**Conversation with SEW Quality Assurance (QA) managers, July 22, 2025**

**Transcript**

July 22, 2025, 7:53PM

 **Todd Helmus** 0:03  
No, they're doing a lot of interesting stuff, so.

 **Laurie Martin** 0:03  
Yeah, it is, yeah.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 0:10  
Well.

 **Todd Helmus** 0:11  
Yeah. So they're doing a lot of interesting stuff. So I don't know.  
Hopefully this adds on to this.  
I think I don't.  
I'm finding I'm learning more about it as.  
I continue to this work I did had not used many of the tools beforehand.  
I'm I'm trying to get up to speed quickly to make myself relevant to this brave new world.  
So.  
All right. So maybe if we could just win place to start would be like what you know for the work that SCW is doing.  
What research methods are are you all seeing come down the Pike?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 0:48  
Umm.  
Or you want to go first?

 **Laurie Martin** 0:53  
Yeah, I I mean a little bit of everything. I feel like we see a lot of.  
Like I I'd call it mixed methods light.  
In that.  
You know, there's usually this element of, you know, interviews or we pull together an expert panel to provide information on something.  
Sometimes there's a survey that that they'll do a lot of it is more in the evaluation space, at least within justice policy and social behavioral policy.

 **Todd Helmus** 1:34  
Mm-hmm.

 **Laurie Martin** 1:36  
Different.  
You know, looking at the effects of different policies on reintegration or on, you know, certain outcomes of interest on.  
You know, so I we kind of see a little bit of everything.  
Just depending on what the project needs are.

 **Todd Helmus** 1:57  
OK, so spans the wide gamut.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 2:02  
Definitely I can give you my what I tell people ran does.

 **Todd Helmus** 2:02  
Tom.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 2:08  
And then I can tell you what I've done in my projects, which I I think mine span a pretty broad range.  
So what I tell people is that in my part of Rand, it's like 50 to 75% literature view and expert interview, some sort of integration of those.  
Compilation, coalescence, whatever words you want to use.

 **Todd Helmus** 2:35  
Cool lessons.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 2:36  
Trying it well, extracting knowledge out of disparate pieces.

 **Todd Helmus** 2:41  
OK.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 2:42  
And I don't know what to call it.  
Mixed methods.  
Light is not bad.  
Actually, there's an awful lot of that kind of work done.  
And I think.  
On top of that.  
We see surveys rarely. We see workshops which are sort of more formal or different versions of expert interviews.  
We don't really do what people call focus groups.  
I don't see that.  
Formally, I think a focus group Once Upon a time was a precursor to a survey.  
You would do a focus group to figure out what to ask in a survey. I don't see much of that happening.

 **Todd Helmus** 3:17  
Yeah.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 3:22  
It could be happening, but I I don't see it.  
There is a reasonable amount of so. So in contrast, what Lori and this is. The other thing I tell people, the two big buckets of brand research is policy analysis and policy evaluation, which is an oversimplification, but it's not bad.  
It covers most you either looking back at a policy and how to do.

 **Todd Helmus** 3:46  
Policy analysis and policy evaluation.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 3:48  
Yeah. And and those are shorthands.  
Those don't mean anything by themselves, but policy evaluation is sort of looking backwards.  
What did that policy do?  
How did it do?  
Did it meet its performance?  
Did it impact things?  
How did it impact things?  
It's a little more empirical and then policy analysis is my shorthand. I don't know.  
It's the right term.  
For, you know, some organization has some mission or plan or goal. How do you get there?  
What are the different? You know there's three or four or five different approaches that might get you there and you compare the two.  
And so you kind of we do a lot of that in chat, a lot of simulating forward and and.

 **Todd Helmus** 4:31  
Simulating forward.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 4:33  
Yeah, it's sort of.  
It's like, yeah, I think it's trying to predict the future.  
In in a in a sense like policy a versus policy B. Where is that gonna get you?  
And sometimes that involves, like I said, that's not in place of literature review and expert interview.  
It's just another angle or another dimension of how to describe it, and I think.  
That is done for those reasons, we also do.  
More bespoke modeling for sure.  
We just are finishing up a project where we're modeling.  
Rolling the electricity grid in California and we're using.  
Cost and performance data.  
And projected demand.  
To try and figure out which mix of resources.  
Is best for 2040.  
So that's.  
And that's sort of bespoke modeling.  
There's a lot of that.

 **Todd Helmus** 5:45  
Mm-hmm.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 5:48  
Umm.

 **Todd Helmus** 5:48  
You know, she's a lot of modeling, is relatively bespoke, right?  
I mean, there's, like always like something like particular that you gotta.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 5:53  
Very much.

 **Todd Helmus** 5:57  
I haven't gotten the sense that there's like a a set methods like. If you say something, you're doing interviews.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 5:57  
Yeah, I think.

 **Todd Helmus** 6:02  
I could tell you the probably the five steps you're gonna take in doing those interviews.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 6:04  
Right, right, right, right, right.

 **Todd Helmus** 6:06  
I can't necessarily think what those steps are for modeling.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 6:09  
Yeah, I think that there's been a push for many years now and I just heard it again yesterday.  
I've sort of doing a better job of keeping track of and preserving and sharing models.  
Between people and projects and over time at Rand, and I'm not too sanguine about that, because we're not a product developer.  
We don't develop models for models sake and we don't develop models for a single line of products that we produce for many years.  
So everything is kind of a bespoke and B, you know not.  
I wouldn't say half baked, but far from useful to a stranger very far from useful to a stranger, so this idea.  
Of.  
Reserving and archiving and organizing model data.  
I mean it depends, but I don't think it's gonna be that useful 'cause it's just.

