GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS INVITED TO SUBMIT FULL PROPOSALS
IMPROVING THE USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE
UPDATED JUNE 2019

Below is guidance for applicants invited to submit full proposals pertaining to improving the use of research evidence, including: guidelines for the development of your full proposal, an overview of the required application materials, application procedures, and the review timeline.

NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Overview

The Foundation is seeking *systematic studies* of ways to improve the use of research evidence. We want to know what it takes to produce useful research evidence, what it takes to get research used, and what happens when it is used. We expect that the proposed projects will pursue one of these broad lines of inquiry.

As you refine your plans, we offer these recommendations based on our application reviews and understanding of existing theory and empirical work. We also encourage you to read the additional guidance for those studying strategies for improving the use of research evidence in ways that benefit youth. This and additional resources, including staff writings and links to publications, are available on our website: http://wtgrantfoundation.org/focus-areas/improving-use-research-evidence/resources-for-applicants.

- **Theoretical and Empirical Rationale**. We encourage applicants to employ clear theoretical frameworks to guide their research questions, sampling, data collection, and analysis plans.
    - Be explicit at the outset about definitions of research evidence. The Foundation defines *research evidence* as empirical findings derived from systematic research methods and analyses. This includes descriptive, intervention, evaluation, meta-analytic, and cost-effectiveness studies done by researchers working within or outside policy or practice organizations. It includes studies addressing various types of research questions and using different types of research designs and methods.
        - Note: Data do not in and of themselves constitute research evidence. When data are used in a planned investigation, this more closely aligns with the Foundation's definition. Applicants should provide their definition of research evidence and a strong rationale to support the definition proposed.
    - We understand the usefulness of focusing on a particular policy or practice issue or set of issues. We ask applicants to include a convincing rationale for why those issues provide fertile ground for studying improved uses of research evidence. What is the theoretical contribution of focusing on those issues? Is there sufficient evidence in the research base? What are the indications that research evidence plays any role (conceptual, instrumental, tactical, etc.) in policy or practice on those issues?

- Be sure to articulate which decision makers, researchers, or contexts are to be studied. We are particularly interested in improving the use of research by state and local decision makers, mid-level managers, and intermediaries.
- Strong proposals describe how *research use* is being conceptualized and why. Be sure to include a strong conceptualization and operational definition of research use drawn from prior work on the use of research evidence and relevant areas.
- Proposals should offer explicit arguments for how the empirical work will test, refine, or elaborate specific theoretical notions.
- Proposals should offer specific hypotheses or research questions about strategies to improve the use of research. This might include strategies that foster routine and constructive uses of research evidence; strategies that facilitate the production of research evidence; and/or whether and under what conditions using high-quality research improves decision making and/or youth outcomes.
- Provide a clear logic for what would create meaningful change in the use of research evidence or its impact on decision making and/or youth outcomes.
- We encourage applicants to use their prior experiences in policy or practice, theory, and empirical evidence to motivate specific research questions. In the past, the most successful applicants often prioritize a few key ideas and pursue them with depth and rigor.
- Research questions should reflect a strong understanding and knowledge of the relevant policy or practice context. In some cases it may be appropriate for applicants to work in consultation with policymakers and/or practitioners to refine their research questions and to engage diverse stakeholders in this process.

- **Research Methods**. Reviewers will seek sufficient information about your design, sample, and data collection procedures. Rich descriptions of your protocols, measures, data sources, and analysis plans are also needed in order to evaluate their rigor and appropriateness for addressing your research questions or hypotheses.

  Sample
  - Provide a description of and rationale for the sampling framework.
  - Applicants should offer a strong rationale for their cases or sampling of sites or individuals.
  - Provide a clear rationale for why that sampling frame would advance relevant theory. If there is variation among cases, sites, or individuals, provide a rich description of what it looks like and why it is relevant.
  - Avoid sampling plans that appear to be based solely on convenience.

  Methods
  - We seek proposals that provide a compelling rationale for the rigor and appropriateness of the research design to address their research questions or hypotheses.
  - We are skeptical about exclusive reliance on self-report without a compelling rationale for this choice. Rather we encourage applicants to propose innovative methods to obtain data and triangulate data sources to validate data and findings.
  - If using mixed methods, please articulate how data will be sequenced or integrated, and why this approach is advantageous.
  - Proposals for studies that include coding of qualitative data should provide some detail about the coding processes and an assessment of the reliability of coding,

as well as explain how coding addresses the research questions. Examples are helpful.

