

# Proposal, grant and CV writing

C.Ceccarelli

Institute de Planétologie et Astrophysique de Grenoble

# TYPES OF PROPOSALS

## **1- Proposals to observe at telescopes:**

2 times per year and per telescope

Usually <2 pages of scientific case + technical sheet

## **2- Proposals to get money:**

Usually once per year

National agencies: depending on the country there could be more sources of funding (in France: National French Agency, bilateral funding, National Projects...)

European agencies: FP7 ITN (Initial Training Network) or Infrastructures.. ERC-EG (European Research Council Early Grants) or ESF (European Science Foundation) networks...

Usually >10 pages

## **3- Proposals to get a position (fellowship or permanent):**

Usually once per year

National and European Agencies (like above) + Marie Curie fellowships (now for advanced Post-Docs)

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COMMITTEES

## Committees are composed of human beings.

- 1- As most human beings, committee members have their own opinions and idiosyncrasies, and they may be wrong. Sometimes the opinion diverge also within the panel members.
- 2- Reading 50 proposals (or even less for that matter) and afterwards write reports is not fun: it takes time, and it takes time from our science time. It is rarely a rewarding activity.
- 3- Most committee members do not take pleasure in rejecting proposals.
- 4- Committees are usually composed of about a half dozen people or more, changing every 2 or 3 years (sometimes people just change hat and keep sitting on the same/another committee, true...). Therefore, there is a mediation and moderation aspect which is important, in the bad and in the good.

If your proposal gets rejected do not feel discouraged and frustrated. Submit again: the committee may have changed or may better receive your proposal.

# VERY GENERAL (AND OBVIOUS) SUGGESTIONS:

There is not a magic formula that ensures success. But the following suggestions help to increase the probability of success.

## 1- How the proposal is written is very important

Be clear. Do not use jargon, very likely not more than 1 or 2 members of the committee would understand it. Write for an astronomer not in your specific discipline. Use short and easy to read sentences.

Make the main idea/message of the proposal clear (and appealing) in the first 4 lines...ok, half page.

It helps writing an outline of the arguments and/or logics you want to develop, before starting writing.

If you want to convey a message/information, it should be crystal clear and understandable at the FIRST reading. Do not count on the referee to read between the lines or to understand subtle messages.

If an information is important for the proposal, provide all useful information in the proposal. Do not count on the referee to look for it, not even in published articles. (if you don't bother why should the referee?)

Strictly follow the requested format for the proposal and the page limits.

# VERY GENERAL (AND OBVIOUS) SUGGESTIONS

## 2- Rush never helps

Take the time to write your proposal. Even a 2 pages proposal needs more than 2 days (especially so if you're not a "veteran")! Start in time!

Re-read your proposal after at least 1 night of rest. Do not send proposals that have obviously not been re-read (many typos, inappropriate cut and paste..). It hurts the proposal, even if it is a wonderful one in the substance. It shows a lack of respect for the committee members that volunteered their time and effort.

Ask someone to read your proposal and give you feedback (for example whether she/he understood what you propose...).

Do not submit the proposal 30 seconds before the deadline! (and btw check when the deadline is...) Many proposals are now submitted via web-based systems: a deadline is a deadline, plus or minus 1 second!

# VERY GENERAL (AND OBVIOUS) SUGGESTIONS

## 3- Ask for what you need

Ask for what is really needed for your project (time or money), not more nor less, and justify it, carefully.

Get informed what is the average approved request of successful proposals. Stay within this limit, do not overdo.

Don't run after all opportunities. Select the calls that are really interesting for you. Writing proposals takes time and energy, and may end up being frustrating.

It is also important to understand that you get a job and/or promotion not because you've written so many proposals but rather because you've written papers.

# VERY GENERAL (AND OBVIOUS) SUGGESTIONS

## 4- The content ...matters too

Be sure that the proposed project is novel and that it has not been already carried out or is being carried out by another group. Search carefully the literature. Inquire older colleagues whether a similar project is already in progress somewhere else.

Be careful to cite other people's work correctly. Do not overemphasize what you have done and how great you are. Consider that 90% of astronomers think that they deserve the Nobel prize. It's highly probable that one of them sits in the committee.

My personal opinion is: do not rush after "à la mode". A bit, of course yes, but too much doesn't pay off.