 **Todd Helmus** 7:04  
We're also so notoriously independent that we don't share very much like that would require like a central place to share everything.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 7:06  
Too, yes.  
Yeah. And there is even Hyde. I've even heard beyond that sort of IP concerns like this is my model.  
I don't wanna share it so.  
That that's I've only heard that once. But you know that can be concerning.  
I suppose it's competitive world.  
What else have we done? We.

 **Todd Helmus** 7:29  
So. So let me just hear back.  
So like so it's interesting. You note that interviews and literature reviews sort of encompass about 75% of the different projects that you see come through.  
Everyone's doing some iteration of those two.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 7:43  
I think so. I've never counted.  
But that's my. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I think so.

 **Laurie Martin** 7:48  
I'd say interview is more so than literature reviews.  
I think there's a push.

 **Todd Helmus** 7:51  
Really.

 **Laurie Martin** 7:53  
Yes, there's a push, at least from Anita.  
Now we'll see what happens.  
Now that SCW is going away.  
But I'm sure she's hearing this from above that we need to do a better job.  
Putting our work within the policy context now, I think some people do that well and some don't, depending on if they've sort of branched into a new space. If they have like blind spots in terms of, you know, not understanding what some of the the pushback or the.  
Concern around a given policy was and sort of you know addressing that in in some form so.  
She I'd say over like the past year.  
Has really started to say, you know, overall we should be doing less like literature review and sort of rehashing of like what's in the literature and instead giving like a pithy policy context to really put our work squarely in the policy space to understand the different angles of.  
A given policy who's at play?  
Who? The key players are.  
And then launching the research from that.  
Or at least you know, placing it within that context.  
I think.  
To me, that would be one potential area for AI that you know, I mean, yes, there's some literature that can be called, but this to me is a little bit different than like, let's just review everything that's been peer reviewed and published and it's more like what is.  
What are the real time debates happening?  
In a given policy space.  
So that's one thought.  
I mean, the other thing that occurred to me is we also do a lot of work on like measurement frameworks and thinking about how to support.  
About funders or communities or organizations, think about how they measure their work moving forward.  
And so there's a lot of work that is trying to synthesize specific data sets and measures.  
That would be available that meet certain criteria publicly available.  
Updated annually, available at a you know.

 **Todd Helmus** 10:09  
Like survey instrument measures.  
Like self report measures or something else?

 **Laurie Martin** 10:14  
Anything. I mean anything really?  
A lot of it is, though, what they're looking for are existing data.  
They can pull year after year to show changes in their community.  
So for example, we just.  
Finished some work with the Chicago Community Trust and their goal is is wealth building and they want to reduce the racial ethnic wealth gap, right? So their question is, how do I know what we're doing matters and it's not and but not at like.  
Individual program evaluation level.  
They're doing a whole bunch of things. They're in housing.  
They're in income, they're in community development and what this project was was a scan of the available types of measures.  
Like, how do you measure wealth and at what level? You know what publicly available data sets exist at what level with different features.

 **Todd Helmus** 11:03  
OK.

 **Laurie Martin** 11:09  
And a lot of that was done by hand by programmers who are familiar with different data.  
Sets that we'd in, they'd read all the documentation. They'd figure out whether this measure met our criteria.  
We'd create these tables by hand.  
That kind of said, here's what we think of these different measures. I mean, that's a type of thing that we've started to do for a handful of projects as well.  
So it you know, kind of a synthesis of data sources, but more specifically the measures within them.  
You know, so you don't have to pull up a in a survey.  
Read through it and look for the wording of the question that you want.

 **Todd Helmus** 11:53  
Yes, and that that does. That seems a task fairly relevant to LL Ms. and things like that.

 **Laurie Martin** 11:59  
Mm-h.

 **Todd Helmus** 12:02  
The the so OK, so trying to get away from literature reviews to make it more policy relevant.  
Does that mean, like fewer systematic reviews?  
I mean, I presume that you guys have had your share of systematic reviews.  
Where we're gonna like, mop up everything we know about this particular topic.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 12:21  
Fewer than you would fewer than you would think I've only seen.

 **Laurie Martin** 12:22  
I haven't had any of those.

 **Todd Helmus** 12:23  
Really.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 12:24  
I've only seen two or three in all years that I've been seeing stuff.  
Suzanne Hample was really good at those and she she, but we don't.  
We don't usually either get asked or people don't want to.  
I don't what the reason is, but the most of the literature reviews are are not super formal.

 **Todd Helmus** 12:47  
OK, like we read a bunch of stuff, and here's here's here's how we organize what we read.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 12:47  
They're not.  
They wouldn't call them systematic reviews.  
Yeah. Yeah, I think some are more formal than others.  
And some will list the search words, but as I understand, a systematic review is something special.

 **Laurie Martin** 13:03  
We don't do those.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 13:03  
But usually people don't even list the search words.  
They don't even summarize the literature they found.  
They sort of say we reviewed the literature and then they kind of just go straight to results like this is what. Yeah. Yeah.

 **Todd Helmus** 13:15  
Oh wait. Here. Take our word for it.  
We reviewed it.  
We know what it is.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 13:19  
Yeah, it's something like that.  
Yeah. So a lot of times it's taking literature.

 **Todd Helmus** 13:25  
OK.  
So that's helpful.  
That's helpful to know.  
So it's not systematic, it's more informal.  
It's partly, I imagine, sometimes they're they're drafting the review and other times, like you say, they're saying they they that they that they did it and they reviewed it.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 13:30  
Mm-hmm.

