Crafting your award application

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Agenda

1. Getting started
2. Project management
3. Don’ts
4. Getting started questions

McGill | Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

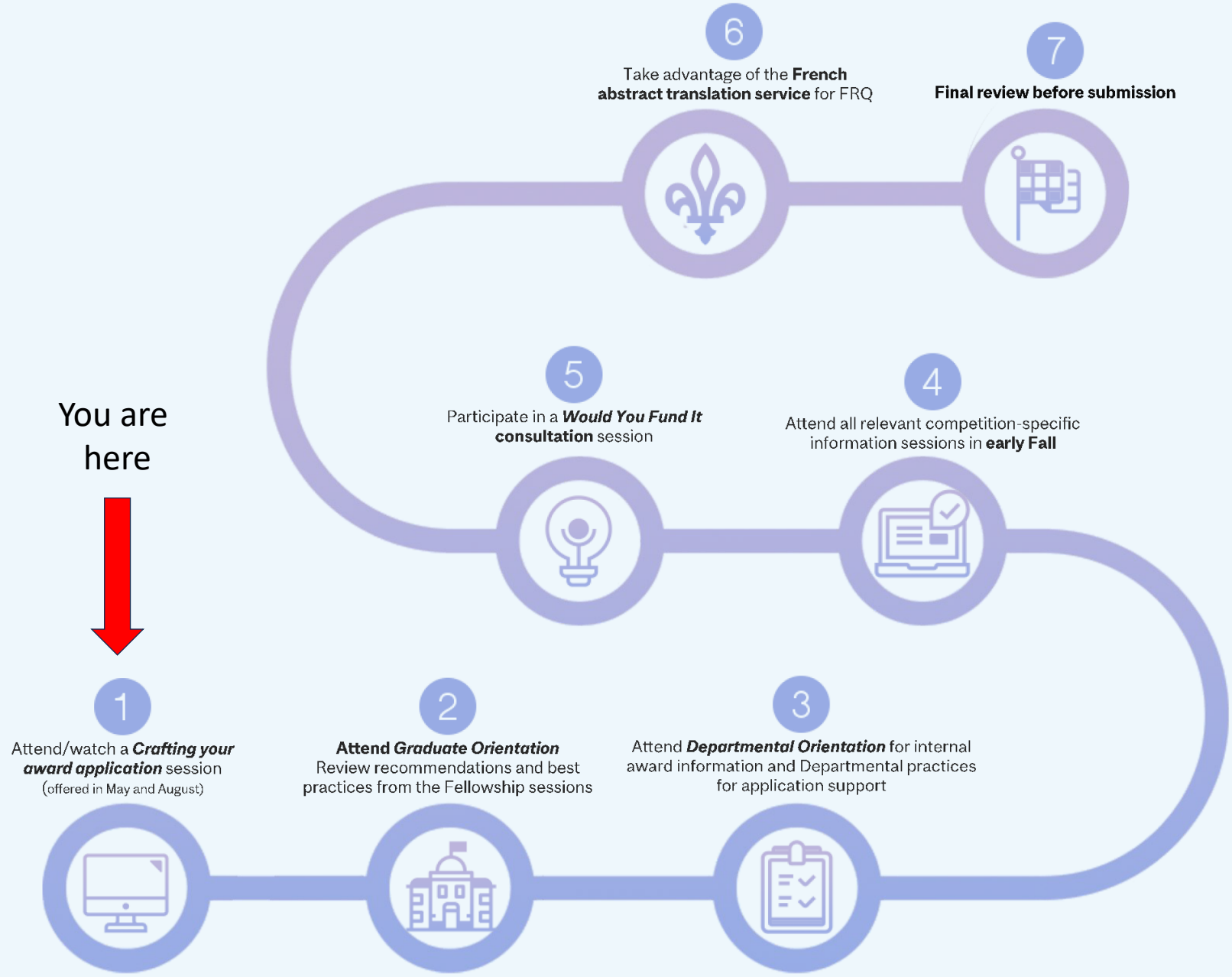
Graduate Funding *Roadmap*

Before you arrive at McGill

1. Check your email for registration information for Pre-Arrival sessions
2. Consult **GradHub and Orientation Portals** to watch session recordings and to register for Graduate Orientation
3. Contact your **Graduate Program Coordinator** for questions

Once you arrive at McGill

1. Check your McGill emails for competition-specific information
2. Consult the **GPS Funding website** for detailed Fellowships information
3. Contact your **Graduate Program Coordinator** for questions



Is it worth it? ABSOLUTELY!

