

VLAG PhD Research Proposal procedure – January 2020 onwards

Background and aims

The PhD research proposal is an important educational element of the PhD training program (4 ECTS, 112 hours) and part of the formal admittance procedure at Wageningen University. All PhD candidates are required to write and submit their research proposal within 6 months after the onset of the PhD project. We ask from our new PhD candidates that they demonstrate ownership of their project by writing their project in their own words, addressing a set of predefined topics, and putting it in a perspective that is up-to-date. The PhD research proposal needs to be written by the candidate with consultation and feedback from the supervisory team prior to submitting it. Even when a peer-reviewed grant proposal is already available at the start of the PhD project, we expect the PhD candidate to work out his/her take on the matter and develop this into a VLAG PhD research proposal. This will not only help to improve his/her writing skills, but will also stimulate reflection and discussions between the PhD candidate and the supervisory team. Getting acquainted with writing a rebuttal to feedback is an additional valuable learning goal for the PhD candidate.

Submission

To ensure that all aspects are being dealt with, a VLAG PhD research proposal template has been created (https://www.vlaggraduateschool.nl/en/about_vlag/form_downloads.htm). When the proposal is completed and approved by the supervisors, the proposal is submitted in digital form (PDF) to the VLAG Office (vlag@wur.nl) within 6 months after the start of the PhD project.

Reviewer

After consultation with his/her supervisory team, each candidate submits at least three names of possible reviewers, preferably VLAG colleagues. VLAG will collect feedback from one of these reviewers, who will be asked to evaluate the proposal from the perspective of a senior coach. In many cases, a VLAG colleague from a neighboring chair group or research institute could be a pragmatic and relevant choice. However, the reviewer can be anyone in the world as long as (s)he is not part of the research groups of the members of the supervisory team, and as long as (s)he is not involved in the PhD project.

Rebuttal and approval

The PhD candidate is asked to return a rebuttal digitally to the VLAG Office (vlag@wur.nl), within 1 month after receipt of the review report. In many cases, the suggestions of the reviewer may lead to further improvement of the proposal. In exceptional cases major revisions may be needed before the proposal is approved.

The decision regarding the approval of the research proposal lies with the Scientific Director of VLAG and is based on the report of the reviewer, the rebuttal of the candidate, and potential amendments to the PhD research proposal.