 **Todd Helmus** 13:40  
And so that, you know, my mind would mean maybe.  
Little less necessity for.  
The types of reviews where you're systematically cataloging like these are the 10 things that these reports say about this population.  
And.  
And and more sort of. I wouldn't say seat of the pants because I've written these, but they're just not as formal.  
But you guys are trying.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 14:06  
Yeah, I think.

 **Todd Helmus** 14:07  
But there's a notion to get away from that that Paul, that the sponsors are not as interested in those types of reviews. They're more focused on the policy issues.  
So understanding what the policies of the day are.  
How those policy issues impact whatever the policy goals that the sponsor has?  
That seems to be more important.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 14:28  
Yeah, I've done a handful of studies where we've talked working for a regulator or not necessarily a regulator, but a policy implementer, and they want to know what industry thinks and they can't really talk to industry in an unbiased way.  
So they get us to go out there and trash them.

 **Todd Helmus** 14:45  
Hmm.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 14:49  
And.  
That can be pretty systematic sometimes.  
But yeah, there's still an awful lot of of that. We did do a study not too long ago where we did a sort of a regression Y kind of thing on the impact of of building codes on fire damage.  
So that would be sort of an evaluate a policy evaluation kind of thing where it was, excuse me.  
It was, yeah.  
It was definitely a a quantitative regression kind of thing, but again, it it probably would fall under the table of bespoke modeling because it was.  
So it was specific location, a specific set of questions.  
And.

 **Todd Helmus** 15:38  
OK.  
So I guess just to put a cap on on that, on that part of the conversation.  
So I'm just thinking like if most of the studies I imagine like as the cost of these literature reviews goes down, you know as.  
LLM's and other things are able to support those and and expedite that process.  
I mean, regardless whether or not the goal is for researchers to get up to speed or to write, you know, to 510 pages on on the topic X.  
I I get that there's a desire to put resources away from that, but I imagine if those become cheaper to do then and the researchers need to get sort of up to speed anyway.  
Then.  
Large language models could be pretty helpful with that, but you know also the goal is to get understood what the policies are, right?  
Then there's policy documents and there's all sorts of written material that could be compiled together.  
I mean, are they is the goal for that?  
Type of study to pull together like these are the 50 reports that the sponsor wants us to look at about policy X or these are the you know, what types of documents.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 16:47  
It just varies like the one I'm in the middle of now.  
It's it's another regulator and they want to know.  
Kind of from a theoretical slash historical perspective, what are the potential implications of regulating a new industry?  
Like what?  
What does regulation do when you first introduce it?

 **Todd Helmus** 17:09  
Hmm.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 17:10  
And so we.  
Are looking at specific industry case studies as well as more general.  
So that more general theory or integrated empirical studies of what regulation?  
Does so nothing about policy in that case.  
They're gonna take it and make policy decisions based partly on that and other stuff.  
But sometimes policies a key part of it, right, it just depends.

 **Todd Helmus** 17:44  
So what kind of reports are you looking at?  
What kind of documents?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 17:47  
You know, a lot of like, business Y research studies people in the Economics and Business world writing about regulation and the impact of different types of regulations.  
So they do, they'll do studies.  
They might be looking at, you know.  
Freight rail or whatever some specific industry and then they can roll it up into safety regulations in general versus economic regulations.  
So they're sort of different levels of integration.

 **Todd Helmus** 18:17  
Are these documents that you search online for or these provided by the sponsor? These academic papers.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 18:20  
Yeah.  
A lot of academic papers, as well as occasionally government agency reports, nonprofit reports, again depends on the depends on the topic of the project. But.  
It really.  
Yeah, there's an there's an awful lot.  
I don't know.  
Some people use the term Gray literature, which.

 **Todd Helmus** 18:45  
Yeah. What does that mean?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 18:46  
I don't try.  
I tend not to use.  
It's an academic term that means anything that's not in a peer reviewed.  
Journal. So Rand reports are Gray literature. According to that definition.  
So it's kind of dumb definition for a place like Rand. If you're a, you know, university, whatever gastroenterology surgeon looking at then, then it makes more sense because you're looking at like super specific peer reviewed stuff.  
But we're always covering a lot of waterfront, so a lot.  
Of Department of Energy Lab reports.  
It's very common, and they'll often do more than just a report.  
They'll put together a sort of a quasi empirical model. They'll say. You know, you can estimate the cost as a function of three these variables and you know, they get that from talking to industry in the same way.  
It's not like they pull it out of thin air, but so it's it's.  
Derivative and integrative, I guess.  
Yes.

 **Todd Helmus** 19:48  
Interesting. So do you and do the last question for these types of studies, do you are you asking the librarian to pull documents or?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 19:56  
Both.

 **Todd Helmus** 19:57  
Because it's Gray and and it's unique and the particular some creases like those lab reports, you know you're not gonna find that on a typical document search engine.  
Engine.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 20:07  
Great question.  
Both, mostly ourselves, but a little bit of that is a habit.  
Question I'm now with a Co Pi who is a habit of going to the librarian or knowledge services. And so in fact, just this morning I got a report from an old service person of a bunch of literature on asbestos.  
And the effect of the ban on.  
Production of products that included asbestos Once Upon a time.  
So what happened to those products?

 **Todd Helmus** 20:39  
Go all right.  
And you see like for the for those types of reviews, do you see have you tried using large language models to support any of that?  
Are you looking for specific things or are you looking like for like needles in a haystack like out of these 50 documents, I'm looking for the one thing.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 20:52  
I have not yet.