Fall 2024 FRQ Doctoral Awards

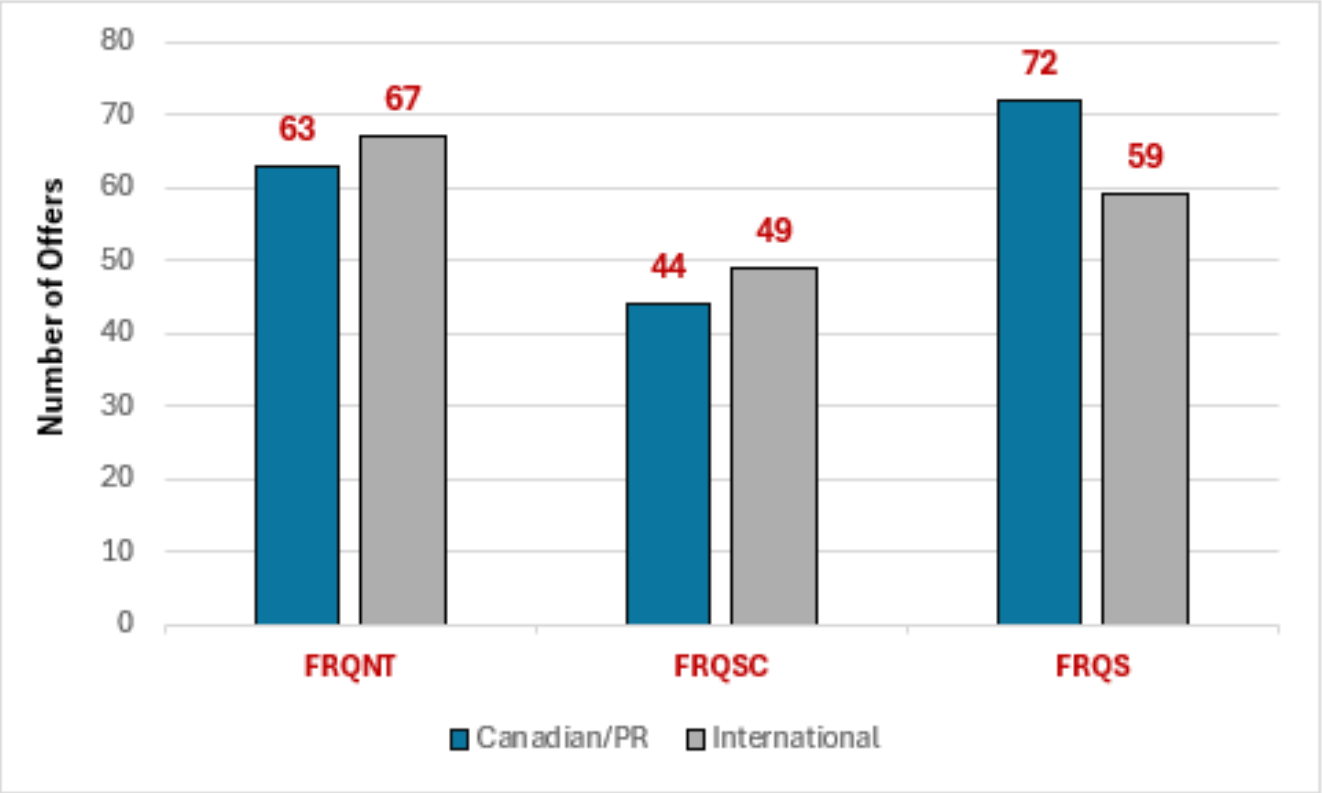
McGill Success by Category

	Total Offers (Quebec)	McGill Offers (% of total)
FRQNT - Doctoral	318	130 (41%)
FRQSC - Doctoral	343	93 (27%)
FRQS - Doctoral	276	131 (44%)

Who has success? EVERYONE!

