

THE RAY THOMAS EDWARDS FOUNDATION

Research Project Proposal Guidelines

Applicants are urged to carefully consider the following guidelines, but may choose to deviate from the guidelines if they believe that doing so will convey their proposal in a more logical manner. Please note, however, that the following restrictions on length and formatting are mandatory:

The proposal, including text, figures, tables, and references shall be no longer than 8 single-spaced pages with a minimum font size of 11 points, and 1 inch margins on all sides. If appropriate, supplemental material may be included in an appendix, but should be done so judiciously—extraneous material in the appendix will be ignored.

GENERAL COMMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

The expectations of the Ray Thomas Edwards Foundation are somewhat different from those typically ascribed to federal funding agencies, in that we wish to encourage research that might be considered exploratory. For example, we recognize that funding by large government agencies (e.g., NIH and NSF) depends on a *hypothesis-driven* proposal that includes preliminary data supporting the credibility of the hypothesis. In general, proposals based on a “look and see” approach are penalized and rarely funded. While the foundation believes that the expectations described above are generally reasonable when applied to mid-career researchers, we recognize that researchers early in their careers often have difficulty meeting such objectives when writing proposals. Stringent imposition of such objectives tends to encourage “safe” research with predictable results, and in some cases, dubious significance. In order to encourage research of a more significant and exploratory nature, the foundation will give ample consideration to funding proposals that lack some of the qualities described above. For example, inclusion of preliminary data is generally not expected. Indeed, a goal of the foundation is to provide promising young researchers with precisely the sort of seed money needed to obtain such preliminary data, which then can be used to help the researcher secure future funding from other sources. Similarly, the foundation will give ample consideration to proposals based on a set of a feasibility studies that aim to establish, rather than confirm, one or more working hypotheses; in other words, some degree of “look and see” research will be acceptable. On the other hand, a proposal should not simply consist of an amorphous set of ill-defined objectives, though these guidelines are intentionally ambiguous about what is and is not acceptable in this regard.

STRUCTURE

The proposal should include the following elements:

Title — There is no formal restriction on the length of the title, but applicants are urged to be judicious. The ideal title should convey the nature of the proposed research to the non-expert.

Summary — This section should be concise and to the point, certainly no more than one page.

Objectives and Background — This section should be accessible to the non-expert, insofar as is possible. It is here that the problem is framed, including what is known, and what is unknown, about the problem. Once a knowledge gap has been identified (the unknowns), the value of closing this knowledge gap should be explained. This section should identify the long-range goals of the researcher, including the potential broader impact of their research on the field, followed by the specific objectives of the proposed study, and how these objectives are expected to contribute to the long-range goals.

Comment: This is an overview section. As such it need not provide complete detail on problem background or proposed experiments. The objectives should be more conceptual than overly descriptive. The objectives need not promise to confirm or rebut a particular hypothesis, but should at least provide realistic hope of identifying one or more hypotheses worthy of future funding.

Problem Background — This section need not be comprehensive, providing just enough literature review to highlight what is known about the problem. This section should also provide any literature references necessary to support the use of any novel research methods that are critical to the study but are not already in widespread use. The unknowns identified in the previous section should be described more fully here. Ideally this section should conclude by suggesting a conceptual framework of how the knowledge gap might be closed, but in the absence of a central hypothesis, some latitude will be allowed on this point.

Research Plan — The purpose of this section is to expand on the specific objectives introduced in the first section. The applicant should describe what experiments are planned, and what gains are expected from these experiments.

Comment: This section appears to mirror the format of the typical agency proposal (as do the previous sections), but the difference lies in the foundation standards for evaluating the plan. Proposing a series of exploratory experiments of uncertain outcome will be acceptable provided the experiments make sense, i.e. have reasonable potential to substantially broaden the researcher's understanding of the problem and lead to meaningful discovery.

Feasibility of the Proposed Research — This section should address the feasibility of the proposed experiments and the potential of the research to provide a significant step towards closing the knowledge gap.