 **Todd Helmus** 20:59  
Or are you looking for something that can summarize?  
Are you looking to summarize and understand all the documents and?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 21:06  
So this may be a generational thing I tend.  
To I've never used a large language model, but after yesterday I'm pretty excited to try a couple because they look pretty cool.  
I didn't really realize ran had developed these things.  
In Bill's sort of downplaying them as quasi beta and you know, not perfect.  
But I'm curious.  
I haven't really looked, so I tend to kind of be pretty.  
What's the word?  
Discriminating in the first pass.  
So when I'm collecting the documents in the 1st place, so the I I guess no, we're not looking for super specific things.  
We're looking for what is the lesson from this report? I mean, again, it varies, but it's not usually like I pulled 1000 documents and I need to know that meet these six criteria and throw out, throw out 850 of them.

 **Todd Helmus** 22:01  
Yeah, it's you're more loose.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 22:06  
So.  
But in this case, you know I actually do have some pretty specific questions and I don't have enough papers to make it worthwhile.  
But if I had 100 or 200 papers, I might throw them into a large language model and see what came up with.

 **Todd Helmus** 22:25  
Do you guys like, especially after having seen like yesterday you see you have sort of a sense of?  
What some of these various tools are that are being sprinkled around.  
Given like the work that you're that you both do as well as the the the work that you're queuing broadly and and seeing broadly as part of the unit, do you have a sense of where automation might be particularly helpful?  
Are there particular methods that you think? Well, we spent a lot of time doing these interviews and we should have X or Y.  
Or.  
Something else?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 23:00  
I yeah, I think the literature review, I really do.  
I think that can be, you know, with some practice and some trust that can be really streamlined.  
I'm probably not the right guy because I'm I'm a little bit older school, but a younger person I think would be like do it.  
What took three weeks could take an afternoon.

 **Todd Helmus** 23:27  
Yeah.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 23:28  
I think.

 **Todd Helmus** 23:30  
Lowering thoughts on where you think.

 **Laurie Martin** 23:31  
And I, well, I think mine goes back to the the measures piece.  
So like, not just practice, not just projects that are like help me develop.  
A.  
A measures framework, but I mean, I even wonder, you know, sometimes we see these surveys and you see the reviews and they're like, why didn't you ask about X and like, oh, yeah, we just didn't.  
Or whatever and part of me wonders whether there's an opportunity for, if it were easy.  
To like refresh.  
Our questions set to things that might be more updated, more relevant, more tied to the issue, but you know, I think people tend to just ask the same questions they ask. And you know, there's a handful of validated measures that they know. So they keep them on there.  
And.  
There's, I haven't seen a lot of like novelty in that space.

 **Todd Helmus** 24:33  
In what?  
In what way?

 **Laurie Martin** 24:35  
In like so for example like OK well-being is a good one, right?  
It's becoming like a a hot topic.  
No one knows how to measure it.  
People are sort of guessing.  
But there there are like a sprinkling of of questions out there, but that is like a needle in the haystack. Question, right, who published it?  
Where is it and is there evidence you know?

 **Todd Helmus** 25:01  
Are these like for surveys?

 **Laurie Martin** 25:04  
Yeah.

 **Todd Helmus** 25:04  
Yeah. I mean, I've heard one suggestion is to just to compile a like a a data set. A survey surveys like any and all surveys you you can get.

 **Laurie Martin** 25:13  
Yeah, that would be amazing that you could query.

 **Todd Helmus** 25:17  
And then it, you know, presumably the sourcing there would be some sourcing attached to whatever relevant questions. So there's there's, you know, if they're scaled, they're scaled.  
You know what?  
The scale is.  
But yeah, I mean, I've heard like on the on the survey development side that there be see we've heard a few different examples of how automation could support those one on the developing the questions, the instrument.

 **Laurie Martin** 25:43  
Mm-hmm.

 **Todd Helmus** 25:45  
Two could certainly support like a background research to to understand what the topics are that you're studying, and then you develop your instrument and it can support development. The instrument with a sort of a a tailored.  
Model. Presumably it could help, like pull your data into a structured format.  
So that you know you could analyze it relatively quickly and then presumably you can view analyze it too.  
Do you?  
What about do you get is, does he?  
Is he?  
Do you guys have do proposals?  
Are they for?  
Do proposals for for work in your units in your unit.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 26:25  
Yeah, sure.

 **Laurie Martin** 26:25  
Yeah.

 **Todd Helmus** 26:27  
What types of proposals, like how?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 26:27  
Box.

 **Todd Helmus** 26:29  
Like how substantive.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 26:34  
More, much more so than the FFRDC's.

 **Laurie Martin** 26:34  
Mary.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 26:39  
And you know, putting on my sage philosophical gadfly hat, I think those two pager FFRDC proposals can sometimes paint people into a corner where they promise things they can't do.

 **Todd Helmus** 26:52  
Yeah, 'cause, you're kind of making it up.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 26:53  
You make it up and you don't really have to justify it or defend it.  
You just say we will do this like that would never fly in an NSF or an NIH proposal.  
How like and show me that you've done it 10 times before, right? All that.  
So we have a huge mix.  
But they in my side, they tend to be mostly contracts, so they're reasonably prescriptive.

 **Todd Helmus** 27:19  
You're not writing a 20 page A10 page literature review.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 27:22  
They're not exactly.  
They're not investigator initiated.  
They will be more on Laurie's side, I think, but we don't do a whole lot of investigator initiated stuff.  
And when we do, it's usually in collaboration with outside institutions that are more used to that.  
So it would be like California Energy Commission, Department of Energy, Department of Homeland Security.  
Well, that would be an H soak. But you know what? They'll put out a competitive.  
Solicitation.  
And ask for proposals.  
And yeah, they're like, you know.  
They can be 10 to 20 pages.  
It kind of varies a lot from agency to agency and they want to demonstrate.  
Objectives, methods, past experience, they want, you know, like all the pieces of a real modified proposal.  
Budget schedule. They always want a management plan which drives me nuts.  
I think that's a stupid waste of time.  
So we do a little a little box tire. I was like Todd will be π and Todd and Tom and Lori will do the research at the end, right.