Fall 2024 FRQ Doctoral Awards

Canadian AND International Students



Is this a good time for me to apply?

McGill highly encourages all graduate students to apply to external awards for all years when they are eligible and have a chance at success for those awards.

Analysis of our success rates has led to the following recommendations for doctoral applicants:

- Based on past experience the strongest applicants have
  - 1) a cGPA well above the minimum and approaching 4.0

  AND/OR
  - 2) a publication record

  AND/OR
  - 3) previous awards to demonstrate academic achievement
- If you have just entered your doctoral program and have not yet published or submitted any articles, it may be advisable to focus on strengthening your CV to improve your chances for next year's competition.

IMPORTANT

This workshop describes a **one-fits-all** proposal application

1. Funders have specific criteria for every aspect. Make sure to follow the latest (NOT last year's!) guidelines. Read funder guidelines **each time you apply** even if you apply to same funder the succeeding year – they may have changed something.
2. Your proposal is always a work in progress. Once written, it can be re-configured so you can apply to multiple funders, included in parts of your Progress Tracking, thesis proposal, publications, etc. Time spent writing it is **never** time wasted, funded or not.
3. Your Common CV is a living document. Once the basics are included it can be applied to other funding opportunities.

Getting Started

- Start early.
- Bookmark and READ **ALL** the funder's instructions including the FAQs – **this is crucial.**
  - What sort of research are they funding?
  - When are the deadlines – helps to know, no?
  - What documents are necessary and when?

Eligibility – window of opportunity

Eligibility – can **you** apply to this?

- Go to the funder website – Note that last year's details may no longer apply so only visit the criteria for the year you will apply.
  - **Months/terms/years in program** – some have limits (need to be registered at McGill in Quebec for X number of terms, need to be within X number of months in your program, etc.), make sure you are within the range they will accept.
  - **Citizenship** – International and out-of-province students can apply to FRQ in Fall of their first year

Getting Started – Tools!

- Start early.
- Make a to-do list or checklist.
- Make a timeline – work backwards.
- Get the tools (Word/Libre Office, Endnote/Zotero, SPSS, Inkspace, R, etc.).

To-do or checklist

- **Funders may have one** – if so, use it, embellish it, make it your own.
- **Add dates to each task** – put in updates – make it a living document.
  - Sent email request – documents received – uploaded – verified is correct.
- **Check off items as they are completed** give yourself a pat on the head.

Your Timeline

- **Start from the submission date and work backwards – internal deadlines?**
- **Know when all the documents need to be uploaded.**
- **Be conservative** – make sure there is wiggle room for all deadlines – not everyone has your priorities as their priorities, life happens, websites go down.
- **Do the easy stuff first.**
- **Ask for references.**
- **Ask for transcripts.**
- **Input information in your CCV.**
- Complete your Sex and Gender or other certificates.

Reference Letters

- **Be polite** – if possible, ask in person.
- **Give them your transcript and CV** – this is no time to be modest – they need ammunition to support you.
- **Tell them the deadlines** – pad it to allow for unforeseen circumstances.
- **Tell/send them the funder details and what the criteria are.**
- **Give them a rough outline of your project.**
- **Follow up with friendly reminder at least 1-2 weeks before the deadline.** – send them the penultimate project text.
- **Do NOT forget to thank them.**
- **Successful or not let them know the result** – and thank them again.

Transcripts

- **READ THE FUNDER'S INSTRUCTIONS.**
- **All means All** – even if there are no marks. Why? Validates your year in the program, your degree, your supervisor, etc.
- **Official means Official** – unofficial transcripts will NOT be accepted.
  - Your university may need time to get your transcripts to you – give them a lot of notice.
  - Non-North American universities may take even longer than anticipated so plan ahead and allow extra time.
- Request **an official translation** if required by the funder.
- Check after you upload that the transcript(s) is right-side up, contains all pages and is readable.

