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Hospitality Research: How to Plan, Fund, Execute, and Publish

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Hospitality Research: How to Plan, Fund, Execute, and Publish

Abstract
Researchers interested in exploring topics of concern to the hospitality industry can discover a wide range of areas to be explored and a variety of sources to fund the research. The authors discuss a four-step plan for conducting and publishing quality research, including tips for the writing process.

Keywords
Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver, William O'Brien, Hospitality Research: How to Plan, Fund, Execute, and Publish, Questionnaire survey, Grant, FIU

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Hospitality Research: How To Plan, Fund, Execute, and Publish

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Researchers interested in exploring topics of concern to the hospitality industry can discover a wide range of areas to be explored and a variety of sources to fund the research. The authors discuss a four-step plan for conducting and publishing quality research, including tips for the writing process.

The hospitality industry is one of the fastest-growing and most rapidly-evolving segments of the U.S. economy; as such, the multitude of areas which it encompasses have concerns and problems which provide a fertile ground for researchers.

The opportunity exists today for hospitality educators and others interested in writing about the area to explore a broad range of industry topics to help extend a basic body of knowledge about the hospitality field. Such a body of knowledge advances the understanding of the field as a whole and provides insight into basic issues through research and the testing of assumptions.

Step 1: Plan Should Have Industry in Mind

The first step in planning a research project is to look at the needs and concerns of the industry and to identify an area which can solve a problem or provide understanding or knowledge where a current need or concern exists. Communication with industry practitioners is critical for researchers to best focus on effective topics for research. In any professional field educators and practitioners need to set up a continuing dialogue to better facilitate an identification of areas which need exploration and which could benefit from academic research.

Joint articles, by an academic and by a business executive, often have greater creditability than those authored by either alone. Often, they see multiple publication because different aspects are of interest to different groups. A trade journal and a refereed scholarly journal might both publish articles on the same material by the same authors.

Sometimes lower-rung managers do not see the long-term benefits

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to their careers from publication. Yet it is precisely that which is missing from the resumes of some of those seeking to cross that nebulous line between middle and upper management.

Once an idea has been selected, it is important to narrow its scope sufficiently so that the angle can be effectively explored. A review of existing literature in the area of concentration will assist in this process in addition to providing the researcher with the pertinent background for his or her piece. A review can also help in the construction of any questionnaire or survey instrument to be used in the study by providing other models and by suggesting questions to be asked. As will be explained, it also forms an essential component of a grant application.

In cases where an issue has been written about and a questionnaire already designed, replication of the study with a different group of respondents may provide additional data to confirm or refute the results of the previous study, thus adding to the body of knowledge. This may be the easiest course for a beginning author. If one is going to replicate another's study, he or she should ensure that the instrument to be used covers all aspects of the problem to be explored, and that permission of the original author is obtained.

Construction of the questionnaire or survey instrument to be used in any study is critical to the success of the study. Questions or statements should be worded so that there is no chance to misinterpret their meanings. In addition, respondents should be given clear choices from which to select one answer. If a number or percentage is required as a response, don't ask respondents to fill one in; instead, give them a choice of ranges. It is thus much easier to code answers, extract additional useful data, and perform computer analysis.

The length of the questionnaire must also be considered. It must be sufficient to elicit enough information, yet not so long as to cause respondents to put it aside. Ten minutes is the maximum reasonable length of time to ask someone who is busy to spend filling out a survey. Sometimes the business person's view of academic research is formed by such absurdities as the 11-page questionnaire that some well intentioned but thoughtless researcher has sent out to a thousand CEOs. "Does this person live in an ivory tower?" wonders the busy executive before dropping the mass of paper into the circular file or giving it to the office "gofer" to fill out. Therefore, pretest the instrument to assess the time it takes to fill it out and to see if respondents have any problems understanding any of the questions or instructions. Ten to 15 individuals are considered enough to pretest any survey. They can provide a critique of the wordings and from their responses the researcher can see if the questionnaire is eliciting the answers he or she expects.

In many cases those who design surveys find that their questions lead the respondent because of non-neutral words or phraseology. Care must be taken in the selection and use of words and phrases so that the most neutral responses are solicited.

