An Investigation of Techniques of Writing a Fundable Research Grant Proposal: Practical Example from a Developing Country

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Abstract: ***A project research grant proposal is the most important document in the search for greater funder-obtaining. For that reason its success to attract and obtain funding will significantly depend on the writing effort and skill applied. The focus of this paper is on the techniques and creative aspects of writing a project grant proposal. It draws heavily on a research grant proposal submitted to Uganda National Council for Higher Education and was funded. The paper emphasizes a concern for significant mutual relationships which involve the donors, beneficiaries of the project, implementers and governments for funder-obtaining.***

Keywords: Fundable, Proposal, Relationships, Research and Techniques

1. Introduction

Many times, practitioners especially those working in Africa, find themselves writing research proposals (RPs) for funder-obtaining either as individuals, for organizations or their own firms. The key question is: how then can they package the proposals to attract funding? Remember if you write a proposal for a client, and it wins funding, many more clients will come to you. Consequently this will lead to greater than before earnings, thus the bottom line – that is profit. Thus this paper aims at providing a basic understanding of the techniques in writing a research grant proposal (RGP) that will receive and attract funding. The paper uses heavily a RGP submitted to Uganda National Council for Higher Education and was funded (UNCHE). (NOTE: We believe the multidisciplinary perspectives and experiences of the authors – social and environment accountant, environmental engineering and technology expert, green marketing expert and psychologists strengthens the content of this paper. Nonetheless, it is hoped others better versed with research grant proposals and other disciplines will also contribute to the following techniques)

Emphasis is given to the basic strategies to employ in developing and designing a convincing proposal aimed at attracting the interest of the reviewer and that of the funding agency. To begin with, it is common that when there is a call for project proposals by a particular funding agency, there will be many of them submitted, whose budgets exceed or fall far below the budget line. This means that not all of them will be funded. Even if the entire submitted proposal budgets were within the budgeted sums, some will not be funded. The major reasons are because they are poorly packaged and lack the needed cooperative relationships – with funding agencies, with community organizations, and with the possible beneficiary group (Levine, 2006). Aside from that, the proposal may be lacking social and economic impact namely improvement of living standards and household nutrition, supply of adequate, clean and safe water, empowerment of communities to take initiatives for their development planning and implementation, and encouragement of regional economy (Matte *et al.*, 2004: 101). Another reason may be that the proposed research is not policy relevant (Luckert, 2006).

To demonstrate the above point further, the first and third author submitted a concept note to AAA *(not real name)* which was rejected. Example 1 presents evaluation of that concept note and reasons given for its rejection.

Example 1: Part of Concept Paper Evaluation

We received a very big number of concept papers that all had good ideas and we could not accommodate all of them due to limited resource envelope. The criteria for concept paper review was in the advertisement but specifically the following:

- Innovative ideas on gender equality mainstreaming focusing on a value chain and or agriculture development generally - not merely targeting women groups)
- Relevant expertise and experience to handle matters of gender mainstreaming
- Relevant expertise and experience in implementing agriculture programmes with emphasis on AB Trust sub - sectors of Cereals, coffee, maize, pulses, fruits and vegetables
- Special targeting for youth and women entrepreneurship development
- Already working with communities, beneficiaries,

groups and stakeholders in the focused areas.

We regret to inform you that your concept paper did not meet the above criteria and, therefore have not been selected for proposal development in this round under AAA grants. However, we have kept your concept in our data base and may call on you in future to discuss and develop it further if funds allow or under a different call for proposals.

We contend as true that other rejection letters are similar to the above. The main rejections of this concept note as summarized above are: lack of new ideas in the direction of the funders' interest, expertise and experience, and cooperative relationships with the targeted beneficiaries. Undoubtedly this showed lack of effort and skill and not enough internalization of the advertisement. Use of words such as "a very big number of concept papers that all had good ideas", "due to limited resource envelope" and "we have kept your concept in our data base" were used only for politeness. Therefore the overarching question is "why should the RGP you have developed and designed be on top of the "heap" and finally be funded unlike others that are rejected"?

In trying to explain the above, the 2010 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup tournament had thirty-two national teams. All the teams were very good. For instance, they included seven (21.9%) teams that had up to that time won the World Cup. These teams are: Brazil (5), Italy (4), Germany (3), Argentina (2), Uruguay (2), England (1) and France (1). More so the qualification process to determine which teams qualified for the tournament started as early as almost three years - in August 2007. Spain, the winner fought hard for the win and ended eighty years of hurt. It had to beat the best to take the Cup.

What is important to note in the FIFA World Cup there is no gambling. Spain to emerge as the winner had to play seven matches, the maximum to reach this far in the final tournament. Apart from these seven matches, Spain had played others in the qualifying tournaments to appear in the senior men's national teams of the members of FIFA. This is the same with research grant proposals as there are numerous criteria and processes used before the proposal is accepted and eventually funded. We also point out that the proposal has to "beat" the best to be the best in order for it to be successful and consequently be accepted and eventually be funded.

This paper is organized as follows: the above introduction is followed by sub-sections on research design and methods, and RGP definition. The paper then moves on to discuss components of a RGP. And fourth, we present general techniques. Finally, the paper provides concluding comments.