 **Todd Helmus** 28:30  
Why?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 28:38  
I mean.

 **Todd Helmus** 28:39  
I mean it's it's kind of prescriptive and almost seems like uniquely tailored up.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 28:45  
It makes me feel like we're not.

 **Todd Helmus** 28:46  
1.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 28:46  
It makes it feel like we're competing with people like Boeing, who've got, you know, this giant management structure and and makes me feel like, well, we're just lame because we just do the research ourselves. But I don't know.

 **Todd Helmus** 29:00  
Yeah. Tom will be the Pi. Todd will be the Co Pi.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 29:00  
But that's a small.

 **Todd Helmus** 29:03  
So then there's a little line to Todd on the side here and then you know, such and such as the manager of the unit.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 29:05  
Right.

 **Laurie Martin** 29:07  
That's right.

 **Todd Helmus** 29:09  
So that goes up there. And then there's the QA person over here.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 29:11  
Right, right.  
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

 **Todd Helmus** 29:14  
Umm.

 **Laurie Martin** 29:16  
I see more.

 **Todd Helmus** 29:16  
The.

 **Laurie Martin** 29:17  
I see much more of a mix.  
So we do have a mix between investigator initiated and contract type of work.  
We do.  
A lot of work for proposals to foundations like RWJF or gates, or, you know, all sorts of things.  
So those are usually.  
I don't know.  
I kind of put him in the middle. Like there's a specific question or a topic or an issue that they want ideas about, but then they they really are investigator initiated.  
So there's a lot more.  
Kind of front matter to kind of set the stage for why this is something that should be funded.

 **Todd Helmus** 29:58  
OK.  
So that means a broader articulation.  
Are there?  
So just looking at the set pieces on these proposals you have, typically if it's a proposal, maybe less the contract, but a proposal, then there's going to be a a, you know, project aims, there'll be a literature review component, there'll be that. And I mentioned that process that.  
Review goes from like this is what science says about X.  
And here's the gap in the science and what we want to accomplish.  
And right you sort of.  
There's a there's a logical like weave that's done to lead to, and we should we should get money to do this.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 30:33  
Mm-hmm.  
Right.

 **Todd Helmus** 30:40  
And then there's the section about how you how you're gonna go about doing it.  
What the methods are?  
What methods will you use and how will you execute those methods? And then there's a management structure, right?  
How's? How's the management gonna run?  
And then how is the quality?  
You know what are the deliverables?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 30:58  
And.

 **Todd Helmus** 30:59  
One thing that's been raised is the potential of like having a like, basically training a large language model on Rand proposals.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 31:07  
What?

 **Todd Helmus** 31:07  
Basically, shove every proposal into a model.  
So the model learns.

 **Laurie Martin** 31:12  
We kind of.  
I mean, we do have like we have all these, all the boiler plate is already there.  
I mean, I feel like that's part of what our our contracts department, you know, I mean, if you get ready to write a big proposal, what?

 **Todd Helmus** 31:23  
You feel they should be doing that?  
Go ahead, finish your thought.

 **Laurie Martin** 31:28  
Well, I was gonna say they do hand you like.  
A.  
33% completed, you know, so that does feel like something that could be easily automated. You know what I mean?  
Like at least give you a good starting point because they're slammed.  
So if you could free them up from sticking in the damn boilerplate and the org charts and the Gantt charts, you know, like all of that stuff should be could be automated, I think.

 **Todd Helmus** 31:56  
Mm-hmm.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 31:58  
It's interesting. You know, I don't know if you saw this, but I feel like Anita just sent around a note from.  
Andrew Moral, saying that the NIH has recently observed instances of principal investigators submitting large numbers of applications.

 **Todd Helmus** 32:12  
Yes.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 32:14  
Some of which may have been generated with AI tools.

 **Todd Helmus** 32:17  
And now you can do that.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 32:18  
And and and now they they said in one case it was like 60 from one guy or something like that.  
So they've instituted a limit of six per year.

 **Laurie Martin** 32:25  
Oh my gosh.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 32:27  
For now.

 **Todd Helmus** 32:29  
I mean, you gotta be like I don't.  
I don't understand like it seems like like I I'm teaching a class and I had a student write this amazing paper like this amazing paper and she used references from class but the references she used had nothing to do with the paper.  
She wrote like she just randomly selected assigned papers and put them in the paper.  
I mean pretty obvious.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 32:49  
Really.

 **Todd Helmus** 32:51  
I mean next to like, just having fabricated references, which can happen.  
I mean, that's probably the next worst thing.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 32:58  
Jeez. So it was a you're pretty sure it was AI.

 **Todd Helmus** 32:59  
Yeah.  
Yeah, yeah.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 33:03  
Yeah, yeah.

 **Todd Helmus** 33:05  
She was just smart enough to use class references.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 33:05  
Well, for what it's worth.  
My my wife and my sister-in-law are both English teachers, one in high school, one in college, and they are basically like done.  
They can't assign essays anymore.

 **Todd Helmus** 33:20  
I know that's only certain thing too.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 33:21  
It's crazy.

 **Laurie Martin** 33:23  
In class handwritten.  
Todd, I had another thought.  
That has nothing to do with research, but it's something that I do think that could be have a, you know, fits in here, which is.

 **Todd Helmus** 33:30  
OK.

 **Laurie Martin** 33:39  
Figuring out a way to map the partner space. I think like we really suck at that and.  
You know, we'll get calls and you'll need a partner and then you spend all this time like Googling who does this.  
Who's really good at this?  
And then you find out, oh, they're partnering with Mathematica already.  
And then you're back. You know what I mean? Like.