Nowadays projects declaring a guaranteed output of the proposed research have a much higher probability to be approved. High risk / high gain proposals are usually advertised by agencies but in practice they are rarely approved.

Put forward any weakness and justify it. Do not count on the referee overlooking it. Recall Murphy's law...

# WHY PROPOSALS ARE REJECTED

Reason	What to do
The proposal is wrong.	Go back and think again what you want.
The proposal is unclear.	Re-write better the message.
The proposal is in the “grey” area, where 80% of proposals are.	Details matter. Any detail can make the proposal slide on the good/bad side.
The goal is too ambitious and the proposal seems risky.	With the increasingly reduced budgets committees are hesitant to give time/money to risky proposals. Emphasize the results that will be obtained, whatever they are.
The proposal lacks originality.	Re-think your project. Read literature better.
It is considered a fishing expeditions.	Define the specific goals better.



# SOME EXAMPLES: 1) ERC-EG (European Research Council: early Grant)

- PROPOSALS for funding up to 1.5 MEuros. Call once per year. Success rate  $<1/10$ .
- Information can be found on the site of the ERC.
- Reserved for young researchers (less than 6 years from PhD).
- Committee formed by 12 persons, representing all disciplines in astronomy. The committee is for 6 years and the name of the members are public (on the web site).
- Selection obtained in 2 steps.
- In the first step, the CV and a 5 page project synopsis is considered (for a total of  $<12$  pages). The proposal is read by at least 3 members. The evaluation is based on the CV of the proponent and the project, with about the same weight. About 30% of the proposals pass this first step.
- In the second step, at least 3 members plus other 3 external referees read the full project of 15 pages (plus again the CV). Again CV and project weigh almost the same, with the project here maybe more. In addition, the candidates are invited for an interview. About 30% pass this step.
- **In the end, not more than 10% of proposals are selected.**

## SOME EXAMPLES: 2) Interferometer IRAM PdB

- PROPOSALS for observing at the IRAM mm interferometer Plateau de Bure. Call twice per year. Success rate  $\sim 1/6$ .
- Information can be found on the site of the IRAM institute.
- Open to the whole community.
- Committee formed by 12 persons, representing all subjects in millimeter astronomy. The committee is for 3 years and the name of the members are public (on the web site).
- Selection obtained in 1 step.
- The proposal (<2 pages with scientific case + technical) is read by 5 members. Before the committee meeting a pre-rating is carried out by each referee. In practice, if even only one referee doesn't like the proposal the chances for the proposal to pass are very small.
- In the end, not more than 20% of proposals are selected.

# CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED IF YOUR PROPOSAL/APPLICATION IS REJECTED. Do not take necessarily it as judgment of your quality as researcher.... (of course, the other approach of thinking that everybody else is stupid and you are the unrecognized genius is also wrong!)

Writing proposals/applications is not a waste of time: you gain valuable experience.

STAMINA PAYS (but with “intelligence”!)

# CV WRITING

There are several web sites with CV templates: pick one you like.

## EXAMPLE

Name

Born

Professional address

Telephone

Address

email

Education & Awards

Employment

Teaching

Professional responsibilities

1

Field of research – brief description

Refereed publications

Oral presentations

Poster presentations

Funding

Languages

Skills (computer, laboratory....)

2

Hint: in the lists, start with the present rather than with your first year of existence

# CV WRITING:

There is not a magic formula that ensures success. But the following suggestions help to increase the probability of success.

## 1- How the CV is written is very important

Be clear. Do not use jargon, very likely not more than 1 or 2 members of the committee would understand it. Write for an astronomer not in your specific discipline. Use short and easy to read sentences.

If you want to convey a message/information, it should be crystal clear and understandable at the FIRST reading. Do not count on the referee to read through the lines or to understand subtle messages.

If an information is important for the CV, provide all useful information in the proposal. Do not count on the referee to look for it, not even in published articles. (if you don't bother why should the referee?)

Strictly follow the requested format for the CV, if any, and the page limits.

# CV WRITING

...AND DO NOT SEND CV.pdf or cv\_engl.pdf !

Do you imagine the mood of the referee receiving 50 CV.pdf files???  
(you are not improving your position in the list!)

