William T. Grant
F O U N D A T I O N

Research Grants on Improving the Use of Research Evidence

2023 Application Guidelines
Updated November 2022

2023 Application Deadlines
January 11, 2023, 3:00pm ET
May 3, 2023, 3:00pm ET*
August 2, 2023, 3:00pm ET
*Letters of inquiry for Officers' research grants are not accepted in May

Contents

At A Glance

Synopsis

This program funds 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 shape youth-serving systems in the United States.

Proposed studies must pursue one of the following aims:

- 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.

Funding Amounts

- Major research grants: $100,000 to $1,000,000 over 2-4 years, including up to 15% indirect costs.
- Officers' research grants: $25,000–$50,000 over 1-2 years, including up to 15% indirect costs.

Funding Rates

- Major research grants: About 18% of letter of inquiry submissions are invited to submit full proposals; about 18% of full proposals are approved for funding.
- Officers' research grants: About 8-10% of letter of inquiry submissions are approved for funding.

Application Timeline

Letters of inquiry are accepted on three deadlines each year (two deadlines for Officers' research grants). Successful letters of inquiry for major research grants will result in invitations to submit full proposals. Officers' research grants are awarded on the merit of the letter of inquiry alone. For letters of inquiry, review decisions are emailed to investigators within eight weeks of the submission deadline. For major research grants, the total time from letter of inquiry to funding decision is generally 10-15 months. For Officers' research grants, funding decisions are generally made within 8 weeks of the submission deadline.

Introduction

Overview

This program supports research on strategies focused on improving the use, usefulness, and impact of evidence in ways that benefit young people ages 5-25 in the United States. We want to know what it takes to produce useful research evidence, what it takes to get research used, and what happens when research is used. We welcome letters of inquiry for studies that pursue one of these broad aims.

ⓘ KEY DEFINITIONS

Strategies:
Replicable methods, activities, or policies intended to improve the use of research evidence or to maximize its positive impact on decision-making and youth outcomes.

Research evidence:
A type of evidence derived from studies that apply systematic methods and analyses to address predefined questions or hypotheses. These includes descriptive studies, intervention or evaluation studies, meta-analyses, and cost-effectiveness studies conducted within or outside research organizations.

Use of research evidence:
The use of research evidence refers to the multiple ways research can be used, including: applying research evidence directly to a decision (instrumental use), the influence of research evidence on decision-makers' understanding of problems and potential solutions (conceptual use), supporting existing stances or positions (strategic use), building trust with colleagues or educating constituents (relational use) or mandating decision-makers to engage with research (imposed use).

To learn more about the Foundation's thinking about data vs. research evidence, see "Studying Ways to Improve the Use of Research Evidence: Distinguishing Data from Research Evidence," by former Senior Program Officer Lauren Supplee.

Decision-makers
Those who create policies or make other high-level decisions that shape practice in youth-serving systems. Decision-makers include but are not limited to individuals or agencies with formal policymaking or policy implementation authority (e.g., school district leaders, state child welfare agency managers, county legislators, etc.); advocates who influence policymaking or policy implementation; or intermediaries such as professional associations (e.g., National Conference of State Legislatures, Council of Great City Schools, etc.) that provide information, consultation, and technical assistance to inform their members' decision-making.

Background

Research evidence can be a powerful resource for policymakers, agency leaders, organizational managers, and others who make high-stakes decisions that shape youth-serving systems. In addition to informing policy formation and service delivery, evidence from systematic research can deepen decision-makers' understanding of issues, generate reliable assessment tools, support strategic planning, and guide program improvement. But only if it is used.

The research on research use

There is a growing body of evidence on the science of using research evidence. While prevailing strategies to bring research evidence into policy and practice rest on models that increase decision-makers' access to rigorous evidence and incentivize or mandate the adoption of programs with evidence of effectiveness, research evidence remains under-used.

> **ⓘ NOTE**
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> One of the most common issues in letters of inquiry is a lack of sufficient grounding in the existing empirical literature on the use of research evidence. **We strongly encourage applicants to review the resources for applicants on our website**. Also see Appendix A for more useful links.

