Writing health disparities research grants:
Tips from 3 decades of successful submissions

Part II

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Éxito! & MTPCCR Webinar
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UCSF Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center

❖ MTPCCR Alums:

Have you completed an alumni survey in the past two years?

Do we have your updated academic/career status?

MTPCCR Alumni Survey Link:

https://redcap.ucsf.edu/surveys/?s=HWJK3L4JWY

or contact

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Webinar I Recap

Overarching Concepts

- ## Mentors

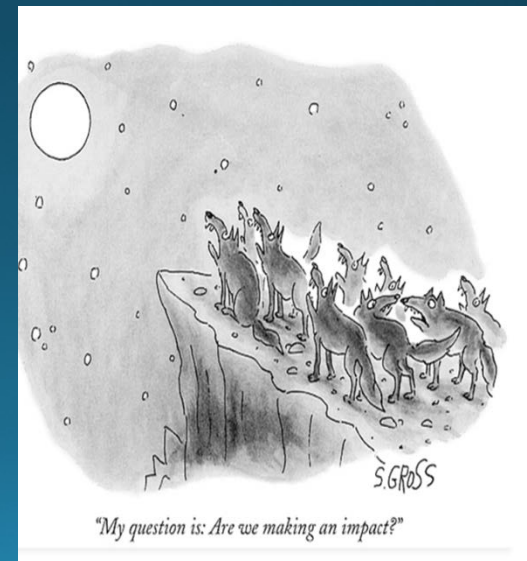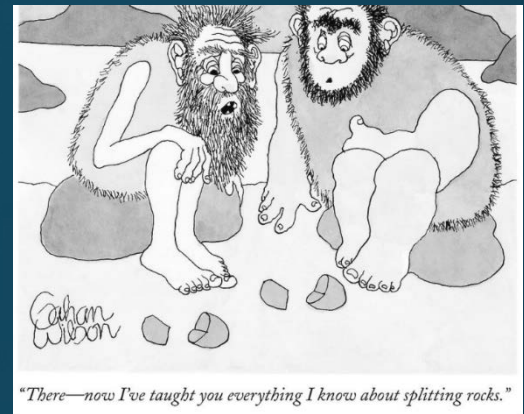 *Intensive hands-on brainstorming,*

  editing, writing

- ## Reviewers/Review Process
  Give them explicitly what they need to draft their review

- ## Research Question

  Must have novel aspects & real-world origins/applicability

"There—now I've taught you everything I know about splitting rocks."

"My question is: Are we making an impact?"

Webinar II - ???

- **Overarching Concepts**
  - Scope
  - Pilot data
  - Integration

- **Grant Components**
  - Specific Aims page
  - Background & Preliminary Studies
  - Methods/Conceptual Framework
  - Timeline
  - Budget
  - Budget Justification
  - Human Subjects
  - Response to prior review ("Introduction")

Overarching Concepts

Scope of the Study

#WEIRD

PYTHON DIES AFTER
BITING OFF MORE
THAN IT CAN CHEW

- Consult – there will be many different opinions
- Most common error: biting off too much
  - Everything takes *longer* and *costs more* than expected
  - Experienced reviewers know this; inexperienced reviewers need to be convinced

Scope of the Study

Outline all the steps that could possibly be taken to address your research question

