

Investigators and Environment Scan

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Show the Strengths of the Investigators.

Show the Strengths of the Environment

Document that the investigators are appropriately trained, experienced, and likely to succeed.

- **Show that the principal investigator is well versed with the methodology.**
- Make it clear that a senior biostatistician will be involved in this project.

Reviewers Comments: “*Can this person pull this off?*”

- **Describe the roles of all co-investigators in sufficient details.**
- Show that there is clear synergy between the PI and the co-investigators with complementing expertise.
- **Summarize the strengths of the team**

Summary of a team: An example from a winning Grant

“The study will be implemented by a high-quality on-going academic partnership between the Nigeria and the UK, working closely with key Federal, State and Local policymakers as the project partners. The Health policy Research Group (HPRG) is a multi-disciplinary group based in the University of Nigeria, Enugu-campus, which conducts research, policy analysis, policy advice and technical assistance. It has strong links with policymakers and other actors in Nigeria. The HPRG team includes experts in *health systems and policy research, evidence-informed policymaking, Statistical Analysis, Health economics, knowledge uptake and research-policy partnerships*”

“The Nuffield Centre for International Health and Development at the University of Leeds (UNIVLEEDS) has a long-standing reputation in international development and capacity building funded by the EC, DFID, ESRC, and MRC. UNIVLEEDS expertise includes *action research, capacity assessments and building, mixed-methods evaluations, health policy analysis and evidence-informed health policymaking*”

“Both HPRG and UNIVLEEDS designed this study and will work closely with decision-makers in all activities. HPRG will primarily lead the overall design and the in-country work including engagements with, and capacity building of, key stakeholders. UNILEEDS will primarily advise on data analysis and intervention design”

Productivity of the team

- **Document the productivity of the investigators** and the research team, particularly publications during the previous funding period.

“Collectively, our research team has more than 10 years of experience in this area of research”.

“We have worked together for the past 14 years and have jointly published more than 25 papers”.

Bio sketches....1

- Use the most up-to-date format and instructions.

<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-15-024.html>

- This web site may be helpful: SciENcv: Science Experts Network Curriculum Vitae

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sciencv/>

- Register for an “ORCID iD” to create a unique identifier to distinguish you from other researchers. Use this ID on your web page, in publications and in grant applications.

<https://orcid.org/register>

Bio Sketches....2

- Explain to your collaborators the importance of updating bio sketches to make them as strong as possible and give them sufficient time to accomplish this.
- Format all bio sketches in the application in a similar fashion and with the same font. Fonts should be 11-12 point with any of the following (**Arial**, Helvetica, Georgia, or Palatino Linotype).
 - **You are selling your research team as this is a unified package. So think in terms of public relations.**
- Don't ask for bio sketches the day before they are due.

Bio Sketches....3

- Show reviewers that you and your team have a strong record of productivity.
- Point out a long history of collaboration.
- *Also, valuable is a long history of working with the same biostatistician.*
- Include a bio sketch for each of your key personnel.
- Reviewers will also look to see that you have converted your abstracts into full publications.
 - *A large number of abstracts with few publications give the impression that you don't know how to do the complete job.*

Bio Sketches....4

- You must tailor your biosketch for each grant application.
- Biosketches must include a “Personal Statement” about what that person's role will be on that project. Write "I will do this..." not "Dr. Manga will do this..."
- This personal statement must be well-written, establish your expertise, your collaboration with the PI, and your understanding of the central research question. E.g.

“My research and teaching interests in clinical research and medical writing over the past 20 years culminated in the publication of a leading textbook “How to write for publications”.

“Having worked with the P.I., Dr. Onunu, for the past 15 years and having reviewed tens of EDCTP protocols over the past 15 years, I have the expertise required for the proposed projects.”

Bio Sketch....5

- Each bio sketch must include the most recent and relevant publications for your grant.
- Your colleagues may not have time to tailor their bio sketch for your project.
 - If your grant is to be successfully funded, you must go the extra mile and ask for permission to edit it, and then send it back to them and ask if they are OK with your edits.
- Follow all of the rules for bio sketches.
 - They can each be up to 2-4 pages;
 - 15 publications is a suggestion, not a rule.

Bio Sketch....6

- Be sure to delete the instructions on the bio sketch form *"Provide the following..."*.
- After the heading for publications, add the total number, such as "(selected from more than 120)".
- Ideally, the bio sketches should include recent publications in high-profile journals.

Some Reviewers' Comments on Bio sketch

- “I am very impressed with the applicant and his productivity.”
- “This is a very productive researcher.”
- “Experienced principal investigator and co-I with consistent publication history; co-I has published in directly related area of investigation.”
- “PI and proposed co-I have published together.”
- “PI with modest productivity mostly in mid-tier journals.”
- “I would describe the investigative team as **craptacular**.”
- “They have made no progress since their last grant was funded.”

Show the Strengths of the Environment

Convince the reviewers that:

- Your scientific environment will contribute to the probability of success
- The Institutional support, equipment and other physical resources available to you are adequate for the project proposed.
- The project will benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, and collaborative arrangements.