2. Research Design and Methods

To conduct this study, we assessed funded research proposals. We selected funded research proposals because they indicate the acceptance by anonymous reviewers who are research experts and, in this sense funded proposals are comparable to referred journal papers.

3. Research Grant Proposal Defined

A RGP is defined as a systematic procedure by which a complex or scientific task is accomplished. And in this third millennium, the role of research in development will be more than before as governments have recognized its link with development (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003:1). It is an essay that fills in all the gaps of the outline, makes all the logical transitions for the reader, and shows the consistent development of the idea from question to answer (Brink *et al*., 2001). It can also be looked at as a tool where desire is taken on the first lap of its journey from the theoretical to concrete into the workshop of the imagination, where its conversion is created and organized. On the other hand, a technique is a strategy that aims at achieving a stated objective at minimal cost, time and available at the right time.

There are many potential sources of funding for RGPs. Among them include governments, non-profit organizations, private corporations and individuals. The competition for such funds is, however, very stiff. Only the well conceived and well packaged proposals are the ones that attract funding. To demonstrate this stiff competition, the success rate of RPs submitted to International Foundation for Science (IFS) for Africa is (15%), Asia (17%) and Latin America (30%) (Gaillard *et al*., 2002).

Another demonstration of this stiff competition of research funding was when UNCHE advertised a call for RPs on January 18 and on January 20, 2010 in the New Vision and Monitor newspapers. The earlier call to public universities calling for nominations to staff development was made on January 7, 2010. Towards the end of 2009, the then Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (recently renamed Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Sports) (MoESTS) had decided that the council would manage research funds for public universities which number seven including Uganda Management Institute (UMI) and Makerere University Business School (MUBS). A sum of UGX620,000,000 was in the Ministry's budget for the financial year 2009/2010 to enable public universities carry out research (UNCHE, 2010). The aim of the funds is to improve and to add to knowledge for academicians working in public universities. Thus, researchers are to benefit from the funds through improving their career prospects and curriculum vitae through research and publication.

Results of the analysis indicate that 78 research submissions were received and only 7(9.0%) funded. The price tag for the various RPs ranged from UGX1,300,000 to UGX972,510,000. While submissions for staff development funds received were 138 only 11(8.0%) were funded. Some of the reasons given for the rejection were wrong internalization of the call, costs for research not indicated, inclusion of salary payments, submission of as many as 4 proposals by individual scientist and limited funds. Only proposals with budget of UGX40,000,000 and below were funded. This implies that the budgets presented were for value of the proposals and not exaggerated. Besides realistic internal transport and research expenses were covered.

In sum, this stiff competition in RGP should not astonish you and deter you from writing proposals. Competition is now the order of the day and is part of doing business. It is not only between industries. An industry's profit potential is a function of five forces of competition, namely the threats posed by new entrants, the power of suppliers, the power of buyers, product substitutes, and the intensity of rivalry among competitors (Hitt *et al*., 2007:51). Like businesses, RGPs have new entrants, have new suppliers, have new buyers - donors, have new substitutes – individual and multidisciplinary, and have new rivalry among competing firms. Michael Porter, however, suggests that companies which pursue overall cost leadership, differentiation and focus will likely perform well (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006:534).

You may have written many RPs and none has ever been funded; and you are now contemplating quitting. Do not quit, give up, give in or succumb to self-doubt; most likely something has been missing in your proposal. Let us heed the advice as contained in the following wise counsel. Try, try again, and try once more. Never give up, never give in and keep moving forward (Tracy, 2009: viii).

What is suggested in this paper does not in any way attempt to answer why all RGPs are not funded, but attempts to address some eligibility criteria. In this paper eligibility criteria have been termed as techniques. What you need is to:

i) Master the strategies involved
ii) Put your points in a coherent presentation
iii) Avoid generalizations
iv) Follow the format/proposal form for submission
v) Know the budget ceiling
vi) Know whom the funding agency is
vii) Know geographical restrictions of the funding agency
viii) Emphasize work plans/priority areas
ix) Identify appropriate granting body. Where are you going to send your proposal?
x) Be a friend of the website
xi) Know the latest grant deadlines

The above clearly illustrates what Tracy (2009:103) points out that preparation is the mark of the professional – professional selling. While he used these words in relation to getting the job you want in any economy, we believe RGP is like professional selling – convincing your audience. Professional selling is aimed at convincing someone to hire you while research grant proposal is to sell your project to gain funds. Gaining funding implies that your proposal at least was satisfactory. Therefore first read the research grant guidelines. Study and think over them. Identify the words and phrase(s) the donor uses to explain the call for the proposal. After this understanding take a look at your competencies and accomplishments. The significance of this cannot be over-emphasized. It is after this perceptive that you will refocus the proposal.

Therefore having a project idea and converting it into a proposal is one thing, while soliciting for funding is another. It is important to note that what you present in your RGP is feasible. Additionally the proposed budget needs to fit within the funders' plans. Above all, it must not duplicate any work already done or being done by others or yourself. This is because money being requested is for a new project or scaling up the existing one.

Before we discuss these strategies which we have called techniques in this paper, we would like to highlight in summary form the basic components of a RGP.