The next step is to decide whether the sample of the population to be surveyed is random or non-random. A truly random sample means that anyone within that population to be surveyed has an equal chance

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of being selected. This type of sample provides the opportunity for the most valid research results from which conclusions can be generated. There are a number of ways of selecting a random or representative sample of the population, including simple random, stratified random and cluster sampling. The second type of sample, non-random, is generally used when the population to be surveyed is small and one mails to all of them; this is also called a census. Most national organizations, associations and corporations have mailing lists they are willing to make available for legitimate research. These provide excellent populations for surveys. Joseph Gregg has a fine article, "Questionnaire Construction," in the Fall 1989 issue of *FIU Hospitality Review*. Appendix A lists this article as one of its "Top Ten" references.

Number of Returns Is Important

In all cases, it is important to have a sufficient number of returns in order to have the most reliable results. Gregg provides a statistical formula with which to estimate the number of responses needed within certain parameters to be able to generalize conclusions for the whole population. It is generally necessary to plan for a second, and even a third mailing to get the greatest percentage of responses possible.

In the case of the hospitality industry, if the population receiving the survey perceives that the results will benefit them in some way, they are more likely to return the questionnaire. Therefore, the cover letter and instructions which accompany the survey must convey that message to respondents. One can offer to let them know the results of the survey if they include their name and address and a request for the results; one can then follow through with an executive summary. The author should stress how the study will benefit the industry and advance the understanding of the area being researched. The cover letter should be brief, one page and no more, and provide a deadline for return. The questionnaire can be printed on both sides so it looks shorter and should include clear instructions on how to fill it out. If it is printed on both sides, it is important to put "please turn over" on the bottom of the page so they do not miss the back. Questionnaires should be coded in some way so second and third mailings can be done, if necessary; however, the author must guarantee respondents confidentiality. Including a self-addressed, stamped envelope is a key to getting responses in a more expedient manner.

A return of 20 to 30 percent or more on a sample of several hundred or more can provide good results. If the sample or population surveyed is one that has a vested interest in the results, especially if they see that the results might provide them with industry information to assist their jobs, a 40 to 60 percent response rate is reasonable. The important thing for the researcher to remember is that a handful of responses will not generate results from which one can generalize. Therefore, second and even third mailings may need to be considered.

The survey should also ask for the demographics of the population. These present a good profile of respondents and also provide the opportunity for cross-tabulations of data by such factors as age, education

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and experience, if relevant, and by size, population, or economic factors of employers or companies respondents may represent. This is valuable information when attempting to generalize data and come to conclusions.

Some academic administrators feel that financial support is one indicator of quality, good or bad, in a piece of research. Better still, from the administration's point-of-view, funded research can be useful in attracting donations, recruiting new faculty, or enrolling students. A study supported by the National Restaurant Association, for instance, would be publicized and perhaps used as a lure for prospective students. On the other hand, the administration would probably rather forget that a faculty member had done a study for a tobacco company on the benefits of smoking.

There is some criticism of industry-funded research–whether it is performed in house by the business or performed by some agency outside the business–merely because the funding corporation hopes that the results of the study enhance profits. Such criticism ignores the fact that even the most altruistic government agency has goals which its research funds support. All research must be funded by someone. It is naive to suppose that the funding agency has no hopes, no preconceived notion as to what the results will show.

Step Two: Grant Seeking and Academic Research Tie Together

Research sponsored by a prestigious grant maker is easier to have published in leading journals. If the journal is refereed, reviewers will be aware that other well-qualified reviewers have already certified the quality of the work for the granting agency. In some narrow, specialized fields of research, they could be the same people. If the journal is a trade publication supported by advertising or subscriptions, the editor will be aware of the power of the grant maker's name.

"Publish or perish" does not tell it all. In an academic institution, promotion and tenure can depend upon one's success in bringing in outside funds. At some institutions, the size of one's annual raise, travel budget, and office are pegged to successful grant seeking. The faculty member who "brings home the bacon" may get a reduced course load or "plum" courses. Some hospitality researchers have obtained funds to travel, buy equipment, fund their summer salaries, and hire clerical assistants. Others have received scholarships or fellowships that allow them to study specialized subjects or get advanced degrees.

Many grant seekers experience needless frustration and time loss before they "learn the ropes." There are three published works which can turn anyone into an expert grant seeker in the hospitality field. Virginia White's *Grants* is a highly readable, thorough overview mixed with humor and subtle insights. Herman Holtz's *Government Contracts* is indispensable within its area. Lynn Huffman and Pam Cummings authored an article in *Hospitality Education and Research Journal* which is up-to-date and the best source for those who need grant requesting techniques tailored for the hospitality field. See Appendix A for a "Top Ten Reference List."

