RESEARCH PROJECT LIFECYCLE

Full Research Plan: Secondary Data Analysis

Stage: Research Development → Gate 3 · Other versions: Trials and Quasi-Experiments (the main Full Research Plan), Questionnaires and Surveys, Interviews and Focus Groups, Mixed Methods

How to use this form

Use this version of the Full Research Plan when the study uses **data that already exists**, such as service records, administrative data or open data. It sets out the data, the question and the analysis **before you analyse anything**. It doubles as your **pre-registration**. It takes **three to five pages**.

- **Who completes it:** the Research Lead.
- **Who checks it:** the Ethics Reviewer, then the Gate 3 Reviewer, as part of the Gate 3 Readiness and Project Sign-Off.
- **Existing data is quick and cheap, but it was collected for another reason.** Check how it was recorded, what is missing, and whether recording changed over time.
- **Plan before you look.** It is easy to find patterns by chance in a large dataset. Write the analysis down before you explore the data, and say honestly if you have already seen it.
- **Be clear about cause.** Most secondary analysis shows patterns, not causes. If you want to estimate an effect, say how you will build a fair comparison.
- **Changes are allowed, but must be visible.** After sign-off, record every change as a dated amendment with the reason.

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A. The project

Most of this section carries forward from earlier templates. Check it is still right.

Field	Your answer
A1. Project title *(essential)* As on the Feasibility and Business Capability Assessment.	
A2. Project reference From the Research Portfolio Register.	
A3. Research Lead *(essential)* Name and role.	

Field	Your answer
A4. Gate 2 decision date *(essential)* The date the project was judged "This research project is feasible".	Date: _____ / _____ / _____
A5. Plan version *(essential)* For example, version 1.0. Every amendment after sign-off gets a new version number.	

B. Question and hypotheses

Field	Your answer
B1. Research question *(essential)* The main question the analysis will answer. For example: "Where and when are young people most at risk of harm on their journey to and from school?"	
B2. Hypotheses or aims *(essential)* What you expect to find, written so the results could prove it wrong. If the analysis is exploratory, say so here.	
B3. Why this matters *(essential)* A short summary of the evidence and the gap this study fills, and who will use the findings. Carry this forward from the Evidence Scoping Summary and update it.	

C. The data

Field	Your answer
C1. Datasets *(essential)* For each dataset: its name, who holds it, the period it covers, and what one record represents (a person, an event, a place).	

Field	Your answer
C2. Access and agreements *(essential)* Pick one, then list the agreements needed. For example: a data sharing agreement or a data protection impact assessment.	☐ Access already in place ☐ Agreement needed ☐ Open data
C3. Data quality and known issues *(essential)* Missing data, recording errors, duplicate records, or changes in how things were recorded over time.	
C4. Linking datasets If datasets will be joined: the method, the fields used to match, and how you will check the match rate.	
C5. Data protection and anonymisation *(essential)* Who can see the data, where it is stored, and how people are kept from being identified.	

D. Design and population

Field	Your answer
D1. Design *(essential)* Pick one. **Descriptive:** what the data shows, such as patterns, rates or hotspots. **Change over time:** trends before and after a change. **Natural experiment or quasi-experimental:** estimating an effect using a comparison built from the data. **Predictive model:** predicting an outcome from other information.	☐ Descriptive ☐ Change over time ☐ Natural experiment or quasi-experimental ☐ Predictive model ☐ Other

Field	Your answer
D2. Population and inclusion criteria *(essential)* Which records are included and excluded, written so someone else could select the same records.	
D3. Study period start *(essential)*	Date: ____ / ____ / _____
D4. Study period end *(essential)*	Date: ____ / ____ / _____
D5. Comparison or counterfactual If you want to estimate an effect: what the comparison is, and why it is fair. For example: similar areas that did not receive the change.	

E. Variables

Field	Your answer
E1. Main outcome or measure *(essential)* The main thing you will measure, defined exactly as it appears in the data.	
E2. Explanatory variables *(essential)* The factors you will look at, each defined exactly.	
E3. Derived variables Any variables you will create, such as age bands or rates, and how they are calculated.	

F. Analysis plan

Write this before you analyse the data. It is the core of the pre-registration.

Field	Your answer
F1. Main analysis *(essential)* The method or model for the main question, and the result that would count as a meaningful finding.	
F2. Missing data and data quality *(essential)* How you will handle missing values, errors and changes in recording.	
F3. Checks on the findings Sensitivity analyses that test whether results hold if you change a key decision. For example, a different time period or definition.	
F4. Subgroup analyses Only the subgroups you plan now. Anything added later must be labelled as exploratory.	
F5. Small numbers and disclosure How you will avoid publishing figures small enough to identify people. For example, suppressing counts under 10.	

G. Limitations

Field	Your answer
G1. Known limitations *(essential)* For example: what the data does not record, unreported events, or bias in how records are created.	

Field	Your answer
G2. What the results can and cannot tell us *(essential)* Most secondary analysis shows patterns, not causes. Say clearly what can and cannot be concluded.	

H. Pre-registration

Register this plan before any data collection or analysis starts. See the ResearchCore guide "Where to Pre-register" for options in different fields, including internal registration and your own website.

Field	Your answer
H1. Where it is registered *(essential)* Pick one.	☐ External registry ☐ Registered Report ☐ Internal pre-registration ☐ Our own website
H2. Registry name and reference The registry, the ID or link, or the internal document reference.	
H3. Date registered *(essential)*	Date: ____ / ____ / _____
H4. Embargo until If the details are hidden until a later date.	Date: ____ / ____ / _____
H5. Have you already seen or analysed this data? *(essential)* Pick one, then explain. Be honest: prior access does not stop you pre-registering, but readers need to know.	☐ No, not seen ☐ Seen, not analysed ☐ Already analysed in part

I. Plan status and sign-off

Field	Your answer
I1. Plan status *(essential)* Pick one.	☐ Draft ☐ Ready for Ethical Oversight ☐ Signed off ☐ Amended after sign-off
I2. Signed off by *(essential)* Research Lead name and role.	
I3. Sign-off date *(essential)*	Date: ____ / ____ / _____
I4. Amendments after sign-off List each change: the date, the version number, what changed and why.	

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