Common CV (if required - CIHR)

- **Get signed up** – get your PIN (Personal Identification Number; BTW it will be yours for life).
- **Select the funder and the correct type of CV** – the funder will have indicated which one to request.
- **Add all the details** – a CCV is a living document.
- **Verify the details in the PDF "draft version" of the CCV** – do NOT submit this version.
- **Make a PDF of the draft version, review it, change any errors/omissions and repeat.**
- **Submit the CCV number** – you can go back and change it if needed BUT your application MUST have the last and correct CCV number.

Application

- READ THE FUNDER'S INSTRUCTIONS – READ THE GUIDE, ALL PARTS OF THE APPLICATION, REVIEWER GUIDES, THE FAQs – DO THIS **BEFORE** YOU START ANYTHING!
- Put in the basic information – your name, degrees, email (use your official email and **not** a Gmail or other non-McGill email) etc.
- Follow the directions for font type and size, margins, word or character count – do not let your application get rejected for something avoidable.
  - E.g.. Abstract – (300 words), update the word count as you revise.
- Correct spelling, grammar, citations, word or character count, as you go, do NOT leave these to end.
- When satisfied upload to application – verify that it fits, do not assume that it will fit.

FRQ – some parts MUST be in French

FRQ competition deadline is on **1 October at 4PM (BUT do not wait until the last minute!!)**

GPS offers a **French abstract translation review service for doctoral FRQ submissions**. To take advantage of this, YOU will need to submit the English title and abstract, with a preliminary French draft (DeepL or Reverso preferred), to GPS using a webform. Before submission, ensure your English abstract has been proofread and is written in lay terms (no scientific jargon). The better the input, the better the output.

Prepare your abstract early! Abstracts will be received for translation review on a rolling basis starting in **August, with a final deadline 8 September 2025. Abstracts sent afterwards may not be returned to you in time for deadline.**

Translation upload requirements:

Title: (max 320 characters in English, max 400 characters in French)
Lay abstract: (max 400 words in English, max 500 words in French)

Instructions for submitting the title and abstract for translation are available on the GPS website.

Setting up your proposal

- Make an outline – this is your blueprint, it is NOT rigid.
- Break down your proposal into point form before writing your first draft.
- Decide whether you will have headings/subheadings and what they will be (e.g., Introduction, Background Material, Methodology, and so on).
- Follow the funder's headings if supplied.
- NEVER EVER disregard the page limit/font size etc. criterion – your project will **not** go forward to committee – set up your very first page accordingly.

AI and you

Be VERY VERY careful

- **RED** – using AI to write your project, abstract, etc, and submitting it as your own work constitutes plagiarism, is in violation of the McGill Code of Student Conduct and is NEVER acceptable

- **YELLOW** – using AI to generate content for your own use may have false information, NEVER rely on this as your only information source

- **GREEN** – for proofreading and editing existing text (of your own work) here you are using AI as a tool to **improve** text NOT **create** text

KISS Principle

- Review committees are multi-disciplinary and will include researchers in many fields other than your own.
- So, describe your project in non-technical terms. Use clear, plain, inclusive language and avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Typographical or grammatical errors. Do not rely completely on your grammar checker – they will make mistakes, verify your text yourself. Ask a friend if you are not sure. Correct mistakes right away. Do not leave this job until the end.
- Hence, follow the **KISS** principle – **K**eep **I**t **S**imple **S**tupid!
- Many times, less is more.

Title and lay abstract

- Title – Have a clear title – make it snappy.
- The title should be simple, understandable, have no jargon or acronyms and attract interest.
- Lay abstract title – make it significantly different from the research title.
- Lay abstract – do NOT wait until the last minute to complete this task. Ignore this important component at your peril. All reviewers will read the lay abstract and all reviewers end up voting in committee. Make sure that all reviewers understand how important and key your research is.

Definition of strength

A strong research proposal:

- Has a precise, pertinent and interesting research question/hypothesis.
- Highlights the significance of the proposed research.
- Describes the data or source material.
- Clearly outlines a research plan that is doable by you within the funding term.
- States what new areas your research might reveal.
- Excites the reviewer so they can appreciate the wider significance of your project – the BIG picture is impressive.

