

Grant-writing skills in life sciences: A workshop for early-career researchers



Dr. Julia Staykova-McKinnon for Scriptorium

Dear Participant, welcome to Scriptorium's annual grant-writing series hosted by DZL!

This workshop will address persuasion skills in grant writing, focusing on the DFG application format as our baseline example. We will discuss, in particular:

1. Strong structure in State of the Art, Objectives, and Methodological Programme: the key scientific sections in a research application.
2. How to provide clear, convincing answers to the 'project' evaluation criteria of innovativeness, high-risk, and high added value, and how to respond to the complex 'candidate' evaluation requirements at the earlier career stage, including emerging recognition and growing track record.
3. How to maximise information in the CV and convey a compelling career vision through a personal statement.

Timeline for live meetings via Zoom, in Berlin time:

1. Monday 21 March, 15:00-17:00. *Introductory lecture and discussion*
2. Wednesday 23 March, 15:00-17:00. *Peer discussion and sample analysis*
3. Friday, 25 March, 15:00-17:00: *Final lecture and discussion..*

Please see next page for meeting dates and details of the programme.

PRIVACY

Zoom as a platform. No project drafts will be exchanged via Zoom; it only serves as a platform for discussion. No sessions will be recorded. The link is only valid for your institution, is password protected, and the waiting room is enabled so only those who enrolled can join.

Non-disclosure agreement. The instructor has signed a comprehensive non-disclosure agreement for this event. All content you may share will be subject to legally binding confidentiality.

Podcast lecture series for remote self-study

Access to the podcast series is retained until one full week after the workshop is completed.

Series 1: General grant-writing skill: ~190 mins

Podcast 1. Persuasion in grant writing: 17.30 mins

Podcast 2. The State of the Art proposal section: 16 mins

Podcast 3. The Objectives section: 20 mins

Podcast 4. The Methodological Programme section: 26 mins

Podcast 5. Evaluation criteria - Novelty versus Feasibility: 26 mins

Podcast 6. Evaluation criteria – Impact: 13 mins

Podcast 7. The Abstract – 11 mins

Podcast 8: The CV and Personal Statement – 27 mins

Podcast 9: Writing skills: 36 mins

Series 2: Top-up podcasts for more experienced applicants: ~85 mins

Podcast 1: The two-page academic CV: 27 mins

Podcast 2. How the project contributes to your longer-term research programme: 10 mins

Podcast 3. Five case studies in rejected proposals: 37 mins

Assignment for peer discussion (middle session)

Please prepare a written response, each ~0.5-2/3 of a page in length. You will be invited to share one example on the Zoom screen and the group will critique it.

Question 1: Risk management and feasibility. Present the risk analysis and mitigation measures for any challenging or risky aspects of your project. Be detailed and concrete. Beyond scientific risks, consider project planning factors such as timelines, access to vital resources including tissues, samples and equipment, and contributions of collaborators with complementary expertise.

Question 2: Research contributions up to date and future directions. Sum up your publication record and research achievements; show quantitative indicators including total publications, citation numbers, talks (including invited talks), and any fellowships or awards obtained. To substantiate how your research programme will evolve during the fellowship, provide a perspective on:

- new technical skills or theoretical expertise you plan to acquire
- the next research question you will explore
- new collaborations or expanded existing collaborations
- targets for mobility (intersectoral or international)
- broader skills including teaching, mentoring or public outreach;
- dissemination targets: how many papers do you plan to produce during this period, where you will target to present/publish them, what other research outputs are envisaged?

Question 3. Who are your main competitors? Consider both the national and international context to explain what is unique in your positioning. Are you aware of any recently funded proposals or recent papers that partly overlap with your objectives? If yes, what is the added value in your case?

Question 4: Why does this project need to be funded now? Is it urgent and timely? Justify.

Question 5 (for more senior applicants): how will this project provide a foundation for a strong research programme for any earlier-stage researchers employed on your project?

Julia Staykova-McKinnon, Ph.D.

Scriptorium Founder, Consultant



Profile

Julia has over fifteen years of experience as a lecturer and consultant in grant writing, interviewing skills in research, and business proposals developed for private investors. She consults on proposals submitted to Horizon Europe (formerly Horizon 2020), including ERC (StG, CoG, AdG, SyG), Erasmus+ Actions (European University, EMJMD, SwafS), Marie S. Curie Actions (ITN/ETN, Doctoral Network, CoFund), and FET-Open/RIA. She also assists on proposals submitted to national agencies, including DFG and Helmholtz Foundation (Germany), ANR, PIA3 (France), FWO/FNRS (Belgium).

Consulting and teaching at EU academic institutions: Julia regularly consults on proposals and teaches workshops for postdocs and junior and mid-career professors at leading universities and research institutes in the EU. A selection of her clients includes Charité-University Hospital Berlin, German Cancer Research Centre (DKFZ), German Centre for Neurodegenerative Diseases (DZNE), Grenoble Neurosciences Institute (GIN), Institut Curie and Institut Cervaux-Paris, Institute of Clinical and Experimental Research (IREC)-Brussels, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL), Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine (MDC)-Berlin, Max Planck-Potsdam, University of Bordeaux, University of Grenoble-Alpes (UGA), University of Cote-D'Azur (France), University of Zurich, and Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (UZH, ETHZ, Switzerland).

Industry: Julia has consulted and taught at Eli Lilly Pharmaceuticals, Hengeler Mueller Partners in Law, HVB Banking Group, KPMG, and Servier Laboratories. With Janssen Pharmaceutica, she developed an innovative training programme implemented at KULeuven's Doctoral School.

Academic Background

Assistant Professor in language studies, University of Amsterdam (2010-11)

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellow, Los Angeles, California (2009-10)

Post-Doctoral Fellow, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (2007-09)

Ph.D. on rhetoric in Renaissance culture, studies jointly at Oxford University and Sofia University, defended at Sofia U in 2007.