

Every day health services research proposals cross your desk and the desks of your colleagues. Unfortunately, in a world of scarce resources, it is not possible to fund all the good ones. How can you and your colleagues identify the highest priority issues? How can you evaluate whether the data exist to address the issues described? What signals should you give the field so that you and other staff are not burdened with reviewing proposals outside of your priority areas? Health Services Research Projects in Progress (HSRProj) and the public health subset of Health Services and Sciences Research Resources (HSRR), free databases coordinated by the National Information Center on Health Services Research and Health Care Technology (NICHSR) at the National Library of Medicine (NLM), could assist you.

Background

HSRProj is a database of information about grants and contracts in health services research that have been funded and are still in progress. The database is a joint effort of AcademyHealth and the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and is funded by NLM. Records in HSRProj include grants and contracts awarded by major public and private funding agencies and foundations. Individuals can retrieve:

- ◆ Names of the organizations conducting and sponsoring the research;
- ◆ Principal investigator contact information;
- ◆ Beginning and ending dates of the project; and
- ◆ Information about the study design and methodology, including demographic characteristics of the study group, number of subjects in the study population, population base of the study sample, and the source of the project data.

HSRProj records are indexed with the NLM Medical Subject Headings (MeSH). Project abstracts are included whenever possible.

HSRR is a database of information on datasets, instruments, indices, and software employed in health services research and behavioral and social sciences. With the goal of strengthening the capacity to conduct public health systems research (PHSR), the University of Kentucky has supplemented the HSRR database with a PHSR subset. In addition to brief descriptions of the research resources, HSRR includes URLs of providers for additional information or access to the resources. HSRR records include information about accessibility (e.g., provider or vendor contact information, costs and restrictions on use) and methodology (e.g., sample size, population characteristics, units of analysis, data collection mechanisms). HSRR contains information about the content and format of a tool and is not a repository of the actual resources. When available, relevant published references about resources are accessible through saved searches with

links to PubMed. Individuals interested in conducting PHSR can obtain datasets with the following types of information:

- ◆ State specific public health statistics;
- ◆ Health behavior related data;
- ◆ Hospital and ambulatory care data;
- ◆ Dental health data; and
- ◆ Data on access to and delivery of public health services.

The public health subset of HSRR is a collaborative initiative of the NLM, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the University of Kentucky.

How Can HSRProj and the Public Health Subset of HSRR Help You?

HSRProj provides access to ongoing research projects before the results are published. Findings from recently completed, but not yet published, health services research projects can be valuable to funders, researchers, policymakers, and conference organizers. The public health subset of HSRR provides information about data likely to be useful in conducting PHSR. Users can examine and compare characteristics of health-related research tools and link to additional research resources. These compilations of ongoing and recently completed research projects, and data to support future research, provide vital links to information not readily available from other sources.

These databases can be used to:

- ◆ Develop your organization's strategic agenda and priority areas for funding, ensuring that they complement existing resources for research;
- ◆ Assess the existing evidence and research gaps on topics within your organization's priority areas;
- ◆ Identify data available to support analyses identified as important;
- ◆ Identify potential grantees with a substantive interest in your priority areas; and
- ◆ Identify experts to assist in the development of proposal solicitations and review of submitted proposals.

