Including sex and gender considerations in WWTF proposals and research teams

What are the benefits of gender balanced teams and increasing the participation of under-represented groups among co-applicants and collaborators?

Gender balanced teams lead to diverse experiences and approaches to knowledge creation and increase the spectrum of ideas and insights which broaden and vastly improve the chances of producing breakthrough discoveries and innovation. It is linked to increased creativity, productivity, engagement and innovation.

Why consider sex and/or gender in research design?

A growing number of studies show that consideration of sex, gender and diversity has the potential to make research more ethically sound, more rigorous and more useful. Extrapolation of research results to the population as a whole, when they actually only apply to a portion of the population, is inaccurate and could lead to serious implications. While there are research projects in which sex and/or gender may not be relevant in terms of the research content, it is well established that, where relevant, not integrating sex and gender analysis into the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of the research can lead to poor results and missed opportunities.

How do I determine if sex and/or gender considerations are relevant in my research?

Not all research has potential sex and/or gender (or diversity) dimensions, but these dimensions and the potential relevance need to be considered. There are an increasing number of examples of research that would have or do benefit from sex and gender considerations being included in the research design and process. A good source for such examples is the website http://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu. The goal of the Gendered Innovations project as presented on the website is to provide scientists and engineers with practical methods for sex and gender analysis in their own research. It is important to analyse sex and gender, but examining how other factors intersect with sex and gender is also necessary. These factors or variables can be biological, socio-cultural, or psychological aspects of users, communities, customers, experimental subjects, or cells.

Some questions you could ask yourself during drafting the proposal are included in the "Gender in research Toolkit" by Yellow Window:

Equal opportunities in research

- Is there a gender balance in the project consortium and team, at all levels and in decision-making positions?
- Do working conditions allow all members of staff to combine work and family life in a satisfactory manner?
- Are there mechanisms in place to manage and monitor gender equality aspects, e.g. workforce statistics?

Gender in research content - research ideas phase:

- If the research involves humans as research objects, has the relevance of gender to the research topic been analysed?
- If the research does not directly involve humans, are the possibly differentiated relations of men and women to the research subject sufficiently clear?
- Have you reviewed literature and other sources relating to gender differences in the research field?

Proposal phase:

- Does the methodology ensure that (possible) gender differences will be investigated: that sex/ gender differentiated data will be collected and analysed throughout the research cycle and will be part of the final publication?
- Does the proposal explicitly and comprehensively explain how gender issues will be handled?
- Have possibly differentiated outcomes and impacts of the research on women and men been considered?

Research phase:

- Are questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, etc. designed to unravel potentially relevant sex and/or gender differences in your data?
- Are the groups involved in the project (e.g. samples, testing groups) gender balanced?
- Is data analysed according to the sex variable? Are other relevant variables analysed with respect to sex?

Further information:

CIHR Key considerations for the appropriate integration of sex and gender in research
CIHR Sex and Gender Online Training Modules
Sex and Gender Equity in Research (SAGER) Guidelines
Stanford University Gendered Innovations