4. Components of a RGP

The components for a RGP may be different depending on the sponsoring organization. Despite being different in terms of structure, the main goal of a RGP is for soliciting and providing funds. Most organizations give detailed guidelines to the applicant to ensure that the major required information is adequately addressed. Like universities and faculties or departments in the same institution may have different formats, the bottom line is that they usually demand similar requirements in their proposals. Some key sections of the proposal, however, appear in almost all – standard formats of major funders. What is important is, to detail steps on how to address a problem or a set of problems that has/have been identified and defined.

Sometimes, the first requirement from the donor is a concept paper/letter of intent/expression of interest and a full proposal later. We point out that a concept note is a brief summary of a project capturing major aspects of the proposal. All these terms mean the same. It is just a matter of terminology. If the concept paper/letter of intent/expression of interest is not as comprehensive as required, it will be rejected at this point. In order for it to be comprehensive, include in summary form the following: objectives, inputs, activities, duration, outputs, beneficiaries, budget, problem and why it is urgent. When the concept paper lacks majority of these variables, it will not proceed to the next step of designing a full proposal. We note that the purpose of the expression of interest is to solicit participation and necessary resource allocation.

As stated above, the basic structure and the components of a RP are fairly standardized, and each component is based on the previous ones. The RGP should include:

i) Project Title
ii) Abstract/executive summary
iii) Background information and rational
iv) A description of the problem
v) Research questions, goal and objectives
vi) Significance/justification
vii) Literature review
viii) Research hypothesis (es)
ix) A description of research methodology, Principal and co-applicants
x) A description of the plan and credible time schedule
xi) A description of the budget

5. Project Title

Every RGP needs to have a project title on the cover page. This should be a brief title of research. This study analyzed

39 funded action researches by African Institute for Capacity Development (AICAD) of the third call (AICAD, 2004). The review shows an average of 15.7 (range 9-30 and median of 16) words constituted in a title. Seven (17.9%) research projects had over 20 words while two (5.1%) constituted less than 10 words. When these were removed from the sample it gave a mean of 14.4 words constituted per research title. Another analysis was made of 759 titles of the 8th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women that took place in Kampala, Uganda July 21-26, 2002 (Tanzarn *et al*., 2002). The central theme of the Congress was, "Gendered Worlds: Gains and Challenges." Some of these titles were applied research while others were basic research. In total the titles constituted 8,962 words thus an average of 11.8 words in a title.

A result of this analysis leads us to a conclusion that a high-quality research title ought to not exceed 20 words most preferably 15 words. A side from that, the title must be comprehensive, clear, concise and meaningful-describing what needs to be done. Another important attribute of a good research topic is that you need to feel comfortable that you have, or can develop, the skills that will be required to research the topic and the interest (Saunders *et al*., 1997:12). Besides it should be understandable, not necessarily by an expert in the same field, but by any other person likely to read the proposal. If the research grant call specifies a number of themes, the title needs to capture the major ones. For instance, the majority (71.8%**)** of the titles of the 8th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women had words such as women, feminism and gender. Even those that did not include any of these three key words had them in the abstract (Sheehan, 2002).

In the 2010 research grant call for UNCHE, emphasis was on linking government, public and private sectors with universities and research institutions. Therefore the top scoring proposal's title reads: *Strengthening Social and Environmental Accounting Practices in Uganda for Sustainable Development*. This title constituted 11 words which number is within the range of 10 to 15. The remainder of this paper heavily makes a reference to this proposal.

6. The Abstract/Executive Summary

This is a brief description of the RP. In other words it is a short and concise summary of a full RP written to capture the interest of both the reviewer and the potential funder or donor. Though written last, it is the most significant section of the RGP. Most significant section because it must convince the donors that the project proposal is relevant to their particular concerns and contributes to a development goal such as the eight anti – poverty goals commonly referred to as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The eight anti–poverty goals commonly referred to as MDGs are: poverty and hunger, universal education, gender quality, child health, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability and global partnership. Second that it meets the needs of the country, in this particular case Uganda a developing country. Additionally that it has been well thought about/conceived and is thus possible. Although brief, it should cover essential areas of the whole research proposal. Thus it is an overview of the project. The objectives and a brief description of how these will be accomplished must be included. It should also cover how the project proposed will solve or significantly contribute to the solution of the urgent problem. The mega challenge of the 21st century is global environmental issues (Michelle *et al*., 2006). The NCHE 2010 top winning proposal focused on environmental sustainability. The expected outputs and the total cost should clearly be included. The proposal should also establish your credibility (very important) and organizational goals in the project area.

Care should be taken in writing this part of the grant proposal (GP). The reason for this is that because it is the one mostly read. Another reason is that sometimes it is the only one read due to many applications. If you are a young researcher writing seek counsel of the senior researcher to review this section. If you are part of the research team writing, your supervisor should review it. A popular saying that two heads are better than one, more especially when the bodies attached to those heads have to implement the ideas together. This can be a page or less, depending on the size of the project being proposed, however, it must not extend two pages.

Writing an abstract or executive summary is a very important step in gaining readers' attention, or selling the focus of the proposal. Below in example 2 we present an abstract/ executive summary of a half a page with a maximum of a 160 words of the top winning proposal for the 2010 UNCHE call.

