Reviewer’s report

Title: Increasing the capacity of policy agencies to use research findings: a stepped-wedge trial

Version: 0 Date: 12 Oct 2018

Reviewer: Jonathan Purtle

Reviewer's report:

This is an extremely well-designed and important study. I have no comments on the methods or approach—they are rigorous and clearly described.

There are three areas where I think that the manuscript could be improved.

There are a number of randomized experiments related to research use in policymaking that should be integrated into the paper. The manuscript states: "Only three studies included any kind of control group and randomized to control and intervention." There are more than three studies that meet the criteria. I suggest that the authors see:


The intervention is focuses on administrative policymakers in government agencies (i.e., not elected policymakers). These two types of policymakers are very different (e.g., administrative policymakers have narrow content expertise in a few specific areas, elected policymakers have shallow content expertise across a wide range of areas; the evidence use behaviors of
administrative policymakers are likely to be less influenced by public opinion than elected policymakers). I think the manuscript would be strengthened if the Discussion included some thoughts about if and how the intervention might work if it was adapted to target elected policymakers (e.g., state legislators in the U.S. context).

I also think the manuscript would benefit from some discussion of cost-benefits/effectiveness. The intervention appears to work, but at what cost? How much does it cost to increase research use in policymaking by a meaningful amount? What is a "clinically significant" (i.e., meaningful) change in research use? I understand that this is not a cost-benefit/effectiveness study and that these issues are beyond the focus of the paper. Nevertheless, I think that the manuscript would benefit from some discussion of these issues, even if only mentioned as areas for future research. Here is a good example of how a cost-benefit/effectiveness component could be integrated.

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An exceptional article

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