



Guidelines for Proposal Writing Scholarship Competition

Your research proposal is a document that provides a logical presentation of your research idea. It illustrates the significance of the idea, shows the idea's relationship to past research, and describes the activities for the proposed research project. The following are guidelines for the preparation of the proposal.

- 1) Research Title: State the title clearly and link to the main objective of the research.
- 2) Introduction: This is a clear, logical statement of the background issues underlying the research, backed by literature. (1 – 2 pages)
- 3) Problem Statement: What the research seeks to achieve or what issue will be investigated. Ask the 'what', 'why', and 'how' questions in developing the research problem. (1 – 2 pages.) See more guidelines below on the research problem.
- 4) Objectives: Should be clearly stated and achievable. A well thought out research question will lead to clear goal (overall goal) and specific objectives. (½ page)
- 5) Literature Review: The research idea, objectives and methodology should be backed by literature (previous published research in the general area of the research problem or topic. The review should be critical and analytical, but concise, and not just copied. In addition to consulting the literature in the development of the research problem, a section of the proposal should be devoted to literature review which should cover further aspects of the research problem, gaps in previous studies, and methodological approaches including underlying theory. It is good practice to draw clear conclusions from the review in terms of what has been done, what contribution your research will make and possibly leads on your research approach. (5 – 6 pages).
- 6) Methodology: this section presents how you will carry out the research. It includes the theoretical framework, analytical framework and tools for addressing the objectives; data sources, sampling approach and study area; if you are using secondary data, describe the source and the reference period of the data. It should also describe the software to be used for estimation and presentation of data for analysis (up to 8 pages).
- 7) Prepare a workplan for executing the research. Indicate time allocation for data collection, statistical and econometric estimations; writing the thesis; writing a journal article for publication. Deadline for the journal article is August 30, 2013.

- 8) List all references cited in the proposal. References are required for the research to be credible. In general, only references included in the body of the proposal should be cited. Only cite what is relevant to your work. More is not better! Consult relevant journals such as the Journal of Agricultural Economics on how to cite and list references.

Proposal should be approximately 15 - 18 pages (excluding the list of references) with 1.5 line spacing and Times New Roman font size 12.

Below is a brief list of items that warrant closer attention when developing the full research proposals.

1. Presentation of a clear problem statement along with policy implications

The research questions have been written down in the concept notes. However, the relevance of the research question is often not clear. For example, if you want to study the demand for baby food labeling, then you need to explain why that is important and what the policy implications of the findings would be. If baby food is not produced in Ghana, then how will the research findings impact policy in Ghana? They may have an important impact but the concept note should be very clear about what this impact might be and how likely it is to occur. The same holds true for things like irrigation and technology adoption. Are these real choices that real people have and how might the research findings influence policy?

2. Identification of a proper control group

Several students propose to do some type of impact evaluation. Examples include studying the impact of increased agricultural productivity on poverty, studying the impact of irrigation on technical efficiency, studying the impact of Ghana's school feeding program and so on. Many (but not all) fail to point out the importance of comparing those that participate in the program to others that did not participate in the program. There are at least two ways to do this. One is via propensity score matching and the other is through a randomized controlled trial. The problem with studying only those who participate in the program is that it will be almost impossible to attribute outcomes to the program alone without knowing whether program participants were different from other people *before* they started the program. At the very least the problem should be acknowledged and some solutions for getting around the problem should be indicated in the concept note.

3. Data collection and sources

Many of the concept notes are too vague about who will collect the data and do not seem to allocate sufficient time to data collection. If researchers have not previously collected primary data, they should talk to those who have done this type of work to learn about the setbacks and difficulties that can arise. In addition, those conducting interviews will probably need to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents in some way. In developing full proposals, researchers should be very clear about

exactly which items from secondary data sources will be used and they should verify that these items are indeed available.

4. Timeline of activities

Several of the concept notes devote 10 months to literature review. The literature review should be done before the research starts, though students can continue to consult the literature even as they analyze the data and do the write-up.

Timelines to Note:

- Full Proposals: Due August 24, 2012
- Workshop for presentation of proposals: September 14 – 15, 2012
- Announcement of scholarships: October 5, 2012

Proposals should be submitted to Ms. Esther Mensah by email at IFPRI-Ghana@cgiar.org no later than 5pm on August 24th. For questions regarding submissions, Esther can be reached at 0302-780-716. More details on the scholarship program can be found on the GSSP blog (www.gssp.ifpri.info) along with additional information as it becomes available.