 **Todd Helmus** 34:03  
Yeah.

 **Laurie Martin** 34:04  
There are so many times where I'm like.  
I wish there was just a tool I could pop up and and I think this can be like reactive or proactive.  
Ideally, it would be proactive.  
We're like this is a space we want to build into.  
Here's a group that's sort of cutting edge that doesn't seem to have a lot of priorities with.  
Our competitors in terms of published papers or you know past partnerships on you know big contracts like all of that stuff feels like it's it should be known.  
By scraping all bunch of things.  
You know that that would, that would be my 1:00 ask like. I mean I think all these tools are amazing but.

 **Todd Helmus** 34:43  
OK.

 **Laurie Martin** 34:47  
I just see so many I I'm starting to see a fundamental shift in the way that funders are started.  
Foundation funders are starting to move, and it is away from this like research model and much more in my in my sphere of work.  
And it's much more about like partnered work and a lot of these calls even, say, Rand couldn't even prime them.  
Like we can.  
We can be a sub, but we can't be the prime and so we have all these skills and capabilities, but we don't have partners and that just takes it.  
It takes a ton of work to build that relationship, but if we could get to that relationship building stage that much faster.  
By knowing who a reasonable partner could or should be, I think that would be amazing.

 **Todd Helmus** 35:32  
Mm-hmm.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 35:33  
Yeah, I 2nd that I think.  
I in particular, but Rand in general doesn't play real well with others and finding partners is always a major headache.  
And if there was a way to scrape the web or whatever to find out like who are 10 candidates for this?  
That'd be great.

 **Todd Helmus** 36:03  
Did you?  
Sort of know what the parameters are that you're looking for.  
Nonprofit or or not, but focus doing implementation in these areas like I have the same thing like I need. I need implementers like cause a lot of research is funding implementation so but we can compete for it.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 36:06  
Mm-hmm.

 **Laurie Martin** 36:16  
Yeah, right.

 **Todd Helmus** 36:19  
But we need someone to actually do the thing that the proposal's asking to be done.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 36:23  
Yeah, yeah. Sometimes that's the case.  
And sometimes, you know, it varies.  
But yeah, well, we need people who have local knowledge of this community or this city or something, right? Just it always.

 **Laurie Martin** 36:34  
Yeah, it's a lot of local.  
Yeah, it's a shift towards more state and local that becomes even harder.

 **Todd Helmus** 36:41  
Yeah. So there's smaller outfits.  
All right.  
Anything else?  
Any other sort of loose items to to think through or areas you'd like to see?  
Automation.  
Talked about proposals, literature reviews, surveys, interviews.  
Documents.

 **Laurie Martin** 37:06  
Writing quality sucks.  
Yeah.

 **Todd Helmus** 37:12  
I thought you were like writing quality.

 **Laurie Martin** 37:14  
I'm not wrong.  
Am I Tom? I'm not wrong.

 **Todd Helmus** 37:19  
I mean, you guys are in the front lines of this.

 **Laurie Martin** 37:20  
Rand sucks at writing.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 37:24  
I.  
I don't know.  
No, I don't think so.  
I think some people are really lazy.  
But there's a mix.  
I mean.

 **Laurie Martin** 37:34  
There's a mix that's that is true. That's unfair globalization.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 37:35  
There's a real mix there.  
Definitely there are definitely people who just can't write.  
Absolutely. Or don't write.  
I don't know which it is.

 **Todd Helmus** 37:46  
I mean, I've heard there's.  
I've heard ran has like a beta for Grammarly.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 37:51  
Oh, I tried that.

 **Laurie Martin** 37:51  
It sucks.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 37:52  
I was one of the Beta E's I I am. I hated it.

 **Todd Helmus** 37:54  
Yeah.

 **Laurie Martin** 37:54  
I was too.

 **Todd Helmus** 37:56  
So there you go.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 37:57  
It was.

 **Laurie Martin** 37:58  
I couldn't.  
I turned it off.  
I couldn't stand it.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 38:00  
I couldn't stand it.

 **Todd Helmus** 38:01  
Really. Why?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 38:03  
Because Microsoft Word already has stuff that jumps in and says you sure you don't want to try it this way?  
So I didn't need yet another person looking over my shoulder offering suggestions.  
And I'm I feel like, and I feel like I've heard I'm a, you know, competent writer.  
So I don't feel like I need.  
Suggestions on sentence structure or I use a thesaurus. I you know I I know what I want to say.  
And I figure out how to say it.  
I.  
I don't know, so I found it just annoying.  
Not helpful and annoying.

 **Laurie Martin** 38:35  
Great.  
Totally agree they had populated the entire Rand style guide, so I had like 3000 errors because my commas were this and not that.  
Literally like so I have to everyone.  
I'm like, OK, go change the freaking comma angle. Like, if that's or the apostrophe angle, you know, it's it was not getting at.  
The right it was.  
It was just focused on totally the wrong things, and half the time it would give me suggestions that would change the meaning of the sentence, and then I'd have to.  
I'd spent more time denying their suggestions.  
What I have found to be much more helpful.  
Is like ranchat. So like I have started to like I write out what I want to say in a paragraph.  
Right, like this is what?  
This is how I'm gonna write it, but I'm not gonna worry too much about like, the precision of language.  
But these are the, you know, this is how I would write my zero draft basically. And then I throw it in ranch at and out pops very polished.  
First draft.  
I feel like you need something like that that's reading chunks of language.

