

Checklist for having your APH research proposal peer reviewed

We do not have a specific format for research proposals. You can for example use the proposal you have written for a funding agency, or you use your own format. Just make sure that the proposal contains sufficient information about the criteria listed below, as the Scientific Quality Committee needs this information to properly assess the research proposal.

- Structure, clarity, use of language
- Goal and motivation
- Central research question
- Research design
- Sample size
- Measuring instruments
- Plan of Analysis
- Research implementation plan and timeline
- Staffing
- Budget
- Feasibility
- Scientific Output

Only submit your proposal for review when your answer is ‘yes’ to these questions

1. Has your project not yet started?

All new VU/VUmc research proposals and grant applications that fall under the remit of the WMO should be submitted to the Scientific Quality Committee before the start of the project because this is a prerequisite for submitting the project to the METc VUmc. It is advised to submit the proposal as soon as the proposal has been funded by a funding organisation. Projects that have already started will not be reviewed by the Scientific Quality Committee. A project is considered as having started when the first participant has been recruited, or the first interview or the first measurement has taken place.

2. Is a researcher appointed at one of the APH departments involved with this project?

Only if an APH researcher is involved in the project or when the PhD will take place at the APH Institute the proposal will be assessed. Projects where a senior researcher or a professor has only an advisory role will not be assessed.

3. Is your proposal complete?

Submitted proposals are reviewed by the APH office to assess whether they fulfil the minimum requirements and are complete. Incomplete proposals will not be taken into consideration. Check carefully whether your proposal includes detailed information on the work plan, personnel, budget, scientific output and analysis plan. In some cases, the proposal approved by a funding agency does not contain all information needed. In these cases an appendix should be included with additional information. Proposals that cannot be assessed because of missing information will be given a negative review. They will be reassessed after you have provided the additional information.

4. Have you fully completed the attached form?

Proposals should be submitted together with the form providing additional information, to the Scientific Quality Committee by e-mail: aph.sqc@vumc.nl.

5. Does your proposal consist of 1 pdf file?

Please make sure that all attachments belonging to your proposal (proposal text, budget information, time planning etcetera) are merged into 1 pdf file.

6. When participants are recruited at a VUmc department: have you included a letter of the department?

When your proposal involves inclusion of patients of a VUmc care department, the head of the department should be informed. Please include a letter of the head of the department in which he/she states that the department is informed about the study proposed.

When your answer is 'yes' to all questions, please submit your proposal with the form providing additional information, to the Scientific Quality Committee by e-mail: aph.sqc@vumc.nl.

Procedures for reviewing research proposals

From January 1, 2018, the scientific quality of VU/VUmc proposals that fall under the remit of the WMO will be reviewed by the Scientific Quality Committee of APH. If a WMO research proposal has been funded by a funding agency that adopts a thorough peer review system (see list below), the methodological quality, planning, innovativeness and relevance will be reviewed. If a research proposal is funded without a thorough peer review system, a thorough peer review will be performed, including the methodological quality, planning, innovativeness, relevance and feasibility. To protect the work situation of PhD students and the fact that APH aims to publish results in particular, much attention is paid to the practical feasibility of the research project including time for publication. Besides methodological quality, items on feasibility that are reviewed are the work plan, the budget, the personnel, the scientific output and the analysis plan.

List of grant providers eligible for a short review:

- a. NWO, ZonMw and related organisations (e.g. EW, WOTRO)
- b. Netherlands Heart Foundation (Hartstichting)
- c. NIH
- d. Dutch Cancer Society (KWF), including Alpe d'Huzes
- e. WCRF
- f. Diabetes Fund (Diabetesfonds)
- g. EU
- h. Lung Foundation Netherlands (Longfonds - before; Astmafonds)
- i. Dutch Arthritis Foundation (Reumafonds)
- j. Netherlands Brain Foundation (Hersenstichting)

These are the major grant providers. Please contact the Scientific Quality Committee (aph.sqc@vumc.nl) when your project has been granted by a provider with a thorough peer review system that is not on this list.