Example 2: Abstract/Executive Summary

The goal of this project is to strengthen business organizations to account for and communicate social and environmental (SE) consequences of their activities. This project targets industry management for public and private sectors, government, universities and research institutions, customers and accounting professionals. The outputs and the activities to achieve them are; identification of institutions and knowledge of staff teaching social and environmental accounting (SEA), an inventory of SEA content in institutions' curricula at both undergraduate and graduate levels, documentation of SE practices, SEA practices development. Another output is disseminated information on guidelines to strengthen SEA. This is a participatory and learning action research that will run for twelve months. The research design will be both quantitative and qualitative. The study will use a combination of data collection tools. The project will contribute to strengthening partnerships among institutions and networking with academic staff. The estimated budget for the twelve months is UGX32.5 million.

Close analysis of the above abstract/executive summary example reveals a number of issues worth mentioning in this paper. These issues are: development goal – contribution to environmental issues, needs of Uganda – industry management, objectives and outputs indicated, budget – twelve months and UGX32.5 million, credibility of researchers - partnerships among institutions and networking with academic staff.

In a situation where the funding organization has not provided a guideline to follow though not likely, we suggest that the proposal also be summarized in a logical framework or logframe (LF). Sometimes LF is called a planning matrix. The LF can be a useful vehicle for applying cost-benefit (CBA) analysis to provide indicators of procedure, project impact or sustainability (Bell and Morse, 2008). This can be appended to the proposal with reference made to it in the write-up. The principle purpose of LF is to persuade users to think extensively about the project. Additionally it summarizes the project in totality, both descriptive and analytical.

7. Background Information and Rationale

Sometimes this section can be headed: introduction, necessity and relevance of research. When this is used, the following section – Problem statement is not necessary. Regardless of the size and complexity of the project in mind, you need to introduce your plan to the reader – in this case the reviewer. Be a good story teller. You have to "hook" the reviewer in your first paragraph. This is done by what you are proposing. The reviewer is in a hurry to take a decision. The introduction ought not to be any longer than two pages. It is the groundwork for the rest of the proposal (Tammemagi, 1999). However, the following needs to be captured in the introduction.

i) It should deal with the background and the analysis of the problem to be addressed by the interventions of the proposed project.
ii) It should be confined to the aspects of the general situation that is relevant to the problem identified and the interventions that are to be proposed in preceding sections
iii) Analysis of unmet needs should be included
iv) Importance of the problem should be described in terms of its magnitude, intensity, and prevalence. If possible, the attempted solutions, the relevance of the policies and the priorities of the person/the organization seeking funding, should also be presented.
v) At this stage, you should put across the approach you are to use in the project.

You need to show the funding organization that the contribution you are to make through the proposed grant project will solve much or make a contribution to a larger problem. In other words persuade the funder that the approach planned will work. It should also convey the importance of the research grant proposal problem; and how it relates to the mission and priorities of your organization and sponsor. You should also state why you are uniquely poised to address the problem if you are the principal investigator/lead researcher.

The last statement of the introduction ought to lead to the problem statement. More so, start the introduction from the global perspective and then lead to the "lower" level. Introduction should portray the problem. In other words the problem must be clear from the very beginning. Problem statement depends on the call for the proposal.

8. Problem Statement

This section details the problems to be solved by the project. Here, you diagnose and further define the problem to be tackled. The statement of the problem looks into the specifics of the issues that directly touch the problem that is being proposed for investigation/implementation. The evidence of this can come from the emotional aspects drawn from one's experience, review of the literature, your own past research, or other sources of an authoritative nature (Reid, 2000). Briefly introduce the problem, comment about it and conclude. You should be clear on the gap between "what is" and "what should be."
We reproduce below in example 3 a section of "what is" and "what should be."

Example 3: A Sample of a Statement of the Problem

In Uganda, a developing country, while some progress has been made in SE management, significant challenges still remains in some thematic areas such as SE information system (Moyini et al., 2003). Besides, Aryamanya-Mugisha (2007) observes that development involves the use of the environment. Whereas the relationship between environment, poverty and development is a complex relationship, an improvement in SE factors proportionately improves the resource base for the poor and can alleviate poverty. It is therefore important to strengthen SEA practices in developing countries as the development pace takes route. Sustainable development (SD) is key when well rooted with social and environmental goals since resource dependence is prime. Therefore this study is designed to strengthen the practices for business organizations in society to account for and communicate SE consequences of their activities. These are important aspects in poverty reduction in the Ugandan business sector with a view to direct the business purposefully on sound SE practices for SD."

One notable fact about this statement of the problem is that there is definite issue – social and environmental information that needs to be solved. Another notable fact is that improvement of SE factors improves the resource base for the poor and can alleviate poverty. More so strengthening SEA practices in Uganda; a developing country enhances development and is needed. Additionally it will strengthen the practices for business organizations in society. As a result this is researchable (Kombo and Tromp, 2006).

9. Research Question, Goal and Objectives

There is a variation in the words used to describe this section. This depends on the funding organization. To some, it is referred to as "objective" and to others it is "purpose." Irrespective of the variation, this section is concerned with what the project will achieve. Goals are the broad statements of what will be achieved or accomplished in the end while research questions are general focus to guide the project stated broadly (Levine, 2009: 6).

Objectives on the other hand, deal with a series of accomplishments and measurable outcomes that are meant to address the stated goals. Objectives are the end points, not

means. It is a description of what will be achieved at the end of a project. They are more specific aims, which the project is set to achieve within a time frame as specified in the proposal. In the formulation of the objectives, you should:
i) Be specific (what and when)
ii) Consider the extent to which the objectives are measurable (how much)
iii) Focus research objectives that are attainable/realistic, suitable and appropriate for the situation described in your background and statement of the problem.

