

Additional guidance for the preparation of research proposals: Diversity and Equality

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is committed to policies and services which embrace diversity and which promote equality of opportunity. The Foundation expects proposals to consider all dimensions of diversity (including, but not necessarily limited to, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, age and sexuality) and, wherever appropriate, to include explicit attention to these issues.

However, we recognise that conducting research that engages appropriately and sensitively with dimensions of diversity raises complex ethical and scientific issues. The guidance below is intended to alert proposers to some of the key challenges that arise in researching race/ethnicity and to encourage careful reflection on whether and how best to incorporate attention to race/ethnicity within their proposed research. This guidance is currently in pilot form and should be regarded as a supplement to the standard guidance for proposers available on the Foundation website. The guidance, though focused on race/ethnicity, should not be taken to imply that other dimensions of diversity should be given less attention. We have chosen to focus initially on race/ethnicity since there are widespread concerns that social research in this area may often lack scientific and ethical rigour.

Researching race/ethnicity sensitively and appropriately

Focus and framing of the research

There will be some areas of investigation in which race/ethnicity is not the most pressing dimension that requires attention. However, race/ethnicity is a very important axis of identity in contemporary societies and there is extensive evidence of significant ethnic variation in many indicators of wellbeing. Proposers should therefore carefully consider the pros and cons of incorporating attention to race/ethnicity within their work. Where studies do not engage with issues of race/ethnicity, proposers should consider the limitations that might ensue in terms of the knowledge generated and its transferability and utility in a multiethnic context. Whether or not proposers decide to engage with race/ethnicity a clear rationale for the approach adopted should be presented.

Proposers that do decide to engage with race/ethnicity should be cognizant of common criticisms that have been levelled at the focus and framing of past research in this field, including:

- a failure to address issues that are of greatest concern to minority ethnic individuals and communities;

- a tendency to overlook the multiple ways in which racial/ethnic identity may impact upon people's experiences and outcomes and rather to focus too narrowly on cultural aspects
- inadequate attention to racism and racial exclusion;
- a tendency to portray racial/ethnic identities as fixed and unchanging, rather than recognising their fluid and context-dependent nature
- a tendency to downplay both the diversity between individuals labelled with the same ethnicity as well as similarities across individuals labelled with different ethnicities;
- a tendency to ignore 'majority' and 'White' ethnicities;
- inadequate justification for, and consistency in, the ways in which key terms (such as race, ethnicity, culture, and so on) are employed;
- inadequate recognition of the potential for research in this area to harm the interests of minority ethnic populations if not carefully conceived and conducted

Operationalising race/ethnicity: categories and labels

Some studies will focus directly on understanding processes of ethnic identification. Qualitative methods are often useful in such studies and researchers will often avoid the use of fixed ethnic categories. Instead, a more exploratory approach that allows the multiple and diverse constructions of ethnicity to be examined will often be appropriate.

However, many studies seek to understand race/ethnicity as a potentially important determinant of experiences and outcomes and such studies tend to be framed differently. Here researchers will usually seek to delineate sets of individuals categorised and labelled as belonging to one or more racial/ethnic 'groups'. Proposers should carefully consider the best way to operationalise such 'group' membership in any particular study and provide clear justification for the approach employed. It should be recognised that particular categorisations will be useful in some research studies but be less helpful in others, depending on the focus of investigation. Unless studies categorise race/ethnicity with sufficient sensitivity and precision they can fail to generate meaningful data. Researchers should recognise the pros and cons of developing bespoke categories as compared to employing standard, administrative ethnic categories (such as Census 2001 categories) which were developed with acceptability and salience in mind. While bespoke categories may be more suited to the research questions at hand, standard categories will enable comparison between research and practice contexts and are used in population estimates.

Proposers should be aware that any attempt at categorising ethnicity is inherently imprecise and be alert to the ways in which the use of fixed racial/ethnic categories

can serve to exaggerate homogeneity within 'groups' and differences between 'groups'.

Sampling and sample sizes

In studies that involve data collection from samples of individuals categorised as belonging to particular racial/ethnic 'groups' proposers should give careful consideration to how such samples are drawn. Regardless of whether qualitative or quantitative methods are used, proposers should ensure that the sampling approach employed is appropriate and generates samples of adequate size and comparability for all the 'groups' of interest. It may be necessary to restrict a study's focus to a limited number of delineated 'groups' in order to ensure that analyses are not compromised by insufficient or incomparable data from different groups. For some studies an exclusive sample of people identified as belonging to just one ethnic category may be warranted, but this should be clearly justified by proposers and the implications for analysis and interpretation should be made clear.

