

UAB-ICRC Research Support Services Unit and Oversight Evaluation Unit

Research Support Services Unit

The Research Support Services (RSSU) Unit, headed by Debra McCallum, PhD, provides technical guidance and assistance in research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation to the Center's research projects. This Unit has already been involved, as needed, in developing individual projects in the current proposal. Kathleen Bolland, PhD, and Al Bartolucci, PhD, serve on this Unit. These three individuals have experience and expertise in a wide range of research methods and designs and data analysis, involving both laboratory and field research, and using both quantitative and qualitative methods. While they have different back-grounds and strengths, they also share multiple, overlapping areas of expertise and interest. For some projects and issues, they will work together as a team to provide a broad range of technical guidance; for others, they will respond individually to meet an investigator's needs. Additional members may be added to this group on an *ad hoc* basis to meet the needs of specific projects. Brief information on each scientist is listed below.

Debra M. McCallum, PhD, is a Senior Research Scientist at the Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR) at The University of Alabama. She served as Director of ISSR from 1991 through 2001, and has been Director of ISSR's survey research unit, the Capstone Poll, since 1989. In this latter role, she has been responsible for conducting hundreds of surveys, using telephone, in-person, written survey methods, and focus groups. She has conducted evaluation research for a number of programs, including several involving children and families. Dr. McCallum has over 20 years of experience conducting research in a variety of settings, expertise in evaluation, survey research, and experimental design, and considerable experience coordinating multi-faceted projects. She is the former Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at the University of Alabama. Dr. McCallum has primary responsibility for technical assistance in areas of survey research and will coordinate the activities of the RSSU.

Kathleen A. Bolland, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work where she teaches research, evaluation, and policy courses at the undergraduate and graduate level and chairs the BSW program. She has a master's degree in human experimental psychology and a doctoral minor in education research and evaluation. Dr. Bolland has almost 30 years of experience evaluating social and educational programs, both as principal investigator and as an evaluator working with others. She has a long-standing involvement in the American Evaluation Association, is a past board member (1999-2002), and is currently Chair of the Topical Interest Group on Teaching of Evaluation. Dr. Bolland has primary responsibility for technical assistance in areas related to evaluation and assessment.

Alfred A. Bartolucci, PhD, is Professor, Department of Biostatistics, School of Public Health at UAB, and a long-time ICRC faculty member. From 1982 to 1997, he chaired the UAB Department of Biostatistics and Biomathematics. Dr. Bartolucci has over 30 years of experience teaching, consulting, and conducting research as a biostatistician. He has extensive experience in health and injury related research and has served on numerous NIH Study Sections. His expertise includes all aspects of statistical analysis and interpretation, and he has primary responsibility in these areas of technical assistance.

In addition to the services of the three members of the RSSU Unit, one of the resources available to investigators of the UTC will be the Capstone Poll, a survey research unit within the Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Alabama. Since 1980, the Capstone Poll has conducted survey research on a wide range of social, behavioral, health, and political issues. The research facilities of the Capstone Poll include twenty telephone-interviewing stations, where survey data are collected using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) capabilities. The Capstone Poll maintains a staff of trained, experienced interviewers, a full-time supervisor, and a full-time project coordinator. The primary role of the Capstone Poll is to assist researchers in conducting survey research. The Capstone Poll is directed by Dr. McCallum.

Oversight and Evaluation Unit

Headed by Dr. Kathleen Bolland, primary members of the RSS Unit also comprise the Oversight and Evaluation Unit, as the tasks of these two groups are clearly interrelated. The OEU unit will monitor, document and assess processes and outcomes. One regular forum for the oversight process will be regularly scheduled *Research in Progress* Seminars where PIs will present their research projects and progress, and Unit members, along with other audience members, will ask questions and make suggestions for strengthening the projects. In addition, unit members will provide reviews of seed projects or other supplemental projects, in addition to reviews provided by external reviewers.

Evaluation

The evaluation plan that follows, describes how the ICRC's Administration and Operations Core's Oversight and Evaluation Unit monitors project activities. Center evaluation procedures include (where relevant):

1. **Process evaluation** -- This program monitoring activity is designed to determine whether tasks were completed as planned, to document changes or deviations that occur and their rationale, and to assess factors that facilitate or inhibit a project from meeting its goals. Results will be used to develop recommendations for possible changes in plans and implementation strategies. If a project is not effective in achieving its goals, sometimes a process evaluation can identify why. When project goals are reached, the process evaluation can help to link outcomes to the processes that were most effective.

2. **Outcome or impact evaluation** -- Each project outlined in this application has specified goals. This part of the evaluation measures whether these goals were reached. Each project also has its own evaluation plan, described as part of the project proposal, which is not repeated here.
 - 2a. **Efficacy or effectiveness evaluation** --This activity involves assessing the results of an intervention. By convention, “efficacy” is often used for laboratory research or clinical trials, while “effectiveness” is used for field studies.
 - 2b. **Cost-effectiveness evaluation** -- This component will allow us to ascertain if a program’s impact is worth its cost.

For the Center as a whole, the Outcomes and Evaluation Unit will conduct outcome and cost-effectiveness evaluations around the Center’s overall goals. This begins with the combined outcome assessments of all the research, training, and service projects, including productivity measures such as peer-reviewed publications and presentations. Evaluation data will be used to draft reports on the Center’s progress, similar to those provided in Chapter 1. Center outcomes will also include (a) the successful development of follow-up research proposals to expand the knowledge or advance the concept further along the pathway from basic science to successful interventions and (b) follow-up training service proposals to implement interventions on a wider scale. The infrastructure and resources of the Center contribute to the cost-effectiveness of these activities. For example, the Research Support Services may represent a cost savings, as these services are available to all projects, and each one does not need to hire its own consultants or find a subcontractor to conduct telephone surveys. Numerous administrative tasks and planning activities are also centralized, providing a cost savings to all projects. Budgets for all projects and for the Center have been developed with a careful eye to cost considerations. Costs will be discussed as part of the process and formative evaluation anytime a project is having difficulties or has achieved an outcome with fewer resources than originally anticipated.

The Center’s evaluation plan organizes a variety of assessment strategies into a unified framework to determine whether its objectives are being achieved. Although the full impact of many Center activities will not be measurable for a few years, as many indicators as possible will be used to assess the Center’s progress toward achieving its goals and objectives. These objectives and examples of data for evaluating success in each area are listed below. An initial task for the OEU, Center administration, and the investigators will be to expand upon this list as needed.