These objectives should be stated in a way that they can be evaluated or tested later. A popular and easy-to-remember acronym that has been successful in helping countless people reach their goals is the word SMART – specific (accurate and not vague), measurable (verifiable and facilitates monitoring), attainable (deliverable and reachable), realistic (comprehensible thus avoids disappointment if not achieved) and timely (targets completion) (Meyer, 2009). You need to note that an objective should not depend on the outcome of another. Be careful not to have many objectives that you will not accomplish in the stipulated timeframe. However, the stated project research objectives (PROs) should have an element of innovativeness and to greater specificity than project research questions (PRQs); otherwise the proposal will not attract funding. Table 1 illustrates this innovativeness and specificity of linking PRQs and PROs.

Table 1: Phrasing Research Questions as Research Objectives

PRQs		Goal	PROs	
1	Can information systems on SEA for end users be established?	To strengthen business organizations to account for and communicate SE consequences of their activities.	1	Establish an information system on SEA for end users
2	Are accounting structures of organizations and the way in which information is captured and retrieved available and utilized?		2	Analyze the accounting structure of organizations and the way in which SE information is captured and retrieved
3	Are mechanisms to incorporate SE externalities examined to allow a full costing approach?		3	Examine mechanisms to incorporate SE externalities, whether good or bad, into the business' own costing and accounting system to allow a full costing approach
4	Is SEA of any relevance to end users?		4	Enhance knowledge levels on SEA
5	Do informed and important stakeholders react to SEA?		5	Disseminate the research findings to stakeholders

Though in the above illustration the number (5) of PRQs are equal to that of PROs (5), this is not usually the case. In some instances the number of PROs can be different from the number of PRQs.

10. Justification/Significance of the Research Study

Having identified the problem and stated the objectives, you then have a basis of argument to show that interventions will be beneficial to a wide range of users. Whereas many receipts/beneficiaries may benefit, you should tell the funding organization the project's benefit, value and importance. For example, of the project recipients/beneficiaries, will the project involve the beneficiaries in its implementation? Does research address national and global policy issues? Table 2 below shows the potential beneficiaries, their needs and demands. The expected benefits include knowledge, portraits/case studies, procedures to guide best practices, publications, curricula that incorporate SA issues, and improved SE governance.

Table 2: Potential Beneficiaries, their Needs and Demands

Potential beneficiary	*Needs and demands*
Industry management for public and private sectors	Checklists of basic concepts of SEA and procedures to guide best practices which are cost effective
Government	Introduction to advanced SEA theories and practices; integration of SE considerations in laws and legal frameworks; facilitation of SE auditing
Universities and research institutions	Designing accounting curricula that incorporates SE issues/case studies leading; demand driven research projects which address developmental issues; and actively participate in international research partnerships
Local Governments	Integration of community needs and demands with business organizations
Customers	Products and services that incorporate SE considerations
Civil society organizations	A culture of pollution prevention and waste minimization; a tool to prove and improve the values of activities carried out by business organizations
Employees	Checklists on social and environmental accounting easy to implement
Accounting professionals	Harmonization of national and international trends of SEA standards that will facilitate accounting and auditing likened to conventional corporate accounting
International community	An indication of country responsiveness to global concerns of SE impacts of business practices

You are requested to note that significance stems from the objectives. In some cases you can head this section as: Relevance to Policy, Impact and Expected Outputs. Example 4 below presents an example.

Example 4: Relevance to Policy, Impact and expected Output

The outputs and impact of this proposed study are: to influence and direct teaching of SEA by the development of relevant materials, taking into account user experience, thus influence moral and ethical values, influence obligations of corporate behaviour, develop and document portraits/case studies of SEA practices. This will be a necessary catalyst to the adoption of better practices of SEA. Companies will thus expect an increased financial gain by producing products acceptable in the global markets, responsible members of the communities and the surrounding areas in SE aspects. These components are subsets of the MDGs that include 50% reduction in poverty and hunger. Besides the outputs have relevance to policy of Uganda National Development Plan 2010-2014 to benchmarking good practices for promoting good governance and sustainable development.

Furthermore education institutions in the country to network and share scarce intellectual resources available will ensure quality and cost-effective provision for education. When universities form partnerships with businesses, industries as well as the government this facilitates sustainable development. The act will reverse concentrating on economic, social cultural and political conditions and focus more on preserving the environment. As a result this mitigates global warming and other adverse environmental conditions associated with climate change. Thus economic goals for businesses and industries will be integrated with poverty reduction and preservation of natural resources such as forests and wetlands.

The portraits/case studies developed will be used in teaching accounting. Universities and other education institutions will show case courses that have relevance to poverty reduction in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The expected outputs and impacts support the role of UNCHE of preservation of quality in teaching, research and services. This means it will go along way to address the challenges and difficulties of higher education, which are, enhancement and preservation of quality in teaching, research and services, and relevance of programmes.

Of importance to note from example 4 above is how the expected outputs were linked to policies – international, regional, national and institutional policies. In this case the MDGs that includes 50% reduction in poverty and hunger. Secondly, the linkages of outputs to policy of Uganda National Development Plan 2010-2014 to benchmark good practices for promoting good governance and SD. A third to note is emphasis of relationship which involves the donor - UNCHE and universities.

