

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



1930's



1960's



1990's

2000's

2010's

- 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

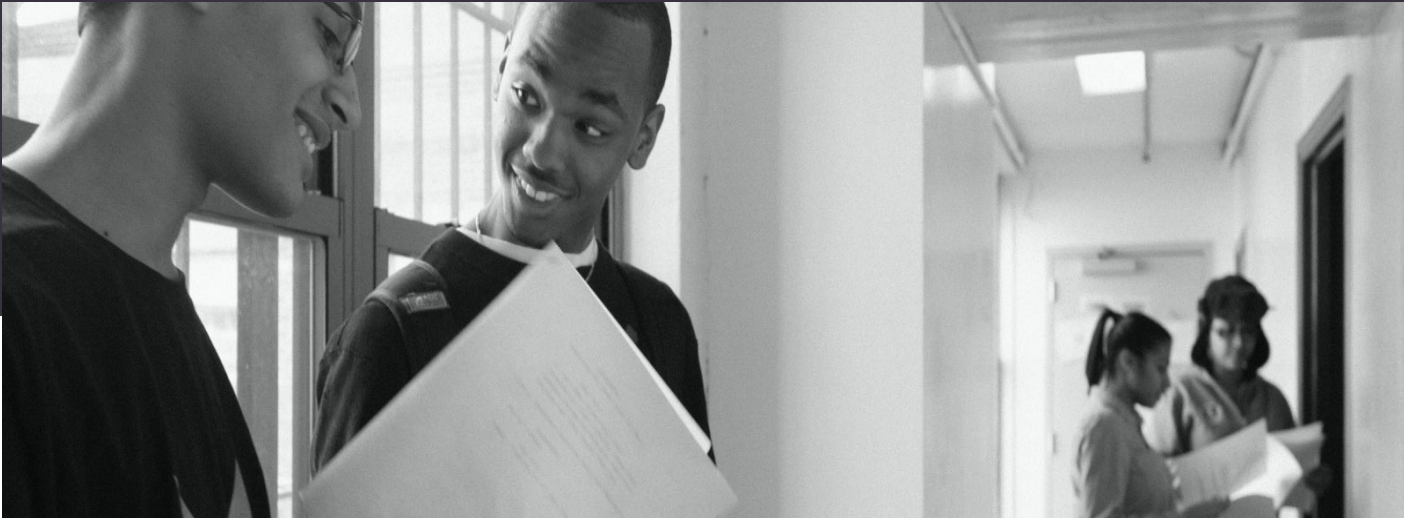
- Understand how programs, policies, and practices reduce inequality among young people in the United States
- Responses not causes/consequences

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

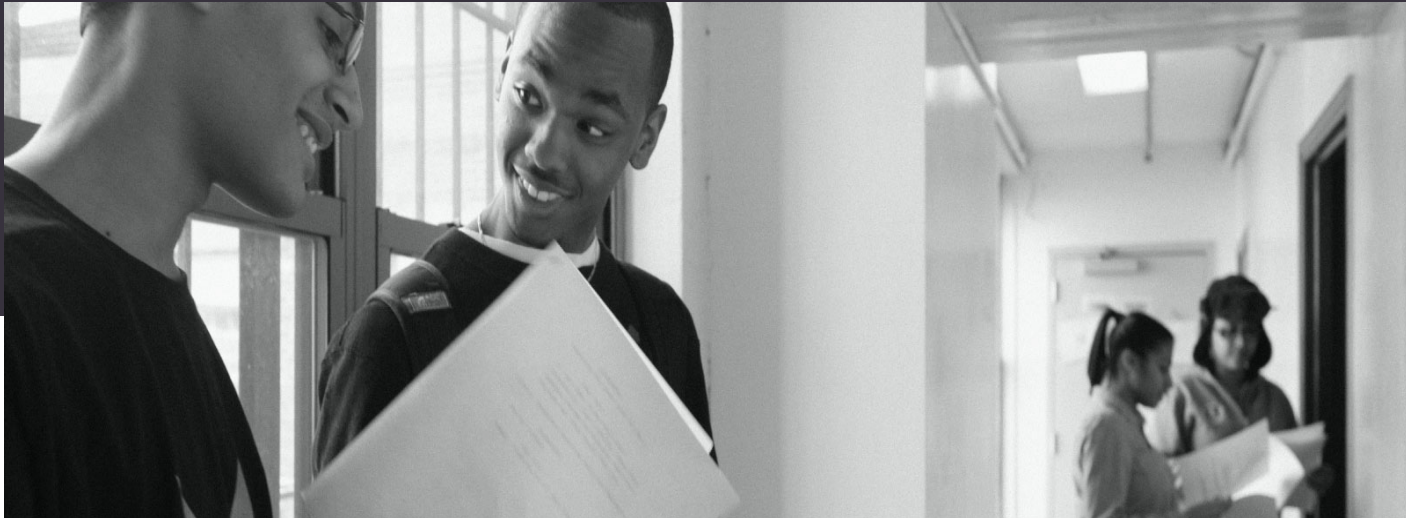
Improving the Use of Research



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

Improving the Use of Research



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

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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