 **Todd Helmus** 39:51  
Do you take that then and make that your?  
That's an interesting way of right.  
Do you take that then and make that your?

 **Laurie Martin** 39:58  
I I will take suggestion.  
I'll compare the two.  
You know, so I'll take some suggestions and I see I can see then where I haven't been clear in my language because it'll it'll change the, you know, the they to a specific what you know what I mean like it.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 40:01  
Hmm.

 **Laurie Martin** 40:14  
It does help with clarity of writing.  
And you know, I usually give it the prop prompt like edit for clarity and it it does a really nice job.  
And part of what I want to do is like take some of these reports of our not so great writers like I don't know if Franchat can do that like, rewrite a whole report like edit this whole thing for clarity.

 **Todd Helmus** 40:25  
Interesting.

 **Laurie Martin** 40:37  
It would be an interesting. I've never tried it.

 **Todd Helmus** 40:38  
It could.  
Well, you'd like it.  
It might be another question.  
I mean also nice if it could like edit like with.

 **Laurie Martin** 40:42  
I I usually do it when I'm like I'm struggling.  
You know when you're like, I know these points that I want to make, but I'm struggling a little bit with the order and you know how to make the like story arc here in this paragraph.  
And it it usually does a really good job, but I I agree.  
I hate it.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 40:59  
111 technical detail that I didn't really rundown.

 **Laurie Martin** 40:59  
Grammarly I I removed it from my computer.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 41:04  
Is it didn't recognize track changes so it was constantly barfing on crossed out words and missing spaces.

 **Todd Helmus** 41:12  
Really.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 41:13  
Yeah, but it's possible I didn't set a setting, but it never came up.  
But that's, I mean, if it's not knowing that that word's not there and it's saying you need a space here and you know.  
That doesn't work.  
That sentence is a run on or whatever.  
Like shut up.

 **Todd Helmus** 41:31  
You know, it's interesting that Lori makes what you said makes me think about, like, you could almost like write an outline for a paper and like, say, your paper needs to cite these like ten sources across 4 paragraphs times, whatever. Like, I could imagine you could just like.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 41:31  
Boom.

 **Todd Helmus** 41:50  
Write out like source X what it finds.  
Source B. What it finds Source C What it finds.  
And then just.  
Ask, ask, ask, ask Ranchat to finish to to write it. It's yours.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 42:03  
Tell me a story.

 **Todd Helmus** 42:04  
It's your thoughts, your structure, your content.  
All I mean.  
All the LLM is doing is just reordering it in a nice way.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 42:16  
I've tried that, not that exactly.  
I tried throwing my paper into ranch at and telling it to make me PowerPoint and it it did it it did it but it was so kind of parts of it were OK, but most of it wasn't.

 **Laurie Martin** 42:23  
Oh.

 **Todd Helmus** 42:27  
Really.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 42:33  
And it was just easier to throw it away and start from scratch, because once you start with something that's wrong, it's sometimes harder to fix that than starting over.

 **Todd Helmus** 42:36  
No.

 **Laurie Martin** 42:41  
Yeah, yeah.

 **Todd Helmus** 42:41  
Yeah.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 42:42  
And I also did the same same text I asked it to make a video a script for a 5 minute video.  
And it it like it didn't hallucinate but it droop on stuff that wasn't in the paper it's like.  
You're getting. You're like, going out into the world and and again. I probably could have given it better instructions and worked on it more.  
But it just wasn't.  
It wasn't anywhere near what I wanted, but again, I think that's partly me.  
I think people who get familiar with these language models know how to talk to them and work with them that I just don't have any experience with.  
I feel like a few iterations.  
Which takes all of you know, 10 minutes.  
I could probably learn how to how to guide it better.

 **Todd Helmus** 43:26  
No.

 **Laurie Martin** 43:26  
One other one other thought.  
I know we're over, but.  
And this is Tom.  
Your report made me think of this.  
Like is, is remediation phyllo a compliance right now we farm that out and it takes pubs two weeks to do and that cannot take more than 30 seconds.

 **Todd Helmus** 43:43  
To do what?

 **Laurie Martin** 43:44  
To to take a report and remediate it for 508 compliance, which we have to do, which is.

 **Todd Helmus** 43:52  
What does that involve?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 43:52  
That's for.  
That's for some federal agencies require reports to be readable for disabled for various disabilities.

 **Laurie Martin** 43:56  
I think all, yeah, all do.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 44:00  
So it has to have things like. I don't even know all the rules, but all. Yeah, it has to describe the figures.

 **Laurie Martin** 44:04  
Both texts for figures.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 44:09  
And.  
So that I suppose.  
A blind person, I assume.  
That's mostly what it's for visually impaired.

 **Laurie Martin** 44:21  
There's all these things about you have to use certain colors and fonts and.  
I I have used ranchat for that before for an online tool where we had to basically write out what our figure was and so I just put up an image and I said create alt text for a screen reader to describe this and it did an amazing job.  
I mean, I still had to edit it, but it was a great first pass.  
It saved me a ton of time.  
I don't.  
I don't really know what is involved with the other parts of it. Reading like they I think they turn it into like a PDF and then it has to get tagged or something.  
But I'm. I'm just shocked that that's not like a a program that you just say make this 508 compliant.

 **Todd Helmus** 45:08  
Yeah, I I could see that. I mean, imagine this would.

 **Laurie Martin** 45:11  
That would save a lot of it. Would save time like a week of tying back on this project if we didn't have to have it done in order to be remediated.

 **Todd Helmus** 45:20  
So from the QA perspective, better writing.  
508 compliance. I've also heard about training a large language model on your own writing.  
Like I think all three of us have produced a large number of reports at Rand and you can presumably train LLM to write like you do.