Once you introduce the expected output you conclude by presenting a summary of outputs sometimes referred to as results of the project. The outputs for this research were presented as below.

i) Identified institutions and knowledge of staff teaching SEA
ii) Established inventory of SEA content in institutions' curricula at both undergraduate and graduate levels
iii) Established SE practices currently in Uganda
iv) Suggested appropriate strategies for SEA practices
v) Developed portraits/cases of SEA practices
vi) Disseminated information on guidelines to strengthen SEA

11. Literature Review

Provide a short and update summary on the current status of social, legal, economic, political, technological and environmental issues on which your proposal will build or from where it will divert. You should build a critique of the literature, specifying gaps of interest. In your critique, be objective and not critical otherwise you may criticize your reviewer. If you have your personal works, which relate to the study, cite them. This will strengthen your application as this will be a sign of your competence in the field. If you are submitting an academic research and you know your supervisor, why not include some of her/his work?

12. Research Methodology, Principal and Co-Applicants

Provide a logically thought research design to permit appropriate data collection and management. While the custom would be to present a description of the research methodologies and/or instruments for data collection and the statistical analysis, we advise a short description followed by a table indicating the focus, tools/methodologies, analysis tools, role of business and industries and other stakeholders. Example 5 presents a sample of a description of the research methodology, principal and co-applicants.

Example 5: A sample description of the Research Methodology

This project will take twelve months to complete. The study targets higher education institutions and staff teaching accounting. Businesses/industrialists will also be among the respondents. The research design will be both qualitative and quantitative. The study will use a combination of data collection tools. Purposive sampling of industries will be undertaken. While secondary data sources will provide an invaluable source for developing a basis for undertaking the primary data collection and also help in triangulation of such information.

Some of the approaches to be used are: collection of primary data through interviews and discussions, observations, photographs, literature review of social and environmental accounting practices and reports, case study reviews and analytical tools. The participating universities are: MUBS, pioneer institution in teaching accounting; Busitema University (BU), new university, near Tororo Cement Limited with magnitude of pollution argued to afflict the surrounding communities. Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) situated in Southwestern cluster of the Uganda cattle corridor with the highest number of milk processing plants. The study will be conducted by a multidisciplinary team.

It is interesting to note the justifications for the partnering institutions namely: pioneer institution in teaching accounting, new university and near Tororo Cement Limited with magnitude of pollution and highest number of milk processing plants in Uganda. To us these words are linked to social and environmental accounting. Secondly the study was to be conducted by a multidisciplinary team – Social and environmental accountant, environmental engineering and technologist, green marketing specialist and psychologist. This multidisciplinary team was indicated on the cover page of the proposal. Furthermore, presented were a summary of the methodologies to be used, analysis tools, role of businesses and industries, and other stakeholders. Table 3 presents the summary.

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Table 3: Sample summary of the Methodology

Outputs (Os)	Tools/Methodology	Analysis Tools	Role of businesses and industries and other stakeholders
Identified institutions and knowledge of staff teaching SEA (O_1)	Questionnaire, key informants interview schedule, observation/participant check lists, focus group discussion guide, profiling staff and institutions	Cross-tabulation, data reduction, ANOVA, editing, published reports	Identify institutions and key respondents (practitioners), provide information in interviews
Established inventory of SEA content (O_2)	Review of different course units that seem relevant to SEA, key informants, interview schedule, photographs	Cross-tabulation, data reduction, ANOVA, editing, published reports	Identify institutions and key respondents, provide information in interviews, support the baseline activities
Established SE practices (O_3)	Select businesses and industries, field visits to businesses and industries, questionnaire, checklists, review of reports, journal articles, textbooks and other publications to assess for SEA practices	Cross-tabulation, data reduction, ANOVA, editing, published reports	Identify institutions and key respondents, provide information in interviews
Suggested appropriate strategies for SEA practices (O_4)	Analyze field data and edit	Cross-tabulation, data reduction, editing, published reports	Identify themes and sub themes for SEA, suggest challenges and difficulties of teaching and implementing SEA, agree on best practices
Developed portraits/cases of SEA practices (O_5)	Editing and agree on exemplary portraits/cases, themes and sub themes, case writing, document best/near-to-best SEA companies, design handy materials about SEA i.e. note pads, fliers, brochures	Cross-tabulation, data reduction, ANOVA, regression, correlation, editing	Agree on portraits/cases applicable to courses in SEA, generate portraits/cases, suggest course considerations for SEA, write findings in languages and terminologies the ordinary entrepreneurs and the public can understand
Disseminated information (O_6)	Hold: workshops/seminars, public lectures, guest lectures, information, education and communication (IEC) materials, video shows, Ora-media, publication in relevant journals, published technical report	Participatory Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation (PAME)	Mobilize and share information

13. Research Plan and Time Schedule

This section involves the strategy and the implementation plan of the proposed study. The strategy deals with the route to be undertaken towards achieving the project objectives identified above. Here, a design of a set of interventions that will help in the accomplishment of set objectives is presented. Ultimately they contribute to the long-term goals.

