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How to write a good proposal

Recommendation 1 – make sure to address the Call text

- **Read the Call carefully and pay attention to the guiding principles** for the support to development research as these principles provide the framework for the support to development research by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.
- Ensure that the research proposal **addresses the theme of the Call** and not only a small part of the Call text.

Recommendation 2 – explain how the research contributes to new knowledge and capacity strengthening

- You must carefully explain how the project contributes to new knowledge by **positioning the project in relation to existing research**. It is not enough to provide a list of literature, but you must explain how controversies in the literature may be addressed and how 'conventional wisdom' may be revised.
- Research questions and hypotheses must **describe the innovative nature** of the proposed research.
- You must make sure that **capacity-strengthening elements are considered**, based on the needs of the partner/sector and that these go beyond PhD training.

Recommendation 3 – carefully consider the socio-economic context and development dimension of the research

- The **socio-economic and institutional context of the research** must be clear in the proposal.
- You must be able to demonstrate sufficient **knowledge of the national and regional context** in which your research will be conducted, including relevant research/literature linked to that context as well as the general situation in the country/region.
- The **rationale for multi-country comparative studies must be clearly explained** in cases where more than one country are included.
- Engage relevant public and private sector partners in the project, and **explain how the research will be positioned for use.**

Recommendation 4 – make sure that the research questions appear clearly

- It must be clear that the proposal constitute a **genuine research project** with clear research questions.
- Make sure that **research objectives** are well defined, clearly presented and reflected in the structure of the work packages.

- You must **identify one or more research questions**, which are not only intellectually challenging but also relevant and under-researched. In other words, you must ask a question to which we do not already know the answer.
- You must demonstrate that you have **the right group of researchers** to answer the identified question(s).
- It is not an advantage to cover very broad research questions or extensive empirical material. It is important that the proposal is **focused, realistic and feasible**.

Recommendation 5 – make sure that the research proposal is feasible, builds on equitability and is gender sensitive

- It must appear clearly **how the research is structured**, e.g. in work packages.
- You must ensure a **good balance between inputs from each of the project partners** and include the right competences in the team.
- You must ensure that the **budget is balanced between South and North partners**, and provide justification for budget distribution.
- Consider **interdisciplinarity a strong asset** or describe the considerations if the project is not interdisciplinary.
- It must be clear **who does what**, why the team composition is as it is, incl. gender composition, combination of senior and junior researchers, North-South balance, etc.
- The main researchers must **allocate sufficient time.** Make sure that it is not only junior researchers, who make the proposal but ensure that senior researchers actively take part.
- Explain how you consider the **gender dimensions of the research**. Considerations about gender sensitivity are encouraged in all aspects of the outlined project, including composition of the research team, data collection strategies, engagement with research participants/communities and analytical framework.

Recommendation 6 – make the research idea come across clearly

- Clarity is important both in terms of focus and text quality. You are **addressing the entire Committee**, which consists of members from different disciplines. Applicants must be able to explain the research proposal to someone who is a researcher but may not have specialist knowledge about this particular aspect of the theme of the Call.
- While making sure that the **research is analytical rather than descriptive**, it must also be meaningful, easy to read without long complex sentences, complex language, complex models etc.
- You must argue why the idea is good and what knowledge the research ideally will bring. **What are the key concepts** (1-3, not 25), what data will be needed/collected, what methods are being employed, and how they are interconnected?
- You can ask both colleagues from your own discipline as well as a colleague/friend from another discipline or field to go through your proposal to check if your research idea comes across to a broader audience.

/DFC, May 2025