Robust Strategies for Improving the Use of Research Evidence in Public Policy

Webinar
June 2020
Today’s Webinar

PART 1
• Improving the Use of Research Evidence

PART 2
• Example 1: Testing a Robust Strategy to Get Evidence Used
• Example 2: Studying the Implementation of a Robust Strategy
• Questions

PART 3
• How to Pursue a Research Grant
• Questions
Our History

- Founded in 1936
- Committed to understanding human behavior through research
- Focus on the most pressing challenges confronting young people
- Support high-quality research
Focus Areas

**REDUCING INEQUALITY**

- Understand how programs, policies, and practices reduce inequality among young people in the United States
- Responses not causes/consequences

**IMPROVING THE USE OF RESEARCH**

- Understand how to create the conditions that improve the production and use of research evidence in ways that benefit youth
- Strategies not barriers to research use

Relevant to U.S. youth ages 5 - 25 years
Improving the Use of Research

What does it take to get research used in ways that benefit youth?

- Studies to identify and test strategies to improve the use of research.
- Studies to identify and test strategies for producing more useful research.
- Studies that test whether using research evidence to inform decisions leads to better outcomes for youth.
OVERVIEW

Improving the Use of Research

What does it take to get research used in ways that benefit youth?

• Studies to identify and test strategies to improve the use of research.
  • Studies to identify and test strategies for producing more useful research.
  • Studies that test whether using research evidence to inform decisions leads...

Uses of Research Evidence

- Instrumental
- Conceptual
Assessing the Use of Research

- What is a “robust strategy” to get evidence used?
  - A systematic approach to infuse evidence into the routine work of policy makers
  - Potent enough to make evidence visible and understood
- May take different forms
  - A tool that policy makers use to support their work
  - A structured process that policy makers follow so that evidence informs their decision making
  - May capitalize on existing structures, or build new ones
- Should be based on prior theory and evidence about the use of research evidence
- Should reflect deep understanding of the context in which evidence may be used
Assessing the Use of Research

- Today we are showcasing two examples of grants we have awarded that focus on developing and testing strategies to improve the use of research evidence.
- Both are in the domain of public policy:
  - One is at the federal level and the other is at the state level.
  - One is an impact study using methods that test cause and effect; the other is an implementation study that examines what is working, where, and why.
- Both show how to infuse research evidence into the everyday routines of decision makers.
Let’s Hear from Our Grantees

Max Crowley, associate professor of human development and family studies and director of the Evidence-to-Impact Collaborative at Penn State University

Itzhak Yanovitzky, professor of communication at Rutgers University
Example 1

Testing a Robust Strategy to Get Evidence Used
EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH-TO-POLICY COLLABORATION MODEL

Testing a Strategy to Get Evidence Used
OVERVIEW

• Research-to-Policy Collaboration (RPC) Model
• Current Evaluation
• Suggestions for Your Improving URE Proposal
USING RESEARCH IN POLICY

- Dissemination – necessary but insufficient
- Interactions are essential
- Fast moving policy windows
- Timely and relevant research
- Collaboration

Boaz et al., 2019; Oliver et al., 2014; Tseng, 2012
RPC MODEL: THEORY OF CHANGE

- Recognizing Policy Opportunities
- Relevant Translational Research
- Use of Research Evidence
- Researcher's Policy Competencies
- Policymaker-Researcher Collaboration
- Trusting Relationships

RESEARCH-TO-POLICY COLLABORATION: MODEL

Capacity Building

- **Step 1**: Policy Identification
- **Step 2**: Network Development
- **Step 3**: Capacity Building
- **Step 4**: Short-Term Needs

Collaboration

- **Step 5**: RPC Event
- **Step 6**: Strategic Planning
- **Step 7**: Rapid Response
FREQUENCY OF LEGISLATIVE REQUESTS FOR SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review Intervention Strategies</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarize Etiologic Evidence</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Impact of Existing Policy</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Analysis of Administrative Data</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare Policy Briefs</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer Legislative Language</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold Congressional Briefings or Support Hearings</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESOURCE CONSUMPTION FOR RPC IMPLEMENTATION
EVALUATION: WHAT WE WANTED TO KNOW

• How does the RPC impact researchers and legislative staff?
• Will congressional offices increase their use of research evidence in legislative activities?
• How might perceptions and experiences of collaboration through the RPC relate to different forms of evidence use among researchers and policymakers?
RPC MODEL EVALUATION DESIGN