The research plan involves answering the question of how to "travel" to the desired destination. This is the core of the proposal, describing the activities to be done and when. Upon deciding where one wants to go, and the route to be taken, then the details of the journey can now be described. It shows the activities, targets and the schedules of work, personnel and equipment to be used. However, the work plan depends on the size of the project. For a big research, you should divide the work plan into many specific project activities; and indicate the time against each of the identified components. The plan may be illustrated in a graphical form like the Gantt chart earlier called the bar chart and developed by Henry Gantt (Lewis, 1995: 3). This is shown in Figure 1 below. Use of Gantt chart, however, has weaknesses. It does not show the interrelationships between the various tasks to be done (Lewis, 1995: 95). Despite these shortcomings, it is still widely used to present the outputs, indicators of achievement and time schedule for each output.

Summary	Indicators of Achievement	One year			
Overall Objective: Strengthened SE practices in Uganda for SD	Mitigation and prevention of companies negative SE impacts				
Objective (O)	**Outcomes**	**Q1**	**Q2**	**Q3**	**Q4**
O_1	Filed study report of institutions and staff teaching SEA				
O_2	An information that is up and running, end-users utilizing the information system, increased number of researchers in the field of SEA, endorsement of reviewed curriculum by universities				
O_3	Create database of practices				
O_4	Increased numbers of staff teaching SEA using the suggested practices				
O_5	Increase in number of practitioners and teaching institutions utilizing developed portraits/case studies, increased number of SE reports, reviewed accounting curricula incorporating SEA				
O_6	Increase in number of practitioners and teaching institutions utilizing developed portraits/case studies, increased number of SE reports by businesses and companies, available literature on SEA practices				
Note: Q represents a quarter of a year i.e. 3 months					

Figure 1: A sample of Output Plan

Conclusively the above research plan should provide answers to some of the following:

i) What are the activities?
ii) What is the sequence/order of the activities?
iii) What is the time needed and resources?
iv) How are the activities to be carried out?

The 3rd and 4th answers were presented in the budget in Table 4 below.

14. The Budget

The budget follows the output plan. It presents the anticipated costs of planned inputs and activities. Costs should be credible and reasonable. However, it is important to keep in mind that a budget is a forecast rather than a fixed statement/expression of costs and prices. The budget should be categorized according to the activities and most sponsors provide the guidelines. It depends on the duration of the research and the activities that are involved. If currency specifications are not clearly spelt out in the research call, consult your funding organization. The budget summary is shown below in Table 4.

Table 4: Sample of Budget Summary

Item	Note	MUST	MUBS	BU	TOTAL
Staff Costs	1	4,400,000	1,540,000	1,540,000	7,480,000
Travel and Subsistence	2	6,800,000	2,600,000	2,600,000	12,000,000
Equipment and Material	3	1, 020,000	250,000	250,000	1,520,000
Dissemination	4	6,800,000	1,600,000	1,600,000	9,500,000
Other Costs	5	1,800,000	100,000	100,000	2,000,000
Total Cost		20,820,000	6,090,000	6,090,000	32,500,000

Notes 1 to 5 in the above budget summary were analyzed further by giving the specifics. For instance justifications for staff costs, travel and subsistence, equipment and material, dissemination and other costs were given.

An important aspect of preparing the budget is to include your organization's contributions whether requested or not. For example, you can cost the time, office space, and equipment. For the vehicle if you have one, only budget the fuel component otherwise budget for car hire. You should be realistic in budgeting and justify your budget by providing proforma invoices to reassure the funder of the credibility of the figures presented. Emphasis should be on high benefit projects. Table 5 presents the type of support from partnering institutions, which are MUST, MUBS and BU. While we did not cost the support from each partnering institutions, it is advisable to do so. Costing partnering institutions support and funds being requested give the total budget of the project.

Table 5: Expected Support from Partnering Institutions

Type of support	Name of Institution
Researchers salaries Office space Computer facilities Contribution to stationery	MUST
Researchers salaries Office space Computer facilities Contribution to stationery	MUBS
Researchers salaries Office space Computer facilities Contribution to stationery	BU

15. General Techniques

i) You should consult widely with senior colleagues, established researchers, policy makers on national issues and major stakeholders.

ii) Research should focus on priority problems affecting the society. Identification of the problem can be achieved by examining the policies, priorities, organizational policy, and literature search. Most funding agencies want to fund projects that are in line with the priority areas in place. For example, the eight UN MDGs e.g. poverty and hunger, universal education, gender quality, child health, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability and global partnership. In our case it was directly tackling environmental sustainability.

iii) It should be action oriented. There is now a shift from research that generates knowledge to developing solutions. However, action should be participatory, collaborative, situational and self evaluative.

iv) Include a capability statement of the organization or individual to handle the research. This is in terms of:
- Organization structure i.e. into specialized departments for research
- Its size i.e. in terms of knowledge and skill, equipment, and capital.
- Affiliated research institutions. If you are working with a committee of diverse persons, explain how you are going to work together. Funders like to see people cooperating with each other.
- State current research relevant to the one being proposed. This is an indicator of the organizations relevant experience and reputation in the proposed field. It also shows that your agency is capable of carrying out what has been proposed. Here, you can demonstrate your qualifications and those of your colleagues. In this proposal, we included a short but precise section on the process followed in project formulation. We reproduce this in example 6 below.