Know the funder

- **Pick the best review committee for your project.**
- **Know the kinds of projects they fund.**
- **Look up what projects were funded in that panel in previous years.**
- **Know who were on the review panels in the previous year.**
  Look them up to get an idea of their expertise – 2/3s of them will be there for your application.

CIHR IRSC
Canadian Institutes of Health Research | Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada

NSERC CRSNG

Québec
Fonds de recherche – Nature et technologies
Fonds de recherche – Santé
Fonds de recherche – Société et culture

SSHRC CRSH
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines

Make it easy for the reviewer

- Make an impact in the first few sentences.
- Grab your reviewers' attention and excite them about your project from the get-go.
- Make it easy for them to write the review and thus fund your proposal. Examine the criteria reviewers are asked to write about in their review. Make sure your proposal addresses each one clearly.
- Tell them in bold, declarative sentences how your research is innovative and valuable.
- Have a clear hypothesis or research objective – make this a statement.
- Significance is vital. Answer the "Who Cares" question. Be emphatic about how your research/scholarship will make a "contribution to knowledge" or address an important question.

Park your ego

- Have the proposal reviewed and commented on by others – tell them to be critical, nasty, a true devil's advocate.
- Get feedback. Edit. Then edit some more. Repeat. The more diverse opinion and criticism you receive on your proposal, the better suited it will be for a multi-disciplinary panel.
- If your reviewers think Aim 3 is rotten – remove it; if Aim 2 should be before Aim 1 – change the order.
- Your document should be exciting, showcase a significant research question, be well-done, well-researched and doable by you.

Lean on others

- Get help – writing is a learned skill.
- **McGill Writing Centre – Graphos**
- Would you fund it? is a program which is helpful to many.
- Consult (rope in!);
  - Other members of your research team
  - Your supervisor and other mentors
  - Have friends read your lay abstract
  - Have them read your project

graphos
GET IT IN WRITING

mcgill.ca/graphos/commons

- **Courses:** 1-credit offerings that complement your degree program.
- **Workshops:** focused events on key writing strategies, conventions, topics, and genres.
- **Peer Writing Groups:** small clusters of advanced graduate students who meet regularly to share and improve works-in-progress.
- **Tutorial Service**: one-on-one sessions to improve your writing skills. (Offered by the McGill Writing Centre)
- **Writing Commons**: a space in which we create conditions for you to write productively in the company of others during thesis retreats and related events.

A compelling proposal MUST have:

THE ARGUMENT. What exactly will you investigate?

CONTEXT. How does your research fit within your field?

A RATIONALE. Why MUST your investigation/idea be funded, i.e., what research gap are you filling?

WHO CARES! Significance. How and why does your research matter? How does it relate to the **BIG** picture?

THE HOW. Methodology—how and what you are going to do to test the hypothesis or answer the proposed questions and why? What is success? What is plan B?

Don’ts (Ever)

- **Wait until the last minute to upload your application.** Websites get overloaded, your internet crashes, you lose power, etc.
- **Flaunt funder guidelines.** Know what they are and use them.
- **Omit necessary documents**. Your application will be triaged.
- **Submit lengthy proposals**. Get to the point. Be focused and concise. Don’t diverge into irrelevant tangents without a clear sense of purpose. Don’t be vague.
- **Cover too much research ground**. Focus your study. The research plan must clearly inform the reader how the study will test the hypothesis or resolve a problem.
- **Neglect the BIG picture**. Mentioning minor issues is acceptable BUT they should not overpower the major one.
- **Poor grammar or careless writing**. Careless writing is equated with careless research. Don’t go there.

Rejection

An important aspect of the proposal experience.