 **Laurie Martin** 45:32  
Mm-hmm.  
Oh, that'd be interesting.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 45:41  
I suppose that's right.

 **Laurie Martin** 45:42  
Or at least a single voice.  
That's the other thing that we struggle with sometimes is I can often tell when.  
A report comes to me, and each chapter was written by a different co-author.

 **Todd Helmus** 45:56  
Yes, interesting.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 45:57  
Yeah.  
Yep, Yep.

 **Todd Helmus** 46:01  
Yeah. To measure the hardest part about your job is dealing with the variability and and and and.  
And just how it's communicated?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 46:15  
Honestly, that's not the hardest part.  
The hardest part is with like. Just connect A to B to C please.  
I don't care if it's written like a kindergartner. It's got to be a logical story first, then, then we can worry about second order effects.

 **Laurie Martin** 46:29  
Well.  
That would be interesting.  
That would be an interesting thing to try to figure out if you could create a model, where do your recommendations directly come from?  
Your findings we see that a lot.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 46:42  
Well.

 **Laurie Martin** 46:43  
Where you do you do this research and then the recommendations are not substantiated.  
They start turning into advocacy and it would be amazing if there was a tool for people authors to like, run it through on their own before it gets to me like.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 46:58  
Hmm.

 **Laurie Martin** 46:59  
Does A equal B equal C?

 **Tom LaTourrette** 47:01  
Yeah.

 **Laurie Martin** 47:02  
That would be pretty amazing from a QA standpoint.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 47:05  
Well, Bill said.  
They were doing a real rudimentary QA prep tool that would just check whether it had a forward, had a had a preface, had references.

 **Laurie Martin** 47:12  
I was looking for like front matter.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 47:16  
You know, that kind of thing.

 **Laurie Martin** 47:17  
It looked like it was an option D checklist.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 47:18  
Which?  
Yeah, it didn't.

 **Laurie Martin** 47:21  
You know.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 47:22  
It didn't seem all that useful, but what Lori just described would be great.  
Like do I need to read chapters one through 6 or can I just go straight to seven because it has nothing to do with the rest anyway?

 **Todd Helmus** 47:35  
Yeah.

 **Laurie Martin** 47:36  
Eric, it's useless.

 **Todd Helmus** 47:38  
I mean, well, I'm running AI.  
Gotta do a review.  
I gotta just assigned a review.  
I gotta do.  
I can imagine like plopping it into Rand chat and asking it to identify the five you know, identify the limitations and weaknesses of this report, and that probably gets me like.

 **Laurie Martin** 47:53  
OK. But you'd be in violation of Rand's new QA policy for reviewers who are not supposed to use AI to do it.

 **Todd Helmus** 47:59  
Really, even to even to get ideas.

 **Laurie Martin** 48:00  
Hmm.

 **Todd Helmus** 48:03  
All right then.

 **Laurie Martin** 48:04  
I.  
I don't know I.

 **Todd Helmus** 48:04  
I guess I guess that opportunity won't happen then.

 **Laurie Martin** 48:08  
Well.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 48:08  
Did you say Lori?

 **Laurie Martin** 48:10  
We have a policy about.  
Reviewers not using AI because.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 48:16  
We do.  
I didn't even know that.

 **Laurie Martin** 48:18  
Susan started it.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 48:19  
Oh.

 **Laurie Martin** 48:19  
I don't know if Agnes.  
Is carrying it forward, but as I was listening to Bell talk yesterday, especially on the AI tool, I was like, we're gonna have to rectify guidance. I completely agree.  
They're great tools and we should use them.  
I'm not sure. I think the. I think the concern was.  
You know, we're paying people 507 fifty $1000 to do this, and if all they're gonna do is plop it into AI and not use their expertise, I could do that.  
But I think that.

 **Todd Helmus** 48:49  
Well, presumably you could do both.  
Like, yeah, I agree. If you just turned in a AI created product that would not be very good.

 **Laurie Martin** 48:57  
Yeah, but if you use it to prompt, that's great.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 49:00  
Hmm.

 **Laurie Martin** 49:02  
You know, maybe pick up a little bit more on like, you know, your blind spots or things that you know you might wanna pay attention to when you read it. Like, I think that would be helpful.

 **Todd Helmus** 49:12  
Hmm.  
Was an interesting conversation.  
Thanks for taking a little bit extra time on this. I think it sounds like it might be interesting to talk to a couple other QA folks because it's a it's an interesting and challenging perspective at Rand on how you basically take these products that researchers crank out and.  
Turn them. Ensure I guess.  
Either ensure that they're up to snuff or turn them into something that's up to snuff that meets.  
High level quality standard.

 **Laurie Martin** 49:41  
Yeah, they're short and I'm not. The other push is for shorter documents.

 **Todd Helmus** 49:43  
Yeah.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 49:46  
Mm-hmm.

 **Todd Helmus** 49:46  
Well, thanks guys.  
Do you guys if let me know if you want APTN for this your time or if you have a management PTN.

 **Laurie Martin** 49:52  
You know.

 **Todd Helmus** 49:53  
I've no argument with using that, but I'm also. I also have.  
APTNI can give you.  
So just let me know.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 49:59  
All right, I think we're. I'm fine. Thanks.

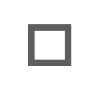
 **Laurie Martin** 50:00  
All right, I'm fine.

 **Todd Helmus** 50:02  
All right, guys. Thank you.

 **Laurie Martin** 50:03  
OK. Thanks. Bye.

 **Tom LaTourrette** 50:03  
Thanks Todd.  
All right, bye.

 **Todd Helmus** 50:05  
Bye.

 **Todd Helmus** stopped transcription