

SARNET Training Programme for Young South Asian Scholars on  
'LABOUR ECONOMICS: THEORIES, METHODOLOGIES AND RESEARCH  
ISSUES'

November 6, 2015

# THE SCIENCE (AND ART!) OF WRITING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

# OUTLINE

- Main Steps of writing a Research Proposal
- What you should focus on?
- What you should avoid at best?
- What makes a 'good' proposal – 'grant-worthy'?
- Sources for learning more

# WHY WILL YOU NEED TO WRITE A RESEARCH PROPOSAL?

- Bid for competitive research grants
- Requirement for availing grants/research awards
- If not for anything else, it is good to have a structured idea of what you would do for your research project
- Have largely an empirical focus, but theoreticians may find something helpful

# WHAT DOES A RESEARCH PROPOSAL LOOK LIKE?

- Many agencies have their own formats, but common traits remain similar
- We will discuss a generic format – you can well adapt
- Always refer to proposal writing guides, and never forget to read your RFP inside out
- May be also helpful to find out examples of successful proposals from your prospective donor

# STRUCTURE OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

## *The Research Process: Basic Components*

- A statement of purpose in the form of formulated problem.
- A description of the study design
- The methods of data collection
- Interpretation of Findings and Drawing of conclusion
- Presentation of The results.

# STRUCTURE OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

## – CONTD.

### PLATE 1      Academic    Example 1.

- I.      Introduction and Theoretical Framework
- II.     Statement of the Problem
- III.    Purpose of the Study
- IV.    Review of the Literature
- V.     Questions and/or Hypotheses
- VI.    The Design-- Methods and Procedures
  - Sampling
  - Instrumentation
  - Data Collection
  - Data Analysis
- VII.   Limitations and Delimitations
- VIII.  Significance of the Study

### PLATE 2      Academic: Example 2

#### **I. The Introduction**

- Background to the Study
- Statement of the Research Problem
- Purpose and Objectives of the Study
- Hypotheses
- Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

#### **II. Review of Related Literature**

#### **III Research Methodology**

*Source: Donald Kisilu Kombo and Debra L.A. Tromp (2006) Proposal and Thesis Writing: An Introduction. Paulines Publications Africa, Darauaters of St. Paul. P.O. Box 49026. 00100*

# COMPONENT 1: THE STUDY OVERVIEW

- 'Abstract'
- Abridged version of the main proposal (ideally 1-2 paragraphs - ~300 words)
- Target a less-specialized audience – general interest & no 'jargons'
- 25-30 lines of A4 paper – use a standard 12 points font – TNR or Arial

# PROPOSAL OVERVIEW IS FOLLOWED BY THE MAIN PROPOSAL

- Background – Problem Statement and Motivation
- Research problem – the main question. Best if a single statement
- What are existing gaps in understanding/literature
- Importance to the audience/“validity”
- Purpose Statement



# COMPONENT 2: PROBLEM STATEMENT

- Include the main research strategy
  - Feasibility
  - Validity
  - Contextuality
- Should have a brief statement on why would you think this proposal should be funded – your key USP

# COMPONENT 3: RESEARCH AIMS & OBJECTIVES

- Hierarchy of Objectives
- Overall aim and central objective – A ‘Solution Statement’ of Component 2
- Specific Objectives (best 3, not more than 5)

# COMPONENT 4: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

## ■ Sourcing of Research Questions:

- Theory
- Previous Research
- Practical Concerns
- Personal Interest

## ■ Type of Research Questions:

- Clarification of an Issue raised under Objectives
- Facilitate description of a particular Objective

# COMPONENT 5: RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- Must be linked to the Research problem
- Should be feasible for empirical testing and fit to the objective(s)
- Can be cross-cutting across objectives but should not be very 'generic'
- Proposals without specific hypothesis are also possible, but once specified, needs to have proper design to back it

# COMPONENT 6: RESEARCH RATIONALE

- Need for the Study
- Why this study should be funded?
- Significance of the Study and Importance
  - Development Priorities
  - Scientific importance
  - Magnitude of the problem
  - Policy relevance
  - If responding to RFPs, this should make it very clear where your proposal fits with the theme/sub-themes

# COMPONENT 7: SCOPE & RANGE OF RESEARCH

- Be very clear and realistic – what you say you have to deliver – promise reasonably, but try to deliver a little beyond
- Should be concerned with –
  - Field (Cautions for Interdisciplinary/Multidisciplinary themes)
  - Topic ('Specificity')
  - Questions of Research
  - Methodology

# COMPONENT 8: LITERATURE REVIEW

- Not mandatory but good to have
- Can be merged with Component 4
- Should be 'analytical' and 'inferential' and not merely 'descriptive'
- Not to be very long, and specific to the main aspects/study questions

# COMPONENT 9: THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- Very useful tool to summarize your approach to the study
- Should be simple and clear, don't make it very complex with fancy graphics and colours
- Try to avoid bi-directional arrows unless extremely necessary
- Best to use any established framework and modify it accordingly to your study with say, different variables



# COMPONENT 10: DEFINITION, LIMITATIONS

- Good to have a brief ‘glossary’ section if you are having a ‘technical’ proposal.
- Explain definitions – follow internationally recognized norms
- Clearly state what the study is not concerned with, and if interpreting what cautions and caveats follow

# COMPONENT 11 & 12: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Be systematic
- Sure with technical details such as sampling designs
- Good to have an outline of your survey instruments for primary studies and data/variables for secondary study – more explicit the better
- Can build on previous work

# COMPONENT 13: RESULTS & DISSEMINATION

- How the results will be presented
- Outline/structure including chapter plan of the main report
- Any other outputs – research briefs, discussion papers, journal publications etc.
- Modes of dissemination – seminar, conferences, monographs etc.

# COMPONENT 14: BUDGETING AND TIME-TABLE

- Budget should be rationale
- Do not over-budget salaries and consumables
- Good to have capacity-building components such as training programs etc.

Other aspects could include details on collaborations, research team profiles and CVs, and a detailed work-plan denoting each activities/milestones

N	Activity <sup>1</sup>	Months <sup>2</sup>							
		Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
1	Conceptualization, literature review and finalization of proposal								
2	Secondary data analysis								
3	Sampling design								
4	Questionnaire preparation (including pre-survey FGDs) & inputs from experts								
5	Questionnaire finalization and pilot-interviews								
6	Data collection (Quant/Qual.)								
7	Data processing and analysis								
8	Writing and submission of draft report								
9	Comments/discussion on the report								
10	Revision and final submission of integrated report								
11.	Preparation of dissemination briefs and research papers								