Scenarios

Where HSRProj and the HSRR Public Health Subset Can Be Helpful



1. Developing a Five-Year Strategic Plan for Supporting Research on High Priority Topics

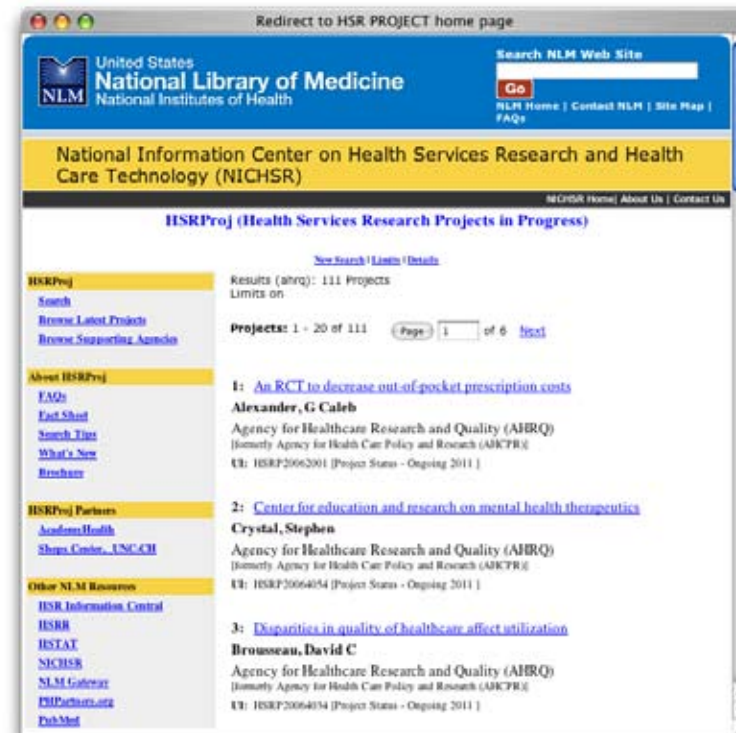
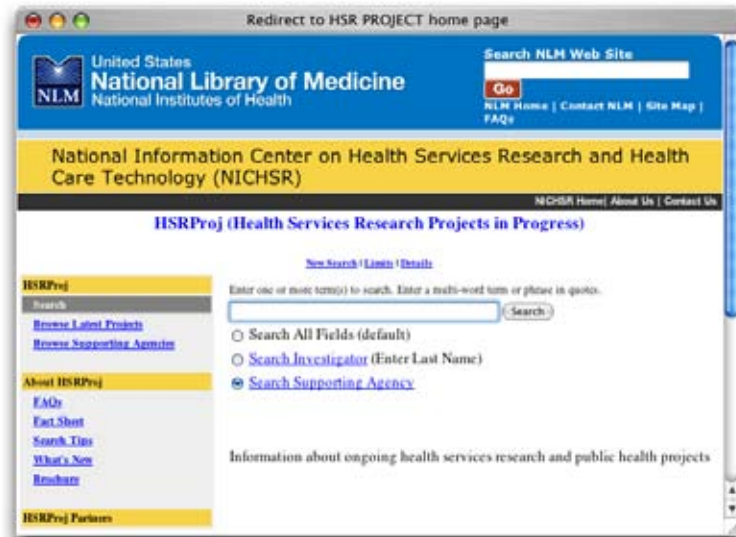
As a project officer at a large philanthropy whose mission is to support health services research, you receive a number of research proposals on a variety of topics. You skim many journals and newsletters and consider yourself familiar with current health policy debate and recently published research. Your foundation has established a strategic planning committee to set funding priorities for the next five years. How can you make a significant contribution to the committee's discussions, identifying questions in need of answers, as well as setting priorities to ensure funded research has the greatest potential to inform future policy discussions?

Findings from the work proposed in the applications piled high on your desk will not be available for two to five years. How can you know what the research needs will be then? How can you be sure that the other foundations aren't already supporting similar work? How can you know what will be most relevant for policy so far into the future? How can you be sure that your grants support work that not only fills research gaps and contributes to the policy debate, but also raise the visibility of the foundation and attract high quality researchers?

You turn to HSRProj and HSRR. HSRProj can serve as a barometer of the field, providing a sense of the level of interest in a variety of topics, while HSRR and its public health subset can provide guidance as to the data available to address topics of interest. You access the HSRProj database at www.nlm.nih.gov/hsrproj and indicate that you want to "search supporting agency." Using the Limits function, you conduct an HSRProj search of all ongoing work funded by your foundation for the last two years. You do the same for the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, which supports health services research, as well as specific institutes at the National Institutes of Health. A quick skim of the results indicates that the recently-funded ongoing work supports analyses examining prescription drug costs, technological innovation, mental health, and a variety of public health issues. You have no doubt that these topics are likely to remain on the radar screens of policymakers over the next five years. In addition, while the currently-funded, ongoing work will provide evidence regarding many facets of the issues, you know that additional evidence will be needed to form an adequate basis for policymaking.

Using information obtained through HSRProj, you contact the principal investigators of several of the larger projects in each of the topic areas to better understand the work, any preliminary findings and important questions the researchers have identified

but will not be able to address with their current grant support. Based on these discussions you develop a list of topics to introduce at the first meeting of the new strategic planning committee. You will suggest that the strategic agenda for the coming years comprise priority funding areas encompassing these topics.



Scenarios Where HSRProj and the HSRR Public Health Subset Can Be Helpful

You know that one of the criteria for determining whether to solicit proposals on a particular topic is whether there is sufficient data to conduct the requisite analyses. To assist you with this facet of your recommendation to the strategic planning committee, you turn to HSRR. Specifically, your foundation has an interest in promoting PHSR but recognizes that data in this field are limited. A search on *mental health* within HSRR's public health subset yields several records, depicting a variety of data sources. *Technology* leads to the identification of five tools. Based on these preliminary searches, you are confident that if the foundation issues proposal solicitations addressing mental health or technology in a public health context, researchers are going to be able to develop sound proposals in response, resulting in the foundation's work playing a critical role in policy development over the next five years.



2. Issuing a Series of Project Solicitations

You have been asked to develop project solicitations on three topics: prescription drug costs, specialty hospitals, and food safety regulation. The most difficult, yet most important, aspect of developing these solicitations is to identify the research questions your foundation is most interested in supporting. In addition, you want to be sure that data exist to allow analysis of the research questions identified.

The first step in drafting the solicitations is to conduct a literature review to ascertain the need for additional grant support. In other words, how would new work complement existing or ongoing work? PubMed (www.pubmed.gov), a service of the NLM, provides access to over 17 million citations from MEDLINE and other life science journals for health and biomedical articles dating back to the 1950s. However, you want to be sure



the proposals you solicit not only build on evidence in the published literature, but address questions that go beyond ongoing work that has not yet been published. So, you turn to HSRProj.

