Writing, Leading and Managing Research Proposals and Projects in Transport Studies

An Interactive Handbook for Students and Educators

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Preface

An Important Preface to a Unique Resource

1. Welcome to an interactive handbook for students and educators

It is our pleasure to welcome you to this "interactive handbook" on academic research proposal writing and the management of research projects. We want to assure you that you are in good hands, as each of the academics involved in writing this handbook has a lot of experience in these challenging areas. This book is based on an online course of three weeks that we presented in 2022 and 2023.

The interactive handbook is structured in a way that encourages critical awareness. You will therefore find many questions that you have to ponder on. We think you'll see that, the more you think about these questions, the more complex they will appear! That being said, the 'content-forward' resources, academic articles, infographics, videos etc. will ensure that you have a rich and rewarding experience while completing the handbook.

2. Overview of this handbook

This version of the interactive handbook is meant for students and educators to work through in groups or individually. If you are working with a printed version, you can write your own responses to prompts in the spaces provided. If you want to work with the electronic version directly, which we recommend, we suggest that you create a separate electronic document(s) (using any word processor) where students and educators can write responses to our prompts together or individually. Here is an overview of this book, along with the outcomes we foresee for each chapter:

Chapter 1: Approaching the Writing of Research Proposals in Transport Studies - Mix of Processes

Main aim: Articulate a deeper understanding of research proposal writing. After this chapter, you will be able to articulate a deeper understanding of research proposal writing, in terms of:

● strategic aspects of the writing process and the tensions surrounding it;

● the Call for proposals and the writing process;

● thinking about packaging and dissemination of research outputs strategically.

Chapter 2: Ways of Leading and Managing Research Projects in Transport Studies - Processes

Main aim: Understand key principles of leading and managing research projects. After this chapter, you will have a deeper understanding of ways to confidently lead and manage research projects, by reflecting upon:

● operational aspects of research projects - the process (in-depth) and its tensions (introduction);

● the ways in which academic/research-specific and administrative processes, like research design, finances, communications and reports, intertwine;

● packaging and dissemination of research outputs operationally.

Chapter 3: Writing Workshop: The Components of a Call for Proposals in Transport Studies

Main aim: To get you to write!

● deciding on a topic, critical reading and pre-writing;

● the most common components you will find in a Call, like the introduction, research methods, budget, timeline, activities, conclusion, abstract and dissemination strategy;

● we recommend that you read this chapter in conjunction with the Student Writing Journal.

Chapter 4: Writing Research Proposals in Transport Studies - the Mix of Tensions

Main aim: To discuss issues surrounding the tensions inherent to the writing process. You will have the opportunity to engage with and reflect upon:

● the writing process and its tensions;

● the need for a carefully planned dissemination strategy to communicate ideas.

Chapter 5: Leading and Managing Research Projects Practical Workshop - Tensions

Main aim: Critically thinking about tensions surrounding project leading and management. You will have the opportunity to engage with and reflect upon:

● research project management and its tensions, particularly focusing on tensions between administrative, financial and academic activities;

● the need for a carefully planned dissemination strategy to communicate ideas.

3. Important Section: How to use the handbook and its resources

This handbook is called the '**Student and Educator Handbook**'. It could be used on its own, but we strongly suggest that you use it in conjunction with its associated resources:

1. The interactive 'fillable version' of this handbook (the '**Educator Handbook**') which could be a valuable resource for educators particularly;
2. A practical student proposal writing journal (the '**Student Writing Journal**')
3. The **Facebook group page**, where you can meet other people who have used the handbook.

Additionally, as mentioned before, you are strongly encouraged to create your own, separate document collaboratively or individually, as educators and/or students. As knowledge professionals you might one day have to present your knowledge using a polished handbook. So, creating a document can be seen as an authentic writing task - this is a writing course after all! You can create, design and edit your document as a group, or appoint a smaller group/individual to be responsible for polishing it. The resources above will also allow you to create your own versions of portions of the handbook, which you can then copy and paste into your separate document, if you like.

The license on the handbook you are reading now allows you to **freely adapt, copy, paste, edit and delete parts of this document**[1], as long as you pay attribution to the original authors somewhere on your beautiful, newly created documents. When you are done creating your version of this book, please share it with us (go to mtracs.net, or share it on the Facebook page). Whether you decide to create your own version of the book or not, how you use this handbook and its resources is completely up to you.

4. "Bring Your Own Context"

The participants of the original course were early career academics from all over Sub-Saharan Africa, who were all conducting research in the broader urban fields (transport planning, urban planning, geography, civil engineering etc.). The images you see in the handbook you are reading now are based on the original participants' contexts. They serve as inspiration for you, but we strongly suggest that you make or find your own media when working with the 'fillable' handbook, the student writing journal, or your document you created by yourself.

We have tried our best to make this handbook accessible to audiences all over the world, regardless of their field, background or geographic location. However, we still feel that connecting with your prior knowledge is of utmost importance, so we attempt in the fillable version ('the educator handbook') to allow you to "bring your own context", adapting and using all our resources as you feel fit. Although students are welcome to engage with the 'educator handbook', it is a resource specifically tailored for adaptation by educators.

So, lastly, this handbook, along with its 4 associated resources have been adapted to suit any group of students (master's, PhD, postdoc, early career) or educators who want to engage with the intricacies of writing research proposals and managing projects in the field of Transport

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Studies. This book is, in its format, a little bit of an experiment. We hope you find working through it as much fun as it was for us to design it! Suggestions are welcome (visit mtracs.net).

Note on using media*: we strongly advise you to, when you are creating your own version of this book by using the fillable handbook, use media that are in the public domain or that carry the Creative Commons licence "CC-BY-SA". Even better, make your own media and licence them under either of these licenses yourself. Visit creativecommons.org for more information.*

For simplicity, if you use parts of this handbook, please add the following to your resource and make sure that your resource complies with the guidelines on creativecommons.org regarding the use of this license: "CC-BY-SA mtracs".

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Let's go!

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Chapter 1

Approaching the Writing of Research Proposals in Transport Studies - Mix of Processes

1.1. Warm-up Exercise - Writing About Ourselves

In this exercise, we would like for you to introduce yourself in writing (name and surname, research interests, institution). **Try to see if you could condense what you want to say into one sentence**. But that is not quite all - try the following...

Close your eyes and think: if we asked you to start writing a research proposal for funding along with some of your peers in your field, what feelings would arise in you? What excites you? What challenges do you think you might meet? Importantly, how do you think you'd excel in this task?

Perhaps you can read your answers aloud to yourself, if possible. Then, if you like to, **condense what you have written down to two sentences and add it to your reply**, after your introduction. Write your replies where you feel fit and only if you want to: in the document that you are creating collaboratively or individually, or even on the Facebook page (remember that the page is open to everyone all over the world though). Feel free to add a photo of yourself, or where you live. Perhaps you can even post a picture of how writing a research proposal makes you feel. It is up to you!

(If you are working on a printed version, individually or in a group, you can use the space on the next page to write your answers.)

[3]

[3] Image on this page: *A view of the bus in Cape Town, South Africa (CC-BY-SA mtracs)*

1.2. What Do You Know?

We all come to learning experiences like these with our own, extremely valuable resources. Everyone has varying backgrounds and important tools we have picked up regarding proposal writing, even if we do not quite know that yet. In the following set of informal questions, we invite you to learn more about yourselves (and maybe your fellow classmates), before we introduce the more 'content-driven' material. Please write down your responses to these questions anywhere you like (only one or two sentences for each question):

1. What is the first thing you'll do once you have found a Call for proposals that really excites you?

2. With whom do you think you will work during the writing of the proposal (a supervisor, another student, your boss)? With which institution is this person associated (yours or another institution, an NGO, another funder)? How do you imagine the interaction between you and the people you work with on the proposal - who will do what?

3. Do you think it is important for you to imagine how your research findings will be presented to the world during the proposal stage already? If yes, why so? If no, why not?

(If you are working on a printed version, individually or in a group, you can use the space below to write your answers.)

1.3. This Chapter's Aims and Key Questions

At the end of this chapter, we would like for you to articulate a deeper understanding of research proposal writing, in terms of:

- strategic aspects of the writing process (in-depth) and the tensions (introduction) surrounding it;
- the Call for proposals and the writing process;
- thinking about packaging and dissemination of research outputs strategically.

Some of the **key questions** we will be asking in this chapter are:

- What are the strategic aspects of the writing process and the tensions surrounding it? How do we navigate these?
- How do we approach the Call for proposals and the writing process?
- Why is reflecting upon packaging and dissemination of research outputs during the proposal stage important, if at all? What counts as dissemination in contemporary times?

It is not necessary for you to answer the key questions now - that will come! For now, we would like you to first really focus on yourself and your relationship with research proposal writing, like we did in the warm-up exercise.

1.4. Approaching Research Proposal Writing in Transport Studies

In this handbook, we do not believe that any kind of project has a 'best practice' associated with it. There are numerous effective ways of achieving your research goals, depending on your writing styles, your teams, your strong points, institutions, countries etc. That is why it would be unrealistic to try and tell you what you need to do, step by step, all the time.

Complex endeavours, like research projects, require that you become **critically aware** of your relationship to the project, so that you can navigate the project as it develops and shifts - similar to what you did in the warm-up exercise. This means that we could provide **components** on which you can focus your awareness. We will have a closer look at what it means to be critical in Chapter 3.

It might be best to approach research proposal writing, as well as the management of subsequent projects, as activities involving a **mix** of overlapping **strategies, operations, processes** and **tensions** that **change over time and space**, depending on the project. The mix of these components, as well as what they comprise of, will be different for every project.

Within a research project, the **research proposal writing** could then be viewed as the area most closely associated with **strategies**. Within these strategies, there will be certain processes that might be regulatory (specified), or they might comprise broader ideas you and your team pin down that will give shape to your research project.

The proposal is the **first step** where you and your team have the opportunity to imagine how your research will unfold. This, however, is not a 'free-form' activity, because you have to mould your research dreams into a specified shape, called the **Call for proposals**, which we will talk about a lot later. Over the next few pages, we will introduce some of the possible processes and tensions that might be involved in research proposal writing. In this chapter, however, we will focus only on the *processes* involved in research proposal writing, leaving the deeper engagement with the *tensions* for later chapters. The table below summarises how we view the research proposal writing mix.

Processes	**Tensions**
1. The various sections in a Call for proposals	1. Roles and academic identities
2. The writing process itself (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing)	2. Intra- and inter-institutional challenges
3. Pinning down your dissemination strategies	3. Content control and constraints
	4. Inter-team dynamics while writing

Research proposal writing (closely associated with 'Strategies')

1.5. Processes Involved in Proposal Writing

In the following three sections, we introduce the processes involved in the mix of research proposal writing:

1. **The Call for Proposals**. The Call for proposals is an invitation from a funder for professional researchers to propose research projects, which they will fund if successful.

2. **The Writing Process**. It is fruitful to think about writing as a process, rather than viewing it as a singular, high-stakes activity, where you only have one chance to get it right and that's it.

3. **Dissemination Strategies**. Although not really common practice, we propose that it is useful to include the reflection upon dissemination strategies at an early stage of the research project.

1.5.1 The Call for Proposals

Funders issue a **Call for proposals** to let the world know that they are open to receiving proposals that they will consider to fund. It is common in academia that such funders are philanthropic foundations who would like research to be done for the public good, on a not-for-profit basis.

The Call for Proposal text will usually detail **what should be contained in the proposal**. Such criteria commonly include: the academic field or thematic focus of the proposal; the geographic location of the proposed research and/or where the applicants are based; the allowed budget and indication of timeframe for the project; and the formatting and submission requirements of the proposal itself. The Call sometimes also indicates how proposals will be adjudicated.

It is important to **read the Call text very carefully**, making notes or highlighting important items as you go along. Keep on referring back to this text and your notes while writing the proposal, to **ensure that the proposal meets all of the stated requirements**. Calls may attract large numbers of applications, and the first to be excluded from consideration tend to be those that miss one or more of the criteria. It is also important to start preparing a proposal, and getting the team together (if applicable), as early as possible. This is not only to ensure that you have enough time to meet the submission deadline, but also to allow time to send the funder queries in case these come up in the writing process.

It may furthermore be useful to **read up about the funder on their website**, or to find someone who has previously been successful with securing funding from them, to be doubly sure that the project that you would like funded meets both the Call requirements as well as the funder's broader aims. On certain funders' websites, they provide **examples** of which type of projects they have funded in the past, which are invaluable. We look closer at how to treat the Call in Chapter 3.

1.5.2 The Writing Process

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[4] The image on this page is in the public domain.

Writing in academia is often a daunting task. Viewing writing as 'one thing', means that you might start viewing it as 'one *enormous* thing', that might at times seem like a too large undertaking to complete.

Let's start with something that is more familiar. Think about when you were/are writing the proposal for your thesis. Responding to a Call for proposals is quite similar but with a few differences. See if you can spot these differences as you learn more about the genre of research proposal writing for funders.

Writing **mediates thinking and reflection**. As we write, we often make connections and work out what we know and what we do not. For this reason, it has become useful over the years to break 'writing' up into little, manageable chunks. This is called **chunking** in educational discourse, which is a useful concept when trying to navigate any complex task.

Viewing writing as a process consisting of several parts helps us to know on what to focus at what time, leaving other aspects of writing (like, for example, 'editing') to a designated time. We suggest a popular way of viewing the writing process, but you are welcome to *adapt* this to how you prefer to approach writing:

1. **Pre-writing** and/or **pre-reading**. This consists of all the reading, viewing, asking, thinking, note taking, meetings and discussions before you write anything. This is a good time to think about *target audience* - (a) who will be reading your proposal? (b) who will be interested in the findings of your research? *Do not underestimate this part of the process - we look closer at pre-writing/reading in Chapter 3*;

2. **Planning**. Although planning is often viewed as a form of pre-writing, we suggest that you view this as a separate part of the process *when writing research proposals*. This means that you give yourself space to focus intently on the stipulations within the Call for proposals, while outlining the larger structure of your proposal;

3. **Drafting**. This is where you take a deep breath and start populating your outline with words and sentences. During this part of the process, do not worry too much about mistakes - the time for fixing them will come. This part is all about just getting the thoughts out of your head and onto the screen (or paper);

4. **Self-editing** and **-proofreading**. You are welcome to use a professional editor and/or proofreader before you submit your proposal, but we encourage you to take time to self-edit the sections you have contributed to the proposal. This is the stage where you can focus on the microstructure of your writing (grammar, cohesion, consistency, coherence, spelling etc.) For more on these micro elements, you can read this article;

5. **Revision**. Now you can take another deep breath and read through your work again, fine tuning your ideas. In a research proposal, this is the best time to read the other parts contributed by other members of the team. Make sure your contributions fit well and that you are using similar vocabularies and tones;

6. **Submission**. This part is often called the 'publishing' part of the process, but we can be more specific when talking about proposal writing for funding. During this stage, you can cast a final eye over the proposal to make sure that it complies to the stipulations in the Call for proposals and that aesthetically it looks professional.

1.5.3 Dissemination Strategies Introduction

Dissemination strategies focus on understanding your target audience(s) and how you can present your research findings using **channels of communication** that appeal to them. A big part of dissemination is understanding the interests of different audiences. For example, some key considerations are how they prefer to see their data, obtain information and what they find easy to use.

Obviously, dissemination strategies will differ from one audience to the next. However, certain principles on how humans like to engage with their information remain prevalent. Recent research has shown that people make meaning in **multimodal ways**, through the interaction of various modes of communication, like writing, still and moving image, movement, gesture, space and sound. As a matter of fact, some research has shown that many people have an especially high preference for video and image-text combinations, mainly because of the multimodal meaning-making involved in these resources. Perhaps that is why video platforms are doing quite well.

This is important to keep in mind, especially since the preferred mode of communication in academia is text - research findings are often presented in text-only format. In this handbook, we (gently) challenge this practice.

We would like for you to take some time to think about the following, as an introductory way of thinking about dissemination:

1. Understanding our target audiences - remember that you are balancing *two* audiences (the funder and the relevant stakeholders regarding the research)
2. Collating and synthesising your key messages
3. Selecting modes of communication for these messages
4. Selecting distribution channels for disseminating messages

Suggestion for educators and students… finding an authentic Call for proposals

*We strongly suggest that you search for a 'real' Call for proposals at this point. Having a Call as the **central document** accompanying this interactive handbook is crucial. It is also important that the Call is in the field of Transport Studies. For examples, explore the VREF's website as a starting point (https://vref.se).*

1.6. Suggested Questions

At the end of each chapter we suggest a few questions that are meant to foster critical awareness of the content presented within the chapter. These are not meant to be easy questions, each with their own single answer. No, these are meant to be questions regarding the content of this chapter that could stimulate discussion. They have many answers.

But first: coming up with questions is a great learning exercise on its own. You could come up with your own questions and write them here:

You can answer your own questions here:

Alternatively, or additionally, you can answer the following questions, in groups or individually:

1. *What are your fears and imagined difficulties regarding research proposal writing?*

2. *What is the writing process (see Section 1.5.2)? How is viewing writing as a process useful or not useful?*

3. *What do you think are the most underestimated aspects of the writing process? Which parts of the process are you unfamiliar with, which do you excel at and which do you tend to 'skip' over (if any)?*

4. *Why is reflecting upon packaging and dissemination of research outputs during the proposal stage important? What counts as dissemination in contemporary times?*

1.7. Final Reflection

Summarise what you learned about research proposal writing for funding in this chapter.

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[5] Image on this place: *A bus in Kigali, Rwanda* (CC-BY-SA mtracs)

Chapter 2

Ways of Leading and Managing Research Projects in Transport Studies – Processes

2.1. Warm-up Exercise - Writing About How We Interact with Others

Try to find a quiet place where you can **reflect** for a little while (5 minutes). Reflect on how you feel when you interact with other people. Do you interact with different people in your life in different ways? How? How do you experience conflict between you and another person?

After your reflection, post **three (3) words** that describe the ways in which you interact with others here. For example, "Careful. Irregularly. Varying."

You can write your words here:

____

____

____

2.2. What Do You Know?

We are really trying to get you to write in this handbook, aren't we? Before we dive into the content, we would like you to answer these three questions, in just **two sentences** per question:

1. Have you ever managed any kind of project (not just a research project)? What kind of project was it and what processes and tensions did you have to manage?

2. What is your understanding of the following terms: "stakeholder engagement", "diversity" and "varying contexts"?

3. How do we operationalise (implement, or carry out) a dissemination strategy that we have planned for during the proposal stage?

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2.3. This Chapter's Aims and Key Questions

Congratulations, you have been awarded your (imaginary) grant! In the previous chapter, we talked about approaching the research proposal as a mix of overlapping strategies, operations, processes and tensions. Then we delved deeper into the processes involved in writing the research proposal.

In this chapter, we continue focusing on **processes**, but this time from a more **operations**-driven perspective. We will therefore be looking at the **research project management** period, which comes after the research proposal has been accepted and your funds have been granted. We will also introduce the tensions that arise during this period, although we will have a much closer look at these tensions in the next chapter.

The **aims** for this chapter are to imagine the ways in which you could confidently lead and manage research projects, by reflecting on the following:

- operational aspects of research projects - the process (in-depth) and its tensions (introduction);
- the ways in which academic/research-specific and administrative processes, like research design, finances, communications and reports, intertwine;
- packaging and dissemination of research outputs operationally.

The **key questions** for the chapter are:

- What are the typical processes and tensions of managing a research project? Think in terms of administrative (including financial) and academic activities.
- How do we manage a mix of processes that might be misaligned in some aspects?
- How do we carry out a rigorous dissemination strategy? Which channels of communication would work for your Call for proposals that you found in the previous chapter?

2.4. Ways of Leading and Managing Research Projects in Transport Studies

We return now to the idea of there being no 'best practice' for writing research proposals, or leading and managing the resulting projects. We are therefore viewing project management as a mix of strategies, operations, processes and tensions. As mentioned in the previous section, project management is more closely associated with the **operations** part of a research project. Operations are the **visible things** that you actually do while managing a project on a day-to-day basis.

In this chapter, we outline the processes and tensions behind the operations of project management. We will then delve deeper into the processes of project management for this chapter, leaving the tensions for the next chapters.

The table below introduces the processes and tensions involved in research project management in Transport Studies that we thought we should highlight, from our own experiences. This does not mean that there are no other processes and tensions.

Processes	**Tensions**
1. Research design implementation	1. The group versus the individual
2. Finances (disbursement)	2. Administration versus academia
3. Check-ins and communications	3. Harmonising different research sites (diverse writing styles, findings, methods, paradigms and rigour)
4. Progress reports	4. Traditional versus contemporary dissemination practices
5. Final report	
6. 'Doing' dissemination	
Each of the above processes can be viewed in two ways, in the manner they involve: (a) administrative and (b) academic/research-specific operations.	

The processes and tensions of leading and managing a research project (closely associated with 'Operations')

2.5. Processes Involved in Project Management

We will now be delving deeper into the processes involved in project management, focusing on the following:

1. **Research Design Implementation** - We have so many dreams while writing the research proposal! Then we have to wake up and actually make things work, according to our research design.

2. **Budget and Finances** - Not all of us enjoy working with the numbers. Managing a budget often feels quite remote from what we are used to in academia and yet, someone has to do it during funded research projects.

3. **Communications** - The backbone to good leadership and management - clear and well-timed communications.

4. **Reports** - Within the complex mix of the project, we still have to keep our funders informed.

5. **'Doing' Dissemination** - Many dissemination strategies never see the light of day. We outline some of the key ways in which you can make sure that the knowledge you have created is shared with the right people.

2.5.1 Research Design Implementation

The research proposal would have set out the research design. However, **much time may have passed from when the proposal was submitted**, to when the funding was confirmed, to when the team was actually ready to start with the research.

In the months (or years!) between proposal preparation and research implementation, the research context may have changed, some members of the research team may no longer be available, or they may have left their institutions. It is not uncommon for these and other factors to affect **the implementability of the research design**. It also happens that projects take longer to complete than originally planned, sometimes for unforeseen circumstances.

It is important for the project leader to **provide the energy to get things moving** once the project starts, and to be in touch with the research team from time to time to check in on how things are going. If it becomes clear that **deviations** from the original research design will be necessary as you move through implementation, discuss this with the team **and** with the funder.

Funders usually will understand if there is a need to deviate from the proposal, if it can be **motivated properly**. However, since they gave the funding based on the proposal, be sure to talk to them if changes to the research design need to be made during implementation, if the project team changes, and to agree on the financial implications of these changes. *Very important*: capture these discussions and decisions in writing (e.g. by email), so that there is a **written record** of what you agreed!

2.5.2 Budget and finances

It might be helpful to think of a budget and expenditure reporting as ways of **presenting the research process in numbers**. The budget comes upfront ("what do we plan to do and how much do we think it will cost?") and the financial report afterwards ("what did we do and how much did we actually spend?").

Funders often prescribe **categories for the budget and expenditure report**. Common items include: staff time, scholarships, equipment, data collection (e.g. survey costs), travel, and university overhead fees. In the absence of guidelines from the funder, each university may have its preferred budgeting and reporting formats.

It is also likely that the funder will ask that a **specific currency be used for budgeting and expenditure reports.** It may be that you have project team members spread across different institutions or in different countries, each with their own local currency. In this case, you or someone in your team will quickly become familiar with currency conversion calculations!

If it looks like your project finances might be too complex, and the funder allows it, you could consider using some of your budget to appoint an accountant. But even if there is professional help, as project leader, put some time aside each month to check that **project finances and project progress are more or less in step**.

