Tips for Writing Personal Grants Proposals in ICT

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(for further suggestions and corrections send an e-mail to the authors)

What is in this Slide Deck?

If you are time pressed, and do not have enough time to go over this slide deck, then you started too late.
Experience learns that the single most important slide is #14 ‘Structuring’.

- Why this slide set?

PHASE I: PREPARATIONS

- Getting Ready. *How to prepare for writing a proposal?*
- Evaluation Context. *What are evaluators looking for?*

PHASE II: PUTTING TOGETHER THE NARRATIVE CV AND PROPOSAL

- Narrative Curriculum Vitae *How to show why you are the right person for the proposal?*
- Structuring. *A recipe for a (successful) proposal.*
- Writing Process. *The mindset for the writing process.*
- Scoping. *How to aim and frame the proposal?*
- Tactical Elements. *A checklist to make a better proposal.*
- Knowledge Utilization. *For ICT proposals an opportunity, if done well.*

PHASE III: GETTING FEEDBACK

- Organizing Feedback. *Alone you go fast, together you go farther.*

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PHASE IV: REBUTTAL PHASE

- Rebuttal. *One of the few things a panel reads completely*.

PHASE V: PANEL INTERVIEW

- Panel Interview. *How to perform optimally in front of the panel*.

FINALLY: PITFALLS AND WISE WORDS

- Common Pitfalls. *So easy to make. So easy to avoid.*
- Final Wise Words. *Thoughts that are useful beyond proposals.*

Why this Slide Set?

Reason #1 for getting rejected is the insufficient focus on scientific challenges in ICT.

- To be successful, learn from the best.
  - This slide set brings together the experience of tens of successful ICT scientists.
- ICT proposals suffer from a number of typical deficiencies.
  - It is easy to avoid these pitfalls if they have been pointed out.
- The learning curve is steep.
  - Following tips and tricks that have worked for others helps to avoid wasting time and to focus on the content that really matters to get the proposal accepted.
- ICT research in the Netherlands is of high quality (see QANU Research Assessments).
  - We rarely see 'okay-ish' proposals; over 50% of the reviews score A+. Therefore, the devil is in the details.
  - A poorly written proposal on a good idea will not make it.

- The length of this slide deck illustrates that there are many factors at play that lead to a successful proposal. It can be a bit scary. Take your time to absorb the information. But be realistic in what are your personal 'must do's' and 'could do's'.

PHASE I: PREPARATIONS

Getting Ready

Start early so that you can allow yourself time to trash earlier versions and start all over again.

- Work on your narrative CV: creating/highlighting evidence that shows the alignment of your vision with respect to the proposal.
- The proposal should be credible from your past achievements. And demonstrate a clear research line.
- Begin with the end in mind. Your academic track record, CV and key outputs serve as underpinning of your ability to successfully execute the proposal. Do not distract the evaluators with details irrelevant for the proposal.
- Read tips and tricks available on the web.
  - *https://theprofessorisin.com/2011/07/05/dr-karens-foolproof-grant-template/*
  - *http://andreas-zeller.blogspot.nl/2013/02/twelve-tips-on-how-to-prepare-erc-grant.html*
  - *https://jvgemert.github.io/storyline.pdf*
- Get training and support from professionals in your organization, such as the ‘grant support’, ‘technology transfer’ or ‘valorization’ office.
- Get your hands on at least five successful and failed proposals and reviews.
- Start early with structuring, pitching and refining your idea without writing any text.
- Learn from Simon Sinek’s Golden Circle: Why-How-What. It helps structuring your proposal using a clear framework. *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Ss78LfY3nE*

Evaluation Context - I

Evaluators look for three things: what are you going to do, why you, and why now?

- Curriculum vitae is important in personal grants. Sometimes first round evaluation is based on short proposal and full CV only.
- What evaluators look for in your narrative CV ('why you'):
  - Authorship on papers. First author (Veni), last author (Vidi, Vici). Point out if 'Hardy&Littlewood rule of ordering authors alphabetically' is used.
  - Scientific independence. Publish without supervisor; build your own group.
  - Papers in important (impactful/A and A+ journals and conferences that have had impact. Point out what A/A+ journals and conferences are in your field. And explain impact beyond citations and rankings (which is often not allowed anyways).
  - Impact. In a world full of papers, what difference did your (key) papers make? Which A and A+ journals and conferences are relevant in your field.
  - Evidence for international recognition of your research by peers.
    - Substantial international experience, e.g. long research visits, collaborative papers.
    - Acquired larger projects (for Vidi, Vici grants) and noteworthy prizes.
    - Keynotes, invited contributions (papers), best paper awards, programme committees, patents (TTW proposal).
    - Media items, especially if they can be connected to the valorization section.
  - Other types of key results. Often key results are interpreted as key papers, but other outputs that have created impacted are equally valuable, like often downloaded software packages or major media exposure.
  - When selecting material, focus on top quality and on relevancy to the proposal; this is your chance to demonstrate the (start of) a successful line of research.