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Researchers will find that, properly approached, the process of requesting a grant requires little more work than would (or should) be done in any case. As part of research, budgets, questionnaires, methodologies, and clerical details all must be planned for whether or not a grant is in the offing. What is bothersome about a grant is that all of these must be planned in a formal way before most investigators are ready to address them. The seeming waste of energy and thought can be maddening, when all the researcher really wants to do is get on with a fascinating investigation. It is essential to seek help.

Most colleges and universities have grants offices which can help investigators who know what they want to do. The benefits to the institution can be as great as the benefits to the faculty member who wrote the proposal which secured the grant. Such offices assist with finding an agency with the same interest, with the expression of ideas in financial and statistical terms acceptable to grant maker review panels, and with the formidable job of putting it all in smooth, polished form in time for some arbitrary deadline. Best of all, they know which research topics are currently in vogue. However, their assistance is essential in the four phases of grant seeking:

- searching for the right agency
- getting an advocate or that agency's staff
- writing a good proposal
- preparing the basis for the next grant

Each phase should be considered carefully.

Strategy Can Assist in Search for Grant Makers

All grant makers want to define problems, advance the state of knowledge and offer solutions in an area that they see as important. Most agencies are actively seeking researchers who share their interests. There are journals which can help bring the two together.

Timing is essential. Grant giving follows trends–fads, according to the cynics–and it is necessary to keep abreast of them if one is to succeed at grantsmanship. A serious grant hunter might read the *Federal Register* each week, the Monday *Washington Post,* the *Commerce Business Daily, The Chronicle of Higher Education, The New York Times.* The *Taft Corporation Directory* and the *Annual Registry of Grants* would also be helpful.

Computer data searches are usually a year or more out of date. Their main use is to ensure that the literature review section of a grant proposal has not overlooked something significant. They are nearly useless as a grant hunting source and can waste time.

Another waste of time for the unwary grant seeker is the situation where the grant maker has decided one particular insider will get the grant or contract. Such "wired proposals" comply with the letter of the law and regulations that are supposed to prevent the exclusion of other qualified proposals. Symptoms include the following:

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- an extremely short period in which to prepare the proposal. It does not matter to the insiders because their proposal was done before the RFP was ever issued.
- improbable constraints on budget, personnel, facilities or some other area. These are tailored to the insider.
- hazy evaluation criteria. The grant maker wants to pick the winner based upon a hidden set of criteria or the winner has already been selected.
- an air of secrecy when the grants specialist calls the grant maker. They cannot afford to be specific.

The "wired proposal" is not as rare as one would like to think. If one can avoid it–or, become the beneficiary–then the next step is assembling a good proposal.

Writing a Good Proposal Is Important

A grant proposal must be as well organized and written as any published article. Like the article, it is the author's written representative. It has a descriptive section, or plan, which tells what will be done. This section, along with literature reviews, can be published as part of an article after the work has been completed. What is often overlooked is that much of the material that goes into the grant proposal is itself publishable. Descriptions of methodology, statistical techniques, questionnaires, data collection, and literature reviews are all virtually unchanged, except for verb tense when the final results are published. Unlike the article, a proposal must make a request and persuade the reader to grant that request. It also makes a promise or commitment.

The specific makeup of a proposal depends upon the RFP sent out by the grant maker. This should be studied with care, especially with respect to financial matters. It is important to allow for indirect costs. Inflated salaries, beyond the inflation and raise allowance, can get a proposal writer blacklisted. Most grant makers expressly forbid overload.

Some good ideas are rejected for trivial reasons. Any directions for the physical makeup of a document should be followed exactly. Elaborate bindings are a waste and can defeat a proposal before it is read. Anyone who has seen the mailroom of a large government organization or private foundation comes away with a vivid impression. Mailroom personnel are under instructions to separate proposal copies and components according to rigid formula. Anything that does not fit the formula may be discarded or put in a slush pile where it can sit for months.

Confusion may be a cause for needless rejection. Is it sufficient to have a postmark or must the proposal be delivered by the deadline? If a document must be postmarked, it should be hand carried to the post office to ensure that the postmark is done exactly as required. Of the proposals that get out of the mailroom, as many as 40 percent may be rejected because of careless organization or writing.

For the rest, the typical review criteria are as follows:

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- originality and significance
- clarity and completeness
- responsiveness to RFP
- internal consistency
- consistency with ideals of the organization
- capability of the applicant and access to facilities (up-to-date vitae should reflect current job description)
- accountability procedures within the researcher's organization
- reasonableness of funding and goals

Every Proposal Needs an Advocate

It is important that the researcher get to know someone inside the grant-making organization. When trying to establish such contacts, the best place to start is with one's own grant specialist. Barring that, the telephone should be used.