No matter how well you might prepare, **tensions around project finances can and do arise**. People attach different financial values to their time for the same piece of work. Inter-institution transfer can take a long time, making the grant-holding partner look stingy. Fluctuating currency exchange rates may leave some partners feeling short-changed. Many more such situations may arise.

Whatever the tension, if any come up in the course of a proposal or project, talk it through in the team to **balance individual interests with the collective intention** of the project.

Practical tips on budgeting to get you going:

- Start with the **fixed amounts** over which you have no control (external costs determined by outside parties, like venue costs, accommodation, transport etc.). With the fixed amounts set, you can start playing with the more fluid expenses. List your possible expenses and mark them as "fixed" or "fluid".
- Find out what **people's rates** per hour/day are and ask them to give an estimate of how many hours they think they would spend on the project (not how much money they want *per se*...). If they take long to let you know, or if they are unsure, do an internet search to gauge what the standard income is for their positions (preferably in their country), as well as how many hours other professionals spend on similar projects. This is just to get your budget started - you can alter this later, according to the actual rates, hours, and what the total ends up being.
- **Outline the various activities** (data collection, analysis, meetings...) and the timeline of the project. The budget, activities and timeline go hand-in-hand, so some find it useful to start with a rough allocation for each activity.
- Have a "**balancing item**" in your budget, like "miscellaneous" or “contingency". This could be a buffer sum or small percentage that could increase or decrease as you make the final alterations to your budget. *Note*: in your proposal you need to be specific about what you mean by these items, even if the amount is just a ballpark, made-up quantity. A footnote could, for example, say it is intended for local transport, stationery or as a buffer against exchange rate changes.
- Just as you must be careful of under-budgeting and not being able to pay for your activities, you must also **beware of over-budgeting**. It is useful to be aware of what kind of "budgeter" you are and balance your personal tendencies with outlining a realistic budget: do you usually over- or under-budget in your personal life?

2.5.3 Communications

We have encouraged you to express yourselves in one or two sentences thus far in this interactive handbook for a reason. Clear, succinct language use has become crucial in a time of information overload.

When it comes to communication, picture the following scenario:

You are standing at a bus station, looking at a map of your city, town or region. You can see the tiny dot of the station where you would like to go next, but you cannot decide which mode of transport to use. Should you wait for the next bus, or hop over to the train station across the road? How far is the next station? Could you just walk?

[7]

The ways that we communicate could be viewed as travelling from one place to the next: the modes of transport in a research project could be **mediators of communication** like e-mails, meetings (in-person or online), meeting notes, instant group messages (like those on WhatsApp, Facebook, or other platforms), but also pictures taken on site, quick phone calls and/or a note left on a desk. Which would be best? You would not take a taxi to cross the street, would you? Importantly, travelling is made much less daunting if we focus on one destination (**one message**) at a time - that tiny dot on the map!

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[7] The image on this page is licensed under *CC-BY-SA mtracs*

From a team perspective, the ways in which you communicate in your team is **worth discussing within the group**, even if just briefly, at the start of the project. How do people in the team prefer to communicate? How regularly will communications occur internally, with the funder and with other stakeholders? Will you be appointing a communications officer that will relay and oversee communications?

From an individual perspective, we recommend the following guidelines for your communication with others:

1. **Regular communication** is important. That being said...

2. Ensure that your communication remains **purposeful**. What is that **one message** (that 'tiny dot') you want to get across? Is the channel of communication (e-mail, meeting, instant message...) the **most appropriate way** of communicating what you want to express? How has that channel of communication been used lately (for instance, emails have tended to become more focused and shorter lately)?

2. Make sure your communication efforts are **distinguished** from one another. How is this message you are sending now different from the previous one? How are you going to highlight the ways in which this message is different, if necessary?

3. Lastly, not everybody engages with all communication in similar ways. **Recapitulations**, placing tiny reminders in your communication about where your message fits into the bigger story (the map), are often useful, but perhaps keep them brief. Example: "We previously discussed research design, so I would like to suggest semi-structured interviews." **Beware of repetition** though. If someone interprets your communication as mere repetition, they might become desensitised to your messages and miss that important message you were trying to convey. They might get lost and end up at the wrong station!

2.5.4 Reports

Reports are essential and are a form of accountability to all parties, particularly the funders. In most cases, funders/grantors provide **simple templates** which they require grantees (the grant recipients) to fill in periodically. The frequency of reporting will be communicated in advance by the funder. So, how do you stay on top of things? **Clear records** are the key.

Documenting all research team meetings will save you a lot of time while submitting reports. This is because you will have all the information on how many meetings you have held until then, the progress of the research, the challenges and how you are overcoming them. Develop a basic structure for minuting your team meetings.

Another aspect of reporting is project finances. **Keep clear records on the budget and money flow**. Have clear details on all received and pending disbursements from the funder. If the funds are being channeled through your academic institution, then you should keep records of all internal communication regarding your grant since your institution may also require you to report.

Lastly, reports also enable parties to **stocktake and reflect on the overall status of the research project.** Reporting is a good time to check in with team members on their reflections so far on the research, high points and challenges, and to brainstorm on how to overcome them.

2.5.5 'Doing' Dissemination

We have now looked at our internal communications. It is time to think about how we communicate our findings to the world outside. In the previous chapter we introduced a few reasons for strategising dissemination efforts. In this chapter, we introduce a few **key terms** with which to think about *doing* dissemination, along with questions to ask to guide our thinking: *collation*, *synthesis*, *target audience*, *mediums* and *distribution*.

Collation: The key consideration is blending and grouping all the data in a coherent manner that will make sense to target audiences who interact with your research.

Questions

1. What story do I want to communicate using my research findings?
2. What broad headings can support me to group my data?

Synthesis: Having grouped your information, deduce key messages from the collated data. This is where you extrapolate trends, interesting observations, and surprises. From your findings, develop recommendations and conclusions. A recommendation is a call to action and is only effective when directed to specific audiences. Consider the duty bearers and key stakeholders whom you want to pay attention to a particular recommendation.

Questions

1. What are the key messages from my research findings?
2. What trends are coming up in my data analysis, if any?
3. What surprised me in my findings?
4. Who should know about the key messages within my findings?

Target audience: Group the stakeholders mentioned in your recommendations. They could vary from government, non-government organisations, civil society, to researchers. Identify your primary and secondary target audiences as this will inform which mediums and distribution channels you could prioritise.

Questions

1. Who is(are) my primary audience(s)?
2. Who is(are) my secondary audience(s)?

Mediums: At this point you could analyse how your primary target audiences like to engage with their information. Here we are thinking about the 'what?'. Do they appreciate short visual outputs such as simple infographics, a one-page policy brief, a detailed research paper, etc? This exercise guides you while identifying the most appropriate mediums. A point to note is to not be afraid of *multiple mediums* aimed at one primary audience. For example, you may decide that infographics *and* a policy brief will be the most appropriate mediums to package your message.

Also remember what outputs you promised in your research proposal. You are usually bound to produce these, although most grants have flexibility on reconsidering these outputs based on valid reasons.

Questions

1. How does my primary audience like to engage with their data?
2. What kinds of information do my primary audience find easy to use?

Distribution: This final stage considers how to disseminate the information that you have packaged in the most appropriate mediums for your target audiences. Think in terms of channels of communication (the 'how?' and 'where?'), rather than the mediums (the 'what?') in this case. Do your target audiences rely on social media, radio, local newspapers, or something else?

Question

Which channels do my primary audience use to access their information?

The framework for dissemination above is just one of many. In the next section, we provide a link to another way of viewing dissemination.

2.6. Suggested Resources on Research Proposal Writing

In the interactive handbook material we have compiled, we aimed for breadth. Because we believe in **multiple perspectives**, we would like to suggest a few resources, in order to supply depth to the material. Here is some more information on (click on the title to follow the link, or enter the address in your web browser):

Academic writing (https://tinyurl.com/hzvkb56h)

This article explores the intricacies of coherence and cohesion.

Engaged scholarship (https://tinyurl.com/4xcve8sb)

An interesting enrichment article that provides ways of thinking about the links between doing academic research and engaging with stakeholders outside of academia.

An example of a successful proposal (https://tinyurl.com/36zhxxth)

A successful proposal from 2019. Although the topics for research have moved on swiftly since then, you can use this example as a model of what kind of writing could receive funding.

An example of a final project report (https://tinyurl.com/yjzn69px)

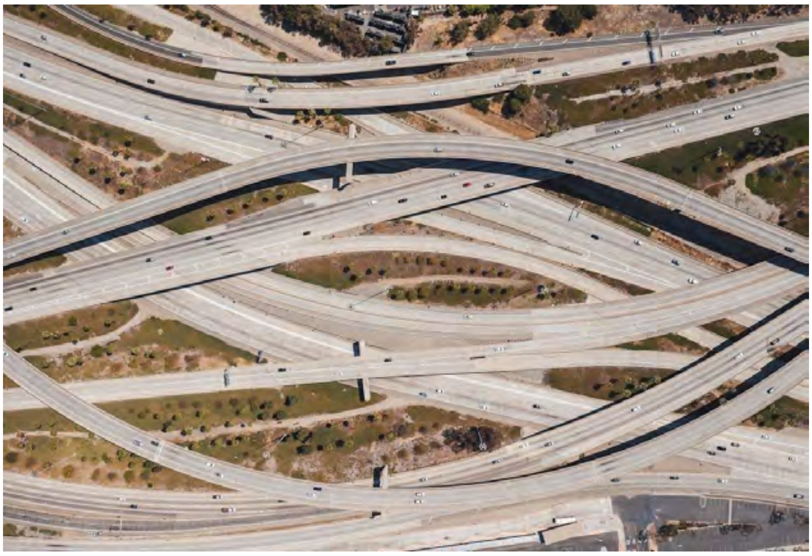
An important resource for you to work through at your own leisure. It shows you the final report of one of the authors.

Rigorous strategy for Dialogical Dissemination (https://tinyurl.com/wbtm2r59)

This diagram will help you to think through the ways in which you create and disseminate your knowledge resources in the broader urban sustainability field, which could include Transport Studies, at an early stage and throughout your research project. You can use this resource in conjunction with our framework in the previous section on 'doing' dissemination.

[8]

Which routes will you take to reach your target audience?



[8] The image on this page is in the public domain.

2.7. Suggested Questions

We firstly encourage you to come up with your own questions on this chapter's content and write them here, just like in the previous section:

You can answer your own questions here:

Here are a few questions we suggest:

1. The first few questions are about the following scenario:

Your team is writing a proposal for a research project which focuses on urban transport safety and health in your country. You and your team decided you wanted to target the community from where the data was collected as the main audience. You are at the pre-writing stage, thinking about this audience…

a. Who exactly in this community will be reading your proposal? Why would they be interested in the findings of your research?
b. What issues do you think the project team will need to take into consideration about your audience?
c. What pre-writing activities will you use to find the relevant information needed to take this audience into consideration?
d. How will this audience shape your findings?

2. Congratulations, you were awarded your grant! What are the typical processes and tensions of managing a research project? Think in terms of administrative (including financial) and academic activities.

3. What are the processes involved in research project management? We have provided a few examples but you can come with your own processes too, based on your experience. How would you approach the processes that you would add?

4. *How do we carry out ('do') a rigorous dissemination strategy? Which channels of distribution would work for the Call for proposals that you found in the previous chapter?*

2.8. Final Reflection

Summarise what you have learned in this chapter. **Two or three sentences** would be enough.

2.9. Time to Write!

By now you should be **familiar with the example of the Call for proposals** you chose in the first chapter. Before moving on to the next chapters, we strongly suggest that you engage in some writing, by working through your Call for Proposal section by section. Focus specifically on the outline for which the Call asks. Pick one section and try writing it, based on a hypothetical project you propose. Although you are of course welcome to do this task individually, remember that a lot of proposal writing is **often done in groups**, which presents a few challenges. **Ask for feedback** from experts in the field, your peers, or whoever is willing to read your writing. For this, you can also use the Facebook Group page for online discussions.