Example 6: Process followed in Project Formulation

The development of the present proposal has been a long process. The project is a result of gaps identified in a PhD thesis titled: "Environmental Accounting of Uganda's Oil Companies: The Relationship Between Legitimacy, Marketing and Accountability." for Charles Tushabomwe-Kazooba, the proposed Principal Investigator (Tushabomwe-Kazooba, 2010). Gaps identified include limited professional capacity among environmental agencies, problems of quantification of environmental impacts, lack of best practice checklists for accounting for the environment, lack of interdisciplinary research and academic net workings, poor linkages of higher education programmes that enhance technological transfer from university laboratories to marketable products, processes and services, and nonexistent of independent verification of environmental reports.

We believe the key issues are a long process, linkage of present project with the PhD thesis title, knowledge and expertise of the principal investigator and gaps identified in a PhD thesis. This points to the trend that the principal investigator has the expertise to lead this multidisciplinary team. Knowledge and expertise of the principal applicant is very important in funder obtaining. In 2004, the first author and four others won a research grant under Lake Victoria Research Initiative (VicRes) on landuse. The project title for the research was: *Improved Community Landuse for Sustainable Production and Utilization of African Indigenous Vegetables in the Lake Victoria Region.* The Principal researcher, Professor M.O.A. Onyango had a PhD in horticulture. This meant that she was the lead scientists. Being a multidisciplinary research, the rest of us brought to the project fields of socio economist, literature, urban planning and taxonomy (Onyango *et al*., 2004).

v) If there is need to attach a covering letter, get the Chief Executive Officer of the organization to sign it. In his/her absence, any other credible person in organization can sign it. It must be stamped with the institution's official stamp and has to be written on a headed paper. For the three partnering institutions, we had to get the Vice Chancellor (BU), the Deputy Principal (MUBS) and Academic Registrar (MUST) to sign the covering letters.

vi) Integrate the problem to be addressed with the vision of the funding agency in the title. In this case this was UNCHE. Under the heading of relevance to policy, impact and expected output, we stated thus, "The expected outputs and impacts support the role of UNCHE of preservation of quality in teaching, research and services. This means it will go along way to address the challenges and difficulties of higher education, which are, enhancement and preservation of quality in teaching, research and services, and relevance of programmes."

vii) An integrated multi-disciplinary approach like including a psychologist, accountant, economist and lawyer should be emphasized in the proposal. This is because of the broader context of socio-economic development. Days of funding individual research are gone and they have now been replaced by group research – multidisciplinary.

viii) Emphasize participatory research that will involve all parties concerned; from policy members to community members, in all stages of the research.

ix) Research duration. Studies should be scheduled in such a way that the results will be availed when needed for key decisions.

x) Impact of output. Indicate the expected outputs from the research and their relevance on socio-economic and environmental welfare.

xi) Research ethics. Briefly explain how you will uphold the principles of research ethics. We included a short section of ethical consideration – 72 words, "To ensure that principles of research ethics are maintained, the study will undertake to inform respective authorities of the impending research. Clearance will be sought from Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST) and the Research and Ethics Committee of participating universities. In addition, informed consent will be sought from companies and the respondents on their willingness to participate in the study."

xii) Emphasis should be on lay out-reader friendly. It should be clearly laid out in a good format.

xiii) The proposal should fit in the mission or purpose of the sponsoring organization.

xiv) Dissemination of research outputs. State clearly the outputs, procedures for dissemination, impact and sustainability mechanisms for sharing research outputs with the wider stakeholder. Table 6 presents what we included under dissemination plan. This was done after a short introduction of 96 words.

Table 6: Sample summary of Dissemination plan, Impact and Sustainability

Output	Procedures for dissemination	Impact	Sustainability
O_1	Published technical report, publication in relevant journals, articles in national news papers, blog	Strength of staff /institution identified and built on while weaknesses are rectified, closed missing gaps in delivering the content	Conducting Training of Trainers (ToT) for staff so as to build and enhance teaching capacity
O_2	Published technical report, publication in relevant journals, articles in national news papers, blog	An updated inventory information on SEA	Periodic reviews of the inventory in light of current SEA developments i.e. EMAS*, GRI*, CERES*
O_3	Published technical report, publication in relevant journals or chapters in books, articles in national news papers, blog	A database of SEA practices	Periodic updates of database
O_4	Published technical report, publication in journals or chapters in books, articles in national news papers, blog	Usage of workable practices	Modifying strategies for SEA
O_5	Report of portraits/case studies, articles in national news papers, blog	Established modes of Documented cases/ portraits and SEA companies in Uganda	Continuous usage of developed portraits/cases studies
O_6	Hold: public lectures, guest lectures, workshops, etc, field days, case stories, IEC materials, final technical report	Findings written in languages and terminologies the ordinary entrepreneur can understand	Usage of research outputs

NOTE:
EMAS: Environmental Management and Audit.
GRI: Global Reporting Initiatives.
CERES: Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies.

16. Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to highlight techniques to be employed in writing a research proposal that will attract funding. These have been discussed under the headings: introduction, research grant proposal definition, components of a research grant proposal, general techniques and concluding comments. Obviously, it has been argued that these techniques are employed in order to make the proposed project have resemblance of the goals of the funding agency, beneficiaries of the project, implementers and government. In addition, a great deal more needs to be known that a good RGP grant proposal and ideas can be rejected if poorly packaged.

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