Evaluation Context - II

Write what you believe, not what you think the reviewers will want to hear.

- Core issue for ICT proposals: focus on scientific challenges that can compete with mathematics and big sciences.
  - The core should stay away from engineering advanced solutions.
  - Engineering and programming might be means in evaluation studies and valorization, but an ICT proposal is not an implementation project.
  - Emphasize that you diverge from the trend, from what others have done, and that you can do this only by researching foundational aspects of the newly proposed concept or approach.
  - Show that you are proud of and confident about what you propose.

- Reason #1 for getting rejected is the insufficient focus on scientific challenges in ICT ('what are you going to do').
- Do not hop on en-vogue topics or follow trends when the connection to the topic cannot be argued convincingly; however, show awareness of possible impacts of these trends onto your research
- A personal grant project should be able to stand on its own feet. Do not (explicitly) make it part of a larger proposal but show how it fits the larger ambition of your research line.

Evaluation Context - III

Strike a good balance between non-trivial, tractable results and extremely risky ambitions.

- A proposal that is not timely or urgent has no reason to be funded. Make sure you argue why your proposal should be funded now. And that you will have to do the research even if not funded.

- Be prepared to answer the following questions, either in the proposal or later in the interview ('why now').
  - If this is so important, why haven't others addressed this already?
  - Who is your competition?
  - If others have tried to address this and failed, what makes you think you can succeed (tip: evidence from earlier results, first proof-of-concept)?
  - Hasn't Google, Facebook, Amazon, OpenAI (etc) already solved this problem? (!)
  - Why isn't company X, hospital Y, or ministry Z willing to fund this research if it is so important (tip: foundational research)?
  - Why not another funding mechanism, like open competition, top sector programs, European programs, direct company funding? Even though it is sometimes difficult to answer this type of questions, have convincing arguments why this particular grant program fits your project and your needs in building your research line.

Evaluation Context - IV

Work packages lead to tangible outcomes, and in shaping them learn from business plans

- Be specific about the tangible outcomes that you target.
- Imagine for each work package that it will end up in a publication.
  - Which venue? What would be the story line?
  - If the work package does not lead to enough material for publication, then revise.
  - Classical pitfall: “work package 1 lays the foundations for XYZ”, without being specific what is actually done and why this is innovative/not incremental/standard.
- Work packages can benefit from similar argumentations as in business plans.
  - Take inspiration from start ups, pitches, SWOT analysis etc.
  - Important to find hidden assumptions, blind spots.
  - Think ideas through to the end.
  - Templates for developing business plans: many out there.
- Use pictures and schemes to illustrate how work packages are connected and how they influence each other.
- Rationalize the proposed timeline with content connected to work packages.
- The Gantt chart and timeline are ‘a’ plan, not ‘the’ plan, that shows that the proposal is realistic. Reality will always differ from the given plan.

PHASE II: PUTTING TOGETHER THE NARRATIVE CV AND PROPOSAL

Narrative Curriculum Vitae - I

A narrative CV is not just a story. It must have a convincing rationale in the context of the proposal

- A "narrative CV" is ambiguous: it cannot nor should not be defined crisply.
- Embracethis uncertainty in your advantage, to (subjectively) motivate why and what the evidence you give aligns with your research vision.
- Put images in your narrative CV, a single image for each aspect. If you wish to put multiple images, create new facets.
- Focus on rationale of the narrative.
  - How does the winding thread of your past accomplishments fit your future vision?
  - This may require creatively looking back at the things you did.
  - And possibly abstracting them in a new light. I.e.: there very well might be a pattern to the unconscious choices you make when you decide on what to work on (because you liked it).
  - What binds your research styles, topics, and organization?
- The emphasis is less on quantity (h-index, nr publications, venues, grants); Focus on quality: your narrative of importance.
- Follow DORA principles.
- Theory of mind: put yourself in the position of a committee member; what is it that a committee member is looking for? And make that easily findable.

