NSERC Discovery grant presentation

Rotimi Aluko
Dept. of Human Nutritional Sciences

Disclaimer: The contents of this presentation represents my opinions only and not that of NSERC
Criteria for evaluation of applications

1. Excellence of the researcher
   • Mainly based on form 100 but quality of current proposal also an important consideration.
   • Most important: previous grant history, significant contributions, publication record and training of HQP.
   • Also important: other activities such as conference presentations (invited and voluntary), peer recognition (e.g., result as cover page material for a journal), awards, editorial service, service to professional organizations.
Significant contributions

• Emphasize novelty of results or contributions to knowledge. Do not just summarize your journal publications.

• Provide references (publications) for each listed significant contribution.

• Could be knowledge that is already translated into industrial use or has been licensed.

• NSERC gives you opportunity to list up to 5, so please use it fully.

• Be your own advocate! Remember this is a competition!
Publications

• Indicate HQP on each listed publication.
• As much as possible please list up to past 5 yrs (instead of 6) if you have to conserve space.
• If your publications are concentrated in just 2-3 journals, it is good to state why.
• If your publications are mainly in low-impact journals (<2.0 impact factor), provide a reason for using such journals. E.g. could be that the journals are published by your professional association and the audience is the most appropriate for your work.
• The committee does not use impact factor to judge publication record but members may be concerned if majority of your papers are in low-impact journals and you have a low publication record (less than 3/yr).
• Most important, please state your contributions to published multi-authored papers.
• If you are applying for renewal, it is always good to indicate which papers were published from your previously funded Discovery grant.
HQP training

• Indicate HQP on each listed publication.
• Number of previously trained HQP in relation to funding history.
• Variety of trainees (depends on level of applicant’s expertise and institution).
• If you are an established researcher and you have trained only MSc students (in past 6 yr), it is advisable to explain why you have no PhD or PDF trainees.
• If your trainees spend too long to completion, please explain (e.g. maternity leave, personal reason).
• In form 100 part II, under contributions to HQP training provide information on calibre of your trainees (awards, current position).
• If you are applying for renewal, it always good to indicate the number and type of trainees from your previously funded Discovery grant.
2. Merit of the proposal
   • Mainly based on form 101.
   • Proposal must be innovative and hypothesis driven.
   • Returning applicants should provide a brief information on what was achieved with previous grant. Avoid narrating what you did but focus on what was achieved (e.g., significant results, HQP training, number of publications).
   • Provide exhaustive review of literature. Always a negative when external reviewers indicate that an important background information was missing from your application.
   • Avoid narrative style for your methodology; instead use ‘why’ and ‘if’ to explain experimental plan. Avoid explaining standard methods so that you can conserve space.
   • Avoid using abbreviations that have not been previously defined.
Merit of the proposal (cont’d)

- Proposal must look feasible (don’t be too ambitious!). This is especially important for new applicants.
- Always good to indicate at least two HQP trainings over the 5 yr period.
- Budget justification should be as detailed as possible within the 2-page limit.
- If possible use structure-function approach (instead of listing of what you intend to do) to write your application. Your proposal should not be a ‘wish list’!
- For renewals, please ensure that you emphasize current application as a progressive approach and not ‘sideways’ to your previously funded work.
- Remember that NSERC funds research programs and not projects. There must be evidence or apparent indication that the current application will generate ideas for subsequent renewal(s).
HQP training

• Based on form 100 (previously trained) and form 101 (proposed training).
• Concentrate on MSc, PhD and undergraduate research trainees (especially for junior to mid-career applicants).
• PDF needs very strong justification, especially type of work to be conducted.
• Important to emphasize quality and achievements of previous trainees.
Some tips

• Get at least two colleagues to read your application (one of them should not be in your field of specialization).

• Follow NSERC format diligently.

• Remember this is a competition, so write your best proposal. And please emphasize HQP training and novelty of your proposal (convince the committee that this is a ‘discovery’ application and not a sophisticated analytical work).

• It is not advisable that majority of your submitted journal articles are funded solely by CIHR.