

Social Science Research Thematic Grant (SSRTG)

From MOE: Aggregated feedback for proposals (2020 – 2021) and observations from past projects

General feedback for proposals (2020 – 2021)	General observations of past awarded projects
1) Literature review 2) Academic rigour 3) Preliminary studies 4) Supporting information 5) Project deliverables 6) Scientific/Academic and Practical Contributions 7) Multi-methods & Multi-disciplines 8) Data Collection & Capability building 9) Applications that build on previous research 10) Letters of support	1) Impact of Research on Industry Collaborations 2) Recruitment and Training of Singaporean Research Manpower 3) Research outputs 4) Pathways to impact 5) Data sharing

General feedback for *proposals* (2020 – 2021)

- 1) **Literature review** → *Essential!*
 - a) Did not cite obvious related literature on topic.
 - b) **REMINDER:** Support applications with comprehensive literature reviews to demonstrate feasibility and academic contribution of project.
- 2) **Academic rigour** → *Essential!*
 - a) Proposed research on topical issues but did not demonstrate significant academic contribution.
 - b) SSRTG supports projects of strategic relevance to Singapore, and which will make a significant academic contribution.
 - c) Research need not be situated in Singapore, but must have strategic relevance and contribute to academic knowledge.
 - d) **REMINDER:** Academic aspects are **essential**.
- 3) **Preliminary studies** → *More info required*
 Should include findings from preliminary studies to better demonstrate feasibility of proposed research.
 → Especially for larger proposals and proposals from PIs with less track record.
- 4) **Supporting information** → *More info welcomed*
 Can include appendices providing more detailed information such as experimental design, survey questions, and power calculations – as and where appropriate.
- 5) **Project deliverables** → *More specifics needed*
 - a) Should provide specific information on i) type of training provided and ii) skillsets to be developed by research manpower, and iii) specific academic journals targeted for publication.

- b) **PREFERRED:** Proposals that train students to carry out fieldwork (viewed more favourably), rather than those that outsource such work.
- 6) **Scientific/Academic and Practical Contributions** → *Both are required*
- a) **REMINDER:** SSRTG supports projects with potential to make **BOTH scientific and practical** contributions.
 - b) Specifically, project quality is assessed in terms of their potential to produce scientific/academic insights (e.g., theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions to research literature) **as well as** practical applications that are of strategic relevance to Singapore.
 - c) Singapore-centric proposals with direct implementation applications of existing scientific/academic knowledge, and/or of direct interest to a specific government agency **but** fail to demonstrate clearly substantive, significant scientific/academic contribution will NOT meet the quality criteria of scientific/academic contributions.
- 7) **Multi-methods & Multi-disciplines** → *Must be purposeful, directed and substantiated*
- a) Use of multiple/mixed methods and/or involvement of researchers from different disciplines should be clearly driven by: i) nature of research and ii) greater adequacy of multi-method/multi-disciplinary approach to tackle specific research questions.
 - b) Should provide more details to show purpose, integration and value of using different specific multiple/mixed methods and/or involving different specific disciplinary expertise in research team.
 - c) Without such relevant details, mere inclusion of additional different methods or disciplinary expertise in a project proposal will appear only tokenistic – and proposal will NOT be judged favourably.
- 8) **Data Collection & Capability building** → *Avoid outsourcing to support local capability building*
- a) Some proposals are outsourcing data collection to market research firms and several have asked for unrealistically large budgets for this purpose.
 - b) When such data collection are practically feasible to be done in-house, outsourcing is a missed opportunity for PIs to build capability for their research teams and institutions, including training staff and students (e.g., undergraduate, master, PhD, post-doc) to gain data collection, project coordination and related field experiences.
 - c) **REMINDER:** Avoid outsourcing work whenever possible and contribute to capability building in local SSHR ecosystem.
 - o *When market research firms are needed for implementation of large-scale surveys:* PIs should supervise these firms closely to ensure that data quality is not compromised, and that data ownership is unambiguous.
 - o **Should:** Be more well-informed about market rates – so as to request realistic budgets (for outsourcing).
 - o **Should:** Have proper processes in place to prevent inflated price quotations and payment rates.
 - o To consider: various procuring methods with vendors (e.g., period contracts, contracts at an institutional or cross-institutional level) to lower costs and increase cost-effectiveness.
 - d) **REMINDER:** Be mindful of parameters of any data collection exercises proposed in projects. Ideally, these should include i) relevant theoretical frameworks, and ii) feasibility considerations – given the contexts in which sample population(s) resided.
- 9) **Applications that build on previous research** → *Must show incremental contribution*
- For applications that build on previous research: Need to show clearly incremental contribution of new project over previous work.

10) Letters of support → *Should provide, and include specific details*

- a) **REMINDER:** Include letters of commitment from relevant entity – for applications proposing research that relies on private companies/government agencies (e.g. to carry out fieldwork, interviews, or provide data), so as to assure project feasibility.
- b) Should provide **specific** details on involvement of these parties in research (e.g. to carry out field work, interviews, or provide data) where appropriate, instead of being just generic statements of support.
→ Critical in assuring panel of feasibility of i) project and ii) collaboration.
- c) **Process of seeking letters of support from potential users**
 - Initiate discussions with potential users to (i) to strengthen strategic relevance of proposed research to inform agencies' work and (ii) explore possible collaborations.
 - Capture details of these exchanges in Letters of support.
 - Feedback from agencies (tips to improve Letters of Support):
 - Info (about proposed research) provided when requesting for letters of support was too brief.
→ Agencies could only provide very generic letters of support (see Point 10b) if they deemed that proposed topic was relevant to their area of work.
 - Finalised research proposals were not shared with agencies after they had provided their inputs to PIs.

General feedback for *past awarded projects***1) Impact of Research on Industry Collaborations**

- a) **REMINDER:** Ensure that industry partners do not profit from project and findings are published and not made exclusive to industry partners.
- b) To prevent possible misperception that impactful industry collaborations were a misuse of public funds to subsidise corporate consultancy.

2) Recruitment and Training of Singaporean Research Manpower

REMINDER: Ensure best efforts to recruit and train Singaporeans → develop capabilities in Singapore's SSHR ecosystem.

3) Research outputs

Reporting of research outputs such as publications, conference presentations etc, should be directly related and arising from SSRTG project findings.

4) Pathways to impact

- a) **REMINDER:** Essential to demonstrate broader SSRTG project impact – beyond academic impact.
- b) Should provide detailed information on pathways to other forms of impact for project.

5) Data sharing

Should provide a clear data management plan in progress/final reports henceforth.
Details should include:

- a) Data that will be or have been acquired or generated over course of project;
- b) How data will be managed, analysed and stored;
- c) Mechanisms that will be used to share and preserve data after project is completed;
and
- d) Expected timeline for which data will be made available to user communities.