

Writing a Letter of Intent

HFSP promotes new interdisciplinary collaborations across the world. Therefore, team members are expected to have their labs in different countries; they should not have collaborated before and should propose a project significantly different from their ongoing research. Priority will be given to intercontinental projects.

This unique program invites highly novel collaborative projects, rather than those which are scientifically solid but not of a “Frontier” character. Applicants are asked to take this “caveat” seriously to avoid disappointment. Even first-rate scientists may be unsuccessful if sticking their successful individual ongoing research programs together as “parallel” projects, each of which are well suited to national funding programs, or if expected contributions are incremental, with little sign of synergy from the collaboration.

Basic do’s and don’ts for a successful letter of intent (read the [GUIDELINES](#) and the [FAQ](#))

Get a novel idea, which would move the whole field forward. Ask yourself what you would really like to know even if the technique is not yet available.

Do:

- Start planning a few months before the submission deadline. Even though a Letter of Intent (LOI) is a short format, reviewers are looking for a well thought out plan presented succinctly.
- think about a paper or presentation that you’ve seen recently that suggested a new twist for your research interests or excited you enough to consider a completely new line of research.
- do a literature search on the author(s) concerned to get an idea of their interests and willingness to collaborate – send them a preliminary mail asking whether they are interested.
- think carefully about the team members before inviting them to join the project, avoid duplicating expertise and creating a team that is too large to be convincing.
- think about the interaction in a practical way, how will each partner contribute, how can you plan the flow of ideas, materials and results backwards and forwards between the partners? Are there critical steps where the project depends upon the success of one team member? Can you see alternative strategies if such a block arises?

Don’t:

- construct an intellectually similar project by adapting a published approach for your gene/your species/your signaling pathway etc. unless you are adding a really novel twist.
- invite people doing the same type of research as you, use the same techniques and publish alongside you in the same journals to form a team.
- look for ‘sleeping’ partners just because they have a big name, are in a prestigious institute or in the ‘right’ country to give your team an intercontinental flavor.
- send in proposals that would be better suited for national or regional (e.g. European) funding schemes. The review committee eliminates many sound proposals that are of applied character or do not promise to extend the frontiers of knowledge in fundamental life sciences.
- propose the next obvious step in your current research program – very many LOIs are rejected for that reason.

Sections of the Letter of Intent

This may be useful for preparing text prior to the opening of the application site, or to see what is necessary without initiating an application (each component will have instructions on the application site).

TITLE and KEYWORDS

- a. Title (maximum 100 characters including spaces).
- b. Keywords (maximum 10). Include keywords for 1. Biological function, 2. Biological material, 3. Methods and instruments. If a keyword is missing from the list (on the ProposalCentral application site), you may add it by using the "additional keywords" box.
- c. Disciplines represented among the team members and relevant for the project (maximum 10). Please choose from the list.

RESEARCH PROJECT

This is the most important page of the application.

- d. Abstract of overall project (1200 characters, including spaces and punctuation). State clearly the aims of the team as a whole. Please provide a brief explanation of the contributions of the different disciplines.
- e. Each team member should describe her/his subproject (1200 characters including spaces and punctuation), with a clear indication of the role played in achieving the goal of the team as a whole. Use this space for the scientific contribution, do not repeat the CV here. [Note that there are four fields in the online form – applicants will have to complete according to the number of team members. In teams with five members, the 4th field will have to be shared between two members]. Please note that each subproject section has an upper limit on the character count, and it is impossible to redistribute between the boxes.
- f. How will the proposed research move/extend the frontiers in life science? Which aspects of the proposed project are especially unique and ground-breaking? What is the potential of the research question, new methods to be developed and/or the combination of new disciplines to lead to a breakthrough in answering a fundamental question in the life sciences (1600 characters including spaces and punctuation).
- g. Interdisciplinarity and research collaboration/team integration
 - (i) How is your team interdisciplinary (including new combinations of expertise)? How will the combination of expertise serve the purpose of your project - specifically, if there are more than 4 members or 2 members in the same country (see 3.3. of the [guidelines](#)) (600 characters including spaces and punctuation).
 - (ii) In which way is the collaboration essential for the success of the project? What makes the team more powerful than the sum of the individual contributions? How does the proposed research differ from the ongoing research of each team member (600 characters including spaces and punctuation)?
- h. Key references related to the project (maximum 5, 1200 characters including spaces and punctuation) – These will mostly include publications from authors other than the applicants, since the project is new for the applying team. Key references indicate that applicants know of the relevant literature and inform

reviewers about the present state of the research field.

Each team member will also have to fill in a personal section including affiliations, degrees, orcid ID, a short CV, and add up to 10 publications from the last 5 years (including [preprints](#)). Please note that lists of prizes or other academic achievements are not requested in the CV, as the evaluation of applications will be mainly based upon the frontierness, novelty, interdisciplinarity and internationality of the research.

The team will have to declare the number (if any) of co-publications between members of the team (see 3.1 of the [guidelines](#)) and provide full references for these. This will help reviewers to understand whether the collaboration is new or already ongoing. If the team has used AI tools at any stage of preparing the application, this needs to be disclosed as well.