Recent scholarship points to the limitations of models that prioritize research production and dissemination without adequate attention to would-be users' realities. Decision-makers may be experts on their systems, but, even with access to rigorous research, they may not have the capacity or resources to critically evaluate, prioritize, and apply the findings. What's more, the research may not be relevant to their specific contexts or communities.

In order to harness the full power of research evidence, decision-makers need deep engagement and support. Across disciplines and policy areas, studies are remarkably consistent in their identification of specific conditions that enable the use of research evidence::

- research is timely and relevant, addressing decision-makers' needs and local contexts
- trusted relationships between researchers, intermediaries, and decision-makers enable collective sense-making of research and deliberation over how to use it
- evidence use is integrated into decision-makers' existing routines, tools, and processes.

Toward new strategies

While an extensive body of knowledge provides a rich understanding of specific conditions that foster the use of research evidence, we lack robust, validated strategies for cultivating them. What is required to create structural and social conditions that support research use? What infrastructure is needed, and what will it look like? What supports and incentives foster research use? And, ultimately, how do youth outcomes fare when research evidence is used? This is where new research can make a difference.

Research Interests

This program supports research on strategies focused on improving the use, usefulness, and impact of evidence in ways that benefit young people ages 5-25 in the United States. We welcome impact studies that test strategies for improving research use as well as whether improving research use leads to improved youth outcomes. We also welcome descriptive studies that reveal the strategies, mechanisms, or conditions for improving research use. Finally, we welcome measurement studies that explore how to construct and implement valid and reliable measures of research use.

> **NOTE**
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> We are particularly interested in research on ways to improve the use of research evidence by state and local policymakers, mid-level managers, and intermediaries. These decision-makers play important roles in deciding which programs, practices, and tools to adopt; deliberating ways to improve existing services; shaping the conditions for implementation; and making resource allocation decisions.
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> We invite studies from a range of disciplines, fields, and methods, and we encourage investigations into various youth-serving systems, including justice, housing, child welfare, mental health, and education. Previous studies have drawn on conceptual and empirical work from political science, communication science, knowledge mobilization, implementation science, and organizational psychology, among other areas.
>
> Finally, we welcome critical perspectives that inform studies' research questions, methods, and interpretation of findings.

We welcome studies that pursue one of three aims:

1. Building, identifying, or testing ways to improve the use of existing research evidence

This may include:

- Studies of strategies, mechanisms, or conditions that foster more routine and constructive uses of existing research evidence by decision-makers.

- Studies that test the effects of deliberate efforts to improve routine and beneficial uses of research in decision-making.

  ○ **For example**, prior work suggests that decision-makers often lack the institutional resources and some of the requisite skills to seek out and use research, and certain organizational norms and routines can help overcome those barriers. Studies might examine efforts to alter the decision-making environment by comparing the effectiveness of different ways (e.g., technical assistance, research-practice partnerships, cross-agency teams, etc.) to connect existing research with decision-makers, or by exploiting natural variation across decision-making environments to identify the conditions that improve research use.

2. Building, identifying, or testing ways to facilitate the production of new research evidence that responds to decision-makers' needs

This may include:

- Studies to identify strategies for altering the incentive structures or organizational cultures of research institutions so that researchers conduct more practice- or policy-relevant studies and are rewarded for producing research that decision-makers consider useful.

- Studies to identify the relationships and organizational structures that lead to the prioritization of decision-makers' needs in developing research agendas.

- Studies that examine ways to optimize organized collaborations among researchers, decision-makers, intermediaries, and other stakeholders to benefit youth.

  ○ **For example**, one might investigate the effectiveness of funders' efforts to incentivize joint work between researchers and decision-makers. Others might test curriculum and training initiatives that develop researchers' capacity to conduct collaborative work with practitioners.

3. **Testing whether and under what conditions using research evidence improves decision-making and youth outcomes**

   This may include:

- Studies that examine the impact of research use on youth outcomes and the conditions under which using research evidence improves outcomes.

  ○ The notion that using research will improve youth outcomes is a long-standing assumption, but there is little evidence to validate it. We suspect that the impact of research on outcomes may depend on a number of conditions, including the quality of the research and the quality of research use. One hypothesis is that the quality of the research and the quality of research use will work synergistically to yield strong outcomes for youth.

- Studies to identify and test other conditions under which using research evidence improves youth outcomes.

