Securing Grants for Qualitative Research in a Positivist Funding Environment

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Agenda

- General Advice on Grant Writing
- Applying this Advice to Qualitative Projects
- Common Mistakes Made by Qualitative Research Proposals
- Discussion and Questions

Know the funder

- Different types of funders (federal, state/local, foundations, corporations)
- Learn their priorities
- Learn their standards of evaluation
- Learn their language
- Learn their format
- Study examples of funded proposals
- Understand who will review the proposal
- Talk to researchers who have been funded or served as reviewers

- In other words, do some qualitative research on the funder!

The "hidden curriculum"

- There are standard formats for grants, but they are often not made explicit (NIH "specific aims" page is one example)

- It's okay (even expected) to talk to program officers before applying for a grant – send them something specific to read in advance

- In most cases, reviewers are reading many many proposals. Yours must be "skimmable" (use formatting to your advantage) and the abstract and intro are CRITICAL.

Elements of a Strong Proposal

From 2004 NSF Report on Qualitative Research:

- Write clearly and engagingly for a broad audience
- Situate the research in relation to existing theory
- Locate the research in the relevant literature
- Articulate the potential theoretical contribution of the research
- Outline clearly the research procedures
- Provide evidence of the project's feasibility
- Provide a description of the data to be collected
- Discuss the plan for data analysis
- Describe a strategy to refine the concepts and construct theory
- Include plans to look for and interpret disconfirming evidence
- Assess the possible impact of the researcher's presence & biography
- Provide information about research replicability
- Describe the plan to archive the data
- https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2004/nsf04219/nsf04219.pdf

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Papers vs. Proposals

- Many similarities
  - Motivate the research question
  - Provide a theoretical framework
  - Justify the methodology
  - Explain the contribution
- But some key differences
  - With a paper, the findings justify the paper and are there to see
  - With a proposal, the reviewer has to be convinced that the findings will be important, that something new will be learned
  - The more detail a proposal can provide about method, procedures, and how possible problems will be solved, the better
  - Anticipate what you might find and what that would imply

Common Mistakes

- Not articulating the methodology in detail (the "trust me" proposal)
- Proposing something inductive without enough structure around it so that the contribution will be clear
- Failing to educate the reader/reviewer about your subfield and its methodological standards
- Assuming the reader knows the literature or your area of research
- Failing to anticipate possible criticisms or problems
- Implicitly using the standards of quantitative research

Questions and Discussion

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