

INSIDE THE MINDS of Grant Reviewers and Grant Recipients

Pitfalls in grant applications – Reviewers' Pet Peeves

Dr. Tamara Krawchenko, University of Victoria, BC Canada

27 April 2021



Why should I care?

What is the issue?

Is this important? Is this compelling? Is this urgent and/or relevant?

Find the narrative – make it compelling. You need the forest and the trees....



How is the grant being assessed? Make the job easy...

Evaluation criteria and scoring SSHRC Insight

Challenge—The aim and importance of the endeavour (40%):

- originality, significance and expected contribution to knowledge;
- appropriateness of the literature review;
- appropriateness of the theoretical approach or framework;
- appropriateness of the methods/approach;
- quality of training and mentoring to be provided to students, emerging scholars and other highly qualified personnel, and opportunities for them to contribute; and
- potential for the project results to have influence and impact within and/or beyond the social sciences and humanities research community.

Feasibility—The plan to achieve excellence (20%):

- appropriateness of the proposed timeline, and probability that the objectives will be met;
- expertise of the applicant or team in relation to the proposed research;

- appropriateness of the requested budget, justification of proposed costs, and, where applicable, other cash and/or in-kind contributions; and
- quality and appropriateness of knowledge mobilization plans, including effective dissemination, exchange and engagement with stakeholders within and/or beyond the research community, where applicable.

Capability—The expertise to succeed (40%):

- quality, quantity and significance of past experience and published and/or creative outputs of the applicant and any co-applicants, relative to their roles in the project and to the stage of their career;
- evidence of past knowledge mobilization activities (e.g., films, performances, commissioned reports, knowledge syntheses, experience in collaboration / other interactions with stakeholders, contributions to public debate and media), and of impacts on professional practice, social services and policies, etc.; and
- quality and quantity of past contributions to the development, training and mentoring of students, postdoctoral researchers and other highly qualified personnel.

Don't make the assessors look for information...

Example: **Canada's 'left behind' places: Rural and small town economic restructuring and government policy responses**

Objectives

The proposed research has two objectives: i) to analyse **socio-economic and demographic trends** in rural and small town Canada in order to document the types of transitions that they are facing now and in the future, and ii) to conduct a policy scan and institutional/policy mapping of how **federal and provincial/territorial governments target policy responses** to rural communities and towns that are losing their economic functions.

This project directly addresses a key social challenge facing Canada today. It meets multiple **objectives of the Insight programme** by:

Building knowledge on transition policies from a cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary perspective, taking a wide-view of the diversity of policies that are targeted to rural and small town Canada (health, labour, economic development, spatial planning etc.);

Providing a common framework of understanding for rural researchers by developing a pan-Canadian overview of socio-economic trends and policies for rural and small town Canada;

Providing high quality training for three graduate research assistants involved in the pan-Canadian policy scan;

Mobilising research knowledge for academic and public sector researchers and rural communities through pan-Canadian research network (Canadian Rural Revitalisation Foundation, Federation of Canadian Municipalities).

Formatting, images, white space and bolding are communications tools in a proposal (if possible to use them)

Example

Methodology

This research project has two components: i) an analysis of **socio-economic and demographic trends** in rural and small town Canada in order to document the types of economic transitions that communities are facing now and in the future (projected) and, ii) **a policy scan and institutional/policy mapping** of federal and provincial/territorial policies targeted to rural communities and towns that are losing their economic functions. Each component is described here.

Contributions of the study—careful with the excessive superlatives...

Excessive

..This will be the first study to ever provide a pan Canadian understanding of place based rural policies. Previous literature has neglected comparative analysis, instead focussing in narrow case studies.

Reasoned

.....While such literature has provided a *depth* of understanding of community characteristics, impacts, and responses to economic decline, there is no pan-Canadian understanding of these phenomena. The proposed study will thus fill an important research gap.

Feasibility and realism

Feasibility and realism in methodology, budget and timelines.
Connections and networks are important.

Experienced researchers will know what makes sense.



Demonstrating impact

What are the expected outcomes of the research?

Who is the intended audience and how will they be reached/engaged?

Knowledge translation activities?



Passive and excessive language is to be avoided

Indirect – flowery.

It is hoped that this research will contribute to important conversations among policy makers and researchers in Canada, informing how they work and communicate with one another.

More direct

The proposed research project aims to directly inform research and policy practice in Canada.

Best practices – try to remove words, clean and concise language/ Read and read and read again, out loud.

Writing and communicating is your super strength - hone it. Stephen King: On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft

Thanks for listening!
Good luck in your applications!

