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EDITORIAL

Top 10 Tips for Successful Qualitative Grantsmanship

This editorial builds on Margaret Grey's ''Top 10 Tips for Successful Grantsmanship'' (Grey, 2000) in which she highlighted key areas ''I wish someone had told me about when I was starting on my career as a nurse researcher'' (p. 91). The advice Grey offered was relevant to the development of all proposals, regardless of design or methodology (e.g., have an important problem, keep a sense of humor and humility). In this guest editorial, we offer advice on writing a successful proposal for undertaking qualitative research. Over the years, we have reviewed proposals whose quality was nothing short of inspiring as well as those that were ''not quite ready for prime time.'' We have experienced success and failure in our own proposal writing efforts as well. Our advice is based on these many years of experience as both reviewer and reviewed.

1. *Make the case for the idea, not the method*. In most proposals, the first few paragraphs are critical, because they constitute the drum roll leading up to the aims. It is here the writer convinces the reviewer that the topic is significant and that the study will generate important new knowledge. Use this critical introduction to the aims, to discuss the scope of the problem in terms of its incidence as well as associated human and social costs. Write the beginning paragraphs so they provide reviewers with a clear understanding of what the results of the study will make possible in terms of clinical practice and future research.
2. *Build on the literature.* As Morse noted in her editorial on the myth of going in blind, ''ignorance does not insure insight . . . li- libraries are not the enemy'' (Morse, 1994, 3–5). In the background section of the proposal, it is critical to demonstrate how the proposed study builds on and extends the literature. To say that no one has ever undertaken a qualitative study of the topic is not a compelling argument for significance. You need to demonstrate how the aims you are proposing address a significant gap in the literature and then discuss how qualitative methods are appropriate for addressing the aims.
3. *Identify your qualitative approach.* Qualitative research is a family of approaches (e.g., grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography), and it is useful to specify the approach being used and link it to the aims of the study. Specifying the approach demonstrates sophistication as a qualitative researcher and can further clarify the consistency and link between the study aims and research design. Recognition of both classic and more recent literature pertaining to qualitative methods can be a positive indication to reviewers that you have done your ''homework.'' For instance, in recent years, there has been growing recognition of the contributions of some of the more generic approaches to qualitative research, and there are excellent references that support the use of such approaches (see, e.g., Sandelowski, 2000; Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997).
4. *Avoid methodological tutorials.* Research proposals are not the place for textbook descriptions of qualitative research or missionary statements about the virtues of qualitative studies. Reviewers are likely to be offended by statements that suggest they are anti-qualitative or do not appreciate the contributions of qualitative studies to nursing science. In writing a proposal, it is best to assume that reviewers will have at least a rudimentary understanding of and appreciation for qualitative research. Those who constitute NIH study sections and other review groups invest considerable effort in setting up groups that have the substantive and methodological expertise required to provide fair and knowledgeable reviews. Proposals need to be written based on the assumption of reviewer competence.

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5. *Use examples to clarify the research design.* Across approaches, qualitative research designs often are described as emergent, because not all aspects of the design can be specified in advance of beginning the study. Nonetheless, as Sandelowski, Davis, and Harris (1989) pointed out in their classic article on developing a qualitative proposal, examples grounded in the proposed research can give the reviewer a clear understanding of how the study is likely to unfold. Examples such as the possible course of the theoretical sampling or likely coding categories provide evidence that the researcher recognizes the key decisions and tasks that will be required to complete the study successfully.
6. *Justify your sample design and size*. Most qualitative studies rely on non-probability, purposive samples. Patton (2002) listed 16 types of probability sampling, including maximum variation, stratified, deviant, and theoretical. Thus, it is not sufficient simply to describe the sample as purposeful. Rather, the specific purposeful intent needs to be discussed and linked to achieving the aims of the study. The principal of saturation typically is invoked when discussing sample size, indicating that data collection will stop when key categories in the analysis have been fully developed. Because it is not possible to know ahead of time how many subjects will be required to achieve saturation, qualitative researchers often specify sample size in terms of an anticipated range of study subjects. Ideally, the range is linked to the type of purposive sample. For example, maximum variation sampling is likely to require more subjects to achieve saturation than deviant case sampling.
7. *Build in quality checks.* The emergent nature of qualitative research designs necessitates special attention to informing reviewers about plans for training research assistants and monitoring the quality of ongoing data collection and analysis efforts. Including a subsection on ''Efforts to Ensure Quality'' that contains strategies consistent with those recommended by experts in your chosen qualitative approach in the methods section of the proposal communicates to the reviewer that you have considered key aspects of implementing a high-quality study. For example, reviewers will want to know that research assistants will be instructed in conducting qualitative interviews and that their work will be closely supervised. They will want to know plans for maintaining an audit trail of the rationale for decisions made as the emergent design unfolds. Qualitative consultants with expertise in the particular qualitative approach used in the proposed study can play a key role in ensuring the quality of the study, and plans to draw on their expertise should be described in the proposal.
8. *Develop a realistic timetable and budget.* Reviewers need to know that the investigator has given careful consideration to what resources will be needed to carry out the proposed study. For reviewers to judge whether or not the timetable for the study is realistic, they need to know that sufficient time has been allotted for all aspects of the study, and that the amount of time various members of the research team will be devoting to the project is appropriate. Data collection and analysis are likely to overlap in a qualitative study, and it is useful to show this overlap on a table or figure that provides an overview of what work is planned for each month of the study. Regarding budget, it is critical to build in funding to cover the full scope of data collection and analysis efforts, including the training of interviewers, regularly scheduled meetings with research assistants, and transcription of data. For example, it often requires multiple contacts and considerable travel to complete a single interview, and a 1–2 hour interview can require 6–8 hours of a research assistant's time. The budget section of the proposal should specify the basis for estimating data collection, management, and analysis costs and justify the appropriateness of the estimates.
9. *Make strategic use of appendices.* Appendices can be a wonderful ally to the qualitative researcher. Space constraints in the proposal impose limits on the use of examples and the elaboration of prior work. In the narrative include brief examples of such things as interview questions and probes, significant statements, coding categories, and analytic techniques. Then refer the reviewer to a more detailed presentation in an appendix. Because reviewers are likely to vary in the extent to which they scrutinize appendices, it is important not to rely on appendices exclusively to convey key information. Rather, consider how appendices can be used to provide further evidence of your qualitative expertise and the likelihood that you will be successful in implementing your proposed research.

10. *Write for both the experts and the skeptics.* Whether the review group is an NIH study section, foundation panel, or dissertation committee, it is likely to include members with different levels of expertise and interest in qualitative research. Thus, one has to write the proposal with both the qualitative expert and novice in mind. The best way to meet this challenge is to ask colleagues with varying levels of qualitative expertise to review drafts of the proposal. It is especially useful to elicit feedback from individuals who are experienced proposal reviewers. Proposals often include some consultants who are substantive experts and others who are methodological experts, and these individuals also can be asked to critique drafts of the proposal. When colleagues provide conflicting advice, it can be especially helpful to discuss the differing opinions with them. Such discussions provide additional insights into how to strengthen the design of the study and the clarity of the presentation.

The tips we have presented are intended to support the development of proposals that both experts and novices in qualitative research will recognize as significant, well-crafted studies. We welcome further discussion of these tips and invite others to share additional tips based on their own experiences in writing and reviewing qualitative proposals.

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