Crafting your award application

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Agenda

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

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.
- Read **ALL** the funder's instructions – **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 – windows 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 students can apply to FRQ – make sure you meet the criteria (terms registered at McGill in Quebec, etc.)

Getting Started – Tools!

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

To-do or checklist

- **Funders may have one** – if so use it.
- **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**.
- **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.
- **Do the easy stuff first.**
- **Ask for references.**
- Ask for transcripts.
- **Input information in your CCV.**
- Complete your Sex and Gender certificate if that is necessary.

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 too.
- **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.
- **Official means Official** – unofficial transcripts will NOT be accepted.
  - The 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

- **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, 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, 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.
- Understand and 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.
- Use Word or other text software. Easier to correct spelling, grammar, verify word or character count, etc.
- When satisfied upload to application – verify that it fits, do not assume that it will fit.

FRQ – some parts MUST be in French

GPS offers a French abstract proofreading and editing service for **doctoral** FRQ submissions.
You need to submit a single .pdf file with using this webform

Translation upload requirements:

Title (max 320 characters)
Lay abstract (max 400 words)

Prepare your abstract early!

Upcoming abstract submission deadlines are:

- **30 August** (13 September return)
- **11 September** (30 September return)

Know the funder

- **READ THE FUNDER'S INSTRUCTIONS.**
- **Know their criteria.**
- **Know the kinds of projects they fund.**
- **Look up what projects were funded 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

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.

KISS Principle

- 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.
- Review committees are multi-disciplinary and will include researchers in many fields other than your own.
- Hence, follow the **KISS** principle – **K**eep **I**t **S**imple **S**tupid!
- Reviewers like it that way.
- 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.

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

https://www.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?

How to get started

Introduction: What exactly 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?

Literature Review

- 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?

Materials and Methods

- 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 are your subjects and control populations? How will you recruit 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?
- Does the project integrate any sustainability concerns of the funder? – Eg., FRQ has specific sustainability goals that you must address.

Sex and Gender

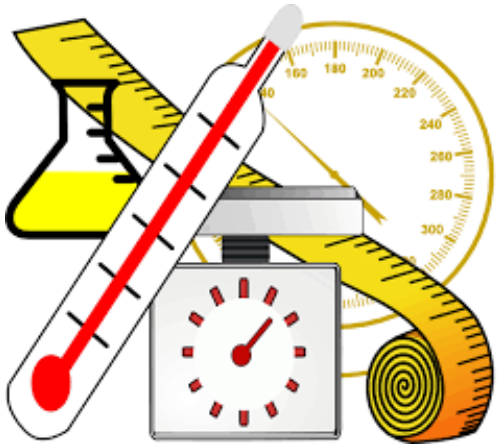
- Know the sex of the biologicals in your project – animals AND cells, make sure to include males and females in every experiment and separate sex as part of your analyses. Not applicable is no longer an option.
- SGBA/GBA+ - women, men and gender diverse people experience policies, programs and initiatives. 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+ & Research Design

- Explicitly state how SGBA/GBA+ and intersecting identities factor into all aspects of your research (design, methodology, data analysis and impact).
  - Does your research directly or indirectly involve/impact diverse or underrepresented populations?
  - Does your project involve secondary analysis of data? If so, why?
  - 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?

Measurements

- What are your key variables and measurements? How are they defined?
- 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 (e.g. questionnaire / technique)? How will you validate the new method?



Analysis and feasibility

- What kind of analysis will you use? Do you have the expertise?
- 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?
- What will be a success? What alternative plans and/or mitigation strategies do you have? What is your plan B?
- Are all the biological systems (e.g. cell lines) and methods in place already? If some are not currently available, how will you acquire them?
- Does the research team (and you!) have all the expertise to complete the study? Are all instruments necessary for success in place?
- Does the preliminary data support your hypothesis and demonstrate that you can perform the study?

Outreach and publishing

- Will your research be published through accessible formats, i.e., open-source platform)?
  - Understand the funder's rules on open access – FRQ and Plan S – open accessibility as soon as it is published, thesis (no embargos allowed)
- Will you share your findings with your human participants?
- How will you reach those who could benefit from the findings?
- Where will you share your work?

The NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL of MEDICINE

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?