Narrative Curriculum Vitae - II

Don’t boast, but be proud of what you achieved.

- Summarize the highlights so that committee members do not have to search for it.
- Make sure you give a full picture of all job-related aspects of yourself.
- Avoid too many details.
  - Make sure you know what it is that the evaluators should remember.
  - Great if they remember one thing from your CV; fantastic if two; more is a fantasy.

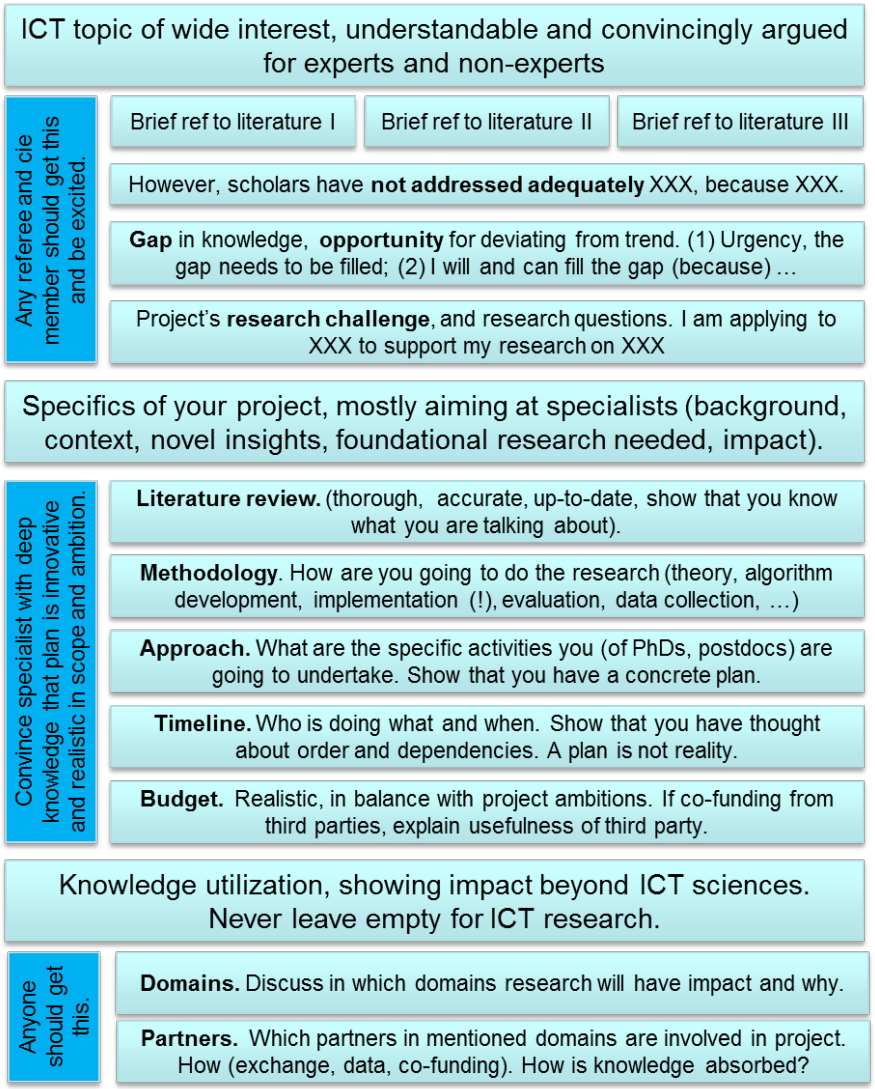
  Decide what they should remember even before starting to write: begin with the end in mind.

- Explain gaps in working experience / periods.
  - Maternity and parental leaves are relevant.

- Reserve sufficient time to put a good CV together.
- Get examples of narrative CVs, reflect on what you (dis)like about them; and synthesize.
- Ask feedback on your CV.

Structuring

Start early and work within well-defined structure. Credit to https://theprofessorisin.com/2011/07/05/dr-karens-foolproof-grant-template/



- Every reader should be able to understand what you are after. And agree that the problem is relevant. Possibly changing people's life. Here you lose or hook audience.
- Informative figures can help a lot.
- Do not drown readers in technical detail and jargon.
- 'However' sentence is the kicker, the crux of the proposal.
- Tell your story convincingly and with confidence.