Procedures for reviewing program grant proposals

Background

The Scientific Quality Committee APH sometimes receives proposals for which a so-called program grant has been awarded. Program grants are awarded for comprehensive research programs consisting of several research projects that are executed by several researchers (usually separate PhD trajectories). Experience has shown that proposals for research programs of this kind tend to be so general that the Scientific Quality Committee is unable to adequately assess them, in particular in terms of the feasibility of their various subprojects (and the associated appointments). Such proposals can be submitted in two possible ways, as set out below. Only program grant proposals or sub projects that will be executed at APH need to be submitted to the Scientific Quality Committee.

Submitting a proposal for a full program grant

Proposals for a full program grant are submitted to the Scientific Quality Committee. The project should be described in sufficient detail in order to enable the reviewers to assess the methodological quality and feasibility of the entire program. Subprojects are described more generally. In this case, a single Scientific Quality Committee (SQC) number is assigned to the program grant.

Submitting separate proposals for subprojects

A reviewer will globally assess the scientific quality and feasibility of the full program. Subsequently, the proposals for subprojects are submitted separately to the Scientific Quality Committee. This means that the project managers need to describe each separate research project in sufficient detail so that the reviewer can properly assess the methodological quality and feasibility of the subprojects. In this case, each subproject is assigned a separate WC number and the project database will specify that the subprojects form part of the same program grant. If the full program or one or more of the subprojects that have their own WC or SQC number have already been approved, the applicants should indicate this on form B providing additional information.

The project database specifies which subprojects belong to which program grant (i.e. which WC or SQC numbers form part of the same program). Applicants should clearly indicate on form B providing additional information whether the research grant proposal submitted relates to a program grant or to a subproject of a program grant.

Criteria for methodological quality and feasibility of a research proposal

1. METHODOLOGICAL QUALITY & FEASIBILITY

The methodological quality and feasibility of the following aspects of the research proposal are assessed.

1. Rationale and background/Embedding in existing theories

To what extent have the following items been described: a. existing knowledge, b. still lacking knowledge or gap in knowledge, c) embedding in theory?

2. Research question/aim Has this been formulated clearly and concrete? Does the research question fit the motivation/background of the proposal?

3. Study design Is study design appropriate for the research question, in other words: is it possible to give an answer to the research question on the base of the chosen study design?

4. Measuring instruments

a. For quantitative studies: validated primary outcome measure Does the chosen primary outcome measure the outcome, as specified in the research question?

b. For qualitative studies: quality procedure described Does the proposal include an adequate quality procedure, which guarantees the validity of the conclusions/results? (member check, triangulation/double coding, saturation)

5. Sample size Is the chosen sample size sufficiently founded? For instance, by a power analysis (quantitative studies) or items like 'sampling' methods, saturation or the chosen internal target group variety (qualitative studies).

6. Analysis plan Can the research question be answered based on the proposed analyses? Have the data analyses been formulated clearly and concrete?

7. Planning, timeline and duration Is a complete and detailed research plan available (describing e.g. the recruitment procedure of participants; a timeline/planning, specified by activities, described for each phase of the project)? Based on the research plan, the assessors have to assess whether the research proposal is feasible within the proposed timeline.

8. Scientific output

Does the project lead to scientific articles, presentations, reports and/or a PhD thesis?

9. Personnel

Is the quantity and quality of the staffing sufficient to perform the proposed research? Has supervision of the primary researcher been provided?

10. Budget Is the budget (concerning budget height and items) sufficient to perform the proposed research? Have the items presented been specified sufficiently (personnel costs, training costs, material costs etc.)?

11. Feasibility Please submit an overall assessment referring to the feasibility of the project, taking into consideration items 8 until 10: feasibility to perform the research within proposed timeline, practical feasibility, the feasibility of recruiting participants, feasibility to obtain a doctoral degree, personnel involved, budget). Please also take into account the guaranteed supervision of the primary researcher.

2. GENERAL CONCLUSION

Can be:

A. Positive, with recommendations for improvement, if any.

B. Negative, it is strongly advised to provide an acceptable reaction to the comments of the reviewer.