

*INSIDE THE MINDS of Grant Reviewers and Grant Recipients*

# Pitfalls in grant applications – Reviewers' Pet Peeves

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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!