  ○ For example, recent federal policies have instituted mandates and incentives to increase the adoption of programs with evidence of effectiveness from randomized controlled trials, with the expectation that the use of these programs will lead to better outcomes. Do these policies actually increase the use of those programs and improve child outcomes?

ⓘ NOTE

These research interests call for a range of methods, including experimental or observational research designs, comparative case studies, or systematic reviews.

- Where appropriate, consider using existing methods, measures, and analytic tools for assessing research use so that your findings can be compared and aggregated across studies (see Gitomer and Crouse [2019] *Studying the Use of Research Evidence: A Review of Methods*: http://wtgrantfoundation.org/studying-the-use-of-research-evidence-a-review-of-methods).

- Existing measures may not be well-suited for some inquiries, so you may also propose to adapt existing measures or develop new ones. We strongly encourage applicants to utilize a new open-access methods and measures repository that shares existing protocols for collecting and analyzing data on research use (https://www.uremethods.org/).

- Mixed methods studies that collect and integrate multiple types of data may be particularly advantageous given the difficulty of relying solely on self-report methods to study evidence use in complex deliberations and decision-making contexts.

Awards

Major Research Grants

- $100,000 to $1,000,000 over 2-4 years, including up to 15% indirect costs.
- Studies involving secondary data analysis are at the lower end of the range (about $100,000-$300,000), whereas studies that involve new data collection can have larger budgets (typically $300,000-$600,000). Generally, only proposals to launch experiments in which settings (e.g., schools, child welfare agencies, justice settings) are randomly assigned to conditions are eligible for funding above $600,000.

Officers' Research Grants

- $25,000–$50,000 over 1-2 years, including up to 15% indirect costs.
- Studies may be stand-alone projects or may build off larger projects. The budget should be appropriate for the activities proposed.

> **ⓘ NOTE**
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> In addition to financial support, the Foundation invests significant time and resources in capacity-building for research grantees. We provide opportunities to connect with other scholars, policymakers, and practitioners, and we organize learning communities that allow grantees to discuss challenges, seek advice from peers and experts, and collaborate across projects. To strengthen grantees' capacities to conduct and implement strong qualitative and mixed-methods work, the Foundation also provides access to a consultation service focused on those methods.

Eligibility

Eligible Organizations

- The Foundation makes grants only to tax-exempt organizations. We do not make grants to individuals.

- We encourage proposals from organizations that are under-represented among grantee institutions, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Alaska Native-Serving Institutions, Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, and Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs).

Eligible Principal Investigators

- The Foundation defers to the applying organization's criteria for who is eligible to act as a Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator on a grant. In general, we expect that all investigators will have the experience and skills to carry out the proposed work.

- We strive to support a diverse group of researchers in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and seniority, and we encourage research projects led by Black or African American, Indigenous, Latinx, and/or Asian or Pacific Islander American researchers.

Eligible Studies

- Only studies that 1) align with the stated research interests of this program and 2) relate to the outcomes of young people between the ages of 5 and 25 in the United States are eligible for consideration.

- We do not support non-research activities such as program implementation and operational costs, or make contributions to building funds, fundraising drives, endowment funds, general operating budgets, or scholarships. Applications for ineligible projects are screened out without further review.

Application Requirements

> **ⓘ NOTE**
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> The application process for all research grants begins with a letter of inquiry. Letters of inquiry for major research grants are accepted three times per year, in winter, spring, and fall. Letters of inquiry for Officers' research grants are accepted two times per year, in winter and fall.
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> We accept applications only through our online application system, which is accessible through our website. Instructions for creating and submitting your online application are also available online.

Letters of inquiry for all research grants must include the following:

1. Project Information

- Project title
- Start and end dates
- Total requested amount, including the combined direct and indirect costs for the full grant period
  - Indirect costs may not exceed 15 percent of total direct costs.
- Brief description (1,500 characters maximum)
  - Start with the major research questions or aims.
  - Briefly summarize the project's rationale and background.
  - Describe the research methods, data analysis plan, and intervention (if applicable).
  - Use language appropriate for an educated lay audience.