then narrow it down
to what is doable
and appropriate

Optimal Scope

Overarching/long-term research question/goal

Incremental steps addressed by the current study

Next steps

*With the **ultimate goal** of increasing CRC screening among African American, Latino, and Vietnamese patients, the purpose of the proposed formative research is to develop and pilot test culturally appropriate guidelines and messages for use in a brief clinic intervention that will be implemented and evaluated **in a subsequent study**.*
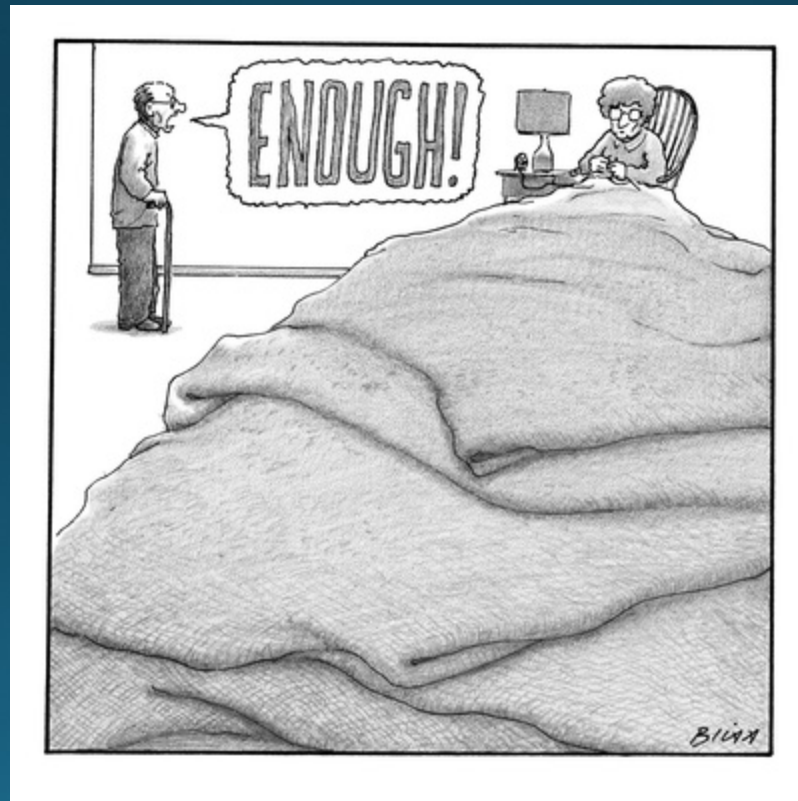
Scope

- What evidence is available (or missing) to support your work as the next essential step?
- Think through all methods in excruciating detail
- Explicitly outline your skills (and those of your team)
- Ascertain time needed to complete work
  - *seek out advice from others with experience in the methods/context you propose*
  - *when in doubt, double the allotted time*
- Carefully detail all essential costs
  - *again, get lots of input*
- State explicitly how & why you developed the scope

TIME IS THE ENEMY

BUDGET

Pilot Data

- Reviewers love, adore, are OBSESSED with pilot data

Pilot Data

- Minimal (for a small grant)

  - Focus groups with diverse public hospital cancer patients

    1 multi-ethnic English & 1 Spanish-speakers
  - Formative data showed that these patients WOULD use the CIS if promoted to them appropriately and if telephone protocols were adapted specifically for them

Pilot Data

- ## Extensive (for an R01)

The proposed study is positioned at the intersection of key gaps in the genetic counseling literature and the strengths of our research team with its record of experience forging new channels of communication for underserved women on HBOC, and in-depth exploration of genetic counseling communication with ethnically and linguistically diverse patients of low-income and low health literacy. **While two recent randomized noninferiority trials** compared telephone and in-person GC in an academic hospital and in rural Utah community clinics with overall equivalent results,[7,8] it is unlikely that these findings translate directly to the safety net. **As our current research is revealing** , the meanings many public hospital patients take away from genetic counseling are inconsistent with counselors' intent due to cultural differences and health literacy.
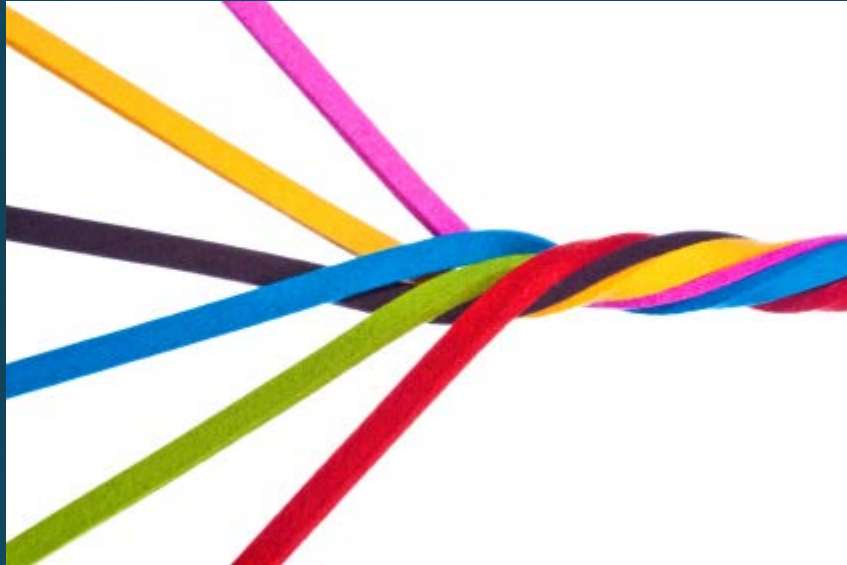
Pilot Data

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Be careful…

- Note the need for additional formative data
- Plan to collect that as part of the start of your study
- Next phase(s) will based on that pilot data

- MUST STATE
  – if this, then that
  – if the other, then x,y,z

Integration

All grant elements must be TIGHTLY integrated

- Aims   - Budget
- Methods   - Timeline
- Conceptual framework   - Skills of team
- Pilot data

Guide the reviewer…. step by step

Reviewers are not gazelles -

do not expect them to leap!