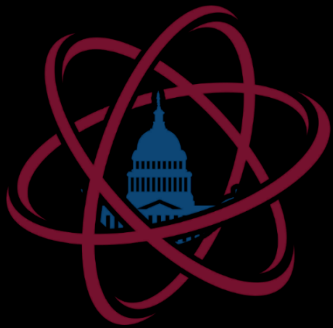


PennState



OVERVIEW

- Research-to-Policy Collaboration (RPC) Model
- Current Evaluation
- Suggestions for Your Improving URE Proposal



Research-to-Policy
— Collaboration —

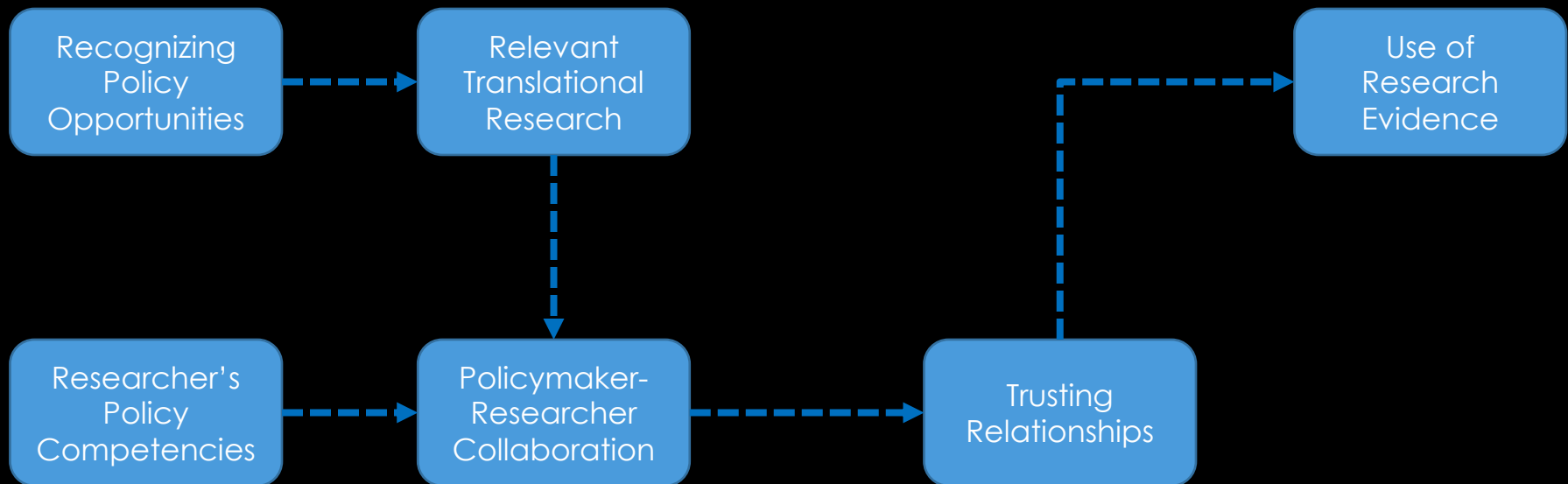
USING RESEARCH IN POLICY

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



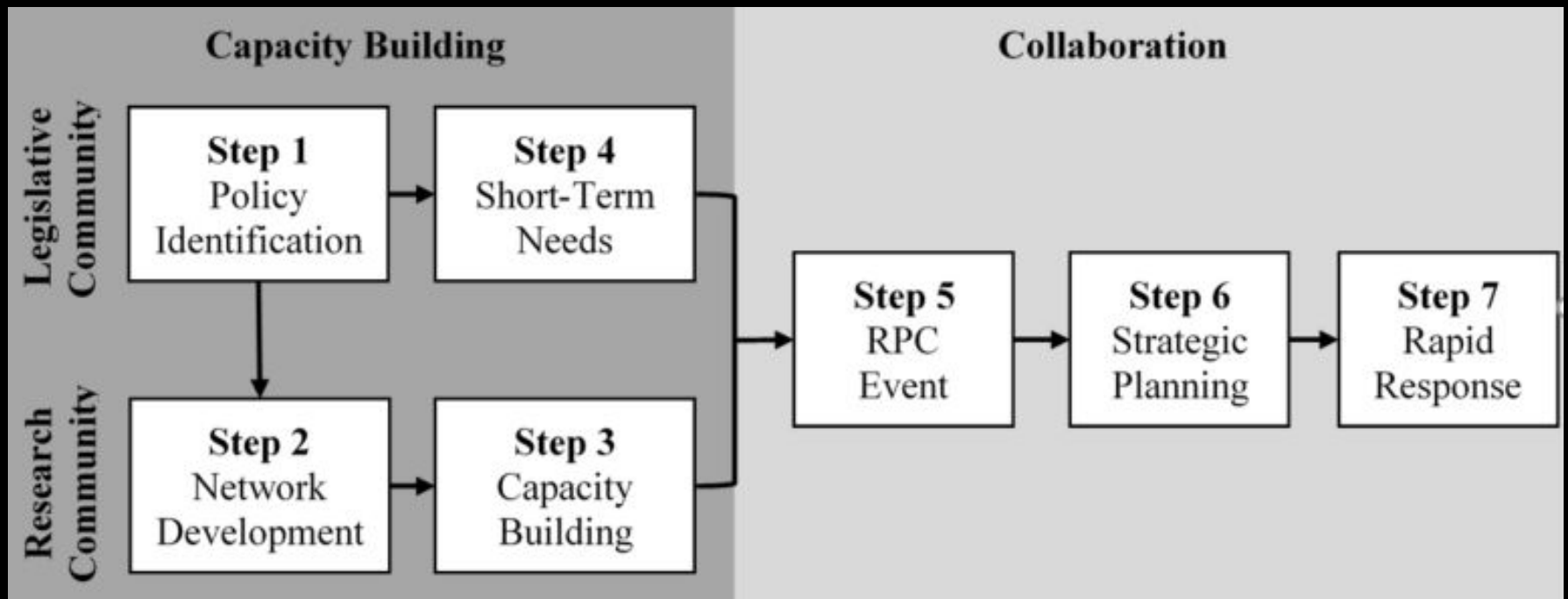
[Boaz et al., 2019](#); Oliver et al., 2014; Tseng, 2012

RPC MODEL: THEORY OF CHANGE



- Davenport S, Davies J, Grimes C. Collaborative research programmes: building trust from difference. *Technovation*. 1998;19(1):31-40.
- Hunter DJ. Relationship between evidence and policy: A case of evidence-based policy or policy-based evidence? *Public Health*. 2009;123(9):583-586.
- Lencucha R, Kothari A, Hamel N. Extending collaborations for knowledge translation. *Evidence & Policy A Journal of Research Debate and Practice*. 2010;6(1):61-75.