Generating and analysing data

In studies that involve the drawing of comparisons between racial/ethnic 'groups' or the linking of racial/ethnic 'group' membership to particular experiences or outcomes, proposers should give careful consideration to the data generation tools and analytical methods employed.

Comparative analyses between racial/ethnic 'groups' can be compromised if data collection tools operate differently for different 'groups', for instance because of cultural incongruity. In particular, working across languages requires the use of rigorous translation techniques with particular attention to ensuring conceptual equivalence. Researchers also need to be well informed about the cultural and social circumstances of research participants so that data are not misinterpreted or misrepresented.

The multidimensional nature of race/ethnicity means that racial/ethnic labels can rarely be taken as proxies for underlying causal factors. Instead, studies should, wherever possible, generate and analyse data on an adequate range of potentially important factors so that underlying causal pathways can be explored. Where such detailed data are not available, proposers should be explicit about the limits to the analyses that they propose to undertake.

Proposers should also seek to avoid the following pitfalls in planning their analyses:

- failure to explore the internal diversity of racial/ethnic groups (such as by generation, education, socioeconomic status and so on)

- uncritically taking the 'majority' or 'White' group as the norm against which other 'groups' are compared
- over-emphasising 'race/ethnicity' to the exclusion of other axes of difference
- over-emphasising difference between 'groups' so that absolute levels of outcomes/experiences of interest within particular 'groups' are overlooked

Presentation and dissemination

Proposers should be aware of the inherently politicised and often controversial nature of research in the area of race/ethnicity. Research findings relating to issues of race/ethnicity often attract significant attention and there is a need to manage from the outset, the ways in which such findings might be interpreted, distorted and (mis)used by the media and other actors. Proposers should show awareness of these ethical issues in the framing and design of their research and take particular care where there is significant socio-cultural difference between the research team and the research participants.

As with all research funded by the Foundation, proposers should consider carefully the best way to present findings and effectively disseminate to a variety of audiences. Proposers should give attention to how their research products can adequately 'give voice' to, and be a valuable resource for, those who are the subject of research. These issues require consideration from the outset .

Care of participants

Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure the safety and comfort of study participants regardless of their racial/ethnic identity. Minority ethnic participants *may* be at increased risk of vulnerability and there will be a need to consider: power imbalances; how to convey information appropriately, how to gain consent in a culturally appropriate fashion; how to ensure avoidance of participant harm and so on. All research team members should be adequately trained and prepared for their role. Individuals involved in data collection with study participants should be alert to the potential for harm through insensitive or inappropriate behaviour. Many of these issues are not specific to research that involves minority ethnic individuals, but are rather generic principles of ethical research practice. Nevertheless, proposers should show an awareness of how these issues may manifest themselves in their particular study and how they will be addressed.

Involvement of people with direct experience

Drawing on appropriate expertise from minority ethnic communities can help ensure that a study identifies issues that are relevant to these communities and that research engages sensitively and effectively with minority ethnic participants. However, effective involvement requires careful planning and sensitive orchestration. Proposers should show an appreciation of the potential ethical and practical issues

that may arise and ensure adequate planning and resourcing so that engagement is meaningful and participants are not adversely affected by their involvement in the project.

Resources and practicalities

Researching race/ethnicity sensitively and appropriately will have resource implications and there is a need to ensure the necessary skills and experience within the research team as well as an adequate budget. Recruitment of participants from some minority ethnic communities may be time consuming and may require tailored strategies. Working across languages can be expensive if there is a need to pay for external interpretation and translation services. Engaging minority ethnic individuals in the design and conduct of the research, for instance as peer researchers or as steering group members, will also imply additional resources particularly where there is a need to work across languages. Where necessary, proposers are encouraged to seek advice from researchers experienced in these areas to ensure that budgeting is appropriate to the work that is planned.

Proposers are also encouraged to reflect on the social diversity (including, but not limited to, ethnic identity) of their research team and how researcher characteristics may influence the conduct and findings of the research.