

NIH has issued some guidelines (National Institutes of Health, 1999) for designing an NIH proposal that includes a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. NIH has also held workshops focused on mixed methods research, such as the one in the summer of 2004 for social work and health professionals. NIH's 1999 guidelines mention the challenge of conducting "combined" research. They recommend that the combined components relate to the research questions and hypotheses, that the authors explain how the data will be integrated (i.e., mixed), and that the authors explain how the results will be interpreted, taking into account data from two different research paradigms. The guidelines call for expertise in both approaches and a complete description of both methods and their contributions, rather than a superficial approach to either of the two methods. They discuss the integrated (i.e., convergent) and sequential models and point out that integrated approaches are challenging and require extensive explanation. They also imply that qualitative methods may not be enough in a study when factors are known that must be controlled and when prior studies characterize a field of study. They finally recommend that adequate time be made available for this form of research and that the investigators be sure they have sufficient expertise.

Guidelines for the grants process for the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Extramural Research at NIH can be found at their Web site: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/oer.htm>. The proposal that investigators write for NIH research grants follows the SF424 (R&R) standard form. This form indicates that the research plan needs to include a 1-page statement of specific aims along with a 12-page narrative for a RO1 proposal or a 6-page narrative for a RO3 and R21 proposal that describes the significance, innovation, and approach. As shown in Table 8.3, we have extracted the major elements of this narrative section and modified them to include components of mixed methods research and designs.

The proposal narrative should include the following mixed methods considerations:

- The specific aim section of the proposal can include the mixed methods purpose statement, as well as the mixed methods research question(s).
- In the significance section, include the reasons for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data as a deficiency of past literature.
- In the innovation section, discuss the innovative use of mixed methods within the proposed project.
- In the approach section, begin with an overview of mixed methods research and the specific type of design being used. Examine Figure 3.9 as a model for how to design this paragraph.

Table 8.3 National Institutes of Health Guidelines for a Proposal Narrative for a Mixed Methods Study

<p>A. Specific Aims (Limit to one page)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals of the proposed research (include a mixed methods purpose statement) with quantitative questions or hypotheses, qualitative questions, and mixed methods questions (include mixed methods research questions). Mention the impact the proposed research will have on the content field as well as the mixed methods literature. Discuss reasons for using mixed methods research and how the study will advance understanding of mixed methods research. • Specify objectives of the proposed research (include objectives that will be accomplished through the mixed methods design).
<p>B. Research Strategy (Match page length to proposal type)</p> <p>(a) Significance (add statements about how mixed methods will enhance the study of the research problem)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress in the field that the proposed project addresses. • Explain how the proposed project will improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in one or more broad fields. • Describe how the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field will be changed if the proposed aims are achieved. <p>(b) Innovation (add information about the innovative use of mixed methods as an approach and research methodology)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how the application challenges and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms. • Describe any novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation or intervention(s) to be developed or used, and any advantage over existing methodologies, instrumentation or intervention(s). • Explain any refinements, improvements, or new applications of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions. <p>(c) Approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the project. Include how the data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted as well as any resource sharing plans as appropriate. Include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Overall approach (mixed methods) and definition of mixed methods research – Type of mixed methods design used (define, give reasons for using design, cite studies using design in field)

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