

2009 Community Forestry & Environmental Research Partnership Proposal Guidelines

Introduction

Participatory research has two very broad goals: 1) to produce a better account of the world, and 2) to do so in a way that directly benefits the community (or communities) with which the research is conducted. Although it shares the first goal with all scientific research, the second goal is intended to overcome the tendency of conventional research to extract knowledge and information from communities while producing no tangible benefits for them. Proposal writing for participatory research thus differs from proposal writing for conventional research because of the need to integrate these two goals.

Proposal writing is a challenging process in which graduate students toil alone, often feeling like there are few light posts to guide them. Although general advice abounds, in the form of writing guidebooks, online advice, and panel discussions on the state of the art presented by tenured professors at annual meetings, when it comes down to actually putting together a proposal, graduate students must rely on themselves. This can be a lonely process in which the selection committee at the foundation to which you are applying seems faceless and mysterious. How will they judge my proposal? What criteria will they use?

Proposal writing for participatory research is even more mysterious because there are even fewer guideposts. For this reason, we have put together the following guidelines to assist you in applying for a CFERP fellowship. The guidelines have links to PowerPoint presentations from some of our workshops, as well as to our criteria and indicators. The latter will show you the criteria the selection committee uses in evaluating proposals. These criteria are based on the criteria we use to evaluate research projects that we fund. Our intent in sharing these criteria is to assist you in designing a project that is likely to succeed in producing scientifically rigorous knowledge and tangible community benefits.

You may find it helpful to also review the Berkeley-Rockefeller online [Dissertation Proposal Workshop](#) for guidelines on writing a research proposal. Although this workshop is targeted at Ph.D. students, its advice applies to master's level students as well. The section on the research question is especially relevant.

Proposal Writing Guidelines

General Advice

Writing a research proposal is about communicating clearly. The goal is to get your point across succinctly so that the reviewer grasps what you are trying to say on the first reading with little effort. This means explaining terms and concepts that may be open to interpretation and laying out the design and methods of your research in as much detail as possible. For example, if you mention “participatory mapping,” how will you go about

making mapping participatory? What will community members actually contribute to the process? How will this help you address your research question?

Proposal Sections

Your research proposal for a CFERP fellowship should include the following sections laid out in the order listed.

Introduction and general background

Explain what the situation is that leads to or sets up the problem that the research will address. What is the rationale for conducting this research?

If known, what are interpretations of the problem from the perspective of community members?

Research problem

Describe the current formulation of your research question(s). Explain how this research question will help to address issues within the particular community and other communities that may face similar issues.

Relate your question to research that has been done before and to relevant theory. Do not simply do a literature review in which you describe the work of other researchers that is related somehow to your project. Rather, show how that work informs your project. What is it about that work that leads you to, or helps you ask your question? What bodies of theory may be useful for explaining the situation you are investigating, and why? What are the advantages of using this theory for helping community members address their concerns about their situation?

You might define your research question in terms of a testable hypothesis. Or, you might explain a question that guides the research toward a focused explanation of the situation at hand.

Methods

Clearly explain in this section how you will go about conducting your inquiry. Be especially clear about how community members will be involved in the research process. If they are already involved (for example, if they initiated the project and/or helped to develop the research question), explain their roles thus far. Describe plans and rationales for community participation in different stages of the project (research design, data collection, analysis, etc.). If it makes more sense to **not** include community members in a particular stage of the research, explain why. The point is to make clear why the choice of methods and level of community involvement is an appropriate way to address the research question.

As you develop your methods, use the CFERP selection criteria as a guide to thinking about how to conduct a rigorous study that provides benefits to the community.

Significance of the research and benefits to the community

What does your research add to the existing body of work? What are the short-term and long-term benefits to the community from being involved in your research?

Budget

Prepare a budget for your project that shows what you anticipate the cost of conducting the research to be. Keep in mind that the cost of attending the CFERP annual workshops is covered by the CFERP program with funds separate from your fellowship monies. In addition, the \$500 travel grants for which you are eligible to apply also come from a separate revenue stream.

Eligible research expenses include:

- rent for housing in the field
- food
- travel to distant research sites and accommodations and meals while visiting those
- equipment for collecting data and/or conducting experiments
- office supplies
- pay for contract work (transcription services, data entry, etc.)
- pay for community members (either for services rendered or to offset lost wages)
- meeting hall rentals and other meeting expenses
- other expenses necessary for your research

Approvals

While it is not necessary to include proof of approval of your project by your university's institutional review board (IRB)/human subjects committee, with your application, you will be required to provide this proof if you are awarded a fellowship. Your grant monies will not be distributed to you until we receive this proof. To avoid delays in receiving your grant, therefore, it is worth either submitting approval with your application, or starting the process of seeking approval now.

If you are working with a Native American community, you will also be required to provide proof of approval by the tribe's IRB, tribal council, or designated authority (whichever is appropriate). Again, it is worthwhile to start the process of obtaining approval as soon as possible.

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation from your academic advisors should address your qualifications and preparedness for conducting the proposed research.

The letter from your community partner should show that the community partner is well acquainted with your project and is, or will be, fully engaged in the research process.

Referees may submit letters electronically to cfellow@nature.berkeley.edu

Curriculum Vitae

Include a copy of your current CV.

Academic Transcripts

Include copies of your official undergraduate and graduate transcripts. If possible, please submit these electronically.

Products

We ask that you send CFERP a copy of your thesis or dissertation upon its completion.