- Make the objectives as concrete as possible.
- Focus, focus, focus. Choose, choose, choose.
- Focus on progress in ICT-science. Emphasize "why now" (tip: new data, techniques, … available).
- 'Methodology' and 'Approach' are typically weak in ICT proposals. A good idea is not good enough. Show that you know how to tackle the problem. E.g., in year 1, what subproblem are you addressing and how?

- Evaluators expect utilization/valorization/technology transfer from ICT proposals. Take this very seriously.
- Only empty if you can make a super strong case for not putting any utilization.

Writing Process - I

Trash initial versions of your proposal, keep only the feedback that you received.

- **Start early**. A good proposal is the result of serious thinking.
- Start with a pitch version of the entire structure of the proposal.
  - Writing is not the most time-consuming part. Bullet pointed pitching and storylines are!
- Kill your darlings. Be prepared to write multiple version of the proposal.
  - Once done with one version, get feedback, and start over.
  - Start with the template but be prepared to change the structure if needed.
  - Be prepared to change the scope and even the core of the proposal.
  - Make the story consistent and rounded. No loose end.
  - Write the proposal with reviewers in the field of submission in mind.
- Ask colleagues from a broad background for feedback on (a) the story line; (b) the weak spots in your argumentation; (c) proof-reading.
  - Frank feedback may be painful and cause more work. Better now than later.
  - Explain your colleagues how you incorporated their feedback.
  - The best way to shape your ideas is to share them and ask for feedback. Feeling reservations to share ideas and deciding to work on a proposal in isolation leads to poorer proposals.
- Allocate enough time to write the proposal, but not too much. At 90% – 95% perfection level, stop working on the proposal.

Writing Process - II

Activate collaboration partner and tools.

- Actively involve collaboration partners in the writing and reviewing process. Their role starts before funding of the project, not just afterwards.
- For more technical projects (TTW), propose and approach candidates for a strong user committee.
  - It shows you have a network in industry and/or the public sector.
  - And it makes technology transfer more convincing and shows links to 'the real world'."

- Use of generative AI and linguistic models
  - Not to write your project.
  - Useful for strengthening language and expressiveness.
  - Include a statement on if and how you used generative AI.
  - Let a generative AI produce a summary with key points of your proposal. It should produce what you expected. If not, ask yourself the questions what needs to be improved.

Scoping

The research objective is not what you want to build, but what you want to know and why this is new.

- The proposal addresses a relevant & novel topic (in ICT sciences).
- Big sciences study the physical world. Modern ICT scientists study the behavior of software, data, systems that form an overlay over today's physical world. Exploit this framing.
- Be specific and concrete about the results of the project.
  - No one will understand abstract (‘hand-waving’) results.
  - If it is a theory or framework, what will it look like?
  - Reviewers are not keen on ‘generalizations’ and ‘unified theories’.
  - If you claim the research is useful for 'someone', back up that claim with names.
- Be prepared to take risk. But
  - understand the level of risk evaluators are looking for, this differs per type of grant scheme.
  - describe the fall back or alternative. How will you re-plan the project?
  - taking risks does not mean ridiculously unbelievable.
  - explain that risks are manageable (by you!) based on (your) previous research, initial results, and expertise. Draw similarities if possible.

Tactical Elements - I

Common pitfalls are ‘hand waving’ results and underestimating the importance of a convincing ‘Approach’ (=‘How’) section.

- Choose a meaningful title, that will also pick the curiosity of reviewers and panels.
- Use illustrative figures and examples to explain the topic, problem, solution you want to work on, and possible alternatives.
- Make the proposal solid and as quantifiable as possible.
  - Use (initial or back-of-the-envelope) figures, diagrams, numbers to substantiate claims and results that you are after (x% improvement, faster, smaller, …).
  - Realize that the competition is very good at this.
  - Tell a realistic story that you believe and excites the reviewers and evaluation panel. You are explaining your ambition and not signing a contract.
- The ‘Approach’ section is typically evaluated as weak in ICT proposals.
  - Say how you are going to tackle the problem.
  - Distinguish between the (abstract) scientific objectives and the (concrete) tasks described in the ‘Approach’.
  - Avoid putting ‘reading literature’, ‘understanding’, and ‘making a plan’ in the ‘Approach’ section. You should have done this before submitting!