Guiding the reviewer (con't)

- Nothing in the proposal should be *implied*
  - know what your assumptions are and spell them out
  - justify every statement of fact
    - with literature
    - with your preliminary data
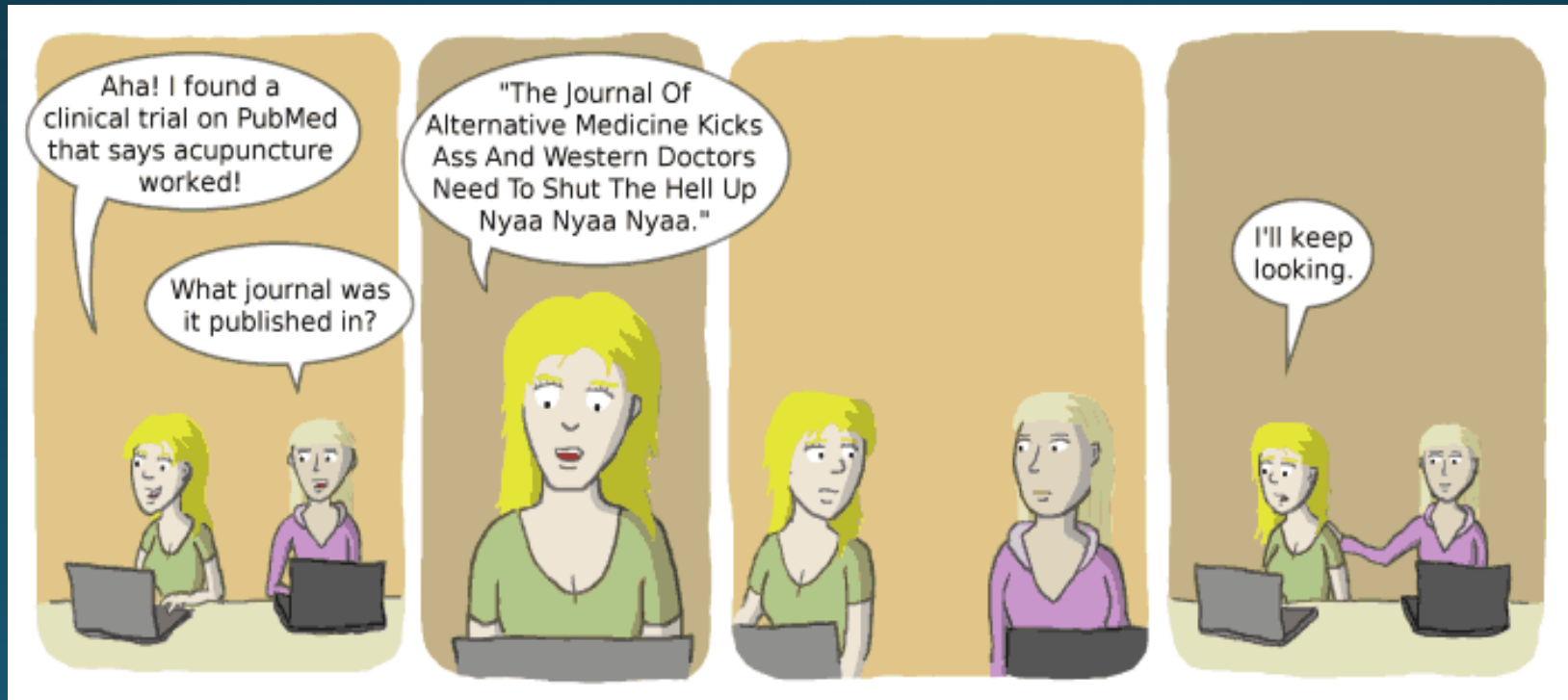 - Anything else **is an assumption** – which must be carefully, systematically justified
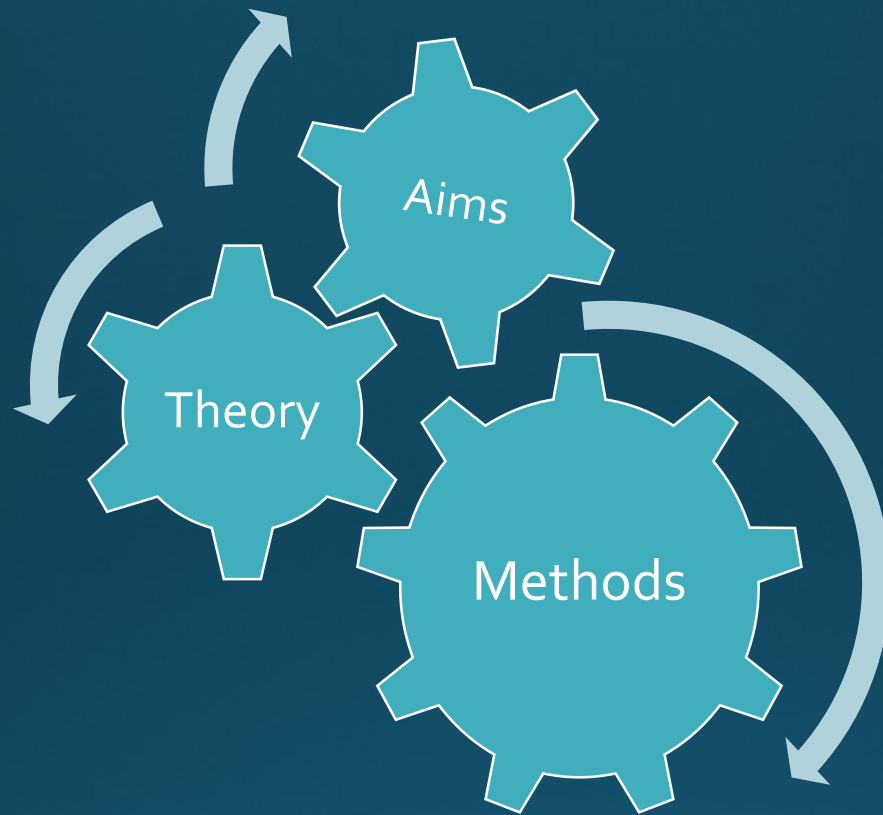
Guiding the reviewer (con't)