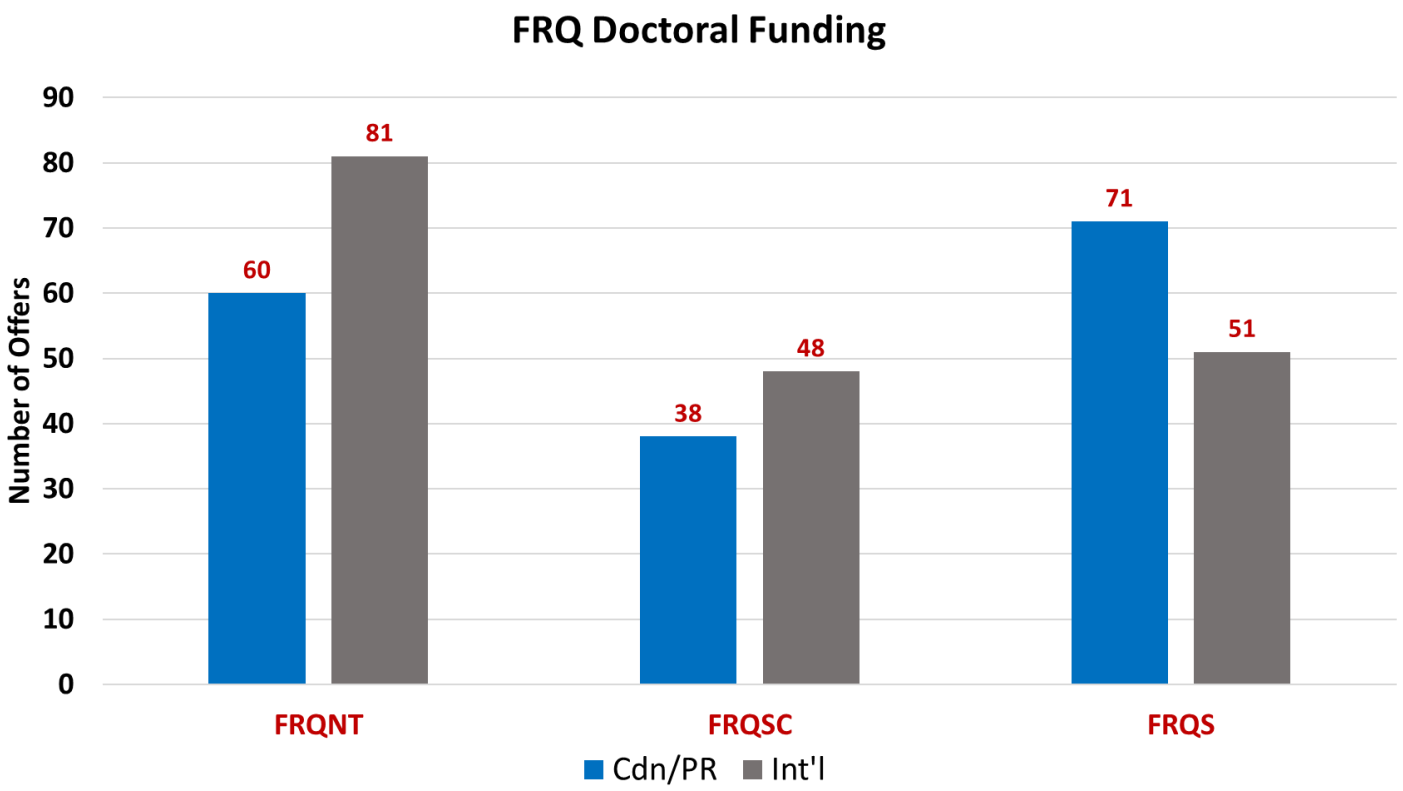
Fall 2022 FRQ Doctoral Awards

McGill Success by Category

	Total Offers (Quebec)	McGill Offers (% of total)
FRQNT - Doctoral	**320**	**141 (44%)**
FRQSC - Doctoral	**340**	**86 (25%)**
FRQS - Doctoral	**273**	**122 (45%)**

Fall 2022 FRQ Doctoral Awards

Canadian vs. International Students



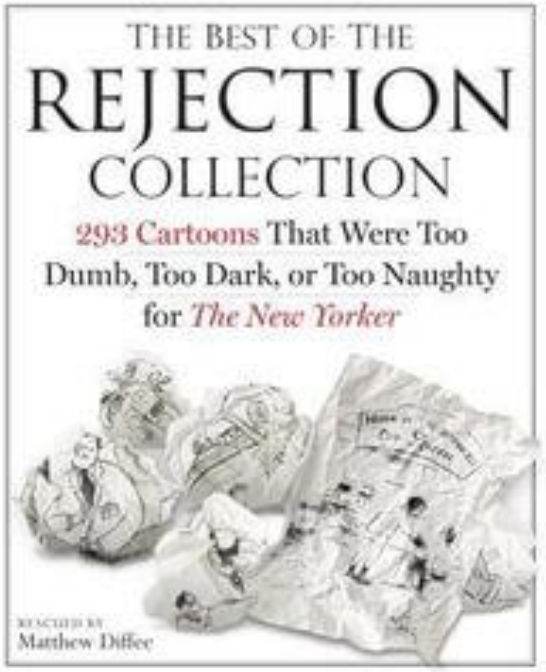
Don’ts (Ever)

- **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:

https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/staying-happy-and-healthy-graduate-studies

Funding unit contact

graduatefunding.gps@mcgill.ca

Questions? Comments?

Thank you!