

How to get Funding for Qualitative Research
(ASA Annual Meeting 2004 in San Francisco – Session 316)

The workshop provided the participants with a draft of “Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research” Prepared by Charles C. Ragin, Joane Nagel, and Patricia White. I believe you can get your own copy by contacting Patricia White at pwhite@nsf.gov. The finalized packet should be available in next few months.

Speaker 1: Pat White (In charge of NSF Sociology 1998-2000)

- Increase in the number of both dissertation and regular research in general
- Review process overview
 - Ad hoc (peer) review – six external reviewers (Dissertation does not have this)
 - Advisory Panel → Panel summary
 - Review analysis by the program
- Review criteria
 1. What’s the intellectual merit?
 - Be specific
 - Method is the *key*
 - Cross-field references (e.g., Is there anything in Anthropology that helps you explain the issue?)
 2. What’s the broader impact?
 - Simply “filling the hole in the literature” is not enough
- What you should take into consideration
 - Advance knowledge (even if you’re doing a qualitative research, there’s a lot that you could find out about your research topic, method, and subjects)
 - Is PI qualified?
 - Creativity and originality are especially important for qualitative research
 - Is the proposal well conceived and organized?
 - Do you have access to the necessary resources?

Speaker 2: Joane Nagel (In charge of NSF Sociology 2000-2003?)

- Problems with qualitative research proposals
 - Ambiguity of question and method
 - Weak in theory
- Dissertation Improvement Awards
 - Ask a clear research question
 - Enter into a dialogue with the broader literature
 - Identify the sociological contribution
 - Identify the theoretical contribution
 - Be specific about your research plan and time table
 - Try to know if you’re wrong as well as right (Recognizing “falsifiability” is important. Look for negative evidence)
 - Week feedback before submitting your proposal
 - Be sure to include 1) Scientific merit and 2) Broader impact

Speaker 3: Kathy Newman

- Ethnographic work must explain the innovativeness
- “Blended method” is always a good idea → means “triangulation”?
- Issues particular to NSF
 - Clarity of sampling method matters
 - Think about what’s publicly relevant
 - Workshop your work (Give your proposal draft to the hardest-ass qualitative researcher in your department!)
 - Allow a lot of time (three times more than what you think it would take)
 - Be humble with your research’s limitation (acknowledging it does not undermine your research’s strength)
 - Have some research done first before sending it to NSF (It is more convincing that way). There are many small grants you can get to get started with the preliminary research.
 - Be clear about what you will be able to claim (i.e., what’s the generalizability?)
 - Use of undergraduate students to expand the number of samples
- Putting together a dissertation or a book on qualitative research
 - Having “numbers chapters” (or something equivalent) helps
 - Stratified sampling is more important than random sampling in qualitative research
 - It’s important that you write about the disconfirming cases (in the final work). This shows that you’re open to other possibilities
 - Discuss the generalizability of findings (e.g., You can give the audience the stats on the size of the population that fits your targeted population. This will indicate how serious the issue is.)

Speaker 4: Susan Silbey

Her contribution to the workshop packet, “Writing Qualitative Research Proposals,” can be individually downloaded at:

http://web.mit.edu/anthropology/faculty_staff/silbey/pdf/49DesigningQuaRes.doc

- Make your work available to those who are outside your own discipline (no jargons!)
- Model on the successful works in the past (especially the structure of the proposal)
- Can you answer the question?: “My work on _____ is an example of ...”
 - You must be able to answer the question with multiple answers
 - And you could take different answer and send it to different granting agencies!
- Same for the theory
 - You should be able to answer the question, “what is this an example of?”
- What is the public problem?
- Finding holes in the literature
 - Sometimes it’s the method that’s driving the findings. Acknowledge where and how the hole can be filled.
 - Address clearly how you’re going to fill it.
- What are you going to do with your notes?
 - Beyond IRB requirement for security, specify exactly what you’re going to do with the data
 - There are many techniques of qualitative data analysis – do some research on what you could use for your project.

- “Think description” capability
 - Write the proposal to show that you know how to provide “thick description”. (In qualitative research, the writing becomes crucial in providing evidence. If you fail to convince the reviewers that you can write in your proposal, they are less likely to be confident that you can deliver the *goods*.)
- Will you need some help?
 - Are there any experts, whose special knowledge or access will facilitate (or be required) for your study?

Presider: Michelle Lamont

- Four epistemological stances that review panel takes
 1. Constructionist → They are marginalized
 2. Comprehensive (70-80%)
 - It’s about detailed description and analysis, driven by theory (but not necessarily about generalizability)
 - Your ability to *translate* the qualitative evidence is the key
 3. Positivist
 - They look to the reduction of reality in order to study
 4. Utilitarian
 - They are driven by social utility
- Just “filling the hole” is not good enough
 - Where’s your originality? (Be daring!)
- Show how you will execute the data