Try to **write in groups** using online software like *Google Docs*, which will allow for you to make changes to the document collaboratively in real-time. It also means that you do not have to ensure that the most updated copy of the work is sent via email. You could all work on the same section of your proposal, or you could assign sections to different individuals (which is the more common practice).

Try to write **at least 300 words** on your 'real' proposal before starting with the next chapter. Working with an actual Call for proposals is incredibly important, because it is an authentic task. We encourage you to really **study the Call**, constantly asking yourself, 'what do the funders really want here?'

In the next chapter, we unpack the parts of a generic Call in Transport Studies and encourage you to write in the Student Writing Journal.

Chapter 3

Writing Workshop: The Components of a Call for Proposals in Transport Studies

Important Note: This chapter is a little different from the ones that came before and those following. In order to guide you, we are looking at the generic components asked for in Calls. You can come up with your own topic (you are an expert in the field, remember!), or you could use a topic from a recent Call, which we recommend. You can write collaboratively, using tools like Google Docs, or you can use the separate Student Writing Journal we have created to complement this chapter, where you will be allowed to write directly in the document.

3.1. Warm-up Exercise - Coming up with a Topic

Since this is a **practical chapter**, it is best to jump right in and think of a hypothetical topic in Transport Studies on which you would like to conduct research. You can think of your dream topic, or you can base your topic on the Call for proposals you found in the previous chapters.

Remember that choosing a topic is a **fine balance between your own interests and/or background in the field and the stipulations in the Call**. If the Call is too far removed from your interests and expertise, it is probably best to move on to another Call. However, if working with the actual Call is too overwhelming for you at this point, then come up with your own topic. As long as you start writing!

Description of research topic:

____

____

____

3.2. What Do You Know?

You have probably written academic theses, articles and/or essays by this point of your life. Maybe you have even engaged in research project funding proposal writing. Believe it or not, within academia, the various writing genres often **have subtle (and not so subtle) differences**. Let's take the writing of a thesis as an example.

What do you know about the corresponding components of a thesis **and** how do you think it compares to those same components in a research proposal for funding?

The introduction/problem statement:

The literature review:

The description of research methods:

The conclusion:

3.3. Just Before You Start Writing Your Proposal

Although this chapter provides some theoretical background on the components of a Call for proposals, it really has only **one** incredibly important aim: **to get you to write**! Writing in the way that it is often seen in research proposal writing in Transport Studies is not a once off and individual task. It often involves an iterative process as discussed before, group writing, feedback on one another's writing, comparing your work to proposals that have won funding before and continuous 'side' research and discussions. So when we say we would like you to 'write', we do not just refer to putting words on a paper/screen, although that is a great start.

Here are a few things you should do before writing your actual proposal in the Student Writing Journal or elsewhere.

3.3.1 What is Research?

This might seem like an obvious question, especially for those who have already conducted research for a master's, PhD, or other research project. However, many proposals responding to Calls from funders seem to leave out why *research* is necessary to address a certain problem. This is why many proposals struggle to articulate what exactly the team is planning *to do*.

We conduct research in order **to build on our knowledge** - it is a knowledge creation exercise. We need more knowledge about a subject, problem or scenario when we do not know enough about the problem in order to speak about it, let alone address it. We can do this by collecting primary or secondary data (going directly to the city in question versus reading up on what has already been written about the city and its challenges).

In Transport Studies, research is often based on **primary data** (although there are many exceptions) and it can be **descriptive** and/or **prescriptive**. Even when we conduct prescriptive research - ie. research that is supposed to end up in findings from which we can make suggestions regarding the possible solutions for problems - we conduct research in order to **better our understanding** of something, which means that a great deal of our research will be dedicated to **describing and analysing** a case, city, system, scenario, process or set of challenges. *Before* interpreting and evaluating our data to 'reveal' strengths/weaknesses and possible solutions, we spend a lot of time analysing, asking immensely important questions like:

What are the constituent elements?

How do these elements interact?

How are things grouped together? What will a grouping reveal?

How does this compare to that? What is different? What is similar?

What are the causes/factors of something? What are the implications? What is absent?

Your descriptive research is never pure description. **Analysis is at the heart of research and NOT finding solutions to problems** *per se*. As a matter of fact, sometimes the funder will not even expect you to provide solutions. 'Solutions' and the 'findings of research' are **not the same**.

With this view on what research actually is in mind, why do you think the funder thought that *research* was necessary to address a certain problem in Transport Studies? Why not some technological intervention, a development project, teaching and learning, or the building of infrastructure? Funders fund all these types of projects, so why did they pick 'research' for this one? *Make sure that you reflect* ***your understanding of why research is necessary*** *for this project in your proposal.* This is something that is so important, but rarely done.

Once you have stated why you think research is necessary, carefully describe *what kind of research you will be doing in detail*.

3.3.2 Critical Reading and Pre-writing

It is often the case that writers first decide what they want to write and then they go out and find literature to back up their claims. We do not recommend this. After you have scrutinised the Call (see the next section), it is best to **first read** quite a bit before you start outlining and drafting your proposal.

In this handbook, we have often referred to 'critical awareness' and now we are referring to 'critical reading'. What do we mean by '**critical**'? Simply put, the word 'critical' involves the **objective analysis of a subject's merits and faults** in order to **reach a reasonable judgment**.

While you do the pre-writing/pre-reading for your proposal, look at the **different stories** various authors tell regarding the problem, themes, or topics mentioned in the Call: Where do they agree? Where do they differ? Which common terms and sub-topics keep showing up? How do their views compare to yours? What examples and conclusions do they provide? Which cities do they look at? Do they include human participants? Whom? What kinds of data do they often collect?

A lot of your pre-reading/pre-writing will not necessarily make it directly into your proposal, but it is important that you conduct a thorough 'mini-literature review', because your deeper understanding of what is written (and not written!) about the themes, topics and problems in the Call will instill your writing with **confidence and gravitas**.

Say you are conducting pre-reading/pre-writing on a theme given in a Call in Transport Studies, like "Walking in Cities in the Global South". If you read critically, these are the **kinds of questions** you might ask while reading:

> *What is meant by walking in the first place? Does it usually refer to walking to work, shops, school, parks, for exercise, or just in general?*
>
> *What are the terms associated with walking in the city? What is the difference between 'walking' and 'walkability'? Which terms are interchangeable? Which are more nuanced? Do their definitions vary?*
>
> *Which cities are often mentioned in research on walking? Does 'walking' mean something different across groups and communities?*
>
> *Which of these cities are in the Global South? Is walking different in cities that are not in the Global South? How?*
>
> *Are there specific benefits to walking in cities? Do these vary across cities? Are there any downfalls? What about walking in rural areas?*

As an exercise, look at the topic that you wrote down before. How does your topic change as you read?

Try finding **three sources** about your topic. Now, write a paragraph that contains a **<u>topic sentence</u>** (a sentence that explains **one thing** that you want to say about your topic in that paragraph), **<u>evidence for your claim</u>** from your three sources, making sure you show your reader the nuances in the authors' arguments (use phrases like, "...agrees with... but argues that...", and, "...do not focus on... although they also found that..."), and an **<u>argument statement</u>**, which is that one thing you want to say about the topic (*usually why a specific kind of research is necessary, in this case*) for which all your paragraphs will supply evidence.

3.3.3 A Call for Proposals at First Glance - A Treasure Hunt

Let's dive right in and have a look at this example of a Call for proposals sent out by the Volvo Research and Educational Foundations (VREF) in 2019. The first page here gives us the most important clues about what the funder is looking for and it is important to read it a few times.

[9]

VREF PROGRAM
"MOBILITY AND ACCESS IN AFRICAN CITIES"

CALL FOR PROJECT PROPOSALS
RESEARCH GRANTS 2019-2020 FOR
EXPLORATORY COMPARATIVE RESEARCH PROJECTS

The Volvo Research and Educational Foundations (VREF) is an independent foundation that inspires, initiates and supports research and educational activities that can contribute to new knowledge on broad issues related to urban mobility and access. VREF's mission is to support the development of research on ideas, approaches and solutions that can contribute to equitable access and sustainable urban mobility, as well as to contribute to educational and outreach programs in these areas. An important goal is also to support dissemination and implementation of research findings among both university researchers, practitioners, decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders, see www.vref.se.

At this time, VREF invites applications for research grants to support projects that will be implemented under the new VREF program "Mobility and Access in African Cities" (MAC), see below. Deadline for submission of applications is **15 October 2019**.

1. Background: VREF Program "Mobility and Access in African Cities" (MAC)

VREF has recently launched a new initiative for funding research and education on Mobility and Access in African Cities (MAC). The objective of the MAC program is to increase knowledge and research capacity on issues related to sustainable and equitable mobility and access in Africa. The program is geographically focused on sub-Saharan Africa and will be carried out 2019-2024, see also: Mobility and Access, The MAC Programme.

The MAC program seeks to contribute to forming a new generation of highly skilled sub-Saharan university researchers and teachers, as well as to engage professionals, policy makers and actors within civil society who are committed to achieving goals of sustainable and equitable urban mobility and access. Leading international experts can also contribute to the program through collaborative research projects with their sub-Saharan African counterparts.

The current Call is one of the first stages of research funding within the MAC program. Starting in 2020, the MAC program will be expanded to encompass large, long-term initiatives for supporting research, education and dissemination in core areas of the program.

The program name ("Mobility and Access in African Cities") is often skimmed over by potential recipients and one of the main reasons why proposals are 'thrown out' is because they do not adhere to the **main theme set out by the proposal**, which is in this case the name of a VREF funding program called "MAC". Additionally, the Call stating that it is a "Research Grant" is not redundant. Funders fund **various types of projects**, including teaching and learning and development projects, so it is important to make sure that what you are suggesting research for is *actually asking for research*.

[9] This example of a VREF Call for proposals is used here with the permission of the VREF.

The next clue can be found in “Exploratory Comparative Research Projects”. This description refers broadly to the **type of research methods** that are expected. If you are not aware of what kind of research this refers to, do some reading on the method, or perhaps this would be an indication that this Call for proposals is not for you. A case study focusing on one city, for instance, would not adhere to the basic requirements of this Call and would thus be disqualified.

The first page of this Call then provides background on the VREF. This is another part that is often skimmed over, although it is crucial that you have a very good idea of **what the funder does**, why it exists, what kind of projects it funds etc. All of these details provide little clues that will help you to sculpt a proposal that will draw the funder's attention. Do you see that link to the funders website? *Follow it*! Learn everything you can about the funder. Now go and see if you can find **the program** under which this proposal falls. What are the goals of the program? What have they done so far? What is usually funded under this program?

Do you see how many clues there are before you even get to the word “deadline”… which is where many researchers start reading? In conclusion, we can not stress this enough, *attention to detail is everything when reading through a Call for proposals.*

We have modelled a way of **reading closely** that you should follow while slowly reading through the whole proposal that you found before. Try this kind of reading yourself with the “Background…” section of our example here. As you read, jot down a few notes (we suggest finding a way to highlight the text):

10

3.4. The Most Common Components Asked for in Calls

We will now unpack some of the most common components that you might be asked for in Calls in the Transport Studies field:

1. **Introduction, Background and Problem Statement** - A careful balancing act between your voice(s), what the Call is asking for and the knowledge in the field.

2. **Research Methods** - Keep it concrete! If you cannot imagine yourself actually doing this research, change it.

3. **The Conclusion** - Is it just a summary? Or is it a summary + 1?

4. **The Abstract** - The ultimate test for your ideas.

5. **The Budget, Activities and Timeline** - We quickly revisit our discussion on the budget, before we give you a chance to actually write the budget. Remember, start with the things you cannot change - the fixed expenses.

