

Expressions of interest

Writing for success

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Primary health care research is a growing discipline and as such needs more funds to support the increase in this research. With the competition for research funds increasing, primary health care researchers need to be astute in how they apply for funds. This article provides key points to keep in mind when writing an expression of interest to increase your chance of success.

An expression of interest (EOI) is a proposal that includes sufficient information to convince funders the proposal could be worth funding. As such, the document should contain the required information presented so that the assessor/reviewer can quickly grasp the merits of your proposal above other EOI.¹

Why write an EOI?

As funders become inundated with requests for financial support, they are turning more to the shorter EOI as the first step in the application process. This has the benefit of reducing the effort required by funders for reviewing complete applications from investigators that have a low probability of being funded and also for researchers who are spared the burden of writing an application in which they have a low probability of success. Expressions of interest accepted by funding bodies are then expanded into more detailed research proposals. These will have a greater chance of success as fewer detailed proposals will be considered given that filtering has occurred at the EOI stage.

Types of EOI

Expressions of interest are usually written in response to a request from someone seeking research on a particular topic. They are sometimes referred to as a 'concept paper' or 'pre-proposal'. Concept papers are often used to assess the degree of interest of a potential funder for a research project and therefore represent a 'cold call'. Both contain all the main arguments and evidence needed to convince the funder to provide the funds required to carry out the proposed project.^{2,3}

What to include in an EOI

The EOI should address the following:^{4,5}

- Problem definition: what is the problem? Who does it affect? Why is it important? What do you already know about this subject? Include recent relevant references to indicate your grasp of the problem
- Proposal: what do you want to achieve toward solving the problem? What outputs, outcomes, and objectives are you proposing?
- Track record: who is involved and why? Why are they the best people to do what is proposed? If you have access/experience with special or unique resources that enable you to do the proposed research (eg. research population or new technology), state this too
- Action plan: how will you carry out what you have proposed? Is it realistic and feasible? What theoretical framework/methodologies will you use and why? Who will do what, when and how? When would you start? How long will this take?
- Budget: what resources and personnel are needed? What overheads need to be included? What can your organisation provide?
- Reporting: what will be reported to whom and how? What dissemination plans do you propose?
- Monitoring and evaluation: how will you and the funder know your project has been successfully achieved?

Hints for success

In preparing to write an EOI, base your proposal on an understanding of the funding organisation and

their requirements. Reading annual reports, viewing the organisation's website, as well as reading all material relevant to the request for the EOI, will assist. Knowing what the funding body is interested in will enable you to present your proposal as a means to assist them in meeting their needs – be it in relation to their mission and goals or in relation to the specific request they have advertised, or both. Using the same language as that used by the funding body will ensure your proposal is better understood by those reviewing your proposal.

If a request for EOI includes instructions regarding presentation, make sure these are followed. Some funding bodies will discard applications that do not follow their guidelines to the letter. In other cases, assessors of the EOI may become distracted or annoyed by variations in the document that may affect how they view your proposal. For example, presenting an EOI in 8pt font when 12pt font was requested may result in the EOI not being read at all. Avoid using jargon and define any acronyms when you use them for the first time. Make every word count. Use headings, short sentences and write

in plain English.³ This will make it easier for the funder to quickly understand what you are proposing.

Once you have written a draft, ask someone who is not closely associated with this area to read and comment on your document. Use these comments when finalising the document. Make sure all those mentioned in the EOI have had the opportunity to contribute and comment on the document.

Check with your own organisation regarding what approvals are required before submitting an EOI. And don't forget to include your name and those of your collaborators, contact details, name of your organisations and title of your project. Address your EOI to the relevant person or section of the funding body (you may need to contact them). Unless the funding body has provided a timeline regarding when they will get back to you, follow up your submission with a contact phone call or email to determine if your EOI has been received and when a response is likely.

Conclusion

Expressions of interest need not be difficult

to write if you follow instructions (where available) and include the points mentioned above. Successful EOI will result in requests for more detailed research proposals that have a greater chance of success.

Conflict of interest: none declared.

References

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Poetry

(from *Salt and Pepper Sonnets*)

Eva grandmother

Eva shrivelled, following that somnolent pneumonic death. Once indefatigably buoyant, an irreducible woman, as pillowy as the suet dumplings she cooked. He left her profoundly puzzled, cast adrift in some no-man's zone. She paddled cautiously around, or sat, a loose sack on his frayed chair - her repartee and wit, Cork-sharp, now blank and blunt. Her hair hung like grey flax. Her loud gregariousness became a cloaked silent harp at dinners, afternoons of whist, even family affairs. She toured Australia in a bus of merry widows. A ploy which worked for a few weeks... then that cavernous stare. Her widowhood her biological loss had exterminated joy, and in its place colonic cancer grew: a huge unexplained tumult. Suet-white, Eva joined her husband in boiling pain.

Jack Hibberd

We shrivel with Eva as the opening line casually begins the inexorable descent of this poem. Like an art nouveau elevator this conversational sonnet has baroque lines, but its impeccable mechanism and immaculate operator release us only when we reach the basement, the doors opening to a dark lake of pain.

Tim Metcalf