

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.

It is important to note that this is a unique program which invites innovative 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. In recent years we have received significantly more letters of intent, many of which were “non-Frontier” applications. Unsuccessful applicants were often first rate scientists sticking their successful individual ongoing research programs together as “parallel” projects, each of which are well suited to national funding programs. The contributions were often incremental, with little or no sign of synergy coming from the collaboration.

Basic do’s and don’ts for a successful letter of intent.

Get a novel idea which would change the science in the domain and move the whole field forward. Ask yourself what you would really like to know even if the technique is not as yet available.

READ THE [GUIDELINES](#) AND THE [FAQ](#).

Do:

- Start your planning a few months before the submission deadline. Even though a letter of intent 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 program or excited you enough to consider a complete change in your 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 contributions and creating a team that is too large to be convincing. HFSP does not fund ‘consortiums’ (see 4.4 of the guidelines).
- 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 a ‘me-too’ project by using a published approach for your gene/your species/your signaling pathway etc. unless you are adding something really innovative that has not been seen in the published studies.
- invite people doing the same type of research as you, using the same techniques and publishing 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 clinically orientated or of very narrow expertise because the underlying idea does not promise to push back the limits of knowledge in fundamental life sciences.
- be satisfied with just proposing the next obvious step in your current program – very many others will be doing exactly the same thing and will be rejected for that reason.