William T. Grant FOUNDATION

Research Grants on Improving the Use of Research Evidence: 2027 Application Guidelines

Updated November 2026

2027 Application Deadlines*
for *Major Research Grants* and *Officers' Research Grants***
January 6 | July 28 (3:00pm ET)

*Applicants may submit only one application per cycle as the principal investigator.

**Officers' research grants require institutional signature at the time of submission.

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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, community organizers, and other decision-makers that shape youth-serving systems in the United States.

We fund:

- Studies that build and test strategies to improve the use of existing research in policy or practice.
- Studies that test whether and how strategies that improve the use of research evidence in turn improve decision-making and youth outcomes.

We do not fund:

- Studies that aim solely to understand how individuals and organizations access research, make sense of research findings, and apply evidence. Studies must examine a strategy to improve research use or the implications of that research use for youth outcomes.
- Studies that focus solely on improving data-driven decision-making. Studies in which data use and research use intersect are welcome, however. For example, some teams have leveraged **routines around data use as a strategy** to embed research evidence. Others have engaged youth to **pair data, personal narratives, and research evidence** to increase school leaders' use of research evidence.
- Studies about improving research use among frontline practitioners, at the point of service. For example, studies of strategies to improve research use among teachers, clinicians, and others in similar roles are not considered a fit. See page 6 for a note on why we prioritize mid-level managers and other organizational decision-makers.
- Studies that focus primarily on physical health youth outcomes (e.g., physical illness, clinical trials, etc.).

2027 Priorities

This year we will continue to prioritize applications that:

- Investigate and test strategies to improve the use of research evidence to benefit young people concerning politically charged and contested issues, particularly in highly polarized contexts. Prior studies of decision-makers' use of research

evidence during school board deliberations (Asen & Gurke, 2014), in legislative sessions (Bogenschneider, Day, & Parrott, 2019; Yanovitzky & Weber, 2020), and by advocacy coalitions (Scott et al., 2017) provide a strong evidence base for designing and studying strategies.

- Propose experimental tests of strategies to improve research use in policy and practice to improve youth outcomes.

Funding Amounts

- Major research grants: $100,000 to $1,000,000 over 2-3 years, including up to 15% indirect costs. Funding amounts vary based on the study design, see page 6 for more information.
- Officers' research grants: $25,000–$50,000 over 1-2 years, including up to 15% indirect costs.

Funding Rates

Due to recent increases in application numbers, funding rates have reached historic lows. Rates listed here are for 2026:

- Major research grants: About 7% of letter of inquiry submissions were invited to submit full proposals; about 25% of full proposals were approved for funding.
- Officers' research grants: About 5% of letter of inquiry submissions were approved for funding.
- This means that even high-quality submissions do not always result in a positive funding decision and that feedback is limited.

Application Timeline

- Letters of inquiry for major research grants are accepted in early January, May, and August each year.
    - Successful letters of inquiry for major research grants will result in invitations to submit full proposals.
    - Invitations to submit full proposals are emailed within approximately eight weeks of letter of inquiry submission deadline.
    - For major research grants, the total timeline from letter of inquiry to funding decision is generally 10–15 months.
- Letters of inquiry for Officers' research grants are accepted only in January and August.
    - Officers' research grants are awarded on the merit of the letter of inquiry alone.
    - The funding decisions are emailed within approximately 8–10 weeks of the letter of inquiry submission deadline.

Introduction

Overview

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.

This program supports studies of strategies that aim to improve the use of research evidence in ways that benefit young people ages 5-25 in the United States. We want to know what it takes to get research used by decision-makers and what happens when research is used. And we are particularly interested in studies of strategies that are robust enough to facilitate research use in decision-making regarding divisive youth issues or in highly polarized environments. We welcome letters of inquiry for studies that pursue these broad aims.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Strategies:
Replicable methods, activities, relational approaches, or policies intended to improve the use of research evidence or to maximize its positive impact on decision-making and youth outcomes. For instance, it may include ways to create the incentives, organizational structures, and relationships needed to jointly produce, make sense of, and use research evidence in ways that respond to decision-makers' needs and ultimately benefit youth.

Please note that proposals focusing solely on research evidence dissemination are unlikely to be successful. Recent scholarship suggests that models that prioritize passive approaches to communicating research evidence were found to have limited effectiveness (Oliver et al., 2022; Langer, Tripney & Gough, 2016).

Research evidence:
A type of evidence derived from studies that apply systematic methods and analyses to address predefined questions or hypotheses. These include 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).

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, groups, 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; community leaders; 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.

The research on improving research use

There is a growing body of literature 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, knowledge about the effectiveness of these approaches and their implications for youth outcomes is limited.

We strongly encourage applicants to review the **previously funded grants** and other **resources for applicants** on our website to ensure their proposed study is grounded in and engaging with the existing empirical literature on the use of research evidence.

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.

Recent scholarship suggests the need for further attention to decision makers and the realities of the settings in which they operate. Of particular interest are studies that examine strategies to improve research use for benefiting youth in contexts with conflicting values, political leanings or public interests. What conditions, interventions, or tools can be used to promote routine use of research in policymaking and programming for highly polarized youth issues? Can evidence about promising responses be more routinely endorsed?

See Appendix B for links to related resources.

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 research 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 and how 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

We are particularly interested in research on ways to improve the use of research evidence by state and local policymakers, mid-level managers, leaders in community organizations, 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.

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, K-12 and higher 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' framing, research questions, methods, and interpretation of findings.

We welcome studies that pursue one of two aims:

1. **Building 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.
- Studies to examine 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**, 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.

2. **Testing whether and how strategies that improve the use of research evidence in turn improve 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 longstanding 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 better informed policy or practice decisions leading to improved outcomes for youth.
- Studies to 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 youth outcomes?

