Research vs Operations Decision Tool

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About this Tool

VHA maintains patient health information and other data used for a variety of purposes, such as program administration, healthcare quality improvement, program evaluation, and research. The process for requesting access to data is based on how the data will be used.

The Access Category Finder on the next page will help you identify the correct data access category. Select a Data Use to view examples. Select an Access Category to view information on the VHA Data Portal about requesting data access.
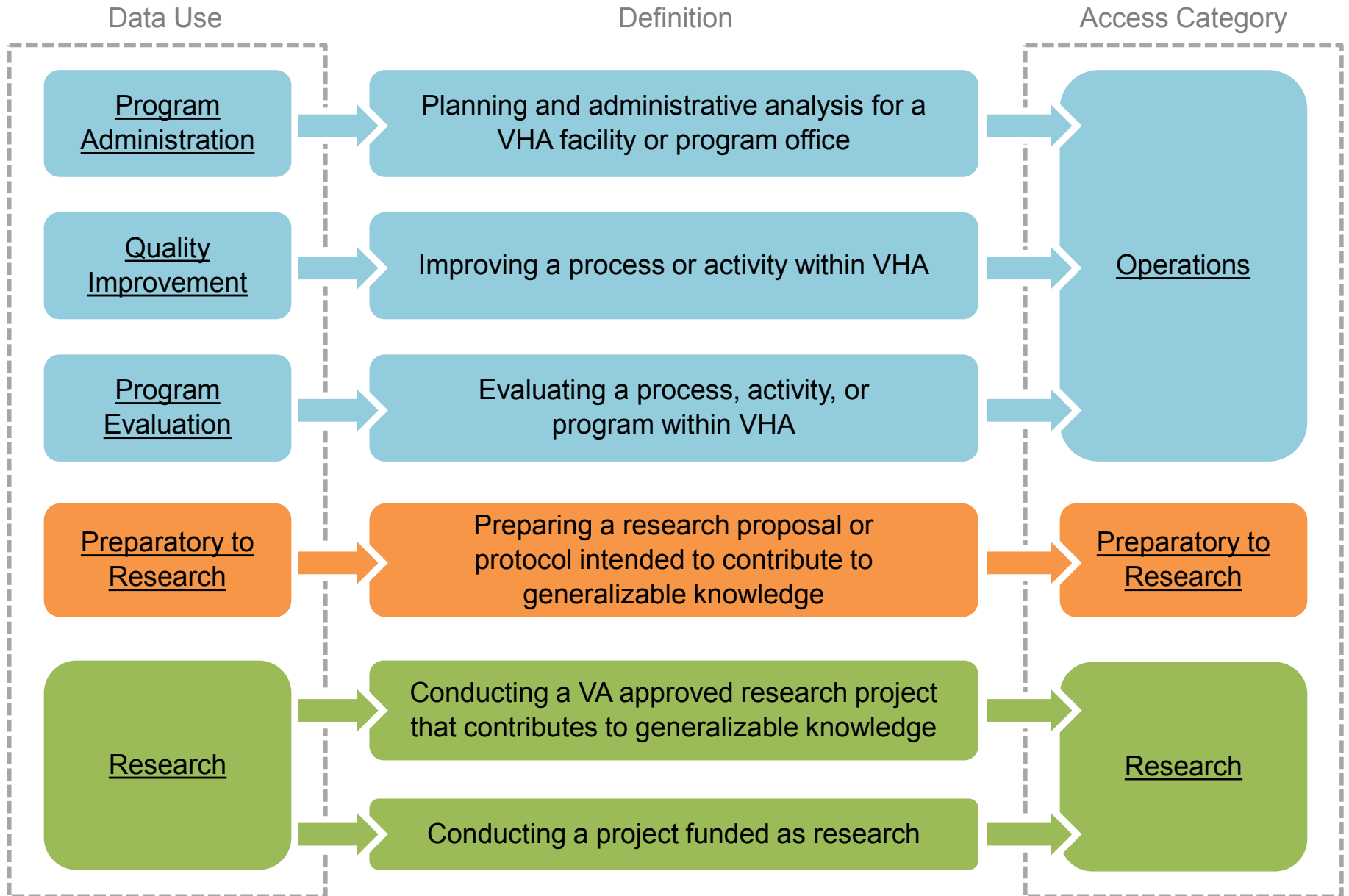
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Access Category Finder

Data Use	Definition	Access Category
Program Administration	Planning and administrative analysis for a VHA facility or program office	Operations
Quality Improvement	Improving a process or activity within VHA	
Program Evaluation	Evaluating a process, activity, or program within VHA	
Preparatory to Research	Preparing a research proposal or protocol intended to contribute to generalizable knowledge	Preparatory to Research
Research	Conducting a VA approved research project that contributes to generalizable knowledge	Research
	Conducting a project funded as research	

Program Administration

Activities designed for internal VA purposes

- Operational monitoring
- Business planning and development

Examples

- Cost-management and planning analyses related to managing and operating an entity
- Business management and general administrative activities
- Financial auditing

Quality Improvement

Activities designed for internal VA purposes

- Routine data collection and analysis for program improvement purposes

Examples

- Cardiac Assessment Reporting and Tracking System (CART)
- External Peer Review Program (EPRP)
- Home and Community Based Quality Care Initiative
- VA Surgical Quality Improvement Program (VASQIP)
- VHA Quality Improvement Initiative (VQuIP)
- Mental Health Program Evaluation Centers

Program Evaluation

Activities designed for internal VA purposes such as routine data collection and analysis for evaluations.

Examples of evaluation activities

- VHA system redesign, patient satisfaction surveys, case management and care coordination, policy and guideline development and related evaluation, benchmarking

- Competence or qualification reviews of VA employees and health care professionals, provider and health plan performance evaluations; peer review; training and education; accreditation, licensing, and credentialing; Joint Commission visits and related activities

Preparatory to Research

Activities using data containing Protected Health Information (PHI) to prepare a research proposal or protocol prior to submission for funding or IRB approval.

VHA Handbook 1200.05 provides information about requirements for Preparatory to Research data activities.

Research

- Activities designed to
  - Add to generalizable knowledge
  - Produce information to expand the knowledge base of a scientific discipline or scholarly field of study

- Activities funded or otherwise supported as research by the Office of Research & Development (ORD) or any other entity.

- Clinical investigations as defined under Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations

- Examples
  - Double blind interventions
  - Placebo controls
  - Prospective patient-level randomization to clinical interventions not tailored to individual patient benefit

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