

Proposal Writing Tips

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Horses and Humans Research Foundation is committed to funding rigorous research that will impact the strength of the Equine Assisted Activities of the future. Here we have presented detailed information on each element of the HHRF proposal, to help applicants develop strong research projects that are more likely to receive positive evaluations from our scientific review committee.

Here we have presented detailed information on each element of the HHRF proposal, and some suggestions and questions to keep in mind as you develop your proposal.

- Scientific abstract/Research narrative

This is the overview of the project and provides the reviewers with an overarching perspective of the proposed research. A thorough review of relevant literature establishes how the proposed research 'fits' with the available, prior data and publications. Does this extend the field? Break new ground? Build on current hypotheses? Explore current techniques in a different population of subjects? A thoroughly researched and clearly written review of the prior literature demonstrates the applicant's mastery and fluency of the field of interest as well as offering a perspective on the relevance and significance of the proposed research. The goal and hypothesis of the research should be focused, achievable, and pertinent to the HHRF mission. A detailed description of the design of the interventions and/or methodology used in the research is critical to the reviewers' assessments. The use of validated, objectively measurable, controlled and scientifically accepted tools and instruments in the population to be studied provide confidence that the data generated will contribute to advancing the acceptance of the results and conclusions. Statistical grounding in hypothesis testing, study design and numbers of subjects enables the reviewers to determine the scope, ambitions, and focus of the research. Is this a pilot study that may be followed later by a larger study, and therefore the budget, timelines and personnel involved reflect this scope? Is this a rigorous study supported by the inclusion of many subjects allocated into several intervention or treatment groups? The clarity, completeness and attention to detail exemplified in the literature review, hypothesis to be tested, testing procedures and rigor of the scientific design is heavily weighed in the review process.

- Need/justification and Research Narrative

The justification for the research and narrative build upon the above points. Placing the research in context focuses the reviewers on the rationale for the

project, the motivation of the research, and exactly why the applicants are qualified, motivated and likely to succeed with their research. Is there pilot data available? Have the principal investigators involved the appropriate centers, experts, and support staff? Will this initial research build to a larger study or raise more novel and exciting questions? Is the support requested part of a larger effort for funding and/or research involving this group and/or facility?

- Proposed Timeline

Project timelines are examined to assess feasibility, time to publication and to provide confidence that the investigators appreciate the complexities and hurdles of working with humans and horses. Realistic timelines, and/or constraints due to facilities and personnel such as winter riding, etc, are appreciated by the scientific reviewers. We understand the challenges and are encouraged by applicants who submit a realistic appraisal of the time the research will take. The timelines are often indirectly used as an assessment of the investigators' familiarity with the research effort and proposed study! For example, can 400 hours of videotaped interpretations really be thoroughly analyzed in 2 days?

- Proposed Budget

Who doesn't look at the budget in this day and age?! The reviewers scrutinize the budget to assure costs are realistic, comprehensive and cover the proposed research. Including 'nice to haves' such as a relaxing weekend for the participants, during which no study data is collected, suggests the research proposal has strayed from the HHRF goals. Yet compensation for subject transportation, remuneration for a statistician, and fees for therapists are reasonable expenses that reviewers accept especially if costs are placed in perspective for the geographic location, special equipment required for the research, etc. (e.g., parking in a large city or travel from rural areas may result in significant budget expense). Costs that are missing from the budget again suggest lack of thoroughness, expertise and appreciation for the complexities of the proposed research and send signals that the project may not achieve the stated goals.

- Investigator and staff background

The very act of submitting a proposal for funding suggests that the investigators and their staff are committed. This is supported by letters from ancillary staff, equine centers, and, if indicated, university or patient-based groups that may be involved in the research. The scientific reviewers assess the qualifications and availability of the investigators and their commitment to publication and presentation with an eye toward ensuring the research will be completed in a timely and high-quality manner with contribution from appropriate personnel.

Additionally, experience in publishing data strongly supports the application. While conducting a study does not guarantee publication, keep in mind that dissemination of data, and advancing the field are major goals of HHRF. Assurance of appropriate treatment facilities, data handling and analysis, and a potential subject pool are scrutinized. The inclusion of and application by investigators new to the field is encouraged especially if mentors and experts provide advice and oversight of the research. Raising awareness and increasing the expertise of researchers is important to the Foundation.

- Compliance statement

Finally, the safety and privacy of study subjects remain foremost. All grant applications are scrutinized to ensure appropriate facilities, protective equipment, subject consents, health information protection, and trained staff are present in the proposed research.

HHRF is committed to high quality research and seeks to advance the understanding, science, and unique benefit of equine-assisted activities/therapies for the physical and mental health and quality of life for people with disabilities. Our dilemma was whether to fund research that came close to meeting our high standards or to provide feedback and encourage applicants to modify the proposals and reapply. We have chosen the latter route, and look forward to funding many more applicants in the near future.