RESEARCH-TO-POLICY COLLABORATION: MODEL

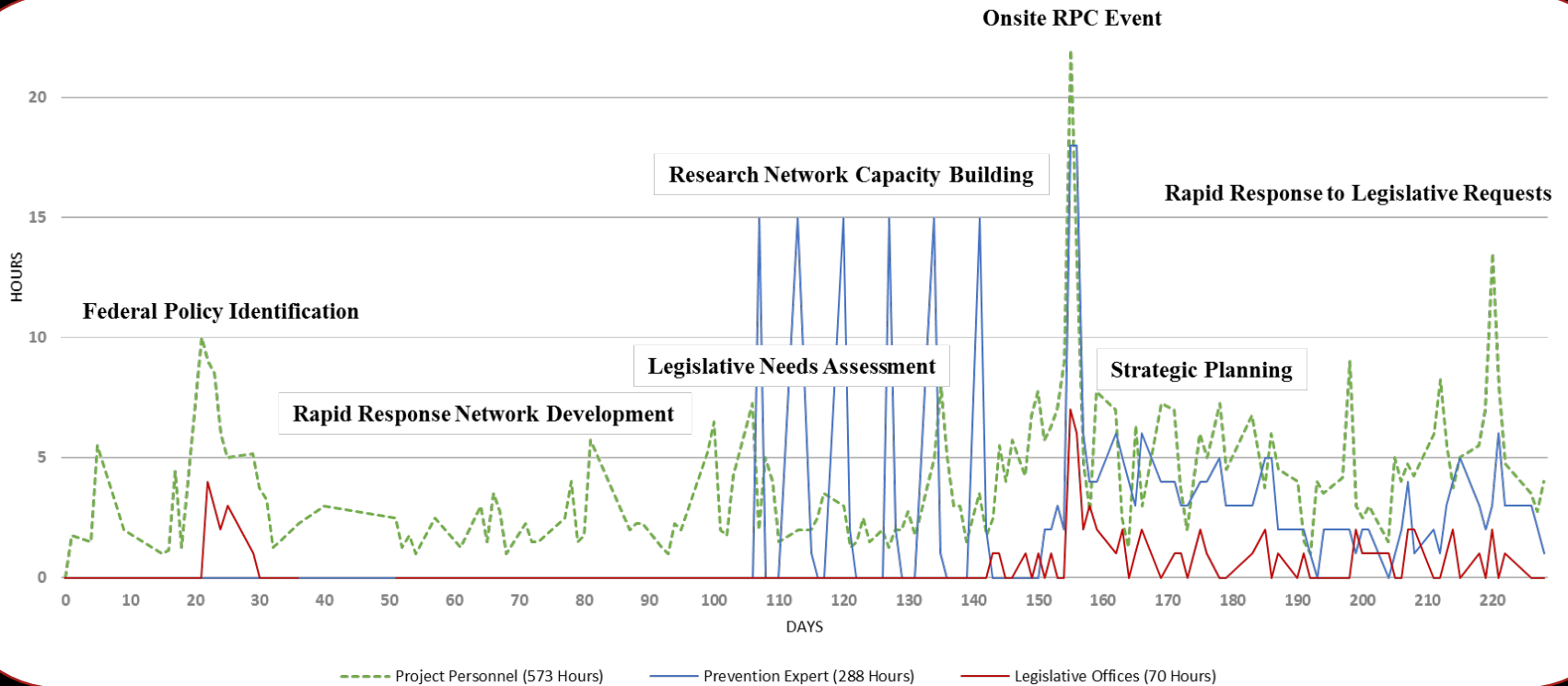


FREQUENCY OF LEGISLATIVE REQUESTS FOR SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

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

- Crowley, M., Scott, J. T. B., & Fishbein, D. (2018). Translating prevention research for evidence-based policymaking: results from the research-to-policy collaboration pilot. *Prevention Science, 19*(2), 260-270.
- Crowley, D. M., & Scott, J. T. (2017). Bringing rigor to the use of evidence in policy making: Translating early evidence. *Public Administration Review, 77*(5), 650-655.

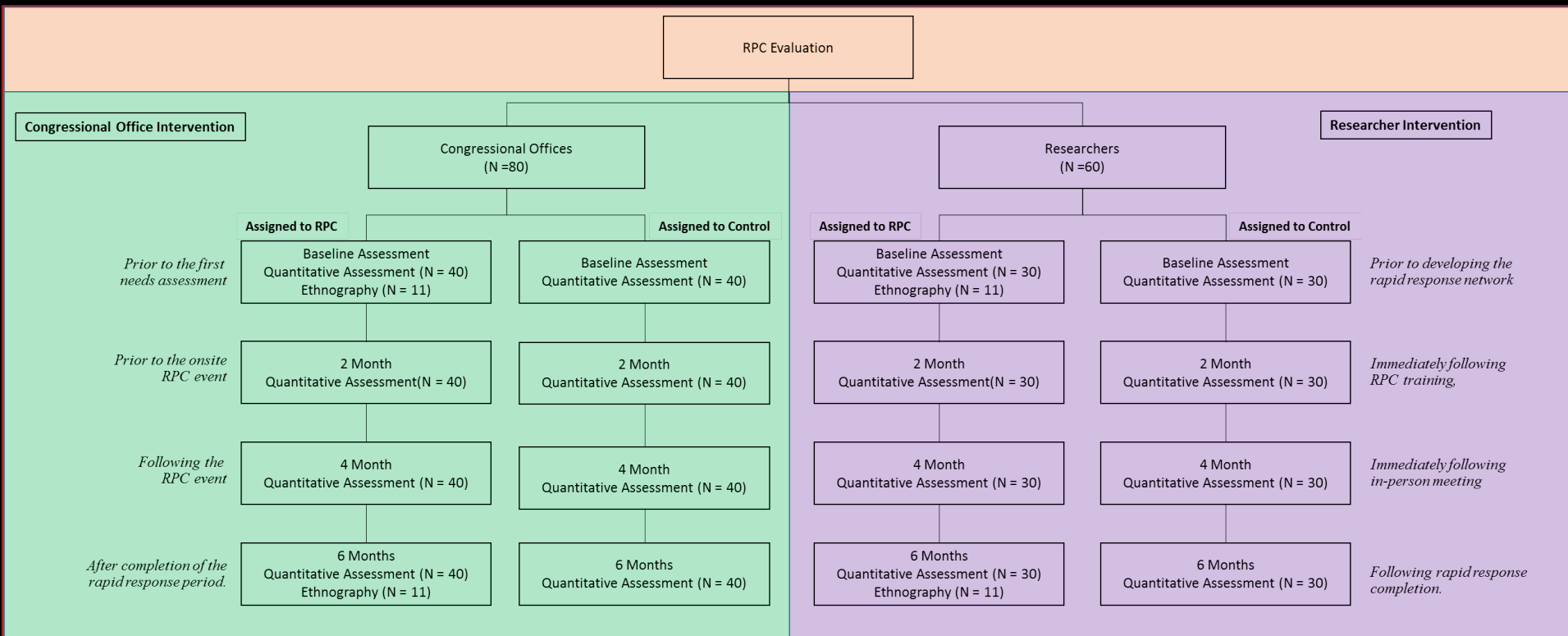
RESOURCE CONSUMPTION FOR RPC IMPLEMENTATION



