

# Module 6: The Importance of Research

## Study Implications

The purpose of research is to inform action. Thus, your study should seek to contextualize its findings within the larger body of research. Research must always be of high quality in order to produce knowledge that is applicable outside of the research setting. Furthermore, the results of your study may have implications for policy and future project implementation.

One problem that often plagues progress in global health is the slow translation of research into practice. Often, a disconnect exists between those who conduct research and those who are positioned to implement the research findings. The underlying problem is that “the production of evidence is organized institutionally with highly centralized mechanisms, whereas the application of that science is highly decentralized. This social distance prevails because scientists are more oriented to the international audiences of other scientists for which they publish than to the needs of practitioners, policy makers, or the local public.”<sup>(1)</sup>

Thus, as researchers, it is imperative to take steps to overcome this barrier. Publishing your study may be one initial step to make your research known to the global community. Other proactive measures can be taken to encourage the uptake of evidence-based interventions. For example, you can present your research findings at various venues, such as Unite for Sight’s Global Health and Innovation Conference. Furthermore, you can send the results of your study to local officials, policy-makers, and community leaders.

## Goals of Research

There are relatively few published studies about eye care in developing countries, and Unite For Sight encourages all volunteers to consider developing a research study to contribute important knowledge to the eye care community on a global scale. Pursuing a research project will be a challenging and rewarding experience, and this opportunity enables you to pursue an in-depth original study about a topic of interest.

Well-conducted research is vital to the success of global health endeavors. Not only does research form the foundation of program development and policies all over the world, but it can also be translated into effective global health programs. Research draws its power from the fact that it is empirical: rather than merely theorizing about what *might* be effective or what *could* work, researchers go out into the field and design studies that give policymakers hard data on which they can base their decisions. Furthermore, good research utilizes methodologies that can be replicated, produces results that are examinable by peers, and creates knowledge that can be applied to real-world situations. Researchers work as a team to enhance our knowledge of how to best address the world’s problems.

## The “Iterative” Process of Research

Ultimately, the key to a successful research project lies in iteration: the process of returning again and again to the research questions, methods, and data, which leads to new ideas, revisions and improvements. It is easy to think of research as a step-by-step “1, 2, 3” process, but it is important to be flexible and open to change. Oftentimes, by discussing the research project with advisers and peers, one will find that new research questions need to be added, variables need to be omitted, and other changes need to be made. As a proposed study is examined and reexamined from different perspectives, it may begin to transform and take a different shape. This is to be expected and is a component of a good research study. In addition, it is important to examine study methods and data from different viewpoints to ensure a comprehensive approach to the research question. In conclusion, there is no one formula for developing a successful study, but it is important to realize that the research process is cyclical and iterative.

## Footnotes

(1) Diffusion Theory and Knowledge Dissemination, Utilization, and Integration in Public Health Annual Review of Public Health. 2009;30:151 -74.

## Contact Us

Unite For Sight  
International Headquarters  
234 Church Street, 15th Floor  
New Haven, CT 06510  
United States of America

Unite For Sight is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Telephone: +1 (203) 404-4900  
Email: [ufs@uniteforsight.org](mailto:ufs@uniteforsight.org)



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