Participatory Research Proposal Writing
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Outline
• General advice for writing research proposals
• Specific advice for writing PAR research proposals

General Outline
• Opening paragraph
• Background
• Question explained, hypothesis stated, theoretical frame
• Literature review
• Methods (how do you plan to acquire the evidence needed?)
• Statement of qualifications
• Timeline
• Conclusion/re-cap goals
• *Clear linkages between all of these components.*

Ask yourself….
• What do I want to accomplish? How can I do it?
• What will we learn that we don’t already know?
• Why is it worth knowing?
• How will we know if findings are valid?
• Will it help rectify injustices?
• What theories help me understand/ explain this situation?

Writing hints
• Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence, provides supporting arguments, extends ideas, leads into next paragraph
• Avoid wordiness: maximum expression of ideas with minimum words
• Avoid passive voice
• Be consistent with terms
• Know your audience
• Presentation: spacing, headings, fonts
• Follow funding agency’s guidelines and stick to their limitations
• Strategies to start writing:
  - “blind” drafts
  - blank pages with headings
  - matrix/ table (question, variables, operationalize, instrument, analysis)
The first paragraph
- Powerful opening grabs the reader
  - states the issue
  - explains why it is important and timely (justification)
- State question and show how it is innovative
  - paradox
  - fills void
  - identifies new relationship between factors

The Research Question
- Focus on central aspect, break into components in narrative (Brinda)
- Is it researchable? (Operationalization)
- Is the scope feasible, given your skills and time?
- Grounded in time and space, even as linked to a larger body of inquiry

Choosing a Question
- Relevance: part of a larger intellectual project/line of inquiry
- Research what people have said about your topic: what are the gaps and contradictions?
- Identify specifics (large or small landowners, type of involvement on what issues) and the evidence needed to identify relationships between factors

The “How” Factor
- What are your strengths? Express these.
- What are your shortcomings? How will you overcome them, specifically.
- Are the contacts feasible? Is the evidence accessible?
- Explore possibilities of what might go awry, and how you plan to address them.

Literature review
- Show your knowledge of your topic
- Talk to experts in the field
- Note classic works, and argue for the inclusion or overlap with newer, less “traditional” sources
- Describe your use of ideas as foundation and justification, not complete overview of field

Budget
- Consider all possible, allowable expenses
- Consider honorariums, leveraging your funding within the community, reciprocity
Methods

- Do they link to the question and the theory?
- Are they achievable?
- Consider how different methods may affect your findings (Guthman)
- Multiple methods show you see that there are a variety of ways to look at a problem

- **Question:** How do communities heal (politically, socially, economically, culturally, and ecologically) in response to historical and ongoing disruption?
- **Sub-question:** What does healing look like in X community, along all of these axes?
- **Hypothesis:** Activism is a manifestation of healing
- **Evidence:** Assessment of community organizations and individual and family activism over the last 50 years, how/why people got involved, their visions and frustrations
- **Methods:** Interviews, archives, participation

Theory

- Helps you articulate and contextualize (in broader history of thought) your “hunch” about what is going on
- Can help generate hypotheses
- Must be operationalized/grounded
- Dialogue/juxtaposition between theory and evidence
- Justifies how case fits into broader concerns

A PAR Approach

- Is an approach that includes various methods
- Justify WHY this approach is important and necessary in your particular situation
  - “if outcomes will be used for, in, and by communities, you need collaboration in determining the ways findings are produced and interpreted”
- Be specific about how you will use PAR—to achieve more useful application of research results, broader dissemination of findings, etc.
- Provide PAR literature review
- Explore potential problems and how you will deal with them
- Using PAR
- *Start the research from the concrete and specific reality, incorporating the peoples’ viewpoints, in order to contribute to a type of social transformation that eliminates poverty, dependence, and exploitation.* - Vio Grossi 1981
- Theoretical contribution
- Communicating PAR
- How will you maintain rigor and satisfy your committee?
- Modifications to PAR: iteration between participation and research
- Define your community (may depart from “traditional” PAR community)
Examples of use

- Technical knowledge in reforestation, fisheries, mapping land use
- Dialogue and interaction to generate new roles and solve social problems (i.e. police harassment, exclusionary policies)
- Social action for joint program development
- If you use PAR, remember…
- The importance of a power analysis, including reflexivity
- Power and knowledge: PAR as recognition of whose knowledge counts (“professionalism”)
- PAR as deepening social knowledge in group process for positive change
- People’s awareness of capabilities strengthened