

# Leveraging secondary data analysis in research on the use of research evidence

**2022 Officers' Research Grants  
Announcement of Special Interest**

*Updated May 2022*

*Application deadline: August 3, 2022, 3:00pm ET*



# Overview

**For the August 2022 Officers' research grants cycle, we are announcing a special interest in applications that use secondary data to answer new questions on how and under what conditions we can improve the use of research evidence.**

## Synopsis

The Foundation is interested in supporting research studies that advance theory and build empirical knowledge on ways to improve the use of research evidence by policymakers, agency leaders, organizational managers, intermediaries, and other decision-makers that influence systems serving youth in ways that benefit young people ages 5-25 in the United States. We are interested in studies from a range of disciplines, fields, and methods, and we encourage investigations into various systems, including justice, housing, child welfare, mental health, and education.

Secondary data analysis leverages data collected for one purpose to use it for a secondary purpose (Smith et al., 2011). Secondary analysis of existing data allows researchers to efficiently address high-value research questions without the cost and time of primary data collection.

Many of our current and former grantees have collected data during their grant but have been unable to fully analyze it to respond to new, emerging research questions. We understand many researchers have already begun to use secondary data such as social media, Quorum, or web analytics to explore questions around topics such as research mobilization in social networks, integration of research into policy deliberation, and use of decision-support tools.

# Our Interests

**Below we share a few ways that secondary analysis can contribute substantively to the URE literature. As always, we are open to other innovative ideas.**

## **Assessing the use of research evidence on youth outcomes**

Secondary data analysis may help researchers assess the longer-term outcomes of research use than could be measured in their original project. Connecting existing study data to other data sources such as administrative data could facilitate research to understand whether and under what conditions research use can improve youth outcomes. As an example, research conducted by research-practice partnerships often aims to reduce youth inequality as a key goal of their work. However, research projects may only be able to measure short-term outcomes such as reduced disparities in disciplinary actions. While this is an important outcome, a longer-term goal may be to increase high school engagement and completion. Connecting the original research to administrative data could help RPP teams measure whether improved research use is associated with long-term outcomes.

## **Using existing methods and measures to code data in new ways**

As we noted above, many researchers have substantial amounts of data collected during prior research projects, not all of which have been analyzed. Teams might consider using existing methods and measures of research use that are amenable to secondary analysis, such as document analysis of archived materials or observation of recorded interactions to answer new research questions (please see [uremethods.org](http://uremethods.org) for many existing coding schemes). As one example, Cynthia Coburn and her colleagues collected hundreds of hours of observations of school decision-making. In a recent article, they leveraged the data already collected to answer new questions on the district's reforms towards reducing inequality related to mathematics (Handsman et al., 2022). Similarly, a different study might apply existing observational coding schemes that allow investigators to track the use of research evidence across decision trajectories to a different dataset. Similarly, a study might use existing document analysis techniques on already collected data used to examine whether evidence was used and instead explore how or how well research evidence was used. Finally, a research team could leverage the shift to virtual meetings during the pandemic to code and analyze archived recordings of school board meetings or county council deliberations to examine new URE questions.

## **Developing and applying theory in studies of research use**

Secondary data may support researchers to develop or refine theories of improving research use. Researchers could leverage any of the secondary data methods discussed above to explore new areas or refine existing theoretical frames. For example, researchers could leverage data such as the Research Excellence Framework, which captures how higher education in the UK conceptualizes research's impact on the economy, society, public policy, culture and other sectors (e.g., <https://impact.ref.ac.uk/casestudies/>). Research teams could examine how societal conceptions of research impact is related to whether and how research is used. One of the Foundation's new Special Interest Groups on the Use of Research Evidence has been developing an operational definition of quality evidence use. Researchers could continue to explore and validate this concept through secondary data analysis of videos, transcripts, or documents.

The field is beginning to explore new questions by applying theories newer to research on research use, such as critical race perspectives, to the study of the use of research evidence (Tseng, 2022). Similarly, research on research use needs to harness what we know about topics such as effective professional development, organizations and systems change, and influencing public policy and apply them to understanding how to improve the use of research evidence (Tseng, 2022). One example of secondary analysis might be revisiting a prior URE study such as Patricia Marin's work on research evidence in amicus briefs around affirmative action, and consider whether and how new findings may emerge through applying a critical race perspective to the work.

## **Using new methods to measure URE more efficiently**

The Foundation is interested in the potential for advancements in methods such as machine learning or natural language processing to validate their application to URE research. Methods such as these and others have the potential to help URE researchers more efficiently analyze large amounts of qualitative data (Tseng, 2022). In one example, Crowley and colleagues (2020) spent hundreds of hours conducting document analysis on policymakers' use of research evidence. Data science techniques could be used on the same data and validated with the coding from the prior project.

# Guidelines

## Teams

Secondary analysis of data often benefits from interdisciplinary and mixed-methods collaboration. It may be given the contextual nature of qualitative data, partnerships between researchers may be particularly valuable for secondary analysis of qualitative data. Alternatively, teams may want to bring in scholars of different theories to examine the data from this new perspective. Teams may benefit from broadening methodological expertise to add data science or other methodologies to the work. We see the potential for collaboration between teams that have data on the use of research evidence to partner with new researchers to bring fresh perspectives to those data.

## The Application

Though secondary analysis is often exploratory, applications still need to be grounded in strong theoretical and empirical literature and consider the strengths and limitations of specific methods. Proposals must align with one of our research interests related to the use of research evidence:

- Building, identifying, or testing ways to improve the use of existing research evidence
- Building, identifying, or testing ways to facilitate the production of new research evidence that responds to decision-makers needs
- Testing whether and under what conditions using research evidence improves decision-making and youth outcomes.

### NOTE

While we have a particular interest in secondary analysis proposals, our awards in this cycle will not be restricted to secondary analysis applications. As a reminder, Officers' research grants are awards of up to \$50,000, and decisions on applications are made within two months of submission. Officers' research grants are great mechanisms to support exploratory, initial work to prepare for a major grant. They are also fantastic mechanisms to support early-career scholars.

**Learn more about Officers' research grants on improving the use of research evidence:**  
<http://wtgrantfdn.org/grants/research-grants-improving-use-research-evidence#awards>



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