- When appropriate, be sure to address potential influence of and possible safeguards for selection effects.
- We recognize that measurement development in this area contributes to gaps in knowledge.
    - If you propose using existing survey measures of research use, provide evidence of the reliability and validity (e.g., construct validity) of those measures and how they have been employed in prior work. If this evidence is not available, provide a plan for establishing the tool's reliability and validity.
    - If you are proposing measurement development work, offer a strong theoretical and empirical rationale as to the nature and importance of the constructs, and the utility of such measures for other studies. These proposals must also provide convincing and detailed plans for developing reliable and valid measures and demonstrate sufficient measurement expertise on the project teams.
- Many studies will require collecting a considerable amount of sensitive data from policymakers and practitioners on their work. In the proposal, provide assurances as to how you will successfully collect that data, including prior experience and methods for maximizing response rates and access to respondents, meetings, and documents.

- **Data Analysis Plan**
    - The data analysis plan should include a detailed description of how the data will be analyzed to address each of the study's main research questions or hypotheses. If appropriate, also describe how the data will be integrated across methods. Including an illustrative example is often useful.
    - The analysis plan for quantitative and/or qualitative data should communicate sufficient sophistication for understanding the strengths and limits of various analytic techniques.
    - Where applicable, there should be attention to statistical power to detect meaningful effects (be sure to provide a power analysis).
    - Where relevant, there should be attention to generalizability of findings.

- **Products and Communication Plan**
    - We expect our grantees to advance theory and empirical evidence about improving the use of research evidence in their respective fields. To that end, all applicants should outline how their proposed research will result in publications that undergo a rigorous peer-review process.
    - In some cases, applicants may develop communications plans that extend beyond academic audiences. We welcome statements that specify how research will result in products and activities designed to promote use of the research by a specific group of policymakers or practitioners. Across our grant programs, successful applicants who choose to share their work in this way detail plans for proactive, coordinated engagement with target audiences, perhaps including plans to co-craft content and format. Should applicants find this avenue of interest, we encourage careful consideration of how some level of collaboration will be developed with policy or practice partners, as well as how products and activities might foster their use of research findings. For guidance on how to reach and develop relationships with policymakers and practitioners outside of academia,

we encourage applicants to consult resources on our Research-Practice Partnership microsite. Although applicants for major grants are not expected to develop this type of long-term partnership, information on the site can help applicants think about strategies for building effective, albeit shorter term, collaborations.

  - "Communicating Research and Engaging Stakeholders" (http://rpp.wtgrantfoundation.org/communicating-and-using-research-findings)
  - "Using Research" (http://rpp.wtgrantfoundation.org/using-research)

- **Affiliated Staff**
  - Please propose work that can be successfully completed given the resources and time frame. The staffing plan must reflect adequate expertise to successfully carry out the project, as demonstrated by prior training, work, and publications.
  - Specific details on the staffing plan should be included in the budget justification form.
  - We value teams that include researchers and policymakers or practitioners who understand the policy or practice setting under study and can help shape the research questions and methods.
  - We value interdisciplinary teams that can draw upon theories, methods, and content expertise from various disciplines.
  - Please limit the use and number of advisory committees and/or consultants to those individuals who will play a significant role in the project.
  - If it becomes necessary to change the Principal Investigator on your proposal, please email Kim DuMont, the Foundation's Senior Program Officer, to arrange a time to discuss and obtain approval for the proposed change.

- **Other**
  - Some applicants are interested in the adoption and implementation of evidence-based programs, practices, or tools. We do not equate adoption of those products with use of research evidence. We are, however, interested in whether and how policymakers and practitioners use research evidence in their decisions to adopt and implement such programs.
  - Our interest in research evidence does not preclude an interest in other types of evidence. We understand that policymakers and practitioners use other types of evidence, and are interested in how they define and use that evidence along with research.
  - We may seek reviewers from different disciplines. Please limit jargon and write for an audience that is not discipline-specific. In addition, consider that reviewers may not understand or agree with what is "known" in your field or discipline; they will likely seek explanations of key claims and acknowledgments regarding the strength of the research evidence for those claims.

FULL PROPOSAL DOCUMENTS

Prepare the following documents that will be uploaded as part of the full proposal.

> Narrative sections should be formatted as follows: 12 pt. font, single-spaced paragraphs with a space between paragraphs, and 1-inch margins on the top, bottom, and left- and right-hand sides. Please add page numbers to your narrative. The proposal narrative should not exceed the maximum of **25** pages, excluding the bibliography, tables, figures, charts, and any other exhibits.

1. **Proposal Narrative.** In addition to the requirements described above, applicants should include a full reference list/bibliography and may elect to include such appendices as:
   - **Exhibits such as charts, figures, and tables**. Be judicious in the selection of exhibits. Exhibits should be items critical to the understanding of the proposed project. Materials such as prior articles, intervention materials, or other potentially relevant documents should be noted, listed, or briefly summarized. Do not include them in the proposal.
   - **Letters of support.** Though not required, letters of support are often useful and reassure reviewers that access to data, settings, or individuals is feasible.

   The narrative, reference list, and all appendices should be uploaded as one single PDF file.