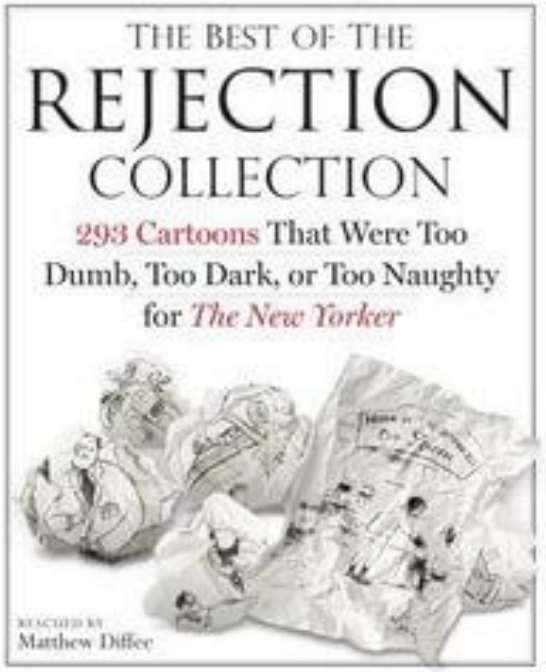
1. Do NOT despair! Many more projects are not funded than are funded meaning that you are in good company. Now, pick yourself up and get going on the next application; you and it **will** be better.

2. After a week or so – reread the review comments in detail. Remember to park your ego.

3. The positive comments. Keep these factors in your proposal.

4. Those negative comments …. –

- Short term text modifications: Immediately alter your proposal. E.g.. hypothesis not clearly stated, power calculation flawed, unclear if patient/client numbers can be recruited, etc.
- Long term experimental modification: Make a plan for what you need to do to address these. Such as, publications are wanting, preliminary data are scant, etc.



Staying Happy and Healthy at McGill

McGill offers a wide range of resources to support your wellbeing during graduate studies. These resources are there for **you**, don't hesitate to make use of them!
Scan the QR code below to see a selection of McGill's best services for graduate student wellbeing:

mcgill.ca/gps/students/supporting-graduate-student-well-being

Funding unit contact

graduatefunding.gps@mcgill.ca

Questions? Comments?

NEXT - some helper slides to get you going

Proposal

Introduction: What <u>exactly</u> do you want to study?

- What is your research question/hypothesis?
- Who cares?
- What is its purpose/significance? Does it have a practical use?
- How are you defining your terms?
- What are the limitations of your study?
- What is your perspective or viewpoint?

Knowns and unknowns

- What is already known? What is your end goal?
- Do past studies disagree? If so, how?
- What knowledge gap will your project resolve/fill?
- What research model was used previously and what were/are its advantages and disadvantages?
- Did past studies address, or not, the relevance and impact of the topic/question for diverse groups? Underrepresented groups? Diseases? Populations? Models? Age groups? Sex and gender? Etc.
- How does consistent underrepresentation of any of the above, if present, impact previous work? How is your study going to address/fix this problem?

Approach - STEM

- What approach will you use? Why is your approach the best one?
- What is your experimental model and how and when will you collect the data? How relevant is the model to the human experience?
- Who/what are your subjects and control populations? How will you recruit/derive them? How will you respect/include EDI? Respect ARRIVE guidelines? Will you randomise? Are some of the team blinded?
- How will privacy be protected? Do you have consent? Are the IRB and FACC approvals completed? Did you complete a power calculation?
- Is the research team in place? Will you have client/patient members on the research team? Are knowledge users appropriate and is the research panel diverse if that is important for the funder? Are sex and gender included in every aspect?

Approach - Humanities and Social Sciences

- What approach will you use? Qualitative? Why is your approach the best one?
- What does it involve? Grounded theory?
- Does it involve ethnography? How will you engage with your selected group or organization? Are you already a member?
- Will you participate actively i.e., Action Research?
- Who are your subjects and why is this group the best group to study?
- Does your study depend on stories told to you? How will you collect, store and analyze these narratives?
- How will privacy be protected? Do you have consent? Is the IRB completed / necessary?

