Washington State
Liquor and Cannabis Board

Standard Operating Procedures
Research Reports
July 2024

LCB Research Program
The Research Program at the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB) is a non-partisan, transparent resource focused on public health and safety outcomes related to the products, policy, and regulation of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and vapor products.

Purpose
This document communicates the standard operating procedures for the development, process, and sharing of research that is conducted within the LCB Research Program.

Contact
For more information about the Research Program and its work, please visit: lcb.wa.gov/research_program.

For specific questions, please email the Research Program at lcbresearch@lcb.wa.gov.

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What are research reports?

Research reports describe results from a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods analysis conducted with internal LCB data (e.g., data that a division or the Research Program collects, such as agency surveys), external data (e.g., data LCB purchases or uses with a data sharing agreement, such as the Healthy Youth Survey), or a combination of both. Research reports largely contain non-technical summaries. However, some findings may require more technical sections to best describe how an analysis was conducted.

What is and is not included in research reports?

What Might Be Included	What Is NOT Included
Quantitative and/or qualitative analyses	Opinions
Summaries or takeaways, what findings may mean, and how to interpret results	Any official position of LCB
Findings that may or may not align with current practices, policies, or rules conducted at LCB	Action statements that require, mandate, or imply LCB will make changes to current practices, policies, or rules
Information that provides the ability to answer research questions	Data that is unable to be assessed or ethically collected
Input and feedback from different divisions and teams	Information that results in a biased finding
Preliminary, in progress, and/or final results of the research project with a description of study limitations	Definitive facts (because research is always nuanced, evolving, and has a margin of error)

How does the Research Program decide what research to conduct?

There are several factors the Research Program considers when deciding what research to conduct. Requests that come from LCB leadership are prioritized. The Research Program also monitors which reports may be needed to promote public health and safety outcomes related to the policy and regulation of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and vapor products. An additional consideration is Research Program capacity and staff expertise. Research ideas are welcome from anyone.

How does the Research Program choose what types of analyses to conduct for a research report?

Determining what analyses to conduct for a research report is a complex process. The Research Program values balancing comprehensive analyses with project timelines. Analytic approaches are determined by examining research questions, types of data available, and the length of time it would take to conduct analyses. Data can be messy and limited in scope, and the best analytic approach may change during the research project. If there is an agency request for research to be conducted, and there is no available or adequate data to specifically answer that question, the Research Program

will use their expertise to determine the best course of action (e.g., use the best available data at-hand or determine that primary data must be collected).
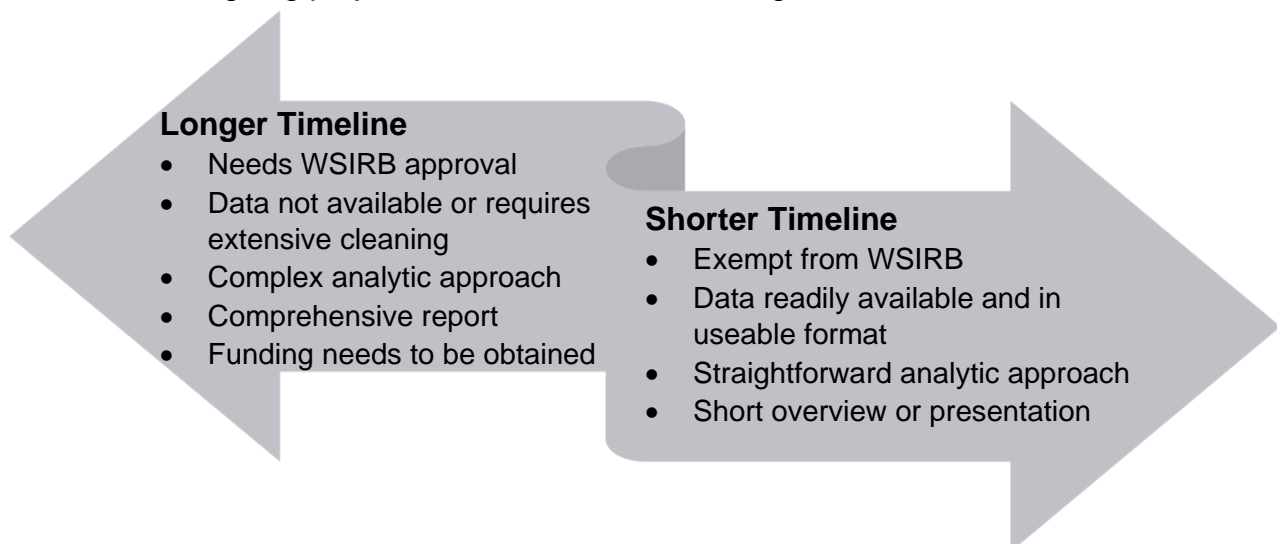
Why is it important to have independent research reports?
The Research Program aims to be a non-partisan and transparent resource focused on public safety and health outcomes related to the policy and regulation of cannabis, alcohol, tobacco, and vapor products. The Research Program is committed to the scientific method. Therefore, it is critical to be able to conduct research without undue influence from internal or external stakeholders, and to remain as objective as possible. This means that although subject matter experts and other stakeholders may be consulted during the project and efforts will be made to collaborate on research approaches and analyses, final methodological decisions will be within the scope of the Research Program, under the Policy and External Affairs Director in the Director's Office.

