research proposal will be a considerable factor in OWSD's appraisal of your application.

The better your proposal, the better your chances of being selected for a fellowship.

Your proposal should outline your areas of interest and your general insight into the research topic. You are not expected to be an expert already and be familiar with all the specific details of your subject. However, you are expected to have a good level of knowledge about the subject and how you might make a valuable contribution to research.

There is no exact formula for a general research proposal across all subjects. You need to check your own subject's particular conventions and expectations. You can do this by looking at any guidelines the university where you want to apply might have on their website. It might be essential to elaborate and discuss the PhD project proposal with the prospective supervisor and agree on its feasibility beforehand. This can certainly result in a stronger application.

For the purposes of the OWSD application, your proposal should be between 1,000-2,000 words. It should be an overview - you need to provide enough detail for an expert in your field to understand but not so much detail that someone in your broad field would be completely lost.

In general, a good research proposal should include the following 5 main sections:

1) Title and Key words

Choose a clear working title for your research project:

- what will you call your project?
- what key words describe your proposal?

2) Motivation Statement

A clear statement about what you want to work on and why it is important, interesting, relevant and realistic:

- what are your main research objectives (hypotheses, propositions, research questions, or problems to solve)?
- what difference do you think your research will make?
- why does this research excite you?
- what research 'gaps' will you be filling by undertaking your project?
- how might your research add value to the subject?

3) Background and Context

Provide some background knowledge and context of the area in which you wish to work, including key literature, key people, key research findings:

- how does your work link to the work of others in the same or related fields?

- does your work support or challenge the work of others?
- how does your work fit with the department/ laboratory/ faculty where you wish to work?

4) Methodology

- how will you conduct your research?
- will you use existing or new theories or develop new methods/ approaches?

5) Strategy and Timetable

- is your research achievable in the time frame (3-4 years)?
- what are the main stages of your project?
- what will you do in each year of your PhD?
- what challenges might you encounter and how will you overcome them?

All of the above are important but number 2 is the most important because it shows your motivation and will help the selection committee to evaluate whether you are the right person, doing the right research in the right place - and therefore assess the chances that you will be able to undertake and complete the research. Remember that receiving a PhD fellowship means that OWSD (and Sida, our funders) are prepared to invest in you for up to four years. Many other women are competing for these fellowships. Why should we choose you?

In addition to the above 5 points, you should also:

6) Check and Double Check what you have written

Take your time to prepare and draft, re-draft and perfect your proposal. Make sure it is well written, without spelling mistakes or typos. If you demonstrate care and attention - that is already a good indicator of your qualities as a scientist.

7) Take the reader on a journey

The purpose and direction of your research project should be clear.

N.B. Please attach the Research Proposal Outline as a separate document where indicated in the online application process.

Credits:

These guidelines have been developed from The University of Exeter downloadable document: 'Writing PhD Research Proposal'

https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/webteam/shared/postgraduate/pdfs/A_Guide_to_Writing_your_PhD_Proposal.pdf

For more information, please also see: www.findaphd.com/advice/finding/writing-phd-research-proposal.aspx