

WHO WILL GET THE MONEY FOR RESEARCH?

C. W. Hill, Cornell University

At this writing, information on policies, regulations, and procedures for developing and funding research proposals under P.L. 88-210 Section 4c is not available. The framework within which research proposals must be submitted is needed and it will be helpful. But after such is known there will remain questions and uncertainties. There are many questions relative to the approval and funding of research projects, such as: What kind of projects will be approved? Who will receive the grants? What institutions and agencies will receive grants? On what basis will projects be approved? And, so the questions go, on and on. It is assumed that there will be some basis for approving research proposals. It is further assumed that there will be certain factors which will be given consideration in evaluating the proposals. Who will approve research proposals and on what basis is not known, but there is a possibility that some of the factors presented below may have some bearing in evaluating and approving research proposals.

Past Performance

A race horse fan attempts to pick the winner and bet on a winner. Past achievements open doors to the future. The opportunity to conduct research must be earned. It is not automatically granted. So, individuals and institutions that have been involved in research and who have produced are more likely to receive favorable considerations. If a researcher should leave the institution, can the research be continued and completed? The record and reputation of the individuals and institutions will be a much more important factor for research requiring a long period of time.

The rationale for research. A problem has some relationship to what has been done and its relationships to the situation in which it exists. From a review and study of related studies a deductive chain of reasoning is developed. One builds upon that which has been done. Through deductive reasoning problems come into sharp focus that help in developing hypotheses or specific purposes of the study.

Qualifications of the Researcher

The qualification factor is closely associated with past performance. The individual who has the insight and ability to ask the critical and important questions and the research ability to design project proposals will be fortunate indeed. He will have the opportunity to be involved in large projects.

There is not a great number of well qualified researchers in vocational education. Those who are not well qualified, but have some ability and much interest should have the opportunity to do research and develop their abilities to do it.

The AVA Research Committee has recommended that the neophyte who has interest and some ability in research be given encouragement. They may be provided for under small or medium sized grants. With basic education in statistics and research methodology the individual can make a beginning and advance in research.

Identification of Needed Research

A thorough knowledge of a vocational field and related disciplines should help to give the researcher penetrating insight and vision in identifying the problems that need to be and can be researched. One of the most important, if not the most important, characteristics of a researcher is the ability to ask the questions for which answers are needed. In many areas vocational educators should have the ability to come up with high priority problems. For some areas of study psychologists, sociologists, economists, administrators, and others may assist or independently identify the critical questions. In the past we have had the lone researcher and likely we shall have him in the future. More and more we find the team approach to research in other fields. The team effort has potential in vocational education.

Interdisciplinary Cooperation

Large problems are likely to be complex and difficult. In the study of student behavior and its relationship to vocational education, whether they be regular students or disadvantaged youth, psychologist, and sociologist could and should team up with vocational educators. Economist and business administrators could assist in a labor market study. The nature of the problem will dictate the kind of researchers needed. Today, the joint effort and interdisciplinary approach is looked upon with much favor.

Economics of the Study

Two aspects related to economics are (1) value received for money spent and (2) time used. It is likely that the researcher, his administrator and the funding agency will look at the cost of a project to decide whether or not the problem and its likely outcomes warrant spending the money. Or, is the cost far in excess of what it should be? Value received for money spent may be considered but only time will give the answer.

Another phase of the economics of research is the allotment and use of staff time. Time is critical with most of us. So, what are the big problems; the critical and important problems that need research? Time should be used for studies that will make a contribution in vocational education. The man with little time may need to get results in a relatively short time. The researcher with much money and time can take time to probe in depth.

A Planned Research Program

A planned program may or may not be a factor in the approval of research projects under Section 4c. It is a factor when seeking money to support research under Hatch funds. As time goes by it is likely that those who have planned long-range research programs will have the rationale to justify and support requests for additional support.

The aim of P.L. 88-210 is training for gainful employment. Three broad areas of vocational education are: (1) the students, (2) the occupations, and (3) the training programs. A long range program might center upon one of the above areas. Or, it could concentrate upon out-of-school youth, occupations

for them or training programs. In recent months studies have centered upon identifying off-farm agricultural occupations. Some work has been done on occupational competencies and competency levels for various occupations. A study could be made that would aid in the development of area vocational schools. There could well be many problems requiring intensive study contributing to the development and operation of the program.

The factors that will be used in approving research programs for funding will depend upon who reviews the proposals. The vocational education administrator will want action, moving, going programs with quick results. While the scholarly researcher in the related disciplines will look for more of the basic fundamental truths. There is a place for a range of projects from the basic research to developmental projects.

We have the opportunity - the finances - to do needed research. The torch has been passed to us. We should strive to seek out new knowledge that will contribute in a significant way to the development and initiation of vocational education programs.