6. **Dissemination and Output** - Dare to go where few have gone before…

Instead of providing comprehensive discussions of each of these components, we think it is more valuable that you get to the writing as quickly as possible. We therefore provide short descriptions of what might be expected in each component before inviting you to go to your collaborative document or our Student Writing Journal to write.

[10] The image on this page is in the public domain.

3.4.1 Introduction, Background and Problem Statement - A Balancing Act

We found that students and researchers often struggle with writing the introduction the most. It is a crucial part of most, if not all, proposals. In most proposals, the introduction is combined with the background to the problem and the problem statement. This component immediately gives the funder an impression of **your expertise** in the field and how you are **connecting to their Call**, or in the absence of a specific Call, their stipulations of what they are willing to fund. Look carefully at the words used by the funder. Do you use the same words/concepts? If not, do you have a rationale for why you are using different language?

However, **do not simply regurgitate** the Call back at the funder. See the background and problem statements in the Call as guidelines, or a starting point, perhaps even as a skeleton or outline. You have to fill in the blanks and provide details of what **kind of research** you are proposing to do. Your introduction is a **careful balance** of your own ideas, what the funder wants and literature from the field, referred to via in-text citations. Writing an introduction takes some practice and it is good to **get feedback** on your writing from supervisors and your peers as much as you can. Lastly, the typical parts of an introduction is the following:

1. Short background on the topic, including references to the literature (not the Call!);
2. A formulation of the problem in the field;
3. An argument statement stating what kind of research is necessary to address the problem and why it is necessary (remember to argue that <u>research</u> is indeed necessary to address the problem - researchers often forget to mention this explicitly!);
4. A quick glance (2 or 4 sentences) on how you plan to conduct your research;
5. An optional last sentence, just to reiterate how your proposed project will address the problem you formulated.

*In this handbook, we start with the introduction, background and problem statement, but it is often good practice to **leave the introduction for last**. It will obviously still appear at the beginning of your proposal, but you can always write it when you have a clearer idea of what you really want to do. It is often through writing that we gain a clearer picture of our own thoughts and ideas.*

Note on "literature reviews"

Whereas most Calls for proposals in Transport Studies would expect some form of introduction and background to the problem, which might include a few references to recent and prominent literature, a full literature review, comparable to the one required for a thesis, is **rarely required**. This is one of those subtle differences between a research proposal for funding, compared to a research proposal for a dissertation.

Although there is usually no component called "Literature Review" in a Call for proposals, it is of vital importance that you conduct a literature review as part of your **pre-writing** (see the previous section). A thorough literature review provides **context** for your introduction, background and problem statement and will help you ascertain what the **relevant debates** are surrounding a topic, or what **kinds of gaps** there are in the research.

In Transport Studies, the building blocks of knowledge are **comparative studies**; an in-depth knowledge of recent studies like these is of utmost importance, because they will definitely **inform** what you propose.

Enough theory! The time has come for you to write. Try to write at least 150 words, or an outline for your introduction before moving on to the next section. **If you want to use the student writing journal, follow this link and go to "Writing Exercise 1 - The Introduction and Problem Statement"**. Encourage others to provide feedback on your writing in the given space, or use the space for your ideas and notes.

3.4.2 Research Methods - See It Happen in Your Head

Many Calls for proposals will directly specify a research method, or at least imply what broad category of methods they are looking for, like the VREF example indicating that they are looking for "Exploratory Comparative Research Projects". However, there would usually be a lot of 'colouring in' that you have to **describe in quite a bit of detail**. The rule of thumb here is to try and imagine how the research project **will actually play out**. *Can you really see yourself carrying out the activities that you are describing?* Are you perhaps promising too much? Will you be able to carry out the research within the suggested timeframe?

Once you are able to picture yourself carrying out the research, you have to describe it in a **meticulous fashion**, so that the funder will also be able to imagine you doing it. Many proposals are disqualified because the research methods proposed are simply not feasible.

Although there are exceptions, many of the research projects in Transport Studies constitute **case studies**, with different cities usually counting as "one case". In comparative studies, you would therefore need to look at at least two cities. But "case studies" are quite broad and there is a lot of detail you need to supply, like:

a. Are you planning to undertake qualitative, quantitative or mixed method research? Are you sure you know what the difference is?
b. Which cities, modes of transport and/or group of stakeholders are you investigating?
c. Who will be the participants of the study, if you are using human participants? How many participants are you thinking about? How will you find, approach and select them?
d. What will count as data in this research? Are you collecting numerous types of data? How will you collect this data?
e. How will this data be analysed? *Be specific - provide a step by step account.*
f. Which ethical considerations might arise? How will you go about obtaining permissions and informed consent, if there are human participants?

The key is to be **specific and concrete** while describing the research methods. The funder must be able to read your description and immediately think, "Yes, I can see this working."

Once again, the time has come for you to write. Try to write at least 150 words, or an outline for your research methods section before moving on to the next section. **If you want to use the student writing journal, follow this link and go to "Writing Exercise 2 - Research Methods"**. Encourage others to provide feedback on your writing in the given space, or use the space for your ideas and notes.

[11]

3.4.3 The Conclusion - Summary + 1

It is not customary that a Call for proposals would specify what needs to be in your conclusion section. They seldom mention that there should be a conclusion section at all. However, we strongly suggest that you **write a strong conclusion** to your proposal, keeping in mind what the word/page length specified by the Call is (*never exceed* the maximum length indicated by the Call, because this would often lead to automatic disqualification during the preliminary phases of the selection process).

Writers have different ways to approach the conclusion. We suggest that there must be **three components**: a **short summary** of what you want to do as a research project; a **quick restatement of why this research is fit to address the problem** you have highlighted; and a **strong final sentence** that will render your proposal memorable. Remember, your proposal will often be one of many proposals the funder receives, so, yes, professionalism comes first, but a **little bit of flair** at the end can go a long way.

Here are two examples of strong final sentences:

- *"It is about time we learn more about citydwellers' walking habits, because mobility is not just 'public transport' anymore."*
- *"This research will highlight the importance of understanding the complex relationships between the components of the 15-minute city; it is less about infrastructure and more about interconnectedness and, importantly, people. "*

[11] The image on this page is in the public domain.

You are now ready to go and write your powerful conclusion. Just do it! Try to write at least 150 to 200 words (the entire conclusion) before moving on to the next section. **If you want to use the student writing journal, follow this link and go to "Writing Exercise 3 - The Conclusion"**. Encourage others to provide feedback on your writing in the given space, or use the space for your ideas and notes.

3.4.4 The Abstract - Test Your Idea

Introductions, conclusions and abstracts are similar in that they **guide the reader**. There are subtle nuances though. Whereas the introduction foreshadows what is to come and the conclusion tells us what has been, the abstract **summarises the whole story**. You have three opportunities to summarise what you want to do in different ways!

There is no part of the writing that will **put your ideas to the test** as much as the abstract. If you cannot explain your proposed research project to someone within 200 to 350 words, then chances are that you are **trying to do too much**. Here we find another crucial difference between thesis or academic article writing and a research proposal for funding: your abstract will be a summary of your background research, the problem that you are addressing and the research that you are proposing for the future and why, *instead of a summary of research already conducted in the past*. This difference seems obvious, but it helps to keep the time difference in mind.

Not having to explain your findings frees up some space for you to focus on the **rationale** for your study, as well as a **clear explanation of your proposed methods**. Remember, you want to leave the reader with a 100% lucid picture of what you want to do. Avoid talking in abstract terms with too much jargon. Be specific. Imagine the reader knows nothing about the subject and you want to tell them exactly what research to do and why, as if they have to do it themselves.

Challenge yourself by writing a crystal clear abstract. Try to write the whole abstract in 350 words (or challenge yourself even more and go for only 150 words!) before moving on to the next section. Here writing less is more... and more difficult! How does your abstract differ from your introduction and conclusion? **If you want to use the student writing journal, follow this link and go to "Writing Exercise 4 - The Abstract"**. Encourage others to provide feedback on your writing in the given space, or use the space for your ideas and notes.

3.4.5 The Budget, Activities and Timeline - Start with the Things You Cannot Change

In the previous chapter, under the section "Budget and Finances", we discussed approaches to the budget. We suggest that you quickly look at those approaches again. To sum up, we recommend that you start with the fixed expenses.

In most Calls, **the budget, project activities and timeline will go hand-in-hand**, or they will at least follow one another. There is a reason for that: it is actually much easier to plan the budget when you visualise the activities and the timeline at the same time. Keeping these components together helps to render them more concrete and feasible.

Ask yourself the **'W' questions** (Who? What? Where? When?) to properly think through your activities and then go about carefully explaining **how** you will go about these activities and **how much** you think these would cost. Describing the details of activities helps to instill confidence that you have experience in what you are proposing, as well as a clear idea of how to execute the project.

We learn a lot by doing things. We invite you to describe the **first three activities** of your project, connect a monetary value to them and three time periods. Imagine that you have 30,000 euros available for these three activities (try working in your own currency and then convert the values to euro - it is a good exercise!). **If you want to use the student writing journal, follow this link and go to "Writing Exercise 5 - The Budget, Activities and Timeline"**. As before, encourage others to provide feedback on your writing in the given space, or use the space for your ideas and notes.

3.4.6 Dissemination and Output - Dare to Go Where Nobody Has Before

Towards the end of Chapter 2, we introduced the different aspects of dissemination. Most Calls would ask for this component, usually as the final part of the proposal. Many times, researchers neglect this component, which means that a lot of work on research is done in a vacuum - the findings of the research on which you worked so hard is not communicated to those who would benefit from knowing what your research project produced.

In Transport Studies, it has become particularly important to share and negotiate our findings **with stakeholders within specific urban communities**. Just this activity alone is a great challenge by itself, not to mention finding the time and capacity to disseminate knowledge through more conventional channels, like academic journals. In the 21st Century, there are **so many platforms and channels** through which to communicate, that this component of the proposal deserves your time, creativity and... *the allocation of funds*!

If you have not already done it, go back to your description of the budget, activities and timeline and insert an activity called "Dissemination" in there, as a fourth activity that takes up at least three months (minimum!). Remember to be direct about your dissemination efforts: *collation, synthesis, target audience, mediums, distribution*.

Dare to go where few have gone before! After inserting your dissemination activity in your budget, activities and timeline section, go ahead and write at least 150 words of your dissemination and output section. Be creative! We challenge you to have a **community participatory activity** as part of your dissemination - how would you go about organising that? **If you want to use the student writing journal, follow this link and go to "Writing Exercise 6 - Dissemination and Output"**. Remember to ask for feedback.

*If you have come this far in this interactive handbook and you completed at least some of the writing activities we have recommended, **we would like to sincerely congratulate you**! Writing is often a scary thing for many people, especially getting started.*

Some researchers in writing practices say that this is because we are often afraid of 'hearing' our own voices; seeing those ideas that we have about things that are important to us. Writing is never a small feat, and if you have managed to get this far, pat yourself on the back before continuing to the next chapter about the tensions we often experience while writing research proposals for funders in Transport Studies.

Chapter 4

The Mixture of Tensions of Writing Research Proposals

Reminder: Ideally, the next two chapters should be worked through after you have done some writing on your hypothetical research proposal, either individually or collaboratively.

4.1. What Do You Know? Key Questions for this Chapter

Before we look at the content for this chapter, we would like you to think about the three questions below. Try to **reflect on the writing** you did recently. The questions here are also the key questions for this chapter, because you are hopefully able to answer these questions after working through the previous two chapters:

1. What is your writing process? How does your writing process compare to your colleagues', or fellow students'? How could you navigate the differences in processes?

2. What are the power differentials (where some groups/individuals exert more power than others) that might arise during research proposal writing and how do we balance them?

3. What are the differences between the following writing genres: a proposal for a thesis; a proposal responding to a Call from a funder; a journal article? In particular, how would the language used in the background, literature review and methodology sections differ?