Tactical Elements - II

Objectives are not your 'love babies'. Focus, choose, and keep only those that contribute to a coherent story.

- Ask yourself if your objectives have real relevance, such as
  - unblocking new scientific directions, deviating from the trend.
  - potential uptake by other researchers or in societal/economic domains.
- In a well-rounded proposal, objectives, approach, utilization, and CV are connected dots, reinforcing its credibility. For instance,
  - earlier collaborations (CV) are now instrumental in addressing the proposal's objectives ➔ you are the ideal candidate to carry out the proposal.
  - partners (including user committee) ➔ provide data, equipment or infrastructure as part of the approach.
  - your earlier work (CV) ➔ already set you on the path of addressing the ICT topic and objectives that the proposal addresses.
- Submit the proposal under one field/category (not multiple!).
  - Even if the proposal is multidisciplinary.
  - Pick the discipline in which reviewers and evaluators know your name.
- Contact the personal grants team of your host university, also to get in touch with people that were successful.

Knowledge Utilization - I

Accept you will never be an expert but familiarize yourself with the lingo and present yourself as someone that knows the field.

- Many foreign reviewers have no idea what the Dutch mean by ‘knowledge utilization’ or ‘valorization’. Explain in your plan the concrete activities and use the more commonly accepted term ‘technology transfer’.

- Do not leave the valorization section empty. Especially in ICT, a convincing valorization section kicks the proposal up in ranking.

- For TTW proposals, industrial experience (former job, exchange) shows awareness of the importance of knowledge utilization.

- Think out-of-the-box and talk to ‘strangers’.
  - Get inspiration by talking to others about the impact of your proposal.
  - Talk to ‘business developers’ and specialists in valorization.
  - They will always ask you unexpected questions.

Knowledge Utilization - II

Nobody gets excited about proposals in niche areas or aiming for delta-improvements.

- Think at two levels.
  - Generic. In which economic, societal, or other scientific domains will the results have impact and why? Show that you are knowledgeable, invest time to learn about these domains. Just mentioning them as potential utilization areas is not good enough.
  - Specific. Who do you target specifically in this project. The best technology transfer involves committed partners in the project that
    - have capacity to absorb the project results. Plan for concrete steps.
    - are involved in the 'Approach', by providing man-power, resources, data etc. Connect these dots.
- Provide (implicit) proof of previous valorization success by listing student (B.Sc., M.Sc.) company projects and staff exchange.

- Avoid empty or unrealistic stories ('I will build this theory, then work with a company, and then put a product on the market').
- Do not fill the utilization section with empty words. Say what you have to say, no more.
- Focus not only on potential, show and prepare for initial concrete steps.

PHASE III: GETTING FEEDBACK

Organizing Feedback - I

It is fundamental to have different external evaluators that give their opinion about the proposal at different stages.

- Involve many, different and external people to read a draft.
  - From your field, from adjacent fields, from a different field, detailed thinker, high-level managing person, student, and from people who have been on evaluation committees.
  - If you get contradictory advices on X, then typically something is wrong with X but readers cannot put their finger on it. Revise X, perhaps differently than advised.
  - Do not blindly change your proposal, take feedback to resolve your own blind spots. What is the question behind the feedback?
- Get feedback as soon as possible.
  - Feedback just before deadline is useless.
  - Start with a rough idea (follow the narrative structure under 'Structuring') and pitch it to colleagues.
- Do as many rounds as possible.
  - Who do you want to read the proposal, and what do you expect from them?
  - Plan towards the time schedule of the readers of your drafts.
- Use experienced seniors and possibly a coach.
  - They will spot weak points and provide tough questions.
  - Ask non-experts to focus on the summary and introduction/motivation. Do they 'get it'?
  - Ask for honest and constructive feedback. It might be painful, but feedback like 'it looks good' is essentially useless.
- Inform your readers what you have done with their comments.

Organizing Feedback - II

Take feedback seriously, and do not defend yourself to the bitter end.

- Mock-up interviews are essential.
- Audience should be composed of
  - ICT researchers; they will teach you how to pitch for a broad ICT panel.
  - Scientists from big sciences; they will teach you how to pitch for a general scientific audience.
  - Laymen (the proverbial ‘grandparents’); they will teach you to pitch in an accessible and understandable way.
- Record yourself, during presentation and questioning, and review your performance together with some colleagues.
- Take timing seriously, even in the mock-up phases. Better use up 75% of the time allocated and use the remaining time for improvements later, than trying to get rid of a 25% overshoot in time.