In this example, a proposal would need to use theory and related empirical evidence to motivate the potential of the evidence mandate to improve research use and the connection between improved use of research and improved youth outcomes. More generally, whether or not the study includes measures of youth outcomes, the connection between improved use of research among decision-makers and improved youth outcomes needs to be well-described.

NOTE

These research interests call for a range of methods, including experimental or quasi-experimental designs, 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 an 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.
    - Please note the following items are not allowable as direct costs: liability insurance (e.g., GAEL), flat rates for shared services, and rent. These types of costs are addressed through the indirect rate.
    - To be considered a direct cost, technology costs and communication services need to be presented as project specific (e.g., prorated in some way with an explanation of how they support the proposed research).
- 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. Please see note above about indirect costs.
- Studies may be stand-alone projects or may build off larger projects. The budget should be appropriate for the activities proposed.

> NOTE
>
> 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.

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, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Alaska Native-Serving Institutions, Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, and Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions.

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.
- ***Please note that you may only submit one application per cycle as the principal investigator. For example, you may submit only one major grant or one Officers' research grant letter of inquiry.***

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. Letters of inquiry for ineligible projects are screened out without further review.

Application Requirements

NOTE

The application process for all research grants begins with a letter of inquiry, a five-page proposal. Letters of inquiry for major research grants and Officers' research grants are accepted two times per year, in winter and summer.

We accept applications only through our online application system, which is accessible through our website.

See Appendix A for a checklist of required materials.

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% 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.
- Applicants do not need to describe the project team in the narrative. The narrative should focus on the research questions, theoretical and empirical background, theory of change for the proposed change strategy, and research design.

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% of total direct costs.
- The applicant organization's IRS tax-exempt status determination letter.

Please note, Officers' research grant applications also require an institutional signature prior to submission. Please coordinate with your institution. In some cases this requires more than a day to secure.

The items above and institutional sign off are not required for major research grants letters of inquiry.

Application Review Criteria

All letters of inquiry are initially reviewed by a set of reviewers with relevant expertise. In general, however, given the breadth of studies proposed in letters of inquiry, 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 research questions or hypotheses. Then we evaluate whether the proposed research designs and methods will provide strong empirical evidence on those questions.

> NOTE
>
> 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 two aims:
  - Building or testing ways to improve the use of existing research evidence in policy or practice.
  - Testing whether and how strategies that improve the use of research evidence in turn improve 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 clearly identifies decision-makers of interest in the given study context.
- 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 highlighted in curriculum vitae demonstrate that the research team has a track record of conducting strong research and communicating it successfully. They also demonstrate that the team has the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological knowledge to execute the proposed study.

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.

Application Review Process

Officers' Research Grants

Officers' research grants are awarded on the merit of the letter of inquiry alone. The decisions are emailed to applicants approximately 14 weeks after the submission deadline.

Major Research Grants

Successful letters of inquiry for major research grants will result in invitations to submit full proposals. These review decisions are emailed to investigators within approximately 9 weeks of the letter of inquiry submission deadline.

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 12 months.

1. If you are invited to submit a full proposal, you will receive a deadline approximately 6-7 weeks from the date of the invitation.
    - 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. 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 involing two or more external reviewers with content, methodological, and disci-plinary expertise in the proposed work.
2. Following external review, the Foundation's Senior Program Team reviews promising proposals and offers additional feedback.
3. 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.
4. Applicants' responses to external reviews are then further reviewed by the Senior Program Team. Finally, the team makes funding recommendations to the Board of Trustees.
5. Approved awards are made available shortly after the Board's June and October meetings.

References

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Appendix A: Application Checklist

Required Materials	Major Research Grant LOIs	Officers' Research Grant LOIs
Project Narrative (5 pages max.)	**Yes**	**Yes**
One page CV, Bio Sketch, or Resume (For each PI and Co-PI)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Project Details (Title, dates, 1,500-character max. description; within SmartSimple application)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Total Requested Amount (Within SmartSimple application)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Foundation Focus Area (Within SmartSimple application)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Additional Contacts (e.g., Co-PIs; filled out within SmartSimple application)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Applicant Demographics (Filled out within your SmartSimple profile)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Applicant's Highest Degree Attained (Filled out within your SmartSimple profile)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Full Budget (Template in SmartSimple)	No	**Yes**
Budget Justification Form (Template in SmartSimple)	No	**Yes**
Organization's Most Recent Audited Financial Statement	No	**Yes**
IRS Tax-Exempt Status Determination Letter	No	**Yes**
Institutional Sign-Off	No	**Yes**
Add wtgrantfdn.org to your **safe sender list** to ensure you receive notifications.	**Yes**	**Yes**

Appendix B: Useful Links

1. **Resources for Applicants**
   https://wtgrantfoundation.org/funding/research-grants-on-improving-use-of-research-evidence/applicant-resources

   Resources include applicant guidance, annotated proposals, and recommended reading on topics such as conceptualizing the use of research evidence, theorizing ways to improve the use of research evidence, methods for studying the use of research evidence, and critical race perspectives on the use of research evidence.

2. **Frequently Asked Questions**
   https://wtgrantfoundation.org/funding/research-grants-on-improving-use-of-research-evidence/faq

   FAQs cover topics including what we do and do not fund, our research interests on reducing inequality, the letter of inquiry, study designs and methods, the research grants budget and human subjects approval, and specifics about the Officers' research grants.

3. **Awarded Grants, 2004–Today**
   (Search and filter all awarded grants by program and focus area)
   https://wtgrantfoundation.org/the-library?_sft_format=grants&_sft_focus_area=use-of-research-evidence&_sft_program=research-grants

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