How long does it take to conduct research and report findings?
Deciding on research priorities, collecting data, conducting analyses, and reporting findings is a lengthy process. Most research projects take between three months and two years. The exact time to complete a report depends on many factors. Some factors that can affect timelines include:
- Whether the analysis requires approval by the Washington State Institutional Review Board (WSIRB);
- The availability, completeness, and quality of current data sources;
- The need to collect primary data and/or access to secondary data (data that has already been collected);
- The need for new data sharing agreements;
- The extent to which a data source needs to be cleaned prior to analyses;
- The complexity of the analytic approach;
- The need for comprehensive research report(s);
- Available funds and budget for specific project; and
- Other ongoing projects within the Research Program.

Longer Timeline
- Needs WSIRB approval
- Data not available or requires extensive cleaning
- Complex analytic approach
- Comprehensive report
- Funding needs to be obtained

Shorter Timeline
- Exempt from WSIRB
- Data readily available and in useable format
- Straightforward analytic approach
- Short overview or presentation

What is the process for research reports?
Research reports can vary extensively. Below are 15 basic steps. Depending on the request these steps may change.

Step 1. A research project is requested and the decision to move forward on project is approved by agency leadership.

Step 2. A Research Program team member will then review the request and meet with requestor(s) to discuss:
(1) Whether a formal research report is needed (sometimes a less formal analysis or a research brief is more appropriate);
(2) What specific question(s) are being asked and to what extent findings may impact internal and external stakeholders;
(3) To what extent data is currently available or may need to be collected;
(4) Who is considered an internal subject matter expert(s) for the topic. This subject matter expert will be consulted during project development and analysis;
(5) Expectations regarding timeline to complete the project;
(6) Confirmation that results will be an independent analysis from the Research Program; and
(7) Goals for use and/or distribution of completed research findings.

Step 3. The Research Program will then determine the extent to which existing, available data answers the research question(s), or if primary data needs to be collected. During this process, a Research Program team member will:
(1) Review the data on the topic including scientific literature, government reports, policies, internal resources, and other credible information sources;
(2) Discuss data sources with internal subject matter expert(s) identified in *Step 2*; and
(3) Determine whether data use agreements are necessary.

Step 4. Methodological procedures will be developed through consultation with Research Program, agency leadership, and subject matter experts.

Step 5. The Research Program will determine if research needs to be approved by the Washington State Institutional Review Board (WSIRB). Depending on the project, a submission to the WSIRB may be necessary to get an exempt determination or research approval.

Step 6. Data will be obtained using the appropriate method (e.g., by division analyst, data sharing agreement, survey collection, etc.).

Step 7. Data will be examined and cleaned to prepare for analysis. This is often the most time-consuming step in the analysis. This step may include: data quality checks, removing duplicate data, merging datasets, variable

exclusion/inclusion criteria, computing and transforming variables, examining missing data patterns and outliers, developing code books, conducting descriptive/summary statistics, etc. Depending on the data quality checks, adjustments to the analytic plan may be needed. The Research Program will consult subject matter experts to make sure data collected is being interpreted correctly.

Step 8. Analyses will be done using identified statistical approaches. If appropriate, sensitivity analyses will also be conducted to determine the extent findings remain stable. Research Program team members will be consulted throughout.

Step 9. Research findings will be compiled into a draft report. The draft report will typically only include aggregated data unless there are circumstances that would require disaggregated data. Components of the draft report may include:
1. Key Takeaways;
2. Brief Introduction;
3. Methods;
4. Non-Technical Statistical Analysis;
5. Technical Statistical Analysis (if appropriate);
6. Results;
7. Tables and Figures;
8. Conclusions;
9. Limitations; and
10. Future Directions

Step 10. The draft report will be reviewed by all Research Program team members and undergo revisions and edits.

Step 11. Once approved by the Research Manager, the draft report will then be sent to the Director of Policy and External Affairs and undergo further revisions and approval.

Step 12. The approved draft report will then be shared with requestor(s) for review and feedback. The Research Program will discuss any concerns expressed, remain responsive to feedback, and ensure findings remain transparent.

Step 13. The report will then be finalized with Communications team to ensure formatting is standardized, aligns with LCB branding, and meets LCB publication guidelines.

Step 14. The report will then be sent to the Agency Director. Unless otherwise discussed, the finalized report will also be sent to all LCB staff to notify all teams and promote transparency.

Step 15. Unless otherwise discussed, the finalized report will be uploaded to the Research Program webpage on the LCB website with the appropriate Consumer Information Brochure Number (CIB) and shared with the Board. Additional presentations may be made to other internal and/or external project stakeholders.

Will the Research Program do anything else with the findings of the report?
The Research Program values sharing research using methods such as conference presentations and peer-reviewed manuscripts. However, we also recognize some findings may not be appropriate to pro-actively share in these settings. We also recognize there are complexities related to ethical standards of approved IRB studies as well as public records policies for Washington state agencies. The Research Program is available to discuss the unique details of each research project.