

Texas Federal Statistical Research Data Center: Opportunities for Research Using Restricted Data

Proposal Development Workshop Part III - Notes on NCHS and other Non-Census Projects

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“Census Projects” & “NCHS/AHRQ Projects”

An RDC provides the opportunity to conduct multiple types of research projects.

All RDC projects have certain things in common

- **A proposal to use restricted data is required**
- **Data analysis is conducted in the RDC secure computing lab**
- **Results are released through a formal review process**
- **Benefits are conferred to the relevant statistical agencies**

Individual projects can differ in important ways.

- **“Census Projects” follow one set of procedures; the RDC Admin plays a central, direct role in the process.**
- **NCHS and AHRQ Projects follow a separate set of procedures; The RDC Admin plays a minor role in the process**

This discussion reviews some key points about NCHS and AHRQ projects

Health Data Sets?

Health-related research in CRDCs has recently grown dramatically. Currently about 40% of projects in CRDC are health related, up from under 10% five years ago.

The website for the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) provides descriptions of the restricted variables that are available in CRDCs by NCHS data set.

[NCHS Restricted Data Sets & Information](#)

The website for the US Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) RDC provides a description of the restricted variables that are available in CRDCs by AHRQ data set at the following link.

[AHRQ Restricted Data Sets & Information](#)

Census Projects

Most RDC projects nationally are “Census Projects”

- **They use restricted census data sets (broadly defined)**
- **They use restricted data sets “owned” by other statistical agencies who coordinate with Census and let Census oversee the review process**

Examples of Census Projects

- **Projects using restricted files from the decennial censuses, the ACS and other census demographic data sets**
- **Projects using restricted economic data sets (e.g., the Census of Manufactures) and related ancillary data sets**
- **Projects using data sets managed by Census (e.g., NCVS)**
- **Projects using administrative data (e.g., IRS, SSS, etc.)**

Census Projects

The RDC Director approves project lab access

The RDC Administrator works directly with the investigator to advise, preview, and submit the proposal

The RDC Administrator assists the researcher with issues that arise in the analysis phase of the project

The RDC Administrator plays a role in the process of reviewing results for release to the public

Researchers must fulfill census benefits guidelines and submit a related report and working paper

NCHS Projects

Researchers work with NCHS analysts and use the NCHS proposal template to develop and submit proposals

NCHS analysts assist the researcher with issues that arise in the analysis phase of the project

- **NCHS charges a fee for the preparation of the data (TXRDC may assist with this fee)**

NCHS analysts assist with review of results

The RDC Admin plays a secondary role

- **coordinates with NCHS to oversee the hosting of NCHS data**
- **must be present in the lab for NCHS analysis**

The RDC Admin is not involved in:

- **proposal development and submission**
- **data management and analysis issues**
- **review of results**

NCHS Projects

TXRDC Directors Must Approve NCHS Project Lab Access

NCHS does not (consistently) confirm that researchers have lab access rights

- **There are no “formal” safeguards to stop a researcher from submitting a proposal to NCHS**
- **The NCHS will review the proposal without necessarily confirming that the research has lab access**
- **This situation presents potential risks to researchers who do not understand the basis for lab access**

Project Benefits

NCHS Benefit Requirements are easier to meet

- **NCHS data fall under different regulatory guidelines**
- **Generating knowledge that benefits national health is part of the NCHS mission**

NCHS does not require a formal benefits report

Access and Usage Costs are Approximately the Same

Costs for Researchers at Consortium Institutions

- **Access is at no cost or at very low cost compared to charges for non-consortium users (due to institutional membership fee)**
- **Scheduling will be prioritized, if needed, on several criteria. (Our lab is large so this will not be an issue in the near term.)**

Costs for Non-Consortium Researchers

- **Researcher access will be on a per project cost schedule in keeping with practices in the national RDC network**
- **For health projects usual terms are \$10,000-\$15,000 per project per year**
- **Collaborating with researchers at consortium institutions can bring more favorable terms.**

Consortium membership is the most cost effective way for institutions to give researchers stable, predictable access

Important Practical Issues to Consider

Obtaining NCHS Project Approval

- **Census Bureau approval of projects is required.**
- **The main criteria for Census Bureau approval is not scientific merit (this is mostly presumed). It is “benefits to Census”.**

The RDC Computing Environment – Software and Hardware

- **Computing is conducted in the secure lab**
- **The data and software are hosted on Census Bureau servers**
- **Workstation hardware and software follow Census Bureau specifications**

Getting Research Products Out Involves a Review Process

- **Project results are reviewed on confidentiality criteria; NOTHING leaves the secure lab without approval**
- **It is crucial to plan ahead for getting project approval and for getting project output (e.g., regression results) out of the lab**

TXRDC Services for Health Projects

TXRDC Directors are a point of first contact for health projects.

The TXRDC Consortium has an Associate Director for Health Research who can advise researchers who wish to learn about/develop proposal for health projects

The TXRDC Consortium has a Research Assistant/Analyst who can help with some aspects of proposal development.

The TXRDC Seed Grant Program will support projects for health research as well as "Census" projects

I Want In! What Do I Do? and When?

Contact the TXRDC Director to discuss next steps

Attend TXRDC Workshops, Events, and Speaker presentations

Apply to our Proposal Development (Seed) Grant program

Review materials at our website, the CES website, the NCHS website, and other sites listed at our website.

When? *Start as Soon As Possible*

Agency approval is needed for RCD access.

The process is not fast, so do not delay unnecessarily.

How Will the TXRDC Help?

Researching information relevant to researcher interests

- **Data availability; available software**
- **Project budgets and timeline**
- **Contact information**

Guidance on Proposal Development Process

- **Navigating the agency project approval process**

Seed Grant Program for Proposal Development

Assistance and Training for using the Secure Lab

Scheduling On-Site Project and Workgroup Space

The Internal and External Review Process

Informal Development Consultation at the TXRDC

Researchers consult with TXRDC Director and staff to learn about the review process and receive advice on proposals.

Official Proposal Review by NCHS or other Non-Census Agencies

Typically this takes about 90 days and may involve revisions.

Tips for a Good RDC Experience

Meet/Consult with the TXRDC Director

Be Realistic, Plan Ahead, and Plan Carefully

- **Start the process early – do not underestimate the time line**
- **Consult early with the TXRDC Director to determine project feasibility and lab access**
- **Ask about seed grants to support proposal development**

Think Strategically About RDC Projects

When appropriate, write proposals geared to multiple papers over an extended time period (2-4 years)

Learn About the Research Environment

Attend RDC workshops; Read on-line documentation and advice; Consult with RDC researchers; Examine CES research annuals and Working Papers

Useful Sources of RDC Information

Information about Health Data, Data Sets, and New Developments

National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)

[NCHS Restricted Data Sets & Information](#)

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)

[AHRQ Restricted Data Sets & Information](#)

TXRDC Contact Information for Health Projects

Developing Projects

Texas RDC-TAMU Director – Mark Fossett
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Texas RDC-UT-Austin Director – Kelly Raley
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Health Researchers Please Remember:

Health projects using NCHS data follow separate project development procedures.

Researchers work with NCHS research analysts and submit proposals using the NCHS proposal template

NCHS does not allow Census RDC Admins to assist with NCHS proposal preparation