RPC Evaluation

Congressional Office Intervention
- **Congressional Offices (N = 80)**
  - **Prior to the first needs assessment**
    - Assigned to RPC: Baseline Assessment, Quantitative Assessment (N = 40), Ethnography (N = 11)
    - Assigned to Control: Baseline Assessment, Quantitative Assessment (N = 40)
  - **Prior to the onsite RPC event**
    - Assigned to RPC: 2 Month Quantitative Assessment (N = 40)
    - Assigned to Control: 2 Month Quantitative Assessment (N = 40)
  - **Following the RPC event**
    - Assigned to RPC: 4 Month Quantitative Assessment (N = 40)
    - Assigned to Control: 4 Month Quantitative Assessment (N = 40)
  - **After completion of the rapid response period**
    - Assigned to RPC: 6 Months Quantitative Assessment (N = 40), Ethnography (N = 11)
    - Assigned to Control: 6 Months Quantitative Assessment (N = 40)

Researchers (N = 60)
- **Prior to developing the rapid response network**
  - Assigned to RPC: Baseline Assessment, Quantitative Assessment (N = 30), Ethnography (N = 11)
  - Assigned to Control: Baseline Assessment, Quantitative Assessment (N = 30)
  - **Immediately following RPC training**
    - Assigned to RPC: 2 Month Quantitative Assessment (N = 30)
    - Assigned to Control: 2 Month Quantitative Assessment (N = 30)
  - **Immediately following in-person meeting**
    - Assigned to RPC: 4 Month Quantitative Assessment (N = 30)
    - Assigned to Control: 4 Month Quantitative Assessment (N = 30)
  - **Following rapid response completion**
    - Assigned to RPC: 6 Months Quantitative Assessment (N = 30)
    - Assigned to Control: 6 Months Quantitative Assessment (N = 30)
MIXED METHODS EVALUATION

- Researcher
  - Researcher Survey
  - Researcher Interviews

- Collaboration
  - Collaborative Experience Survey
  - Observations of Collaboration

- Legislator
  - Staff Survey
  - Staff Interviews
  - Statements, social media, bills
SUGGESTIONS

• Consider strategy sustainability from the beginning
• Look for convergent evidence to build your evidence-base
• Map your measurement onto your theory of change
• Strive for opportunities to strengthen ability to make a causal inference

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Example 2

Studying the Implementation of A Robust Strategy
ROBUST STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE IN STATE POLICYMAKING

ITZHAK YANOYITZKY, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

https://comminfo.rutgers.edu/yanovitzky-itzhak
ROBUST STRATEGIES

- Too many interventions are focused on improving dissemination of research evidence to policymakers. This alone does not guarantee increased URE, if policymakers are not already able and motivated to use research. Successful strategies are focused on improving engagement with research evidence.

- The three Rs of robust strategies for improving URE:
  - **RESPONSIVE** – provide a good match to users’ needs, motivations, and circumstances (the research evidence they need, when they need it, the format they prefer, and how they plan to use research evidence).
  - **ROUTINIZED** – seek ways to integrate URE within existing individual and organizational routines (e.g., work flow, decisionmaking processes).
  - **RELATIONAL** – focused on building or leveraging existing relationships with users.
KNOWLEDGE BROKERING

- Patient advocacy organizations (PAOs) are uniquely positioned to broker research in health policymaking:
  - Credibility (reputation, recognized and trusted brands).
  - Established relationships with scientists, policymakers, and other policy actors.
  - Organizational capacity (resources, skilled personnel, defined roles and responsibilities).
  - Routines aimed at influencing policy.
  - Power to influence policy discourse.

- PAOs are a major and trusted broker of research to state policymakers. They are often consulted about the potential implications of implementing proposed policies.

- PAOs can be more effective knowledge brokers if we equip them with research evidence that speaks to the technical aspects of implementing proposed policies and likely constituents response to implementing these policies.
THE URE-RELATED PROBLEM

- In order to ensure that the best available research evidence is informing public policy, research is being synthesized and packaged into guidelines (Example: guidelines recommend routine screening for depression in children and adolescents aged 12 to 18-years-old).

- These guidelines offer prescriptions for action (what to do) but say little about how to implement them. Without clear prescriptions from research regarding implementation, policymakers (as well as practitioners) remain ambivalent about adopting scientific guidelines (e.g., feasibility, cost, and potential unintended effects of mandating and implementing universal screening for adolescent depression in schools).

- Research about the potential implications of implementing an evidence-informed policy is hard to come by, particularly for state policymakers, as they do not have the same levels of resources and access to hyperlocal research evidence.

- Can we use knowledge brokering effectively to this end?
THE INTERVENTION

- Researchers partners with PAOs to build local or regional research infrastructure to produce research that is responsive to policymakers’ knowledge needs regarding the implementation of evidence-based practices/policies.

- Researchers and PAOs also collaborate on co-designing tools (e.g., knowledge hubs) for engaging policymakers and other policy actors (e.g., media, advocates, professionals) with research evidence about potential barriers and facilitators to implementation of evidence-based practice/policy.

