

If you build it, will they come? Linking researcher engagement and scientific productivity in large infrastructure grants

The NIH grants Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) to support infrastructure by offering research support services for community engagement, statistics, and dissemination and implementation strategies, among others. The awards also prioritize translational research—studies that result in measurable real-world change—for example, improvements in practice, professional guidelines, and delivery of health and social services.

While most evaluations of these programs focus on increases in publications or grants, few focus on the process of how and why this happens or how the additional infrastructure helps researchers become more productive and benefit communities. Authors focused on researchers at Washington University in St. Louis who were members of its CTSA program. **This study investigated how engagement—researchers’ interactions with the new infrastructure and resources—helps increase scientific productivity.**

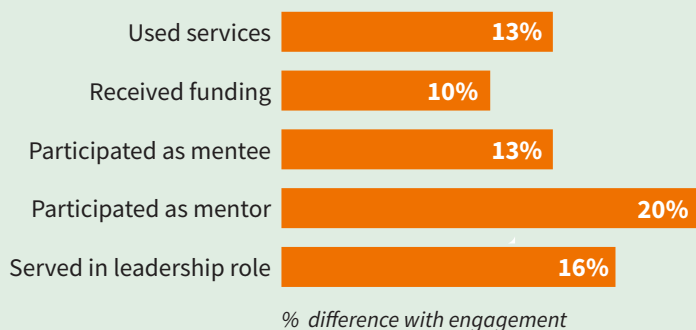
Authors in this study developed indicators to define engagement in four categories: using **program services**; receiving new project **funding**; participating in **mentor-mentee** opportunities; and serving in **leadership** roles. Since a randomized controlled trial where participants are randomly placed into two groups (considered the gold standard of research) was not possible here, the authors matched pairs of researchers based on years of experience, academic discipline and rank, and previous levels of scientific productivity (numbers of publications and grants from previous years), and then used these matched samples in analyses to investigate how engagement with new services and programs affected productivity. The study authors found that **researchers who were engaged published more and submitted and received more grants than those who were not engaged.** They also found that across all types of engagement, **male researchers published more and submitted and received more grants than female researchers.**

RESEARCH BRIEF based on this article: Combs TB, Carothers BJ, Liu Y, Evanoff B, Luke DA (2021). If you build it, will they come? Linking researcher engagement and scientific productivity in large infrastructure grants. *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science*. 2021:1-35. [doi:10.1017/cts.2021.17](https://doi.org/10.1017/cts.2021.17)

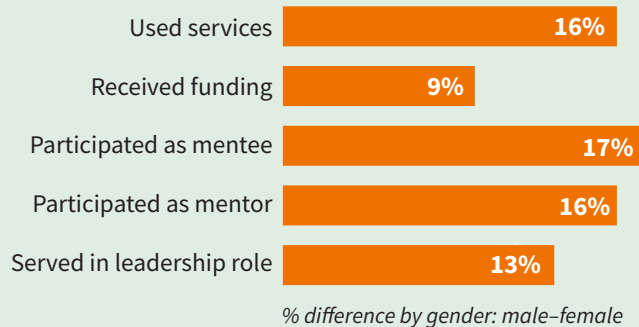


KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE RESEARCH

Engaged researchers were **10-20%** more likely to receive **grant awards** than those who were not engaged



Even with similar backgrounds, **male researchers** who were engaged were **9-17%** more likely to publish **scientific articles** than female researchers who were engaged



“ Even when women or racial and ethnic minorities engage with available services and support, their productivity boosts are not as great as those for white males, illuminating the need for more efforts focused on understanding and overcoming barriers to academic success among women and underrepresented groups.