Sex and Gender – STEM and Social Sciences

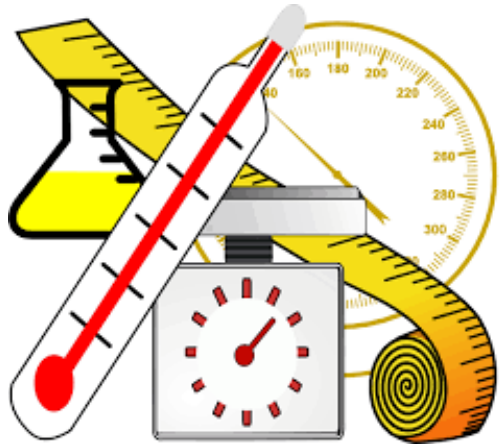
- Know the sex of the biologicals in your project – make sure to include males and females, men and women in every part of you project and separate sex/gender as part of your analyses. Not applicable is not an option.
- SGBA/GBA+ - women, men and gender diverse people experience policies, programs and initiatives. Include them.
- Intersectionality: The "plus" in GBA+ i.e. differences between biological (sexes) and socio-cultural (genders), other factors (such as race etc.,) AND how these factors influence policies, programs, services, and research, etc. Talk about it.
- Resources: Gender-based Analysis Plus research guide, Women and Gender Equality Canada; SGBA in Clinical/Health Research (CIHR); Course on GBA Plus, Women and Gender Equality Canada ; EDI in Research, Equity at McGill

SGBA/GBA+ – STEM and Social Sciences

- Explicitly state how SGBA/GBA+ and intersecting identities factor into all aspects of your research (design, methodology, data analysis and impact).
  - Does your research involve/impact diverse or underrepresented populations?
  - Does your project involve Indigenous communities?
  - Will you interview people individually or in focus groups? Will you take notes?
  - Does your project involve secondary analysis? If so, what form? Text? Audio? Video?
  - Will your survey include open-ended questions?
  - If SGBA/GBA+ or diversity factors are not applicable, why not? Is this a limitation?
- If your proposed topic and disciplinary norms include researcher positionality, how does it impact the research problem, research design & methodology of your research?
- How did/can you mitigate bias?

The How - STEM

- What are your key variables and measurements? How are they defined?
- Will you randomize? Are some of the team blinded to your intervention?
- How and when during your experiment will you collect the data for your study (observation, interviews etc. daily, weekly, yearly, etc.)? Why are these the most informative times?
- Are your methods of data collection feasible by you?
- Is the necessary expertise in place? Equipment available to you?
- Do your definitions and measurement methods duplicate or differ from those used previously? Why are the ones you chose better?
- Are you developing something? How will you validate the new method?



The How – Humanities and Social Sciences

- Are your methods of data collection feasible by you?
- Will you transcribe the interviews or type up the notes?
- How will you describe and categorize content either text or otherwise for common words? Phrases? Themes?
- How will you examine for patterns or repeated idea or themes?
- Will you have a data coding system?
- Are you developing something (e.g. questionnaire / technique)? How will you validate the new method?

What and Who

- What kind of analysis will you use? Do you have the expertise?
- Do your definitions and measurement methods duplicate or differ from those used previously? Why are the ones you chose better?
- Will you disaggregate your data by any specific factors? Why is this important to do?
- How will you account for variation in your population or model? Did you factor this into your power calculations?
- What variables will your analysis consider? Inclusion/exclusion criteria? Why these ones?
- Does the research team (and you!) have all the expertise to complete the study?

Expectations and plan B

- Does ALL your preliminary data support your hypothesis and demonstrate that you can perform the study?
- What will be a success?
- What alternative plans and/or mitigation strategies do you have?
- What is your plan B?
- Are all the systems and methods in place already? If some are not currently available, how will you acquire them?
- Are all instruments/patient/client etc., groups necessary for success in place? If not, how will you make sure your project can be accomplished?

Conclusions

- How does your research project address a burning need?
- How will your research inform on your hypothesis and/or objectives?
- How does your project relate to the BIG picture?
- How might others use your results/discovery?
- How will this information change the field? Advance knowledge? Impact policy? Change outcomes?

Outreach and publishing

- Will your research be published through accessible formats, i.e., open-source platform?
- Will you share your findings with your human participants?
- How will you reach those who could benefit from the findings?
- How will you share your research findings? Where will you share your work? Give names of conferences if appropriate.