- PAOs receive advanced training on a suite of strategies and tools for effective knowledge brokering.
# PROJECT ASPEN

## Active Surveillance of Policy Ecosystems and Networks (ASPEN)

### RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

**Surveillance and Environmental Scan**
- Health indicators data.
- Legislative/executive/judicial actions.
- Public and constituent opinion data.
- News coverage and social media content/sentiment.
- Key stakeholders’ positions / concerns.
- New research / guidelines.

**Analysis**
- Tracking trends.
- Assessing knowledge needs and gaps.
- Detecting windows of opportunity.
- Formulating audience-centered engagement strategy.
- Identifying influential brokers.

**Dissemination & Engagement Strategy**
- Targeting (audience)
- Packaging and tailoring (content)
- Channels (distribution)

### KNOWLEDGE BROKERING

**Knowledge/Engagement Portal**

### TRAINING

- Science communication.
- Audience segmentation.
- Branding.
- Facilitation.
- Media advocacy.
- Influence analysis.
- Evaluation.

**Products and Tools**
- Research briefs.
- Policy briefs.
- Research news and alerts.
- Data visualizations.
- Stories and testimonials.
- Interactive data dashboard.
- Social media feed.
- Community feedback tools.
- Links to research resources.
- Data collection tools.
EVALUATION

• Process evaluation:
  • Tracking and comparing PAO’s URE to guide strategic decisions and outreach/dissemination activities pre-post interventions via interviews, document analysis, and analysis of outgoing communication (news releases, social media posts, communication with members).
  • Tracking and monitoring changes in the information and policy ecosystems for the topic of adolescent depression and suicide (in part, to identify policy windows).

• Outcome evaluation
  • The intervention cannot be randomized so an RCT is not feasible. The best evidence of effect comes from rigorous mapping and tracking of changes in use of research evidence (including proprietary ASPEN research) in policy and public discourse about the topic.
  • Mapping is accomplished through a mixed-method research (surveys, interviews, document analysis, news and social media analysis, website analysis) to:
    • Track pathways through which research evidence is brokered (e.g., advocacy, testimonials/hearings, public comments, news coverage, etc.).
    • Describe and analyze who, uses what research evidence, and when.
    • Assess the uptake of ASPEN-generated research (scope, nature, and timing).
    • Compare uptake of ASPEN-generated research relative to other research and non-research evidence.
A FEW SUGGESTIONS

- Make sure you are addressing a URE-related problem. Your focus should be on ways to improve use of research evidence (e.g., improving capacity, motivations, and/or opportunities for engaging with research evidence), not on changing policy.

- It is important to situate your proposed intervention in relation to the policymaking process or context that you are targeting (e.g., legislation, regulation, enforcement, oversight, etc.).

- Your theory of action (logic model) ought to be user-focused (i.e., describe how the intervention will change users’ URE behavior) and “respect” the conditions and circumstances in which URE plays out (e.g., private vs. public decisionmaking process).

- There is no single definition of URE. URE is ultimately defined by what specific users do with research evidence and how they use it in a particular context. Relevant dimensions include the characteristics of evidence used, frequency/duration of use, nature of use (instrumental, conceptual, strategic), and the context in which evidence is used (in short, what-how-when-where). The definition and specific operationalization of URE also depends on what you want to be able to infer based on your measure of URE.
THANK YOU

HTTP://WWW.ASPEN.RUTGERS.EDU/
Questions?
Research Grants

- **LETTER OF INQUIRY**
  - Deadlines in January, May, and August
  - 6-8 week response time
  - Internal review for fit with current interests and funding criteria

- **FULL PROPOSAL**
  - External review
  - Internal review

- **APPLICANT RESPONSE TO REVIEWS**
  - Internal review
  - Board of Trustees meeting in March, June, and October

- **AWARDS**
  - Officer’s Research Grants ($50k)
  - Major Research Grants ($100k-$600k or $1 million for URE)
Proposals on the Use of Research Evidence

- Richly conceptualize what you mean by the use of research evidence
- Offer an operational definition of research use
- Provide details about the methods and analyses you will use to assess the use of research
- Ensure your team has the methodological expertise to do the work
Tips for Applicants

- Prioritize the research activities
  - Lead with the research questions and offer hypotheses

- Ground the study in prior work
  - Engage with different traditions and approaches

- Closely align the research questions and study methods

- Demonstrate how the study adds value
  - Push forward what we already know
Resources

wtgrantfoundation.org/grants/research-grants-improving-use-research-evidence

- Application Guide
- Blog posts on methodological considerations
- Blog posts offering tips about the letter of inquiry
- Writings by staff, grantees, and others
- FAQs
Resources

Studying the Use of Research Evidence: A Review of Methods

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Kevin Crocco
Rutgers University
Questions?
THANK YOU!

We look forward to receiving your letter of inquiry on August 4, 2020!

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