PHASE IV: REBUTTAL PHASE

Rebuttal - I

Keep it short and concrete.

- The rebuttal period is a short and stressful period. Keep your head cool, and do not let your positive or negative emotions overwhelm you.
- Remember, evaluators process stacks of proposals. They are time-limited. Thus, they look for the key points in the proposal summary, reviews and rebuttal.
- Do not add any new information. You are invited to rebut the comments of the reviewers if needed.
  - Summarize and then point to information in the proposal.
  - If the reviewer asks for more details on a specific approach or method, see this as an opportunity to point to your earlier work and that you are 'on top of it'. Keep the provided additional information very short.
  - Take questions and misunderstandings seriously. Do not only answer but expand on what the consequences for the project would be (like: exploring A is a useful alternative but this would require work package X to be revised).
- Do not write your own positive interpretations of the reviewers, e.g., "*Thanks Reviewer #1 for seeing my project as an outstanding and most valuable proposal*". Reviewers carefully choose their words and do not need to be rephrased.

Rebuttal - II

Never quit after a mediocre review. Do not underestimate the power of the rebuttal.

- Evaluation panels may disagree with reviewer's comments based on your rebuttal.
- If a reviewer is factually incorrect, point this out with a short motivation.
- Formulate positively and be gentle but factual towards the reviews.

- Focus on the key comments, often given in the form of a summary at the end of the review. It is not necessary (and in fact a bad idea) to try to rebut every little remark.
  - Focus on rebutting the top-3 main points of criticism.
  - Take the liberty to collect similar points under one point to rebut.
- Avoid long quotes of reviewer's comments.
- Do not put comments of one reviewer against another.
- If you are asked to rebut per question, do not repeat your points several times.

- Ask for advice, for instance from those that gave feedback on your proposal.

- Generative AI can be of help to improve the formulations, but the rebuttal should be authentic and recognizable as written in your own style.

PHASE V: PANEL INTERVIEW

Panel Interview - I

Look at the opponent, listen carefully to the question, do not interrupt, and then answer concisely.

- Do not underestimate the panel members.
  - Look up photos + expertise areas of panel members, so you know the background of the person who is asking you the question.
- Be grateful for the panelists taking their time and being interested in your ideas. They have a long day of interviews. Make sure they remember you.
- Do not be in defensive mood, be confident on your proposal.
- Be respectful, enthusiastic, and keep cool. Enjoy the interview!
- Do not assume opponents are attacking you. Questioning is intended to get more information. Give that to them as objectively as possible.
- The last word is for the opponent, unless you are given last words.
- Answer concisely and to-the-point. If the opponent wishes to know more (the question behind the question), they will ask.
- Avoid long monologues and stacking argument on argument. You will lose the panel in length and complexity of the answer.
- Stop talking if the opponent interrupts. Apparently, they wish to know something that you are not (yet) giving.

Panel Interview - II

Rule #1: stay within time when presenting.

- Keep your presentation simple but not shallow. Have a (short) part that shows you are on top of the details (and for which it is okay if they do not understand).
- Shape your presentation such that it will trigger curiosity. Panel members are scientists. Manage to get a ‘puzzle’ element into your presentation that triggers them.
- Be explicit about what they should remember from your presentation.

- Be ready to answer detailed questions. Someone in the panel may have detailed knowledge and ask sharp questions.
- Anticipate as many questions as possible. Practice answers, especially the hard ones. Prepare a few key backup slides.
  - Not all panel members will ask questions, anticipate who might query you based on their background.
- Have additional concrete cases and examples ready for use.
- Always answer the question. Better to deliver a speculative beautiful answer convincingly than fumbling while not giving an answer.
- Do not put arguments of one opponent against another.

Panel Interview - III

Giving a pitch on the proposal is easy. The real art is in delivering beautiful answers to opponents.