HINT: We suggest you come back to the answers you post here after working through the entire book.

[12]

Managing tensions…

4.2 This chapter's Aims

Although there is still a bit of 'content' for the last two chapters, we would like you to view them as more *practical* chapters. **Your** writing should now become central to what we talk about here. The final chapters are all about tensions, which we define as 'risks and constraints' experienced during writing. Here is what we would like for you to reflect upon:

1. The writing process and its tensions;

2. Conflicts between non-traditional dissemination strategies and traditional ones.

[12] Image on this page: Dunsmuir Separated Bike Lane (CC-BY Paul Krueger)

4.3. Tensions While Writing Research Proposals in Transport Studies

In the previous two chapters, we introduced the processes and tensions involved during research writing and project management. We argued that there were no set rules and steps to completing these complex tasks. Rather, we said that these activities should be approached as mixes of overlapping and interacting strategies, operations, processes and tensions.

We suggested that research proposal writing is *more* closely associated to strategies, compared to the leading and management of the project, which is *more* associated with operations. However, as we are sure you experienced thus far in the interactive handbook, we tend to '**bounce' between strategy-mode and operations-mode** throughout the completion of tasks. The 'bouncing' is part of what makes these undertakings so complex.

It is often useful to be **critically aware** of the ways in which we approach the smaller tasks of which the bigger goal comprises, keeping in mind that it remains a mix of everything, all the time. For instance, when you are writing a report, you will move backwards and forwards between:

- Strategies (such as checking the 'promises' made in the research proposal and formulating a way of representing your progress or findings in the report);
- Operations (like who is writing which part of the report and when and how is it going to be completed);
- Processes (notably the writing process and the conventions associated with report writing in the Transport Studies field); and
- Tensions (such as deadlines set by the funder and differences in opinion regarding what has been accomplished during the project).

Becoming comfortable with this messy 'bouncing' between ways of viewing the project is crucial while learning how to write proposals and manage research projects. This is why we focused a lot on how you **position** yourself during these activities.

In the chapters preceding this one, we focused on the processes of proposal writing and project management, only *introducing* the tensions. In this chapter, after you hopefully did some writing yourself, we think it is time to delve deeper into the tensions.

Tensions are not always a bad thing; as a matter of fact, they could be rather productive at times. Other times, they could be restrictive and hold you back from reaching your goals. For this reason, we have defined tensions as '**risks** and **constraints**'. At this point, it might be wise to refresh your memory regarding processes and tensions, by revisiting the tables presented in Chapters 1 and 2.

Some Ideas on Risks and Constraints

Risks are seen as beneficial in this handbook. We define them as those tensions that arise because you are **pushing against the boundaries of conventions** (doing things differently), whether you are pushing against your own, personal ways of doing things, or the way things are done in the field, like presenting a course to public transport operators about your research findings, instead of writing another journal article.

Constraints could be **positive and negative** at once. They refer to those times when the **boundaries** of the context in which you find yourself restrict the ways you do things. Constraints often mean that we have to **compromise**, due to contextual restrictions. Yet, very importantly, constraints could **foster creativity**. Compare having to write a research proposal without the Call for proposals' stipulations: the task could become overwhelming, because you would be able to write *anything!* Additionally, the Call for proposals could guide your thinking, so that you reflect upon aspects of the project you would not have under different circumstances.

4.4. Risks and Constraints in the Research Writing Process

The following tensions (risks and constraints) are discussed further on the next few pages:

1. **Roles and academic identities** - We argue that everybody has current but constantly shifting roles in academia, whether they are still in the beginning of their careers, or whether they are more established;

2. **Intra- and inter-institutional challenges** - Ever had to send several emails to get one signature? Confused about why things take so long at another university? What calibre of work is the funder expecting? What about communication with government and NGOs?

3. **Content control and constraints** - Since the birth of the World Wide Web, intellectual property has been a hot topic. We discuss some of the more prominent topics on intellectual property, permissions, copyright and just generally what belongs to whom;

4. **Inter-team dynamics while writing** - In one project, team members could be from various powerful institutions situated in vastly different contexts associated with different practices, with varying agency;

5. **Conflict resolution** - As project leaders, it is essential to know how to resolve conflict. We provide some tips on how to approach this.

4.4.1 Roles and Academic Identities

People sometimes complain that large and complex projects have a tendency to "swallow them up". It is true that projects with many stakeholders and delicate relationships between people and things often feel overwhelming.

For this reason, we have focused a lot on how you **position** yourselves within these projects, even if the project that we are focusing on here is only a simulation. As a matter of fact, it is through **imagining** ourselves in these complex situations that we discover ways of navigating them.

We strongly believe that regular **reflection** on how we position ourselves in relation to our academic work, our private lives, our colleagues, our friends and the things surrounding us is key to negotiating daunting tasks. What about how others position you? What do you think they see as your strong points? What is that unique and valuable contribution that you are making? Are you being forced to do things that you do not view as aligned with your strengths?

In this handbook we hope we planted the seeds for **regular written reflective practice.** After working through this book, we would like to challenge you to continue writing reflections. Maybe once a week, maybe once a month. *Write small reflections frequently*. Just sit down, relax and write about where you find yourself. Nobody has to read it, not even you, if you do not want to - it is more about the process of getting all those thoughts running through our heads out and onto the screen or paper. If the words do not come immediately, try **drawing a picture** first. We could almost guarantee that this practice would make a difference in your life in general and with regards to the ways in which you approach research projects.

4.4.2 Intra- and Inter-institutional Challenges

Universities tend to be large organisations, each with hundreds or thousands of staff members... before even counting the students. In order to allow such a big institution to function, **a university usually builds a hierarchical structure** over time as the institution grows in size, not only to provide lines of communication but also of decision-making.

While a hierarchy can help with organising strategic priorities and with managing the people who make up all of the various units, departments, faculties or colleges within a university, it also creates a class system that often emphasises **academic seniority** (or 'rank'). The longer an academic has been at an institution, and the more publications, projects and accolades they collect, the more important their stature may become within the institution. In turn the institution gains from the collective statuses of its member academics.

The academic hierarchy is typically mirrored by a **bureaucratic structure** to support the administrative and educational activities of the academic part of the university. As with the academic side, the bureaucracy may also grow into large and complex hierarchical structures that emphasise seniority. It is difficult to talk about academia without talking about seniority and the **politics** that this create throughout all the hierarchical layers right to each individual research and administrative unit and position.

Now, imagine that each university has its own **institutional character**, practices and politics along the above lines. You might then start to understand that a multi-university research project is not only a collaborative academic undertaking, but also a process to find a way to **navigate personalities, habits and rules** that have developed in each of the partner institutions!

Each **funder and external organisation** that is involved in a research project will also have its own practices and personalities in place. It might thus not be a surprise to you that there is ample opportunity for intra- and inter-institutional **conflict**. This is why it is important to understand not only the character and priorities of the audiences that a project might want to reach, but also the **project-internal audiences** - that is, each research partner, the funder, and any other participating organisations. **Keeping relationships** with numerous individuals **healthy** becomes difficult but *integral* to successful research projects.

4.4.3 Content Control and Constraints

Not all resources are under **full copyright** (completely closed for reuse) or **public domain** (completely open - reusable without any attribution of author necessary). If you are not already familiar with it, we would encourage you to use **Creative Commons**. *Creative Commons is a way of declaring in which ways the resources you create are shareable.*

There are many resources out there bearing Creative Commons ("CC") licenses. You can search Creative Commons's repositories, or select Creative Commons in your internet search options. Otherwise, for images, simply click on the image you have found on, for instance, Google Images, and look for the license attached to it (usually written below the image). For more information, visit creativecommons.org, or go through the optional section on the next page.

Besides the above matter of publication controls, it is also important to be aware of the **relationship between the authors** who produce these resources. It is expected that a research project produces one or more academic publications, in which different project members might **each contribute some part** of the final product.

This is not always an actual portion of text: it could be taking the lead in initial article planning, doing fact-checking of the written text, or nothing other than having collected the underpinning data in the field.

Conflicts about authorship can, and do, happen. This may play out as a battle over whose name comes first in the list of authors to acknowledge seniority rather than scale of contribution, or disagreement about the relative contribution of each project member to the final publication. As with a project proposal, **discuss at the outset** of planning a publication how **authorship contributions and recognition** will work to limit the potential for conflict later on.

[13]

The often cold world of intellectual property...

[13] The image on this page is under the license *CC-BY-SA krimpet.*

Creative Commons Licenses

Here is a short introduction to how Creative Commons (CC) licenses work. It might take some time to get your head around them, but knowing what they mean could resolve many of your copyright and permissions headaches. Simply write the following abbreviations (or use the images in the picture above) somewhere on your resource itself, or in its metadata, to tell people how they are allowed to share your work - *nothing else needs to be done*:

CC0, or "public domain" (most open and technically does not count as a Creative Commons licence) - People can use your resource without having to say who created it (paying attribution) or in which ways it is shareable;

CC-BY (most open of the CC licences) - People who want to reuse your work only need to mention to whom the resource is attributed; for example, "CC-BY mtracs". It means that people do not have to contact you for permission to reuse your resource: you have already granted permission and they just need to mention your name. This is the most basic license you can give your resources;

CC-BY-SA - This means "share-alike", alongside attribution, usually meaning people are not allowed to make the resource more closed[14] if they adapt it, or if they use it as part of a bigger resource. For example, if my photo appears licensed under CC-BY-SA in someone's Powerpoint presentation and they would like to share their presentation slides, then the whole presentation must be licensed under CC-BY-SA and not a more closed license, like CC-BY-NC below. CC-BY-SA has gradually become one of the most popular licenses in academia, although the concept of "share-alike" is still not well understood;

CC-BY-ND - "No derivatives", alongside attribution, means that people are free to use your resource, but they are not allowed to alter it in any way. Technically, this also means that you are not allowed to use the resource as part of a bigger resource. It also means that adding "SA" at the end, would not make sense, because you do not have permission to alter the resource in any way;

CC-BY-NC - "Non-commercial", alongside attribution, means that the resource may not be used in any for-profit endeavour. You can add an "SA" to the license to prevent it from becoming more closed when the resource is adapted;

