Elements of Effective Proposal*

SANDEE

Mani Nepal
Research and Writing Workshop, Islamabad, Pakistan,
Sept 14-17, 2012
* based on D. Glover, EEPSEA slides

South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics

Kathmandu, Nepal

What makes a good proposal

- Relevant and interesting Issue
- A well defined **Research Question**
- A sound understanding of **Relevant Literature**
- A clear **Methodology** accepted in the literature
- **Ability** to undertake research
  - Familiarity with alternate techniques
  - Knowledge of tools
- **Policy Relevance**
- **Budget**

A good proposal…

- Makes the reader want to read it (**Interesting**)
- Has a clear message or question (**Not Tangential / Obtuse**)
- Is convincing (**Logical**)
- Need to **Know the Reader/Audience** before you decide
  - ➢ **What you will say**
  - ➢ **How you will say it**

Proposal Title

Keep it short – title is not your abstract

An Analysis of the Use of a Market-Based Instruments System for Controlling Water Pollution in Boola Bay, District 7, Wahala Province, Guyana: An Assessment of Cost Effectiveness Implications (*30 words*)

Solution 1

Using Market-Based Instruments to Control Pollution in Boola Bay, Guyana: Cost Effectiveness Implications
(*14 words*)

Solution 2

Market-Based Instruments for Controlling Pollution in Boola Bay, Guyana: Are They Cost-Effective?

(*13 words*)

(You can always improve an English sentence by shortening it.)

Outline for a Research Proposal

Introduction (*SPQR*)	1-2
*S*ituation, *P*roblem, *Q*uestion, *R*esponse (incl. backgr, problem, obj & hypos)	
Literature review	1-2
Methods (Underlying Theory/Framework)	2-3
Study Area and sample design	1
Empirical Method/ Data Analysis	1
Summary & Conclusions	1
TOTAL	10

Elements of a sample introduction

Situation: Trees in government protected forests are cut down by villagers for use as firewood and for sale in the local market, despite high expenditure on deploying armed guards. Forests are therefore threatened with destruction as cutting rates exceed plantation.

Problem: Forest is only source of firewood for poor villagers and fuel wood fetches high price in the market. Poor villagers have no incentives to manage forests and government forest management has failed.

Question: Could villagers be given incentives to manage forests through joint ownership ventures with government?

Response: Study will examine whether new joint forest management schemes have been successful in reducing illegal cutting of trees.

Main Message: Joint forest management schemes significantly reduced illicit destruction of trees.

Situation (background)

Include only essential background, relevant to the case

- e.g. if pop. density is an influence on the behaviour you're studying, include it; if not, leave it out
- don't need latitude & longitude
- Include only key numbers

Problem

– **give enough evidence** that there is problem to convince the reader, but not more

– **show plausible cause & effect**

What does not work
Multiple research projects disguised as one study

The specific objectives are as follows:

- Mapping the spatial location and extent of the southeast coastal islands
- Identifying the geo-morphological resources of the coastal islands
- Evaluating the existing resource utilization patterns for developing sustainable resource utilization models of the coastal islands.
- Developing indigenous, low cost technology for family-based enterprise development for local, regional and global markets

Tip – Limit the Scope of the Problem

- Don't solve all problems in one study
  - Be honest about what you think can be achieved and what you can't, even if it is desirable (**simple is beautiful**)
- Limit the scope of your study
  - By geography
  - By identifying what already has been done
  - By policy needs or your interests
  - By thinking through time and cost implications
  - By considering analytical/data requirements

Identifying your key question

- **Research Question is 'The Most Important Element' in your Proposal**

- The question dictates:
  - the other ideas in the document
  - how you organize and express those ideas
  - the information you use to support them

Tip - Ask Simple, Relevant Questions

- Keep the question simple
  - (Why do some households adopt clean stoves while others do not?)
  - a good question is answerable, not descriptive
- Is the question really relevant? For whom? Which stakeholders will benefit? Has it already been studied?
- Focus on economic choices/behaviors – begin to formulate behavioral hypothesis

What does not work?
Technique before Question

- Valuation is a technique
- Econometrics is tool
- Data don't provide answers

- Start with the Research Question

Examples of questions

What are the economic costs of extreme events in Kerala over the last 100 years?

Does local access to infrastructure funds contribute to improved embankments in the Sunderbans?

How do different water management regimes affect the success of small scale irrigation in drought prone Orissa?

Is indoor air pollution contributing to a decline in labor productivity?

Literature Review

- **What do we know** about research issue/question
- **how do we know** it
- **Tell a story** / Narrative (no lists)
- **Synthesize**

Theory/Method/ Analytical Framework

- Theory can be
  - **Explicit Mathematical Model** describing the theory
  - **Sometimes it's Implied**: a conceptual story about (HHs, firms, etc.) behavior
  - A simple flow chart or a sequential order (issue - input – output- effect)

- The analytical framework is important, otherwise
  - you can't really make sense of data
  - can't generate testable hypotheses
  - hard to identify relevant variables

- It helps to identify Testable Hypotheses and Relevant Variables

Theory/Method/ Analytical Framework (cont.)

- BUT, don't create your own mathematical model unless you are absolutely sure what you are doing
  - You need to link it with empirical analyses

- Hypotheses – keep these simple (short sentences) – otherwise they become truisms or are not testable

- Proposed Analyses

Analyses

- Discuss analytical strategy for each research question

- Clarify how each hypothesis will be tested

- Identify what data will be required

Data

- Study Area
- Data collection strategy
  - Identify core issues such as household survey versus focus groups, secondary versus primary
- Sampling strategy
- Questionnaire (no need to invent in many cases, build on others)

Research Matrix

Research Question	Hypothesis	Analytical methods	Data

Policy Implications

☐ Make a clear statement about what you may be able to recommend, and who should do it.

- ☐ maybe do it by agencies:
  for Ministry of Environment:
  for Ministry of Industry:
  for donors
- ☐ don't make 'motherhood' recommendations (e.g. govt should raise the income of the poor people...")
- ☐ Avoid recommendations that don't directly flow from your work

Don't Present Irrelevant/Too Much Information

If you present irrelevant or too much information:

- it is ignored

- the reader is confused & annoyed

- the readers will ask you irrelevant questions, which will take you in different directions

Use Numbers Effectively

- Be economical with numbers – avoid information overload
- Use a few simple, striking numbers
- Round off numbers **(20566.~~75~~)**
- Use comparison figures. Absolute numbers by themselves mean nothing to the reader **(5% of income)**
- Precision vs. accuracy
- A tiny difference = no difference ("Policy A will be 0.1% cheaper than Policy B.Therefore …?")

Editing

The aim of editing is to make your proposal easier to read.

The reviewer should never have to stop at any point and wonder what you are saying.

"The aim is not to write so the reviewer can understand, but so that s/he cannot possibly misunderstand."

Finally…

Proofread – don't count on your spell-checker

"Environmental Impacts of Breading Poultry"

(…Breeding Poultry)

More on effective writing...

An interactive "teach yourself" course is available at the IDRC/EEPSEA website:

Go to www.eepsea.org   >> Links >>

"Writing for Change"