- Do a mock interview.
- Practice delivering answers to the questions you can anticipate. This is more important than delivering the short presentation.
  - Prepare (and share) a list of questions.
  - Generative AI can provide useful inspiration for questions.
- It is not enough to know the answer; try delivering them in ten different flavors. With enthusiasm and passion.
- Ask feedback during the mock interview on three things that typically go wrong with ICT researchers.
  - Getting stuck in repeating arguments on motivation and context ➔ Provide information on how you will do the research, with concrete activities, cases, and examples.
  - Use of abbreviations and jargon ➔ make interview maximally accessible.
  - Use of the word ‘model’, ‘framework’, ‘theories’ ➔ immediately give one or two understandable examples.
- Finally: follow an interview training, addressing issue such as improving appearance (standing, voice, speed, …).

FINALLY: PITFALLS AND WISE WORDS

Common Pitfalls - I

Keep it simple: panels are not the experts on your proposal.
They often trust their intuition more than the opinion of experts.

- **Starting too late so that you do not have time to make major revisions to the proposal**.
- Being too technical in the first part of the proposal so that non-specialists have no idea what you are planning.
- Forgetting to state the obvious.
- Not citing all relevant research on the proposed topic.
- Thinking that the idea will sell itself. Everything, not just the idea, has to be outstanding: writing, style (short sentences, simple words), grammar, layout, font, diagrams. It is easy to get help on those aspects of your proposal.
- Naïve understanding of the valorization/application domain.
- Implicit lack of confidence, by including disclaimers such as the words ‘might’ and ‘can’ rather than ‘will’.
- Wordings that could foster the impression of incremental work.

Common Pitfalls - II

Stick to objective facts and claims. But you are allowed to speculate on the best possible outcomes.

- Being rude towards related work. Especially in ICT we tend to be hypercritical of each other's work. When distinguishing your own planned works, be gentle towards cited other people's work.
- Submitting a proposal on a topic in which you cannot demonstrate reputation. Have at least two very relevant publications that show you are on the right track solving the problem and explain how these results underpin your proposal.
- Self-applause and overselling (wording like 'exponential', 'massive impact') annoy evaluators. Stick to objective facts and claims.
- Riding the hype, promising unrealistic results and impact.
- Writing the proposal as a research paper. In a proposal you are allowed to speculate on the best possible outcome, and you should.

Common Pitfalls - III

Asking feedback too late is useless for yourself and frustrating for the readers of the late draft.

- Steer away from two multidisciplinary pitfalls.
  - 'X is great, Y is great, I am combining X and Y which is even greater'. Combining things is not enough without a convincing rationale.
  - 'I am using X for problem Y'. This happens a lot in ICT, using some ICT solution for some specific domain problem. The pitfall is
    - for ICT, 'X' is not innovative enough and should be funded by domain 'Y',
    - for the domain, 'Y' it is a straightforward application of 'X' and not innovative for domain 'Y'.
- A typical example these days is using AI for a particular application. There is nothing wrong with AI in an application context. But you will have to argue why this application poses new challenges for AI science. Otherwise, you are just proposing an implementation or (worse) AI training project.
- Delaying asking for feedback, because you 'first want to get the whole proposal done'. Ask feedback as soon and often as possible, starting with the pitch of the core idea.
- Motivation and context will sell the project. Wrong! Balance 50% 'why' (motivation and context) with 50% 'how' (approach, planning).

Final Wise Words - I

Master your time. Be disciplined. ‘Too busy’ is drowning the ability to choose.

- Believe in your proposal.
- Never apply ‘just to see what happens’. Look forward to do the research. Even if it is not funded (this time).
- Aim high yet also show that you have a clear path and achievable objective.
- Read the signs and act on it. Most energy is lost on useless things. If the proposal does not work out this time, stop. And restart some other time aiming at another funding program.
- Make an effort to understand the success and failure factors of your earlier proposals.
- Cherish your harshest critics. They are right! Never go on the defense, but ask: why did they not understand X? Why do they not like Y? In other words: why did my message not get across?"

Final Wise Words - II

At crossroads pick one road full-heartedly. Believe in your choice and let it show. The other road will return to you later.

- **Start early, earlier, even earlier**. If you start (too) late, the tips in this entire slide deck are useless. You will deprive yourself of the chance to do better.
- Sort out your priorities. Choose, focus, select, cut, cut, cut. If you cannot choose, wait. If waiting does not help, stop. When going for it, go for it.
- Trust your intuition but feed it with reality.
  - Take the initiative to do things differently.
  - Take initiatives which you feel to be uncomfortable.
- Never stop learning from others, both successful and failed proposals.
- Keep up the effort! You may fail a few times before succeeding.