The proposed study is positioned at the intersection of key gaps in the PCa disparities literature and the strengths of our research team.

Gaps include sparse research on prostate screening SDM specific to both low-literacy men and to under-resourced settings where low-income men obtain screening. Examples of critical questions yet to be asked include: what really happens and what is possible regarding SDM in under-resourced settings? What is the meaning and potential of SDM for low literacy men? Is there an efficient alternative to the intensity of screening SDM when as much as 95% of tests end up normal (4.0 ng/mL).[60] Importantly, most decision aids and communication toolkits address provider-patient communication in isolation from the setting where it occurs.

Cite Cite Cite Cite

- Any factual statement must be supported
- The more current, the better (classics are fine, but also show recent applications/developments)
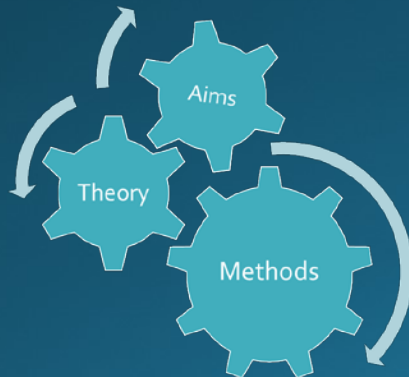- High quality journals/key researchers

All components must be tightly interconnected

Including Budget, Timeline, Human Subjects

Make an "integration table"

Aims	Conceptual Framework	Methods	Human Subjects	Team/Budget
1. To document current practices in shared decision-making for PSA testing	Inductive Social context Health literacy Patient-centered communication	Mixed Methods Ethnography In-depth interviews Observations Web survey	Identical to methods – more elaboration	Team – all critical expertise represented Budget – every cost item identified
2. To assess the feasibility of pre-biopsy counseling (PBC) for African American men	Adapt patient-centered communication functions and domains using "5As" model of behavior change	Observations Semi-structured interviews Phone surveys		

Grant Components

Specific Aims Page

- Relationship with reviewer is made or broken right here
- Writing style here is critical
  - *write and rewrite, again and again*
  - *vary sentence structure*
  - *not a single unnecessary word or phrase*
  - *flow must be tight*
- Content
  - *~ first two paragraphs: key elements of problem*
    - A small hint of drama is ok/good
  - *next: what this study is about*
    - who's doing it
    - key gaps in the literature
  - *tie it together with the research questions*
  - *aims*
  - *final statement*

All major issues are introduced here – all that follows are details