2. Curriculum Vitae, Biographical Sketch, or Resume

One page maximum. No formatting requirements

- Include a one-page curriculum vitae, biographical sketch, or resume for each Principal Investigator and Co-Principal Investigator.
- Be sure to include education and training, peer-reviewed publications, and grants.
- Do not submit full curricula vitae or resumes.

3. Project Narrative

Five pages maximum. Format your narrative as follows: 12-point Times New Roman font, single-spaced text with a line space between each paragraph, numbered pages, and 1-inch margins on all sides. If you have a reference list, include it in this upload. It will not be counted toward the five-page maximum.

- State the major research questions or aims guiding the proposal.
- Provide a strong rationale that includes:
  - a brief literature review indicating how the project complements and extends prior and concurrent research and theory
  - a description of the theories that provide the foundation or organizing frame for the work
  - a description of the project's relevance for policy or practice.
- Include specific hypotheses and/or research questions to be tested or addressed.
- Describe the methods and data collection plan, including:
  - sample/case definition and selection procedures
  - research design
  - key constructs, data sources, and procedures for data collection
  - intervention (if applicable).
- Summarize the data analysis plan for addressing the hypotheses and/or research questions.
  - Identify the key measures.
  - If you are proposing quantitative analyses of a casual nature, provide convincing evidence that the study will be adequately powered to detect effects.
  - If you are using qualitative data, provide some detail about coding processes and the plan for establishing that the coding is reliable.
  - If you are proposing to develop or improve measures, discuss how you will show that the measures are valid and reliable.

ⓘ NOTE

If you are applying for an Officers' research grant, you must also submit with your letter of inquiry:

- a budget and a budget justification form
  - templates for both are provided in the online application
  - indirect costs may not exceed 15 percent of total direct costs
- the applicant organization's IRS tax-exempt status determination letter.

These materials are not required for major research grants letters of inquiry.

Application Review Criteria

All letters of inquiry are initially reviewed by internal staff with social science expertise. On occasion, internal reviewers will request more information from applicants or solicit expert opinions to better assess a project. In general, however, given the breadth of studies proposed in letters of inquiry, internal reviewers may lack deep knowledge of an applicant's specific area of work, so avoid disciplinary jargon and use language appropriate for an educated lay audience.

We begin application reviews by looking at the importance of the research questions or hypotheses. Then we evaluate whether the proposed research designs and methods will provide strong empirical evidence on those questions.

> **ⓘ NOTE**
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> For major research grants applications, based on internal review of the letter of inquiry, the Foundation either invites a full proposal for further consideration, or declines the application. We do not accept unsolicited full proposals. Officers' research grants are awarded on the merit of the letter of inquiry alone.

The letter of inquiry functions as a mini-proposal and is reviewed against the following criteria:

1. Fit with Research Interests

- The proposed study aligns with this program's research interests and pursues one of three aims:
  - 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.
- The proposed study relates to the outcomes of young people between the ages of 5 and 25 in the United States.

2. Conceptualization and Relevance

- The letter of inquiry reflects a mastery of relevant theory and empirical findings.

- The letter of inquiry provides a clear operational definition of the use of research evidence for the purposes of the proposed project.

- The letter of inquiry states the theoretical and empirical contributions the study will make to the existing research base.

- The letter of inquiry discusses how the findings will be relevant to policy or practice.

3. Methods

- The proposed study employs rigorous methods (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed) that are commensurate to its goals.

- The study's design, methods, and analysis plan fit the proposed research questions.

- The description of the research design makes clear how the empirical work will test, refine, or elaborate specific theoretical notions.

  - Quantitative analyses might emphasize hypotheses and plans for testing them, while qualitative analyses might elaborate on how the research will illuminate processes underlying specific programs, policies, or practices.

- Plans for case selection, sampling, and measurement clearly state why they are well-suited to address the research questions or hypotheses.

  - For example, samples should be appropriate in size and composition to answer the study's questions. Qualitative case selection–whether critical, comparative, or otherwise– should also be appropriate to answer the proposed questions.

- The quantitative and/or qualitative analysis plan demonstrates awareness of the strengths and limits of the specific analytic techniques and how they will be applied in the current case.

- If proposing mixed methods, plans for integrating the methods and data are clear and compelling.

- If proposing quantitative methods, the letter of inquiry demonstrates that the study will have adequate statistical power to detect meaningful effects.