Personal relationships can be developed as part of grant seeking. Sometimes the place to start is the *Federal Yellow Book* of office and telephone numbers. Useful steps include the following:

- sending a letter to a specific individual; outlining the idea and stating a call will be made for an appointment
- after a week, calling for the appointment
- bringing the full proposal to the appointment

All the homework should be done before the researcher shows up for the appointment. His or her own institution will have specific policies that ensure it complies with a host of federal and state regulations. It is important to be aware of those that are relevant and prepared to discuss them. Areas of particular concern are protection of human subjects, civil rights, property acquisition and disposition, patents and copyrights, and care of lab animals.

Foundation Should Be Built For the Grant

In one sense, every grant is a gamble. The grant maker is gambling that something good will result from an expenditure. By this logic, the best grant recipients are those who have already successfully completed funded projects. The worst risks are those who, for one reason or another, did something unacceptable under previous grants. This last group constitutes what is in effect a blacklist. Getting onto the blacklist is almost never a result of the quality of one's research. Almost always, it is the result of poor record-keeping and bad financial decisions.

Audits are never a problem if the grant receiver is careful to protect the reputation of the grant giver. Federal grants in particular are subject to close scrutiny by outside agencies ranging from the unbiased General Accounting Office to hostile congressional staffs intent on cut-

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ting the budget of the granting agency. It is necessary to keep meticulous records of expenses and clear them through the channels set up within the researcher's own institution. Large expenditures toward the end of the grant period will be questioned and may trigger a detailed audit.

If the idea is sound, if the proposal is persuasive, and if the researcher has sought out advocates, then funding will become available. It remains to perform the research.

Step Three: Good Experiment Design Ensures Results

Business research in the United States is nearly always applied research as opposed to fundamental or theoretical research. It is important for a scholar to decide which kind is to be done. In the first case, there will be a definite, usable result such as a new product, a way to increase the occupancy of a particular hotel, a cooking method which increases the yield of a menu item, or a policy which reduces labor turnover by a certain percent in a given job category. Applied research usually provides an immediate benefit such as improved profitability or a competitive advantage. Much of it is done on a strictly proprietary basis, is not published, and remains closely held inside the company that did the work.

Even work sponsored by government agencies may often have some definite objective or application such as increasing business ownership in minority ethnic groups or increasing the number of French tourists visiting the Orlando area. More often than not, the research applies to some objective which can be achieved in a relatively short time period.

Fundamental or theoretical research seldom has any immediate use. If it solves a problem at all, the solution may be in the far future. It offers no proprietary benefits and cannot be patented or copyrighted. It might open the door to a host of applied research projects or it might remain an intellectual curiosity with no apparent use. For example, the development of a mathematical model of the fast food industry could suggest new product research.

Many researchers have difficulties because they have not, in their own minds, determined whether they are doing applied or fundamental, theoretical research.

It is difficult to get funding for fundamental research because it is almost impossible to state the problem. The best a researcher can come up with is something like this: "I might find something interesting if you let me travel around the world photographing the art work in famous restaurants." Imagine the problem George Boole would have had in getting funding for the study of the then useless binary numbers. Publication will be in some small, esoteric journal.

On the other hand, a well-organized researcher can nearly always get funding for applied research because it lends itself well to a precise statement of the problem. It is always possible to state an objective, show how it is significant to do the work, and phrase a question whose answer will be useful. When these can be done, the actual research and publication follow easily. Major journals will offer the

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work to a wide audience of business executives.

In applied research, dependent variables (responses) and variable factors are the two keys to designing an experiment; the researcher must make some assumptions about causes and effects. For instance, a chef might wish to examine the relationship between two preparation methods and product yield. Clearly, product yield is an effect and the preparation method is the cause. Stated another way, product yield is a response to the variable factor preparation method. The underlying objective is to control yield by varying the preparation method. In a more elaborate version of this experiment, one might vary two factors, brand and preparation method, while measuring two responses, taste and yield. Sometimes it is not wise to assume any casual relationship and it is not at all clear which is the response and which is the variable factor. Suppose one wished to examine the relationship between coffee drinking and executive salary. What if one found a pattern showing higher coffee consumption accompanying higher salaries. Which is the response and which is the variable factor? Does a high salary cause one to drink more coffee or does high coffee consumption cause one to move into higher-paid positions? Or does it mean that both coffee consumption and salary are responses to some variable, or hidden, factor not mentioned?

