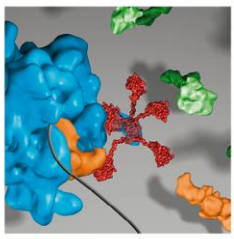

Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds
Stiftung für medizinische
Grundlagenforschung

Writing a research proposal for a BIF PhD fellowship

by U. Benjamin Kaupp, former Trustee of the BIF

The following is a list of recommendations that should be followed when preparing your application for a BIF PhD fellowship. Although the following points may seem obvious, they are ignored surprisingly often. As a result, seemingly excellent candidates fail to obtain a fellowship, simply because their proposals do not conform to these minimal standards.

1. Layout

Use font size 12, 1.5 spacing, and a margin of 2.5 cm or 1 inch. This is not a niggling formality, because some applicants apparently have difficulties to keep it short. Choosing font size 10 and single spacing is not an acceptable solution.

2. Length

For the description of your research project (i.e. proposal, excluding CV, etc.) three pages are definitely too short, 15 pages are definitely too long. The proposal should be as concise as possible, yet contain all the information necessary for its evaluation by an expert in the field, as well as by scientists from related disciplines. It is this successful balancing act between conciseness and comprehensibility that makes for a good application.

3. Illustrations

Illustrations can help understand complex subject matter, such as a research proposal. The illustrations should be used sparingly and made to serve the purpose of your application. Do not just use a graph or picture that happens to be in your power point collection. Modify pictures to match the specific needs of your proposal. Each figure should be accompanied by a legend that contains **all** the information needed to understand the picture. Explain abbreviations. Make sure that everything in the picture can be deciphered without the use of a magnifying glass.

4. Preparation

Carefully craft your application. Do not "copy-and-paste" parts from your thesis advisor's NIH or DFG grant or from your master's thesis. Make use of sub-headings, paragraphs, etc. to structure the text according to the inherent logic of your research project.

The length of the individual parts should be balanced. The **summary** should not be longer than two-thirds of a page. Write an **introduction** to the subject of your research. What is known? What is unknown? What is controversial? Why is it important to know all that? What is your own ground work (if applicable)? Then state specifically the scope and objectives of your proposal. This introduction should consist of 2–4 pages. If your research is successful as planned, how would we have advanced our understanding of this scientific problem (ca. 0.5–1page)?

Put great emphasis and care on the section that describes your approach in general and the experiments in particular (**experimental strategy** approx. 4–5 pages). This should represent the core of your proposal. Be specific rather than general, but avoid giving unnecessary details such as the ingredients of a buffer solution, unless they are truly essential to the success of your

endeavour. Include alternative approaches for important parts of the project that are particularly risky.

Finally, add your **work schedule** for a three year project and do not forget **references**. More than 30, however, are rarely necessary. Include all authors and full titles of the – mainly primary research – papers you cite.