Research Grants on Improving the Use of Research Evidence: Overview of the Program and How to Apply
Today’s Webinar

- William T. Grant Foundation
- Improving the Use of Research Evidence
- Questions
- Application and Review Process
- Questions
Founded in 1936

Committed to understanding human behavior through research.

The most pressing challenges confronting young people change over time.
Focus Areas

REDUCING INEQUALITY IN YOUTH OUTCOMES

IMPROVING THE USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE IN WAYS THAT BENEFIT YOUTH

Supporting Research to Improve the Lives of Young People
Improving Use of Research Evidence: Background

Inform Research

Research

Inform Policy & Practice

Practice & Policy
Why study ways to improve the use of research evidence?

- Research agendas can miss the mark on decision-makers’ concerns, questions and needs.
- We assume knowledge and tools from research will improve decision-making, but we lack strong evidence about robustness of this theory of change.
- We know a lot about conditions associated with research use, but we lack knowledge on how to create those conditions.
Phase I
- First request for proposals (RFP) released in 2009
- Fund studies to UNDERSTAND the role of research evidence and how it is used in policy/practices

Phase II
- Launched in 2015
- Built on our learning from the first 6 years
- What strategies IMPROVE the use of existing research evidence?
Key Aims

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

- Studies to build, identify, and test strategies or mechanisms to improve the use of existing research evidence.

- Studies to build, identify, and test strategies for producing new research evidence that responds to decision-makers’ needs.

- Studies that test whether and under what conditions using high-quality research improves decision-making and, ultimately, outcomes for youth.
Studies to identify, create, and test the structural and social conditions that foster more routine, constructive uses of research.

Extend evidence from prior studies about the conditions that foster research use.

Example: Prior research suggests that opportunities for discussions about research and active deliberation foster deeper understanding.

Studies are now needed to determine how to create the venues and processes that deepen understanding of research and to evaluate their effectiveness across different conditions.

Improve the Use of Existing Research

Strategies to get existing research evidence used.
Research-to-Policy Collaboration
Max Crowley and Taylor Scott, Penn State University

- Intervention: structured interaction between researchers and Congressional staff, with training for researchers
- Among those who volunteer for collaboration, both researchers and staffers are randomized to the RPC
- Focus on legislators’ use of research evidence in policies related to child maltreatment
- Use of research evidence is self-reported and observed
- Results: RPC increases use of evidence and researchers’ knowledge and practices
Produce More Useful Research

Strategies for producing new research evidence that is more useful.

- Studies to create and test the incentives, structures, and relationships that facilitate the production of research that responds to decision makers’ needs.
- Build on the available evidence about the conditions that stimulate research agendas responsive to decision-makers’ questions.
- Example: We know that research is more likely to be used when it is viewed by policymakers as sensitive to local context.
- Studies are needed to test mechanisms and initiatives to develop researchers’ capacity to conduct collaborative work with practitioners.
Community-Academic Partnership for Translational Use of Research Evidence
Gregory Aarons & Danielle Fettes, University of California, San Diego

- Understand optimal ways for enabling/fostering research-practice partnerships to improve use of research within child welfare service systems.
- CAPTURE focuses on three core components to facilitate research use.
- Critically and reflectively assess the co-production of research by academic partners and child welfare stakeholders.
- Mixed-methods study with some agencies receiving the intervention and others conduct business as usual.
Systematic studies of whether and under what conditions using high-quality research improves decision making and youth outcomes.

Using research is not sufficient for better outcomes, what conditions matter?

Example: Federal policies have mandated and incentivized adoption of evidence-based programs with an expectation that their use will lead to greater engagement with research AND in turn better outcomes for students, teens, and young workers.

Studies are needed to determine whether these policies increase the use of programs and ultimately improve youth outcomes?
Supervisors of school-based mental health providers randomized to treatment and control

The research evidence base provides insights on ways to engage adolescents in mental health services

Results show increase in evidence-based treatment strategies

Youth outcomes now being examined
Questions?
Application Process
Letter of Inquiry (LOI)

- Submit a 5-page mini-proposal

- Deadlines
  - Major research grants: January, May and August
  - Officers’ research grants: January and August

- Budgets
  - Major research grants: $100,000 - $1,000,000 over 2-4 years. Do not require budget materials.
  - Officers’ research grants: $50,000 over 1-2 years. Requires budget materials.

- Plan time to get signatures from your institution if submitting an Officers’ research grant
Review Process

- Letter of Inquiry
  - Internal review for eligibility and fit with research interests and funding criteria
  - 6-8 week response time (invite full proposal or decline)

- Full Proposal
  - External review by expert reviewers: Content + Methods + Policy/Practice
  - Internal review by senior program staff
  - Action Letter to PI

- Applicant Response to Reviews
  - Internal review
  - Board of Trustees meetings in March, June, and October

- Post-Awards
  - Program reports
  - Biennial grantees meetings
Developing the Letter of Inquiry
Different Study Types

Fit the study type to the research question

- Descriptive studies meant to clarify the mechanisms for improving research use
- Intervention studies that examine attempts to improve research use
- Measurement studies that enhance the work of researchers or decision makers
The Use of Research Evidence

Richly conceptualize and assess research use

- Define what you mean by the use of research evidence

- Provide details about how you will measure and analyze research use
  - Observations, document coding, survey work, networks, discourse, and/or interviews
  - Outline the analytic strategy and what you hope to learn