In this case, the flaw in the underlying assumption is apparent (especially if the study was funded by a coffee company); more often it is not. Especially in health and food relationships, it is possible to create spurious relationships. Suppose one finds a correlation between blood pressure and fast food consumption? Is one a cause of the other? Or are both responses to some other variable factor not mentioned?

Techniques for getting the information should be reasonable or at least practical. One should be able to count or measure something, perhaps only the number of "yes" responses. Even subjective factors such as taste can be quantified. For the independent variables, one must decide whether they will be constant, assume certain levels, or be averaged out by a randomization process.

The analysis of the experiment includes data reduction, computer processing, if necessary, and the computation of some test statistics such as t-tests and chi squares, all of which are explained in any good research text.

Step 4: Publishing the Results is Rather Easy

Writing a good research article, one that communicates vividly and clearly the results of data collection, is relatively easy if the researcher divides his or her writing efforts into several specific sections:

- introduction
- methodology
- demographics of respondents
- survey results (this may be further subdivided by category)

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- summary and conclusions/recommendations

The hardest part is the introduction. Too many researchers do not give a thought to beginning an article in an interesting, thought-provoking manner. They just assume their research will be read, but that's not always true. The introduction, which means the first paragraph or two or three, should take a narrative approach to intrigue–or maybe surprise–the reader and draw him or her into the article. This can take the form of a positive statement or summary of some of the more intriguing data–or a strong statement of the theses of the article–or a quote—or an anecdote.

Once that has been accomplished, the rest of the article reports the data. A summary of methodology, an explanation of how the population and sample were selected, and any other pertinent information comes next. This should give the reader a clear picture of how the study was done and should also include the dates and number of mailings completed.

Reporting the demographic data is a simple process; it gives the reader a picture of the respondents and any generalizations made about them as a group and/or about any organizations or companies they represent.

The next step, which provides the largest part of any study, is reporting the results of the research. This area may be divided into a number of sections depending upon how the data group themselves by category. The researcher will have percentages available on data, but to make these figures more realistic, he or she should also report how many respondents the percentage represents. Whenever possible, reporting "slightly more than one half" rather than "52 percent" is more useful to reader comprehension, as it is when the word "percent" is written out, rather than used as a sign.

Data by themselves can be boring and often hard to understand, so the researcher should explain the data as he or she reports them. It is simple to give significance at this point.

Conclusions Are Vital to Research

The final task is to summarize the study and to offer conclusions and recommendations based on the data. This section ties in with the introduction to the article and brings the research full cycle. The conclusion should recommend action, modification, further research or something conclusive and should tie the research together. It should also be as interesting as the introduction.

With regard to overall style of the article, authors should always write in the third person (never using the pronouns "I" or "we" or commanding the reader with "you"). In addition, he or she should be aware of the tenets of good writing style which include using strong action verbs; short paragraphs; concise, terse, forceful statements; and a variety of vocabulary. The use of bullets to list important points also helps the writing style. With regard to guidelines on capitalization, punctuation and other style requirements, authors would do well to consult the Associated Press *Stylebook* which is in use by many journals and which

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provides a good summary of these uses. In addition, Appendix A includes a "Top 10 Reference List" for researchers and writers.

Some subheads will occur as natural divisions within the article; others should be inserted for reader interest. Subheads are mini-headlines; they include a subject and verb and summarize and highlight the next several paragraphs. They are also brief. The same style follows through for the title of the article; sentences communicate best and titles should therefore reflect this structure.

With regard to footnote format, today's preferred use is as endnotes, not on each page or in parentheses in the text.

The final piece of writing to be completed is a 50–75 word abstract or preface to the article which follows the cover page and which provides a summary of the piece.

The author is then ready to send his or her manuscript to a journal for possible publication. A researcher should always have the style and format of a specific journal in mind before beginning to write and then should write to that format. This increases the chances of getting published since a major overhaul might be avoided and since an editor will find it easier to follow the article. Most journals will provide a list of requirements to authors. It is wise to follow them to the letter.

Conducting meaningful research and writing for journals in the field is very rewarding. It brings recognition to one's efforts and scholarship as well as advances the body of knowledge in that field. The hospitality industry needs good researchers who are willing to communicate what they learn to others across the industry and across educational programs in the field. The 1990s present many challenges to the field and many avenues for relevant research.

Appendix A
Top Ten Reference List
For Hospitality Researchers and Writers

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