

A perennial challenge in real world research is balancing competing priorities. Regardless of specific study context, researchers face challenges that require decisions and that have consequences for study design and execution. Challenges include both obvious ones (e.g., containing costs, honoring funding guidelines), as well as more subtle ones (e.g., determining which measures are appropriately sensitive to an intervention or policy shift, communicating transparently with diverse stakeholders, securing cooperation with a study over multiple years). For example, funding guidelines may preclude providing incentives to schools or individuals to participate, yet prior research indicates that absent incentives, response rates are likely to be problematic. Or in another case, researchers may weigh the potential benefits of using a validated instrument that could loosely be construed as related to the domain(s) targeted by an intervention versus a to-be-developed instrument to assess program impact specifically in the targeted domain(s). In another instances, a study's external validity would likely be strengthened if a larger number of sites participated, yet the study's budget could accommodate only a limited number of sites.

These represent some of the dilemmas--and potential trade-offs--that researchers often face as they design and conduct studies. How do researchers develop strategies for weighing the inherent trade-offs inherent in school-based research? What kinds of information do they use in weighing the potential upsides and downsides of decisions? And what kinds of information do they wish they had?

In this proposed moderated panel discussion, four different researchers will describe their experiences related to challenges they have faced when designing and conducting school-based research. The panelists include Barbara Foorman, Florida Center for Reading Research, Kelly Ann Hallberg, Urban Labs/U Chicago, Jim Kemple, Research Alliance for NYC Schools, and Barbara Means, Digital Promise, and Beth Gamse, Gamse Partnership, as moderator. The panel as a whole (the researchers and the moderator) include individuals with substantial experience in a variety of settings, including academia, K-12 schools, university-affiliated research centers, government, contract research organizations, and non-profit organizations. Each is also a senior researcher who has led studies at local, state, and national levels, is an active participant in professional organizations, and is recognized for her/his expertise.

Each panelist will be asked to describe different examples of balancing the advantages and disadvantages, first in terms of making key study *design* decisions, and then in terms of making key study *execution* decisions. The moderator will ask follow-up questions about the information each panelist had on hand, or needed to have when trying to make key decisions, and will also ask whether the decisions seem reasonable in hindsight, because sometimes the tensions we balance are more apparent in hindsight than they are contemporaneously.

The moderator will solicit audience input about design and execution decisions they have experienced. Audience participation is integral to this discussion, as it may contribute to a broader understanding of potential factors that influence various decision points, as well as whether/how such factors vary and/or are constant across studies and contexts. While neither the moderator nor the panelists have preconceived notions about whether a fixed set of considerations could emerge from this conversation, they agree there may be some potential guiding principles that could help researchers prioritize decision factors in terms of short- and/or longer-term importance, ramifications for research rigor, and sharing lessons learned.