

# FROM IDEAS TO ACTION: DEVELOPING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Sue Goodwin ([susan.goodwin@sydney.edu.au](mailto:susan.goodwin@sydney.edu.au)); and Margot Rawsthorne ([margot.rawsthorne@sydney.edu.au](mailto:margot.rawsthorne@sydney.edu.au))  
Social Policy Research Network, University of Sydney

# What is research?

‘Research is something that anyone can do, and everyone ought to do. It is, simply, collecting information and thinking systematically about it. The word ‘research’ carries overtones of abstruse statistics and complex methods, white coats and computers. Some social research is highly specialised, but most of it is not: much of the best work is logically very straightforward. Useful research on many problems can be done with small resources, and should be a regular part of the life of any thoughtful person involved in social action’ (Connell, 1975)

## Why 'thoughtful people involved in social action' do research:

- To 'find' answers to pressing questions
- To produce new knowledge, including new questions
- To reflect upon and inform policy and practice

But also as

- A form of organisational or political participation
- A form of communication

# From ideas to action: steps in developing a research proposal

- From 'idea' to 'topic'
- From 'topic' of research to 'purpose' of research
- From 'purpose of research' to 'type of research'
- From 'type of research' to 'research question/s'
- From 'research questions' to 'research methods'

PLUS finding an academic mentor/partner

# From idea to research topic

What issue/problem is your research concerned with?

- an issue that stands out
- An issue that irritates and forces us to ask – there must be a better way, or why is it like this?
- An issue that is being dealt with well, but has not been documented.

*However* we also need an issue that is important to others – a shared concern – for our findings to be valued... so,

- An issue that is of importance to others



What issues/topics stand out for you?

# Two questions about the topic:



Is it worth researching?

Is it researchable?

# Is it worth researching?

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This involves doing a bit of research:

What existing research has been done around this topic?

What conclusions were reached?

What are the main issues and controversies surrounding the topic?

Are there significant gaps in previous research on this topic?



# Is it researchable?

Ensure that what you *want* to explore fits with what you *are able* to explore.

Is the topic possible to research: are your questions about this issue capable of being answered?

Do you have the time/resources/access to data to research this topic?

Answering these 2 questions will help focus your topic.

# From Topic to Purpose

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- Research proposals require a clearly focussed statement of the overall purpose of the proposed research.
- These are often written and rewritten at the end of the development process, but a sense of the ‘purpose’ of the research is important.

# Summarising the purpose:

*From University Research Office:*

Will your project facilitate:

- an important discovery or innovation
- the solution to an important practical problem
- a significant conceptual advance

*From AVETRA research grant application form:*

1. Why should Australian tax payers fund this research?  
Please justify the proposed research in 100 words or less.

# Thinking about purpose:

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- What 'problem' will the research solve/address?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Why does it *matter* that this problem is addressed?

# Two examples from ARC Linkage:

## **Influences on farmer suicide in Queensland and New South Wales**

### **Project Summary**

Australian farmers have been identified as being at high-risk of suicide. This project will provide direction for targeted suicide prevention strategies by quantifying the individual and environmental factors that place farmers at higher risk of suicide, as well as the protective factors that may buffer against suicide and suicidal behaviours.

## **Captive Audiences: the impact of performing arts programs in Australian prisons**

### **Project Summary**

The project Captive Audiences examines performing arts programs in Australian prisons in regard to the impact they have on the wellbeing of prisoners and their lives after imprisonment. The outcomes of the research will assist with the development, implementation and evaluation of future performing arts programs in Australian prisons.

# Purpose

## Example 1:

To provide targeted suicide prevention strategies.

Implicit Assumption: suicide prevention strategies are not provided/or not effective.

## Example 2:

To evaluate if an arts program improves the well-being of prisoners in and after prison.

To Implicit assumption: that prisoners and people post-release need to improve their well-being.

# Significance of purpose:

- Example 1: How does 'farmer suicide' link to *either* organisational *or* broader societal, political and economic concerns?
- Example 2: How does 'prisoner well-being' link to *either* organisational *or* broader societal, political and economic concerns?

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- How does your research topic link to broader organisational, political or economic concerns?



# From 'purpose' to 'type of research':

- What **type** or **types** of research would be most relevant for your research topic? (this is different to what methods)
- What kind of knowledge do you seek to produce? facts, descriptions, meanings etc.
- What skills/capacities/experiences do you and your organisation have (including consumer or community participants)?

# Types of research:

- Research highlighting experience and meaning

*Explores people's everyday lives and the meanings they give to events so as to influence policy or practice*

- Social indicator research

*Used to assess levels of need, social inequality and quality of life between population groups and make comparisons*

- Community needs studies

*Used to document the extent of needs for services required for planning*

- Program evaluation

*Used to assess the relevance or success of a policy or program in action*

# Types of research continued

- Prevalence and indicator studies

*Used to indicate the extent of social issues within a population group*

- Comparative studies of policies or program

*Undertaken across a number of countries or jurisdictions in order to compare outcomes*

- Social attitudes research

*Used to ascertain community orientations toward an issue, policy or program*

- Policy analysis research

*Used to explore the content or processes of specific policies or policy proposals.*

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- Which of these *types of research* suit your topic?

# From 'type' of research to 'research question':

- Turning the purpose, or aim into a research question (or research questions):

Example 2:

Do arts programs improve the well-being of prisoners in and after prison?

# Refining research questions:

- Define each term/ each concept:

Do arts programs improve the well-being of prisoners in and after prison?

Defining terms and concepts helps with working out what kind of data is needed: statistical data, surveys, interviews, policy documents, data from small or large samples, etc.

# From research question to method:

What techniques and procedures are to be used to do things like:

- Identify participants/ informants/documents/data sets
- Gather data
- Process or analyse data
- Develop 'findings'

# Methods in action:

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- Consumer/community involvement
- Ethical issues



# Consumer/community participation

- Who chose the problem to be studied?
- Who made the research policy decisions? (e.g. is there a control group?)
- Who conducts the research?
- Who writes papers/makes presentations? Who owns the data?
- Where/how are the results disseminated?

# Community/ Consumer Participation

Engaging consumers or the community in

- Research design
- Development of research questions
- Participation in data collection
- Participation in data analysis
- Dissemination of findings

Consumers can be engaged as participants in the processes or advisors on the processes, or somewhere in between.

# Ethics:

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- Ethical aims
- Ethical processes
- Ethical outcomes
- Harm
- Consent
- Confidentiality

# Resources:

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Finding an academic mentor

Familiarity: with the issues, with the organisation, with the location/region, with the research team.

Congruence: discipline, field of research, research approach.

Time and commitment: clear scope of works