

Reviewer's report

Title: Translating Research into Practice: Lessons from the IDSRN Program

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Reviewer: Heather Buchan

Reviewer's report:

General

This paper aims to contribute to knowledge about the general topic of translating research into practice through reporting the outcomes of an evaluation of a specific AHRQ program, the Integrated Delivery Systems Research Network.

This could potentially be of interest to a number of readers of the journal but the paper needs some further work to achieve its aims.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The paper could be improved if the program and its goals were more clearly and concisely described, as this would help place the evaluation in context. It would also be helpful if a greater distinction was made between the overall program evaluation and the aspects that deal with the value and impact of specific parts of the program as perceived by the participating health service delivery organisations. This would be useful in helping to better achieve the overall aims of the paper.

I found the program background section lacking in some information that would have been helpful to a non-US based reader - both to gain a better understanding of the program and to help understand the evaluation. The authors describe the request for proposals and list the separate organisations that were successful in gaining awards but it is not clear what the awards made in September 2000 actually entail – did the different consortia gain funds to support research translation infrastructure, or to support specific research proposals or did the awards simply mean they were entitled to enter a process to bid for further project funds? Exactly what infrastructure and support did the AHRQ provide to the program overall? - an annual meeting and newsletter is mentioned (p4); in other parts of the paper the lack of infrastructure within AHRQ to support the program is mentioned (p18). The term "task order " is used in the text and in table 3 – it is partly explained at the bottom of page 12 but it is not really clear to a non US based reader what a task order is. The general description of the whole process of grant application and awarding is rather vague. This may be because the 58 different funding awards covered a variety of different types of proposals, from investigator initiated research to contract research directed at specific questions posed by the funders – this is implied on p3 & 4 (e.g. "Funded projects vary as to the specificity of required work" etc etc). However it is not clear whether the project type (table 3) is dictated by the type of funding proposal and what influence the criteria for awarding funding have on the overall outcomes. Did the competitive nature of funding have an impact on the broader dissemination, sharing and uptake of results?

The paper would also benefit from a clearer description of the goals that the program was evaluated against. There are 2 broad aims identified in paragraph 1 of the program background on page 3 – to

foster private public collaboration (specifically to make more data from the private sector available to researchers) & to develop ways of generating research findings and tools that would be applied in real world settings. However further goals are suggested later in the paper – e.g. sharing of insights and dissemination of outcomes beyond the research location. It's not clear whether one of the goals of the program was to have the issues identified by the participating organisations influence the priority setting and funding decisions of the AHRQ.

The motivations for organisations to participate in the program are also unclear. It would be helpful to know more about the views of the executives of participating organisations – we don't learn why high level executives support the program despite the stated considerable cost to their organisations (p16). What return on their investment do they feel they have received? Given the stated aims of the paper the perceptions of operational managers about impact and usefulness of the program are particularly important.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Greater use of specific examples within the Results section would bring focus to some of the more general comments.

Specific examples would be helpful in clarifying statements like "there was some concern that requests for project proposals may not necessarily have been sufficiently well structured to capitalise on the link between research and practice" (p9), "those at operational level reported being overwhelmed with many externally imposed requirements of government, payers and others etc etc" (p15), "perception of some IDSRN participants were not always as closely linked to the evidence base in the field as was desirable" (p19).

The authors state that the new iteration of the program ACTION has taken into account the insights from the evaluation but nevertheless is likely to face many of the same challenges and tradeoffs inherent under the IDSRN. It would be helpful if they expanded on this statement and made a clearer link between their comments in the Discussion and those in the Conclusion.

The general background introduction could be considerably shortened as relevance of interest in translating research into practice does not need to be justified to this Journal's readers.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests