

Writing a Successful Research Proposal

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What is a Research Proposal?

Research proposal is a written statement.

The purpose of this statement is to convince a funding source and reviewers that you can deliver a product (an answer to a research questions) that they are interested in.

Why Do You Need a Proposal?

To convince others that

- You understand the issue
- Are familiar with what has been done in this area
- Can identify what is missing
- Can do the work and deliver a high quality product

Structure of a Proposal

1. Specific aims
2. Background and significance (literature review)
3. Hypothesis
4. Methods
5. Results dissemination
6. References
7. Budget and staffing

Specific Aims (Executive Summary)

- They leave the first impression
- Aims need to be clear, crystal clear
- Aims need to be achievable
- Aims need to have obvious potential contribution
- They should be used as the key organizing principles for the entire application
- Repeat them at relevant points throughout the application

Specific Aims (Executive Summary)

Example:

Our study will estimate the impact of tobacco tax on tobacco consumption and tobacco tax revenue in Laos using data from the Ministry of Statistics from 1998 to 2004, etc.

Results of this research will provide important information to Laos Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Health so that they propose the best policies to improve public health of people of Laos.

Background and Significance (Literature Review)

- Why are you and why should your funding agency be interested in the subject of your research.
- Provide the epidemiology (nature and extent) and the historical and cultural contexts (focus on your country, but also show that you understand the dynamics in the region (this will show that you are very familiar with the issues current in the field))
- Remember, the reviewers are scientists and will not be convinced by poetic rhetoric or political statements

Background and Significance (Literature Review)

Example:

Describe historic trend in tobacco consumption in your country and in the region.

Demonstrate the harm of smoking to public health and to economic development including the issue of poverty.

Provide examples from your country or other countries how higher tobacco prices/taxes affect smoking and government revenue.

Provide example from other countries in the region that have successfully used tobacco tax policy to reduce smoking.

Point to any possible weak points of this policy and show how those are addressed in your country or elsewhere.

Our result will contribute to the knowledge in Laos and in the region regarding the impact of tobacco tax on tobacco consumption.

Hypothesis

- States what do you expect to find

Example:

Higher tobacco taxes in Cambodia will reduce tobacco consumption and increase government revenue from tobacco taxes if tax collection method is improved. Tobacco smuggling is not going to increase as a result of a tax increase.

Methods

- Describe in detail data you will use and how will you use them
- Be explicit about measurement of variables (measurement of behavior)
- Make sure that there is a connection between your specific aims and the hypotheses to be tested and the design and analyses
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your design and approach
- Convince the reviewers that you can do this research

Methods

Example:

We will calculate price elasticity of tobacco demand based on the change in consumption and the change in tobacco price between 1998 and 2004 in Laos. We will also control for the impact of income on tobacco consumption.

We will use a method applied by Marks (2003), but our model will assume income elasticity of tobacco demand of -0.4.

Tobacco consumption in our model will be defined as ...

Tobacco price in our model will be defined as ...

Results Dissemination

- Describe how do you plan to distribute your results
- Who is your audience for the results and who can make use of them

Example:

We will present results of our research to the Ministry of Finance and to the Ministry of Health. In addition, we plan to present the results at the regional conference on tobacco or health. We will also make them available to the press for broader dissemination to the public.

References

- Take a note of all sources you use in your literature review and data search (even those that you do not intent to use at the present time)
- Note web address of all information from the Internet.

Example:

Stephen V. Marks. July 29, 2003. "Cigarette Excise Taxation in Indonesia: An Economic Analysis." ECG, USAID/Jakarta.

Indonesian Ministry of Health. March 2004. Tobacco Sourcebook. Chapter 5. Increasing Price and Taxes. www.tobaccofree.or.id; accessed 8/9/2005.

Successful Proposal Writing Strategies

- Make your proposal easy to read: larger print, preserve white space; be specific and not wordy
- Common problems include:
 - overly ambitious
 - weak, incomplete or inadequate Background
 - flaws in Method
 - arguments for the research do not following a logical argument