2. **Curriculum vitae** for each Principal Investigator, Co-Principal Investigator, and other key staff. There are no page limits, but each file cannot exceed 16 MB. Each vita should include the following:
   - Name;
   - Position/Title;
   - Educational history (baccalaureate, graduate/professional, and post-doctoral), including institution, degree, year conferred, and field of study;
   - Research and professional experience, including employer, title, and date of employment;
   - Honors and awards;
   - Grants;
   - Publications.

   We do not have specific formatting guidelines for curriculum vitae.

3. **Budget and Budget Justification (and applicable Subcontractor Budgets and Budget Justifications)**. All applicants submitting a full proposal are required to complete the online budget grid in the Budget section of the application. In cases where the project involves a subcontract award exceeding $50,000, the subcontractor must complete the Budget form in Excel, and submit its own completed Budget Justification Form.

   The proposed project's start date can take place as early as the first of the month following the Board meeting during which it is expected to be approved. For example, applicants submitting a full proposal for consideration at our March Board meeting should set a project start date no earlier than April 1st. The Foundation also prefers to make awards in the year that they are approved. Otherwise, applicants may set the project start date as they see appropriate for their project.

Go to the Uploads section of the online full proposal task to download, the 1) budget and budget justification guidelines, 2) budget justification form, and 3) budget form for applicable subcontracts.

NOTE: While Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is not required at this time, no grant money will be issued for projects needing IRB review until approval is submitted to the Foundation.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

You can begin your online application and then save and return to it as many times as you would like.

1. **Log in.** Go to our website at www.wtgrantfoundation.org and click Log In at the top of any page.

2. On your home page, click on the incomplete "Full Proposal - Research Grants" task.

3. The following information will be automatically copied from your letter of inquiry. *Please make sure the information is still correct and provide updates where appropriate (e.g., new co-PIs or updated requested amount).*

   - **Contact and Demographic Information** for the Principal Investigator only.
   - **Project Contacts.** Add contact information for each additional Co-Principal Investigator.
   - **Organization.** Select the organization that would receive the grant and mark it primary.
   - **Project Information**, including:
     - **Project title** (120 characters maximum)
     - **Start and end dates** of the project
     - **Project description** of the project (1,500 characters maximum)
       The brief description should be written in language appropriate for an educated lay audience, not for other researchers. Begin by stating the major questions guiding the work. Then, briefly summarize the project's rationale and background, research methods, and data analysis plan.
     - **Requested amount** (direct and indirect costs combined)
   - **Project Coding.** Enter additional information about the project.

4. **Budget.** Complete the project budget by grant year, for all direct and indirect costs. Indirect costs may not exceed 15 percent of total direct costs for each grant year. This ceiling includes any indirect costs contained in expenses for subcontracts. Please follow the instructions from the "Budget and Budget Justification Guidelines."

5. **Signatures.** Both the primary principal investigator and an authorized institution official must endorse the proposed project and certify that the costs entered in the budget form are necessary to execute the proposed project and that they are estimated in the manner described in the budget justification. As the full proposal can only be associated with the principal investigator's user account, be sure to provide the institution official with the login details required to access the proposal.

6. **Uploads.** Upload the following files separately.

   - **Budget Justification (and applicable Subcontractor Budgets and Budget Justifications)**
   - **Proposal Narrative**
   - **Curriculum vitae** for each Principal Investigator, Co-Principal Investigator, and other key staff.
   - **IRS Tax Determination Letter.** Grants are limited, without exception, to tax-exempt organizations. A copy of the Internal Revenue Service tax-exempt status determination letter is required from each applying organization.

7. **Review and Submit.**

   - Click "View PDF" to preview the application. Make sure that your internet browser's pop-up blocker either allows pop-ups from the EasyGrants website or is turned off so that the PDF can generate.

   - After all required elements of the application are entered, the submit button will appear at the top of the page. Select "Submit" (please note: once you have selected "Submit," you will be unable to modify the application). The system will send an email confirmation of your submission. If you do not receive an email confirmation, select "Submit" again or email the Foundation via the link at the bottom of any page of the online system.

REVIEW PROCEDURES

Full proposals undergo a rigorous peer review process. Each proposal will be reviewed by two to three external reviewers, likely two researchers and one policymaker or practitioner. External reviewers will receive the full proposal and related documents on our research interests. Applicants with proposals that appear promising after internal and external review will be asked to submit a written response to reviewer concerns. Proposals, reviews, and applicant responses to reviews will then be evaluated by the Foundation's Senior Program Team. The Board of Trustees makes award decisions three times per year, and funding is available immediately thereafter.

An approximate timeline is shared below:

Full proposal due	*Reviews sent to PI*	*Responses due*	*Board Meeting*	*Earliest start date*
April	mid/late July	mid-August	October	November 1st
September	mid/late December	mid-January	March	April 1st
November	mid/late February	late-March	June	July 1st