Describe how the environment will ensure that the proposed studies are successful.

Some Reviewers' Comments on Environment

- “*Facilities, resources, and equipment are minimally described.*”
- “*The resources available to Dr. X are minimally described.*”
- “*The level of detail provided is minimal. It is very difficult to assess the appropriateness of the research environment to support the work proposed.*”
- “*The environment is probably OK but it's minimally described so maybe it's good but maybe not.*”
- “*First class environment.*”

Reviewers' Comments: An example from a winning Grant

- *This is a strong group, both in the UK and Nigeria. The individuals have a strong track record in the field and are very well placed to deliver the research proposed. The host organisations in the UK and Nigeria appear supportive and have worked together previously. Appropriate facilities appear to be available.*
- *One particular strength is the team member with key expertise in realist evaluation, although it is slightly unfortunate that this person appears to have **no** low-income country experience. An important and very positive effect of the proposed work will be to build capacity for the realist approach in Nigeria, among a strong and influential research group in the country.*

Note on collaboration

- **Describe how you will collaborate with other departments, universities, and institutions.**
- **Identify your weakness** and recruit experienced experts in these areas to collaborate.

Reviewers' Comments

- “*The PI needs a pathologist on the research team.*”
- “*The PI clearly needs a health systems expert on the research team.*”
- “Investigator group has appropriate research skills and track records although the research team composition is dominated by Psychiatrists with no sociologist and biostatistician. The biggest weakness is that some key disciplines for this research are not included. The investigators need expertise of an academic nurse/midwife to interpret professional practice issues concerning implementation and what works”

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Reviewers' Comments

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- *"The PI clearly needs a health systems expert on the research team."*
- Investigator group has appropriate research skills and track records although the research team composition is dominated by Psychiatrists with no sociologist and biostatistician. The biggest weakness is that some key disciplines for this research are not included. The investigators need expertise of an academic nurse/midwife to interpret professional practice issues concerning implementation and what works.

Responsible conduct of research

- Document that the investigators have received training in the responsible conduct of research.
- Create a heading "Training in the Responsible Conduct of Research".
 - List the courses you have taken and the courses you will take.

Evidence of institutional & organizational support..1

- **Demonstrate support from the university and department.** A letter of support from your Dean/Provost/CMD is critical
- The support letter should make it clear that **the person writing the grant is considered an important part of the future of that department.**
- Demonstrate support from Policy makers if collaborating with them
- Give people plenty of lead time to write professional customized letters of support.
 - Often investigators give a template at the last minute and this can result in unconvincing letters.

Evidence of institutional & organizational support...2

- The letters of support should be well written. Rather than starting most of the sentences with "I ...", it should be more sophisticated. For example: *"This letter is to confirm our conversation regarding my willingness to collaborate on your proposed MRC application".*
- The letter should be written in a formal style, even if you are close friends. Rather than "Dear Richard", write "Dear Dr. Uwakwe".
- Avoid letters of conditional support such as:
"If Dr. X receives this grant we will support him."

Example of letter of support from FMOH

- We recognise the importance of Integrating community-based health information systems and national health management information systems for effective decision making in Nigeria.....
- We at the Federal Ministry of Health see this research as an excellent opportunity to help us understand how community-based health information system can be successfully integrated into the National Health Management Information System and improve community engagement in grassroots-level health planning and management decisions within the current context of Nigerian health system.....
- We shall regularly engage with researchers, to help them understand the policy processes, and help us understand the importance of, and practice, continuous reflection. We will invite researchers to discuss the project at different stages and will continuously review its progress at our 3-monthly management review meetings.

Reviewers' comments on Letter of support

- *There is a lack of evidence for institutional support.”*
- *“The PI would benefit from including a more senior investigator on the research team to provide some general guidance and to help develop a more innovative and imaginative approach.”*

Proposed levels of commitment by the research team members

- **Make it clear that the PI and collaborators will be able to devote the time to this project.**
- In general it is not a good idea to put people on your grant for 0% effort.

Some Reviewers Comments

- *“He is putting 0% to this effort, so I don’t see how this will happen.”*
- *“There are 4 bosses and 1 working person. I cannot imagine 1 person doing all this work.”*
- *“The PI is asking for no support. It will all be done by an unnamed posdoc.”*
- *“Dr. X’s time commitment of 10% is insufficient for the scope of the proposal.”*
- *“Levels of effort proposed for some collaborators are insufficient for the scope of the project raising doubts that goals will be accomplished.”*
- *“The scope of the work is broad and it is doubtful that it can be accomplished in the allotted time with an as yet to be named technical assistant and key collaborators that have no effort or support.”*

Summary.

Document the following:

- The research team is well suited for the project.
- Productivity in publishing. An ongoing record of accomplishment that has advanced the field.
- Collaborative multidisciplinary team with complementary and integrated expertise.
- Appropriate organizational structure to lead and govern the team to success.
- Designated laboratory space and equipment that you have sole control over.
- Evidence of institutional support.
- The PI will devote sufficient time to the project.
- The proposed levels of commitment by the research team members are more than adequate to the project goals in the proposed timeline.
- Well written Biosketch