University of Maryland Baltimore

Human Research Protections Program (HRPP)
Tip of the Month

November 2026

What Does "Generalizable Knowledge" Mean?

One of the key factors in determining whether an activity meets the regulatory definition of research is whether it is designed to develop or contribute to **generalizable knowledge**.

❌ **Myth**: "If I plan to publish or present the results, my project is automatically research."

✅ **Reality**: Publication or presentation alone does not determine whether an activity is research. The more important question is whether the activity is designed to draw conclusions that extend beyond a specific program, patient population, or local setting.

When considering whether an activity may constitute research, ask:

- Is the primary intent to improve a local process or program?
- Or is the activity designed to test a hypothesis, draw broader conclusions, or produce findings that may apply to other settings or populations?

Remember: No single factor determines whether an activity contributes to generalizable knowledge. The overall purpose, design, and intended use of the findings should be considered together.

If you're unsure whether your activity constitutes human subjects research, the IRB Office can help. Investigators are also encouraged to review **OHRP Decision Chart #1: Is an Activity Human Subjects Research Covered by 45 CFR Part 46.**

Concepts adapted from educational materials published by Emmanuel University and Boston University's Office of Clinical Research.