- Ensure your team has the methodological expertise to do the work
Successful Letters of Inquiry

OTHER TIPS

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

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

- Focus on research use involving state and local decision-makers and intermediaries
  - We rarely fund studies focused on the use of research by front line workers

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

- 2023 Application Guidelines for Research Grants on Improving the Use of Research Evidence
- Application Submission Instructions
- Grants Archive
- Blog posts, Essays, and Articles by staff and grantees
- FAQs

https://wtgrantfoundation.org/grants/research-grants-improving-use-research-evidence
ANOTATED PROPOSALS FOR RESEARCH GRANTS ON IMPROVING THE USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Fostering Research Use in School Districts Through External Partnerships: The Role of District Capacity

Cynthia Coburn and James Spillane, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University; Anna-Ruth Allen, School of Education, University of Colorado at Boulder; Megan Hopkins, College of Education, Pennsylvania State University

July 2015–December 2017, $543,284

Impact and Optimization of The Research-To-Policy Model: Testing an Approach to Improve the Use of Evidence

Daniel Crowley and Taylor Scott, Human Development and Family Studies, Pennsylvania State University; Kathryn Oliver, Dept. of Evidence-Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation, University of Oxford; Lauren Supplee, Early Childhood Development Research, Child Trends

March 2018–February 2020, $553,028
IMPACT AND OPTIMIZATION OF THE RESEARCH-TO-POLICY MODEL: TESTING AN APPROACH TO IMPROVE THE USE OF EVIDENCE

Proposal to the William T. Grant Foundation
Use of Research Evidence Priority Area

Daniel Crowley (Pennsylvania State University), Principal Investigator
Lauren Supplee (Child Trends Incorporated), Kathryn Oliver (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine), Taylor Scott (Pennsylvania State University), Co-Principal Investigators

Major Questions

While there is growing bipartisan interest in using scientific evidence to inform legislation (i.e., evidence-based policy), it remains unclear how best to facilitate the uptake of research findings by policymakers. A growing body of literature emphasizes major barriers to the use of research evidence in decision making, including (1) lack of interaction between researchers and policymakers, and (2) difficulty crafting legislation informed by scientific evidence—that executive agency staff can successfully execute. Without direct interaction between legislative offices and researchers, legislative staff’s ability to access, distil and use scientific evidence will remain limited. Yet, even efforts characterized by productive researcher-policymaker collaborations still experience difficulties incorporating research evidence into legislative language (i.e., proposed bill provisions and enacted statute). Thus, there is a need to simultaneously address these core interrelated obstacles.

This proposed project seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention for improving the use of evidence in policymaking, known as the Research-to-Policy Collaboration (RPC). This model supports productive researcher-policymaker interactions and facilitates development of legislation that leverages empirical evidence—particularly related to preventing child maltreatment in the United States. This proposed work aligns directly with the William T. Grant Foundation’s prioritization to test actionable strategies to improve the use of existing research because it aims to enhance understanding around evidence use in law making, as well as validate and strengthen a strategy to promote federal lawmakers’ use of evidence. Ultimately, this project will contribute to an actionable science around improving...
Theoretical Framework
The two-communities theory suggests that researchers and policymakers are embedded in unique cultures characterized by different values and languages. Some argue for additional “linking” mechanisms that could systematically introduce social science to policymakers in useable forms at critical times, and that researchers could filter science-based information according to policymakers’ interests and needs. However, the facilitation of such interactions must be tactful to avoid potentially aversive and/or ineffective interactions resulting from misunderstanding one another’s divergent cultures. Positive interactions critical to developing trusting relationships across communities often requires increased empathy, understanding of how policymakers use research, and attention to ideological dimensions of decision-making.

Figure 1: Theory of Change

This section provides a strong example of how to connect the proposed work with prior theory and empirical research.
TURE Methods: Thinking in the Field

Here you will find selected resources developed to help users explore current perspectives on URE methods. This section focuses on work about methods used to study URE, not the methods themselves.

- Examining Methods
- Critical Perspectives
- Implications of Studying URE

If you would like to recommend resources for inclusion in this catalog, please send suggestions to contact@uremethods.org.
Conversations with Kim DuMont
Senior Vice President, Program

Some lessons and questions from the Foundation’s portfolio on improving the use of research evidence in ways that benefit youth
June 12, 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm EST
Early-Career Reviewer Program

WHO
Early-career researchers (within 8 years of receiving degree)

WHAT
Serve as peer-reviewers of use of research evidence grant proposals submitted to the Foundation. Receive personalized feedback on submitted reviews and have access to reviews by senior peer-reviewers.

WHY
To develop understanding of proposal evaluation, peer-review process, grant writing and use of evidence research.

https://wtgrantfoundation.org/grants/early-career-reviewer-program
Noteworthy

- We especially encourage proposals from teams with Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian American members in leadership roles.
- We welcome multi-disciplinary and mixed method studies.
- Resubmissions welcome!
Questions?
Looking Ahead

- Conversations with Kim DuMont: June 12, 2023
- Early Career Reviewer Application Deadline: July 18, 2023
- LOI Deadline for Major Grants/Officers’ Grants: August 2, 2023
- Watch out for next year’s application guide: November 2023
We look forward to receiving your letter of inquiry!