

Ten Tips for Preparing Interdisciplinary Research Proposals

1. Remember that your proposal will be read by a range of people, not just those within your research area: don't assume knowledge of your discipline – describe (concisely) why your research is important, innovative, and impactful.
2. Don't just describe your proposal as interdisciplinary. Explain why an interdisciplinary approach is necessary to achieve the intended research outcomes.
3. Interdisciplinary proposals may be evaluated by those with expertise in collaborative research rather than your discipline. Write clearly for a general reader – use the minimum of technical language and abbreviations and define specialist terms when they are first used.
4. Collaboration and integration take many forms, and work, to achieve. Outline what kind(s) of collaboration or integration you envisage (theoretical, methodological, etc.) and the specific ways in which you hope to achieve this.
5. Explain the methods that you plan to use and, if they are novel, give examples of where they have been successfully used in other fields.
6. Bear in mind the extra costs associated with interdisciplinary research, such as additional network building, and budget for them accordingly.
7. If the research involves new collaborations, assume that these relationships will take time to develop and provide opportunities, both formal and informal, for this to happen, especially at the start of the project.
8. If the research includes different types of stakeholders, describe what they bring to the research, what and when they are expected to contribute, and how they will benefit from taking part.
9. Plan for a range of outputs to be produced across the lifetime of the project; this protects against failure and satisfies the needs of different collaborators. Academic publications are usually of little importance to societal partners who will often need more focused outputs – a program of activities or a new tool to pilot – to justify their continued involvement in the project.
10. Criteria for authorship vary considerably across disciplines. Describe how authorships for project outputs will be allocated, or a process for agreeing on this, early in the project. Otherwise, this can become a major problem.