- The letter of inquiry demonstrates adequate consideration of the gender, ethnic, and cultural appropriateness of concepts, methods, and measures.

4. Feasibility

- The proposed methods, time frame, staffing plan, and other resources are realistic.
- The letter of inquiry assures that data will be successfully collected, describes the team's prior experience collecting such data, and identifies strategies for maximizing response rates and access to data sources.
- Prior training and publications demonstrate that the research team has a track record of conducting strong research and communicating it successfully.
  - Be sure to demonstrate that the research team is well-positioned to address the varied tasks demanded by the study's conceptualization and research design. This might include combining expertise across disciplines or methods.
  - Be specific about the value of each member's contributions to the team. We strongly discourage teams that comprise many senior investigators for very limited time and effort or otherwise make cursory nods to multi-disciplinary or mixed-role project teams. Instead, clearly justify the unique value of each team member and the specific role each will play in different stages of the project.

Where appropriate, we value projects that:

- harness the learning potential of mixed methods and interdisciplinary work
- involve practitioners or policymakers in meaningful ways to shape the research questions, interpret preliminary and final results, and communicate their implications for policy and practice
- combine senior and junior staff in ways that facilitate mentoring of junior staff
- are led by members of racial or ethnic groups underrepresented in academic fields
- generate data useful to other researchers and make such data available for public use
- demonstrate significant creativity and potential to advance the field, for example by introducing new research paradigms or extending existing methods, measures and analytic tools to allow for comparison across studies.

NOTE

For major research grants, the review process for a successful application—beginning with the submission of a letter of inquiry and ending with approval by our Board of Trustees—is 10 to 15 months. If you are invited to submit a full proposal, you will be offered two deadlines to submit it, ranging from approximately six weeks to six months from the time of the invitation.

In general, the full proposal follows a format similar to that of the letter of inquiry, and includes a proposal narrative of about 25 pages, a complete budget and budget justification, and full curriculum vitae or resumes for key investigators and staff. If you are invited to submit a full proposal, we will provide additional detailed instructions on developing the proposal. Institutional Review Board Approval is not required at the time of the proposal's submission but is required before issuing grant funds. Full proposals are reviewed using a scientific peer review process involving two or more external reviewers with content, methodological, and disciplinary expertise in the proposed work.

Following external review, the Foundation's Senior Program Team reviews promising proposals and offers additional feedback. Applicants who receive positive reviews with critiques that can be addressed within a short time frame are asked to provide written responses to internal and external reviewers' comments. Applicants' responses to external reviews are then further reviewed by the Senior Program Team. Finally, the team makes funding recommendations to the Program Committee and the Board of Trustees. Approved awards are made available shortly after Board meetings, which take place in March, June, and October.

Appendix: Useful Links

1. **Resources for Applicants**
    http://wtgrantfoundation.org/URE-resources

    - Applicant Guidance
      wtgrantfoundation.org/URE-resources#applicant-guidance

    - Recommended Reading
      wtgrantfoundation.org/URE-resources#recommended-reading

      Topics Include:
      - Conceptualizing the use of research evidence
      - Theorizing ways to improve the use of research evidence
      - Methods for studying the use of research evidence

2. **Frequently Asked Questions**
    http://wtgrantfoundation.org/URE-faq

    - What We Do and Do Not Fund
      wtgrantfoundation.org/URE-faq#what-we-fund

    - Research Interests: Improving the Use of Research Evidence
      wtgrantfoundation.org/ure-faq#research-interests

    - The Letter of Inquiry
      wtgrantfoundation.org/ure-faq#LOI

    - Study Designs and Methods
      wtgrantfoundation.org/ure-faq#designs-methods

    - Research Grant Budget and Human Subjects Approval
      wtgrantfoundation.org/ure-faq#budget

    - Officers' Research Grants
      wtgrantfoundation.org/ure-faq#officers-research

3. **Awarded Grants, 2004–Today**
    (Search and filter all awarded grants by program and focus area)
    http://wtgrantfoundation.org/browse-grants

William T. Grant
FOUNDATION

60 East 42nd Street, 43rd Floor
New York, NY 10165
212.752.0071

wtgrantfoundation.org
@wtgrantfdn