Out of the Ivory Tower: How Philanthropy Can Support Rigorous Research to Revitalize Communities Across America

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Founded in 1936

Committed to understanding human behavior through research.

The most pressing challenges confronting young people change over time.
Mission of the Foundation

Supporting Research to Improve the Lives of Young People

- Young people ages 5-25 in the United States
- Focus areas
  - Research on reducing inequality among young people
  - Research on improving the use of evidence from research in policies and practices that affect young people
Activities of the Foundation

Supporting Research to Improve the Lives of Young People

- Major research grants
  - Studies that are both rigorous and relevant
  - Aimed at one of our focus areas
    - Reducing inequality and using research evidence
    - Will be transformative in the long run

- William T. Grant Scholars
  - Career development awards for junior scholars
  - Expand expertise to new areas with supportive mentoring
Both focus on reducing inequality in youth outcomes.

Both draw lessons from grantee findings on improving the use of research evidence.

Both demonstrate the value of applying rigorous research to pressing social problems.

One aims for institutional change and thus has a deliberate pace - the other is “rapid”.

Two new grant programs are aimed at revitalizing communities.
Institutional Challenge Grant

1. Calls on universities to build a partnership with a public agency or non-profit organization
2. Jointly develop a research agenda, and provide fellows to carry out the research agenda
3. Build the capacity of the agency to use evidence in its decision-making
4. Reshape incentives for faculty to support engagement
Institutional Challenge Grant

- Cornell University is the first grantee
- In partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, a rural county in upstate New York
Institutional Challenge Grant

- Research challenge: addressing the opioid epidemic and reducing child maltreatment
- Will evaluate two specific interventions in the judicial and child welfare systems
- A five-year process to build capacity to use research evidence and build incentives for university researchers to address local challenges
Rapid Response Research Grants

- Designed for cases where research exists, but needs to be contextualized for a specific need
- “Rapid” means from proposal to findings to action in 15 months or less
  - Not a dissemination plan but an engagement plan
- “Research” means based on existing bodies of evidence
- “Response” means protecting vulnerable children and youth in challenging times
Rapid Response Research Grants

Six awards in 2017-2018

- Social services for children of immigrants
  - Two awards: one focused on state policy and the other on child welfare offices
- Integration of Muslim refugee children in school
- School safety for teenaged sexual minority youth
- Rebuilding youth employment services in Puerto Rico following Hurricanes Irma & Maria
- Responding to the opioid crisis in rural Ohio
Community Foundation Opportunity Network

- A network of 45 community foundations plus three national funders including the Annie E. Casey and William T. Grant Foundations
- Mission: close opportunity gaps for young people
- Strategies: implement research-based approaches identified in recent consensus reports
How to Reduce Inequality?
Efforts by researchers and research funders to improve the quality of evidence have succeeded.

The barrier to evidence-informed policy is at the point where evidence gets *used*.

Here, too, research funders have a role:
- Support partnerships between research & policymakers
- Require engagement plans, not dissemination plans
- Incentivize faculty to come down from the ivory tower

Private philanthropy is leading the way, federal support will be essential for large-scale change.