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



MIXED METHODS EVALUATION



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



WTG Webinar (June 2020)

ROBUST STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE IN STATE POLICYMAKING

ITZHAK YANOVITZKY, 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.

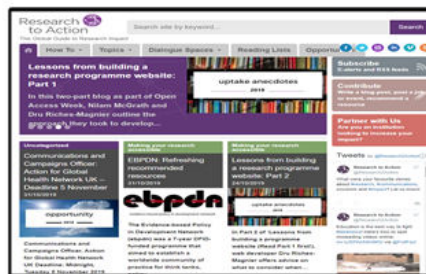
Analysis

- 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

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.

TRAINING

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

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 .





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THANK YOU

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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

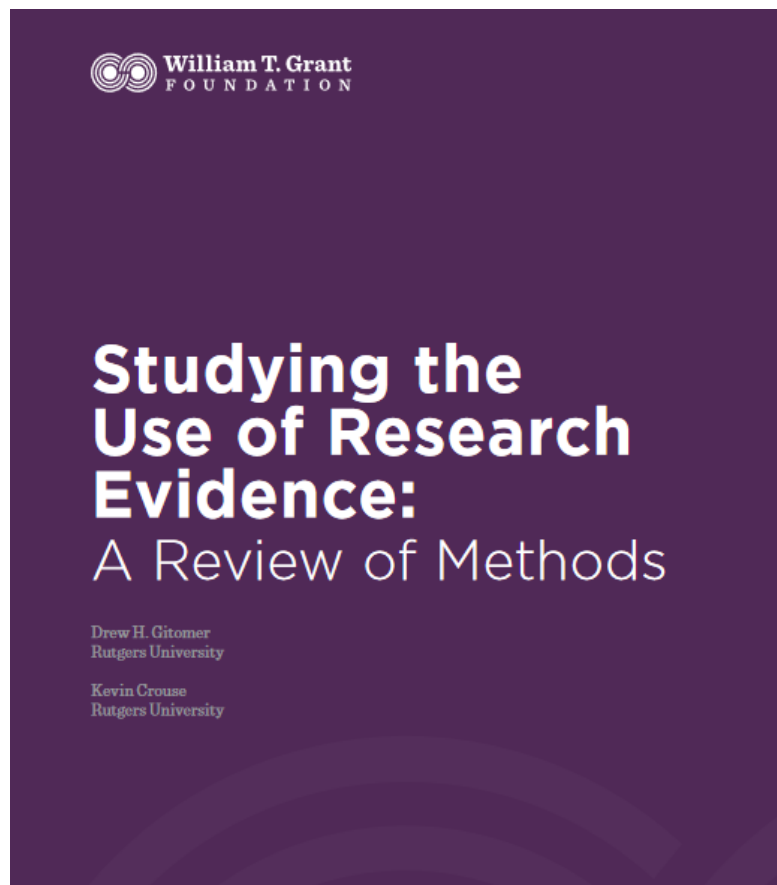
- Prioritize the research activities
 - Lead with the research questions and offer hypotheses
- Ground the study in prior work
 - Engage with different traditions and approaches
- Closely align the research questions and study methods
- Demonstrate how the study adds value
 - Push forward what we already 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



Questions?

THANK YOU!

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

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 **William T. Grant**
FOUNDATION