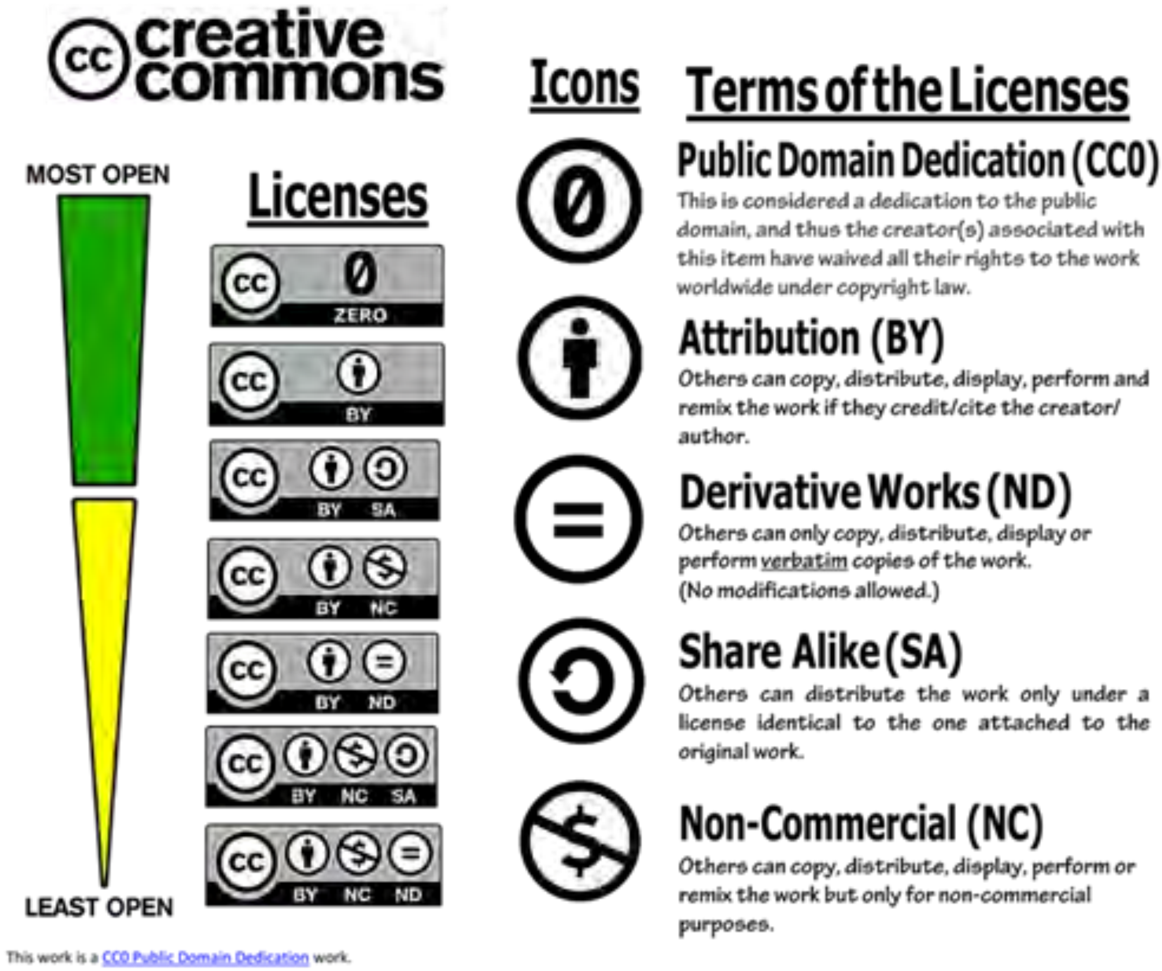
CC-BY-NC-ND (most closed of the Creative Commons licences) - This means that, alongside attribution, the resource may not be used for profit nor may it be altered in any way.

If you do not see a CC licence on a resource you would like to use, or it does not explicitly state that the resource is in the public domain (CC0), then you should consider the resource to be under **full copyright**, meaning that you are obliged to ask for permission from the creator in order to use the resource.

Lastly, working out which license should be used, or rather, which license should be used when resources with varying licenses are used together, can be **surprisingly tricky** and it deserves careful attention.

[14] Thinking about it logically, the act of placing a more closed license on a resource, like CC-BY-NC, already prohibits it from being part of a larger resource (like a Powerpoint presentation) that is under a more open licence. This is why we view the "SA" license to be meant for preventing the resource from becoming more closed and not vice versa. "CC-BY-NC-ND-SA" would make little sense, although we have seen it being used!

[15]



4.4.4 Intra-team Dynamics while Writing

Research projects are team efforts and team dynamics definitely come into play. Like any other team, there will be diversity of personalities, strengths, approaches towards research, cultural values and administrative tasks. This diversity, if well channeled, is great for the team, but if not managed well it could be a source of tension resulting in conflict between team members.

The first step is, at the inception of the work, to have honest discussions on what each team member brings to the table: deliverables, milestones, timelines and team etiquette. Then, divide roles and responsibilities early on, and as much as you can, match team members **to what they are good at**. Of course, these can always be reviewed, but having some structure will be helpful in averting some of the conflicts commonly experienced during team work.

[15] The image on this page is in the public domain.

Here are some **common causes of conflict,** as well as a few solutions and suggestions on how to mitigate their effects **(***in italics***):**

1. Team members feeling that they are carrying more than their fair share of weight compared to others - *Consider using tools such as RACI, or Asana - these are responsibility assignment tools often used in project management;*

2. Delayed disbursement of funds, if your institution is receiving the funds - *From the onset, manage expectations on disbursement if your institution is not efficient with disbursement. You can even request the grantor to directly disburse to each team member. If that is not an option, regular updates to team members can be reassuring.* ***Something to avoid****: don't allow cross-communication between your team members with your colleagues at your institution. If you are leading the project,* ***always be the point of contact between your institution and team members****;*

3. Another source of conflict is team members dragging their feet to deliver on their part of the work, which delays the whole process - *Nip this in the bud early on through regular team meetings, which must be agenda-based. This encourages team members to be prepared and to honour timelines. If regular meetings do not seem to work, consider one-on-one discussions with a team member who is lagging behind. They could be experiencing personal challenges or just need some motivation;*

4. Geographic power differentials, which are common during comparative studies that may cover different countries - *Research is not apolitical. It involves power, money, race, and colonial legacies. Many tensions surround who has funds, leading status, and capacity. Diffusing (engaging these matters through dialogue) rather than ignoring these tensions is important;*

5. Clash in research approaches. This is common as all researchers have their personalised ways and unique academic backgrounds - *Seek to blend approaches rather than pick one over the other. The most important aspect is to have a clear path on the kind of information you are all seeking. The process of collating your information at the end will harmonise these different approaches.*

4.4.5 Conflict Resolution in Research Projects

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As you've seen in the previous section, it's important to put mechanisms in place to prevent conflict and tensions. Collaborative research projects depend on **good relationships** and so it's crucial to think how to build good relationships from the outset. Collaboration does not happen naturally – you need to build relationships and put structures in place to support the work. You need to create an environment where people feel safe and valued, but where there are **clear boundaries**.

Start by choosing your research team carefully for their particular expertise. Interview each person individually to ensure that they are invested and passionate in and about the research. Crucially, make sure that they are not over-committed and that they have time for the research. **Rather under-promise and over-deliver on research**.

Within the group, create a space where people feel a sense of belonging and of being valued for their expertise. But also, develop clear, explicit **ground rules and structures** about roles and expectations, as well as the boundaries. Do this at the outset – put drafts on the table for discussion and buy in. For example, as mentioned before, be explicit about how often you meet, what's expected at the meetings etc. Have clear agreements about publications, authorships and the financial expenditures.

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[16] Image on this page: *Conflict Resolution Illustration* (CC-BY Digits.co.uk)

Tips on conflict resolution

1. The aim *must be* to **resolve** the conflict – *the research community is small*, so you likely have to work with the same people again.

2. Don't let **problems fester**, or build up over a long period. ***Mediate***. Give people space and time to talk or vent.

3. **Listen**. Ask questions and do not jump to conclusions. Help the person to feel seen and heard. Each member should feel respected during interactions.

4. Be prepared to **compromis**e, or to **apologise**. Be the bigger person. *Park the pride*!

5. Don't attack a person's character. **Address the specific issue instead**.

6. **Don't blow things out of proportion**.

7. Come up with **specific steps** and an agreement.[17]

Additionally, you might find the following videos interesting. For those of you with limited bandwidth, please note that these videos are quite long:

1. In this video (https://tinyurl.com/yckf5398), Dr Ernest Uwazie reflects on traditional systems of conflict resolutions.

2. Dorothy Walker, in a rather entertaining TedTalk (https://tinyurl.com/yc52xn2e), looks at three ways to resolve conflict.

[17] It is with gratitude that we mention the following: this section on conflict resolution was contributed by a facilitator in the 2023 run of the original online course on which this handbook is based, Associate Professor Rochelle Kapp.

4.5. Suggested Questions

Just like in the previous chapters, we encourage you to come up with your own questions and write them here. Then answer them, according to what you have learned:

You can answer your own questions here:

Here are a few questions we suggest:

1. *How did the writing you did before reading this chapter confirm or challenge your ideas about target audiences?*

2. *If you engaged in writing as a group: What are the strengths and weaknesses of collaborative writing compared to individual writing?*

3. *How did a close reading of your Call for proposals influence your writing?*

4.6. Reflection

You know what to do by now... Two sentences would be enough.

[18]

[18] Image on this page: *A tram in Orleans, France* (CC-BY-SA mtracs)

Chapter 5

Balancing Tensions while Leading and Managing Research Projects

5.1. Short Warm-up - What Have You Learned?

What did you learn in this interactive handbook thus far in three (3) words/concepts? Example: *Collaboration. Conflict resolution. Fun.*

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5.2. This Chapter's Aims and Key Questions

We hope that by now you have a much better idea of the processes and tensions involved in research proposal writing and project management. In this final, short chapter, we would like for you to imagine the ways in which you would approach these complex undertakings, while we delve just a little deeper into the tensions surrounding project leadership and management.

As the aims of this last chapter, we would like you to reflect upon:

1. Research project management and its tensions, particularly focusing on tensions between administrative, financial and academic activities;

2. The need to implement a carefully planned dissemination strategy to communicate your ideas, for one last time, because, as you might have noticed, it is something we feel strongly about.

You'll probably notice that this chapter's aims are very similar to those of the previous chapters. This is because the tensions overlap quite a lot across research proposal writing and research project management.

Here are some the key questions we invite you to reflect upon, before you read this final chapter:

*1. Describe your thinking around project management. What **intra-team tensions** arose while you were completing your writing, if any? How did you navigate them?*

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2. What does 'stakeholder engagement' mean and how do we ensure it? What do we do when the research done by different parties (different cities and methods) are extremely diverse?

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19

Transport could be about walking too, although some researchers would not agree…

[19] The image on this page is in the public domain.

5.3. Tensions During the Project Leading and Managing Stage in Transport Studies

In the previous chapters, we discussed what is meant by 'tensions'. We view them as 'risks' and 'constraints', which could be negative and positive all at once. We have covered the processes of research proposal writing and project management, as well as the tensions involved during writing. What is left is to take a look at the tensions most closely associated with project management. Now would be a good time to revisit the tables of processes and tensions provided in Chapters 1 and 2.

5.4. Risks and Constraints in Project Management

Many of the tensions in project management overlap with those surrounding research proposal writing. We tried to pinpoint those risks and constraints that are associated specifically with project leadership and management. Additionally, we tried to highlight the tensions that often arise in research projects within the Transport Studies field.

In this section, we will introduce the following notions:

1. **Administration versus academia** - We introduced this tension in a previous chapter. In this chapter, we zoom in on that delicate relationship between your institution's administration (like the department head, as well as the administrative officers) and you as a professional researcher.

2. **The group versus the individual** - Research projects in Transport Studies tend to be big undertakings with many stakeholders.

3. **Harmonising different research sites** - How do we account for diverse writing styles, findings, methods, paradigms and, dare we say it, rigour?

4. **Traditional versus contemporary dissemination practices** - We provide some more examples of how to reach your ideal audience in the 21st Century.

5.4.1 Administration Versus Academia

[20]

In the previous chapter, we touched on the intra-institutional structure of a university, which comprises an academic and an administrative hierarchy, each of which has its own internal class dynamic. What we didn't say then was that there is also **a class system between the academic and administrative parts** of the university. From your own experience in academia, can you say which of these parts thinks or acts as if it is superior to the other?

While this class distinction usually exists in any university, these two parts are **dependent on one another**. If you take away the academics, then what will be the purpose of having administrative staff? If you remove all administrative staff, will the academics be able to cope with doing their research and teaching, in addition to supervising building maintenance and drawing up financial statements?

*Bear in mind that many, if not most, of the **administrative staff** who directly or indirectly contribute to the success of your research project are often not treated with the respect they deserve*

[20] The image on this page is in the public domain.

If the academic and administrative parts are both critical to the workings of the university - and to the success of your project - then treat everyone, regardless of their position or rank, with **kindness and dignity**, and do not be shy to add a **smile**. You might just find that your grant transfer request is processed that little bit faster.

5.4.2 The Group Versus the Individual

We would like to talk about words here. Strange, right? Shouldn't we be talking about different 'personality types', 'introverts', 'extroverts', 'right-brain thinkers', 'left-brain thinkers' and 'group dynamics'? Not necessarily.