A search of *prescription drug costs* yields more than 50 records; *specialty hospitals* yields nearly 30 records; and *food safety* yields several additional records. The numbers alone give you a sense of the research commitment made to each of the topics to date. A review of the abstracts, along with those from PubMed, allows you to identify areas where additional research is needed. With this information, you can identify the most important questions to include in the solicitations. A similar series of searches in HSRR allows you to evaluate whether there are existing datasets to address these issues or if primary data collection will be necessary. In addition, you can begin thinking about a niche that additional funding could fill, allowing your foundation to be a visible player in these fields of research.

Once the solicitations are issued and you receive proposals, the projects you have identified through HSRProj can help you to assess whether particular analyses would be pioneering or make marginal, but perhaps critical, contributions to a well-studied field. In addition, the principal investigators for these projects might serve as a ready set of expert external reviewers.

3. Allocating Funds for Public Health Systems Research

You work at the college of public health at a major university. You and your colleagues would like to increase awareness in the academic community about the scope of research that is being done at your university and other institutions on emergency preparedness and, at the same time, would like to establish your university as a major source of information in health services research. After much discussion, it is determined that funding

additional research on the topic would be an excellent way to meet these two goals. As a result, you are tasked with developing a new request for proposals that will highlight emergency preparedness in the field of public health systems research.

In order to successfully complete this task, you determine that it would be helpful to review the current and past research done on the topic to:

1. Familiarize yourself with research projects that are currently being conducted on the topic, specifically what is being examined and who is funding the research. This will allow you to create a list of potential topics dealing with emergency preparedness that may have been overlooked or under-researched, as well as help you create a list of researchers that you may solicit for abstracts.

2. Familiarize yourself with which researchers and organizations are currently funding research in the field or have funded research in the past.

You quickly realize that merely conducting a literature review of the topic would encounter major problems. It would be biased in favor of research that is already completed. You would not be able to identify researchers that are new to the field and unpublished or consider emergency preparedness topics that have recently been introduced to the field of public health. A review of published literature also would not provide a detailed picture of related projects that are already funded, but not yet published.

HSRProj has the information you need. A search of the topic *emergency preparedness* on HSRProj, yields approximately 10 records. Each project listing contains the research topic, researcher, and performing organization of each project. HSRProj also provides information on the supporting agency of each project, as well as an abstract detailing the project purpose.

How Do You Search?



HSRProj

1. Go to www.nlm.nih.gov/hsrproj
2. Enter search terms in the query box. Use double quotes ("") around the terms to search for a multi-word phrase, Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT), and field tags enclosed in square brackets to search within a field (e.g., [ir] to search for investigator).
3. Select the type of search (e.g., investigator/researcher or supporting/funding agency).
4. To conduct a more-tailored search (e.g., if you are seeking projects recently added to HSRProj, projects funded in a particular year or a certain state, or completed projects), click on the limits option above the query box and enter the appropriate parameters.
5. Click the Search button. A results screen is displayed.
6. HSRProj records are displayed in a brief format: project title, full name of investigator, sponsoring agency, unique identifier number, and project status. Note that HSRProj displays records in reverse chronological order of the project's status. (For example, a project that has an end date of 2009 will appear before a project that has an end date of 2005.)
7. View the full record by clicking on the hyperlink of the project title (opening a new browser window).
8. Use the print function of your browser to print all the information displayed on the Web page.



HSRR

1. Go to http://www.nlm.nih.gov/nichsr/hsrr_search/
2. Enter the terms you would like to search in the query box, and select the search option you desire. (You can search all records, datasets only, instruments/indices only, software only, or PHSR subset only.)
3. Multiple terms will be automatically combined with "and".
4. Use double quotes ("") around multi word terms to search for a specific multi word term. Boolean operators (typed in capital letters) and field terms can also be used. In addition, terms can be used with field tags (enclosed in square brackets), but if used must be combined with Boolean operators.
5. After entering the appropriate term(s), select the "search" option.
6. HSRR search results are displayed alphabetically by title, and contain the name of the resource, the type of resource it is (dataset, instrument etc.) and the source of the instrument.
7. A more detailed record can be viewed by clicking on the title.

How Can You Be Sure Your Project is in HSRProj or your Dataset is in HSRR's Public Health Subset?

Researchers are invited to submit a description of their current health services research projects to HSRProj.

Please send email to hsrproj@academyhealth.org or complete an online submission form at www.academyhealth.org/hsrproj/input.cfm.

If you have a dataset or instrument that could be included in the PHSR subset of the NLM HSRR database, please contact F. Douglas Scutchfield, M.D. at scutch@email.uky.edu.

To find out more information about the NLM Health Services Research and Public Health Information Programs, please contact NICHSR at nichsr@nlm.nih.gov.