## *Describing the Methodology and Work Plan in an Individual Humanities/Humanities-Related Social Sciences Proposal*

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**Describing a methodology** amounts to answering the question, "What techniques and kinds of analysis should be used to answer my research question most fully?" In the field of humanities research, the method(s) used to conduct research are expected, for the most part, to be "qualitative" rather than "quantitative," "interpretive" rather than "empirical." But this doesn't mean that data are forbidden in humanities proposals. After all, one significant exception to this general rule--Digital Humanities (DH)--uses quantitative methods to analyze humanities materials and both the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) provide funding for DH projects. So how can researchers know whether or not their projects' methods direct them to the NEH or to a "quantitative" Social Science funder, such as the National Science Foundation?

To find a close match between a research method and a funding agency, applicants will want to understand the granting agency's culture and mission. The NEH funds primarily "interpretive humanities research." It will, therefore, welcome research asking why a particular social or aesthetic pattern has emerged in the present and/or the past, e.g., why have repeated reports emerged in the last decade describing the damaging effects of social media on U.S. teens' mental health, and are those reports worth taking seriously?  Humanities researchers will answer this question using methods such as interviews with teen users, detailed descriptions of teens' responses to social media, immersion in a group of teen social media users, descriptions of teen users' lived experience of social media use, and/or analysis of teen users' stories related to their responses to social media use. A quantitative researcher, on the other hand, is more likely to begin by collecting data related to a carefully configured group of teen users, perhaps separating them by high, medium, and low use; they may use the same test with each group to assess their ongoing mental health; they may also predict which group will most likely report a negative effect on mental health related to amount of media use.  Quantitative researchers may devise an experiment asking students to use social media for a predetermined number of hours per day or week followed by a survey of the students' sense of mental wellbeing.  In addition, surveys and systematic (measured) observations of student behavior may be undertaken and recorded.

To check on the compatibility of a project's method and a funder's culture, look for successful samples of proposals on the potential funder's website.  NEH makes these available routinely. Applicants can ask funders other than NEH to make a copy of a successful proposal available.  If

they can't or won't, look at examples on the NEH website whose method comes the closest to your own.

**Creating a work plan** amounts to breaking down a large task into small and manageable pieces. Individuals working on a solo project need to pay special attention to listing all of the major steps involved in the project and then clustering those steps into waypoints on a timeline. There are two ways in which this process can go sideways: (1) important steps in the workplan might be omitted or the steps included might be only vaguely described; and (2) the applicant may appear overly ambitious and therefore unrealistic in judging how many steps can be accomplished within a specific period.  Reviewers will scrutinize the workplan for its detail and feasibility.  Have all of the major tasks been described?  Have they been allotted sufficient time to be realistically completed?

In cases where an applicant may be applying for an NEH fellowship, for example, this section of the application is asking for a description of the entire project, such as a book, with a chapter-by-chapter listing of its contents.  It's not necessary that all chapters be completed during the grant period, but reviewers will want to know the full scope of the book and the section(s) to be completed during the period of the award. In the case of a book project, all chapter titles could be shown here, along with a description of whether the chapters progress chronologically or thematically.  Aim for chapter titles that indicate the contents of each chapter.  If they don't, add a brief description of each, but avoid reproducing a book proposal.  Work already completed on each chapter should also be described—this could include archival research and/or interviews and a literature review.  If parts of the book have been drafted or appeared in print, mention that along with any support received to complete that work.  If your project includes collecting data, note how long that will take.

**Timeline vs work plan**: a timeline is a graphic designed to show the reader at a glance the dates by which various stages of a project will be (or already have been) completed.  A Work Plan is usually a narrative description of what will be accomplished over the course of the funded time period.  Speaking generally, a timeline is suited to a complex project with various components to be completed at various times.  It may or may not accompany a Work Plan.  The work plan alone is suited to a relatively simple proposal, usually undertaken by a single researcher, with a limited series of tasks.  In some cases, not all tasks are expected to be completed during the period of the award.

Describing a method and work plan is not especially difficult, but if it is not done carefully, it could call into question the applicant's judgement and preparedness to complete the proposed project.  Reviewers will want to see that the project's goals match the proposed method and work plan and that the plan is both reasonably detailed and coherent.