Since this is partly a writing handbook, it is perhaps more appropriate to become aware of the ways in which the **words we choose always reflect our identities, our backgrounds and even our ideologies** about life. Our words form one of the ways that we express differences and similarities. But how do we ensure that the diversity within a research project team is indeed the project's strength and does not become a tension that is resolved through silencing certain individuals? We would like for you to reflect on the following:

Awareness. Look at the words that you choose when interacting with others. Are they conducive to establishing a healthy working relationship? What about the words we choose to use while finishing the final report? Are they in direct conflict with the terms and concepts other team members are using?

Negotiation. In academia people often come from nuanced backgrounds, fields and paradigms that often use words in different ways. At conferences there are often heated arguments about the meaning of words. In a diverse group, the terms that we use and their meanings should constantly be explicitly reflected upon, so as to not confuse our audience.

Balance in voices. The strength of having a diverse group of people working on a research project is that you infuse the findings with multiple perspectives. Each voice in the team makes the knowledge that is created stronger, because it is not just viewed from one person's experience, with particular ways of looking at phenomena. Throughout the project, ask yourself if your voice is still coming through in the project, as represented in the words of the reports. Perhaps you feel you are being silenced. Alternatively, perhaps your voice is dominating. Engage these matters through direct dialogue with other team members. Like in the previous two points, it comes down to awareness and negotiation of our words.

5.4.3 Harmonising Different Research Sites

Harmonising different research sites is particularly important when undertaking comparative research, something which, as you may know, is done often in Transport Studies. It calls for a delicate balance, and the following guidelines may support you in the development of a *unified story*. In Transport Studies, as mentioned before, a lot of research relies on the **comparative case study research strategy**. Data analysis is done through **analytical induction**, where you allow themes and topics arising from the data itself to form the framework for your analysis. Many studies in the field follow a **mixed approach**, employing quantitative and qualitative analysis at once. However there are exceptions here and there, where researchers use different methods. In this chapter we focus on case studies with a mixed approach, using analytical induction, because it is the most popular research design:

1. Allow the research to **take shape organically**. Avoid the pressure of feeling that your team must settle on some set parameters at an early stage. Let loose and just start the exploration process.

2. You will **naturally begin to see some themes** arising from your preliminary fact finding missions. Thereafter, settle on **key themes** that you would like to focus on. Be careful not to have too many themes: 3-5 themes should suffice.

3. Using these themes, start to **offer rich context on each of the different sites**. At this point, do not restrict yourself on how much information you should collect or how to phrase the findings, just focus on understanding the site and providing detailed information.

4. Then, your team can **settle on the format for the write-ups;** length of write-ups from each of the sites, uniform referencing styles, recommendations and generally the tone of the write-ups.

5. So, at this point, you should have **mini-complete research outputs on each of the different research sites.**

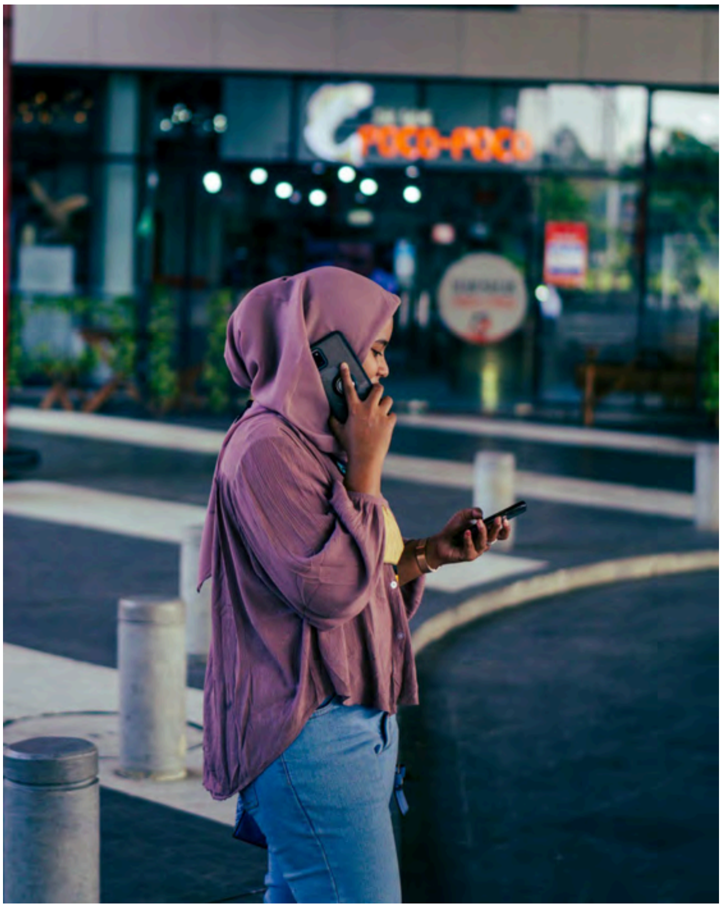
6. Conduct an **internal peer-review of each write up** within your team. Highlight areas that need more information or clarifications, references etc.

7. Using the revised write-ups from the different sites, draw out the differences, similarities, and unique aspects from them. Then, **agree on how you would like to present your work** - *do you want to do it per site or per theme?* Choose whichever you deem appropriate. Where trends are difficult to draw, organise your work per site, then have sub-headings for each of the themes. Where it is easier to draw trends, go per theme, then present the findings from each site under the respective themes.

8. **Select someone who will harmonise the work** into one research write-up using the selected format. Essentially, the work should not come across as a disjointed document authored by several people. Of course, we desire the richness of different authors but the story must be coherent and have flow.

9. **Review the harmonised draft as a team** and jointly contribute to enriching the document. Some sections such as recommendations and the executive summary can really benefit from that 'team punch'.

[21]



5.4.4 Examples of Less Traditional Dissemination

Infographic (https://tinyurl.com/4xn2fdwv)

CC-BY The Department of Culture, Digital, Media and Sports, London, 2012. The influx of public transport use during the 2012 Olympics.

Video 1 (https://tinyurl.com/4rzm2sp5)

“Sustainable Cities: Stockholm's low-carbon transport revolution” by CDP: Disclosure Insight Action.

Video 2 (https://tinyurl.com/bddab7av)

“Study shows African transport and logistics better than expected” by BusinessLIVE.

Podcasts

If you search for “urban mobility” and/or “transport studies” on your chosen podcast provider, if you have one, you will find a few interesting results. Podcasts have become popular over the

[21] The image on this page is in the public domain.

past ten years, especially among those who often undertake long commutes. I am sure we can do something with that knowledge…

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

From the New European Bauhaus (https://tinyurl.com/ntwamu9a) on Futurelearn. Under "Digital Placemaking" there is an image named "More citizen's engagement in the governance of EU Cities", which is useful. We do not have the rights to display the image here.

From the University College of London (UCL) (https://tinyurl.com/5f6jzucy) on Futurelearn.

5.5 Suggested Questions

Just like in the previous chapters, we encourage you to come up with your own questions and write them here. Then answer them, according to what you have learned:

You can answer your own questions here:

Here are a few questions we suggest:

1. *It is often the case that many project team members, including the project lead, change over the course of a long project, which could make it difficult to keep the project going, as no one is left who has overall knowledge of the project. At the proposal stage, what actions can you take to prevent this kind of situation from influencing the research project in negative ways?*

2. *In a project you are managing, the one case city's data collection is just not working out. Instead of choosing to scrap one of the case countries and reducing the requested budget, as is sometimes the case, you choose to find a replacement case country. Which stakeholders inside and outside the project would you talk to, and what would you discuss with them?*

3. *What do you do when you realise that you are doing more than the other team members during the research project?*

4. *In your academic careers, you will definitely encounter cross-disciplinary groups, where each group member comes with specialised expertise. Below are four individuals representing typical backgrounds found in Transport Studies research projects.* ***In one sentence each, name the <u>strengths</u> of each of these individuals****:*

a. An urban planner:

b. A geographer:

c. An engineer:

d. A political scientist:

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Almost there…

[22] The image on this page is under the license *CC-BY-SA mtracs*

5.6 Final Question

In Chapter 1 we urged you to find an older Call for proposals to use as a central document. Imagine that this Call is repeated again next year, following a similar framing as outlined before. What would your first **THREE steps** be in preparing a submission?

5.7 Conclusion

This is as far as we are able to bring you with this handbook. From here on, we encourage you to use the content, questions and your reflections, and apply them to the actual proposals that you will be writing to secure funding for your research. There is no substitute for experience - the more proposals in which you are involved, the more you reflect on what worked and what did not, and the more comfortable you become in your field and professional network, the easier it will become for you. Unfortunately, more proposals are unsuccessful than not. Practicing and reflecting on your writing is perhaps the best advice we can give you. This handbook is not intended to be the only resource that you can or should rely on in helping you along the way. In the appendix that follows, we have provided some further resources that we created. We also provide some links for further reading.

All the best in your writing!

The Mtracs team

Appendix

More Resources on Knowledge Creation & Dissemination

Mtracs is a French Association (not-for-profit organisation) that specialises in the creation and dissemination of knowledge resources in urban sustainability. That is why we have a small section on this topic in each chapter. We like to push the boundaries when it comes to these practices and therefore we philosophise and read up about it a lot. In this appendix, you will find some of our own resources, as well as links to further scholarly work in this exciting field.

a. Mtracs Resources

Rigorous strategy for Dialogical Dissemination in Urban Sustainability

The diagram will help you to think through the ways in which you create and disseminate your knowledge resources in urban sustainability at an early stage and throughout your research project. Your target audience is placed in the centre. First identify and describe your target audience in detail. Then, as you move your focus from 1 to 4, first relate your strategy to your audience through dialogues with and about them, then to the other numbers not focused on.

Five characteristics of Tractable Knowledge Resources in Urban Sustainability

Making knowledge resources "tractable" is the "T" in Mtracs. This notion is one of the Mtracs flavours. The infographic provides an overview of what we mean by the term when it comes to creating resources in urban sustainability, which includes urban mobility.

Ways of Thinking About Knowledge Resources

An infographic that serves as a more philosophical approach to thinking about knowledge resources. It is a good start for thinking about what the knowledge resources we create and disseminate are supposed to do.

Online Courses for Researchers in Sub-Saharan Africa

We argue that online courses aimed at adult learners are powerful ways in which to disseminate knowledge. If the courses are appropriately designed, they can even serve as ways to shape the knowledge that you are disseminating, through learners' voices in the course. This infographic presents the lessons we learned in designing an online course for early career scholars in Sub-Saharan Africa - Mtracs' very first funded project.

We are slowly but surely building our library of these little infographics. For more, visit mtracs.net/resources

b. Further reading

Baron, N. (2021). Know what? How digital technologies undermine learning and remembering. Journal of Pragmatics, 175, 27-37. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.01.011

Bateman, J.A., Thiele, L. and Akin, H. (2021). Explanation videos unravelled: Breaking the waves. Journal of Pragmatics, 175, 112-128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2020.12.009

Bondi, M. and Cacchiani, S. (2021). Knowledge communication and knowledge dissemination in a digital world. Journal of Pragmatics, 186, 117-123. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.10.003

Facchinetti, R. (2021). News discourse and the dissemination of knowledge and perspective: From print and monomodal to digital and multisemiotic. Journal of Pragmatics, 175, 195-206. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.01.015

Labinaz, P. and Sbisà, M. (2021). The problem of knowledge dissemination in social network discussions. Journal of Pragmatics, 175, 67-80. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.01.009.

Maier, C.D. and Engber, J. (2021). Harvard Business Review's reframing of digital communication: From professional expertise to practical guidance. Journal of Pragmatics, 176, 186-197. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.02.005

Schmied, J. (2021). Popular digital knowledge dissemination platforms: Evaluating the pragmatic professional credibility from Wikipedia to Academia.edu and ResearchGate. Journal of Pragmatics, 180, 187-202. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.04.027