

# Qualitative Research Proposals: Common Pitfalls (and Solutions)

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# Poll Question #1

- My research expertise is
  - Exclusively qualitative
  - Exclusively quantitative
  - Mostly qualitative
  - Mostly quantitative
  - Fairly mixed

# Common Proposal issues

- Research Focus
- Terminology & jargon
- Sampling issues
- Common methods issues
- Qualitative Research Evaluative Criteria

# Poll Question #2

- What types of qualitative approaches have you used for proposals and/or projects? (Select all that apply)
  - Content analysis
  - Grounded theory
  - Phenomenology
  - Ethnographic
  - Other

# Research Focus: Pitfalls

- Aims that are not appropriate for qualitative methods:
  - establishing causality, generalizability across populations, etc.
- Focus is not clear and/or specific
  - Inductive does not mean without focus
- Focus is TOO clear and/or specific.
  - Overly deductive or hypothesis driven
- Multiple Aims that do not fit together
  - Conceptually
  - Chronological

# Research Focus: Solutions

- Develop aims that:
  - Are appropriate for qualitative methods
    - Understanding, Identifying themes and factors (barriers, etc.), etc..
  - Narrow enough to clearly distinguish a specific phenomenon
    - Focus on specific experiences or settings
  - Open enough to allow for discovery
- Utilize a clear conceptual framework that:
  - is consistent with qualitative inquiry
  - actually informs the research proposal

# Terminology & jargon: Pitfalls

- Using terminology that reviewers may be unfamiliar with.
- Including unnecessary philosophical depth
- Using terminology from outside of the study's specific qualitative approach without explanation.
- Using technical terms in lieu of detailed descriptions of how the research will be conducted.

# Terminology & jargon

- Describe method specific terminology in a way that demonstrates the fit between the research approach and question.
- Provide definitions of possibly unfamiliar terminology with clear descriptions of what this means in terms of this study. If you can't provide a clear example, reconsider including the concept.
- Be consistent within the specific qualitative method. When deviating explain.

# Sampling issues: Pitfalls

- No rationale for sample type, size, or recruitment method
- Lack of iterative approach
- Lack of diversity
- Lack of homogeneity
- Failure to consider participant bias
- Naive participation expectations or assumptions
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# Sampling issues

- Support participant selection with appropriate literature:
  - Recommendations within the specific qualitative approach
  - Consistent with range of published studies with similar focus, method and populations
  - method
- Make the fit between participant selection and aims explicit
- Provide specific details re. iterative recruitment and data collection methods
- Address recruitment and data collection challenges

# Methods issues: Pitfalls

- Poor “Fit”
  - The qualitative approach is not the most appropriate.
  - The qualitative approach drives rather than serves the study.
- Methods are not consistent with the specific qualitative approach and/or variation is not noted and justified
- Lack of clarity re. data collection and/or analysis methods
  - (e.g. interview guides)
- No specifics are described for the “mixing” of methods.

# Methods issues: Solutions

- Understand a variety of qualitative methods.
- Be willing to change methods while developing the research proposal.
- Describe specific guidelines for data collection and analysis including:
  - Scope and type of interview questions
  - Initial Interview guide
  - Protocols for open interviewing
  - Guidelines for iterative data collection revisions
  - Specific data analysis steps
- Cite standard and appropriate sources that reflect the specific method, type of study, etc.. When not possible provide rationale.
- For mixed methods include clear approaches to mixing data methods and findings

# Qualitative Research Evaluative Criteria

- The qualitative research literature presents a wide, and sometimes inconsistent variety of evaluative criteria.
- However, there are some common concepts:
  - “Fit”
  - Trustworthiness
  - Creditability
  - Confirmability
  - Transferability
- Proposals should address:
  - Method specific criteria
  - Common criteria
  - Funder specific criteria

# Poll Question #3

- What has been the most weakness cited in your qualitative research proposal reviews? (select ONE)
  - \_ Research Focus
  - \_ Terminology & jargon
  - \_ Sampling issues
  - \_ Common methods issues
  - \_ Lack of Evaluative Criteria

Questions.

# Resources

- Robert Wood Johnson: <http://www.qualres.org/>
- NIH:  
[http://obssr.od.nih.gov/scientific\\_areas/methodology/mixed\\_methods\\_research/index.aspx](http://obssr.od.nih.gov/scientific_areas/methodology/mixed_methods_research/index.aspx)
- Creswell, JW. (1998). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Munhall, P. (2006) *Nursing Research: A Qualitative Perspective*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers
- Smith, J. (2003) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Camic, P. (Ed) *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspectives in Methodology and Design*. APA
- Penrod, J. (2003) Getting Funded: Writing a Successful Qualitative Small-Project Proposal. *Qualitative Health Research* 13: 821

# NIH Guidelines for qualitative research (abridged)

- The research paradigm and approach are clearly described.
- Research design rationale, strengths and weaknesses are discussed.
- Qual. & quan. methods are addressed with equal care and specificity.
- Mixed Methods: Integration of data and findings are explicitly described.
- Expertise needed for the study is available on the team.
- The research problem, aims, methods, and data analysis are linked and the terms are consistently defined and used.
- Limitations and potential pitfalls of methods and procedures are addressed.
- Rationale (theoretical and scientific) for sampling decisions are discussed.
- Data collection procedures are fully explained.
- Data analysis procedures are fully described for each aim or research question.