Researcher's Guide to Georgia's Academic and Workforce Analysis and Research Data System (GA•AWARDS)

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Introduction

This document serves to familiarize external researchers with the process to request individual-level data from Georgia's Academic and Workforce Analysis and Research Data System (GA•AWARDS).

GA•AWARDS is a P-20W data warehouse that contains data provided by the following state agencies:

- Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)
- Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE)
- State Charter Schools Commission (SCSC)
- Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC)
- Professional Standards Commission (PSC)
- Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG)
- University System of Georgia (USG)
- Georgia Independent College Association (GICA)
- Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA)
    - Data from College Board, ACT, and National Student Clearinghouse
- Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL)

GA•AWARDS uses defined rules and trust values to assign a unique identifier to track students across agencies and across time. All personally identifiable information (PII) is removed immediately after the unique ID is applied.

Below is a high-level overview of the available data. For more detailed information, consult the Data Dictionary.

- Pre-K participation and number of months attended
- K-12 and postsecondary student characteristics
    - Demographics and classifications
    - Course-taking (enrollment, course information, grades)
    - HOPE eligibility and award
    - Diplomas, certifications, and degrees
    - Applicable state assessments
    - Applicable national assessments (SAT, ACT, AP)
- K-12 educators
    - Demographics
    - Credentials and assessments
    - Length of service
- Unemployment data (industry type, quarterly wages)

Eligibility

For the purposes of this process, all research requests must involve individual-level data from more than one participating agency. The SCSC data in GA•AWARDS are provided by GaDOE. Therefore, requests involving only GaDOE and SCSC data are not considered interagency requests and consequently will not be fulfilled by GA•AWARDS.

If the request involves data from only one participating agency or involves only aggregate data (not individual-level), please email GAAWARDS.Support@georgia.gov for information on how to request these data.

Access to GA•AWARDS data is limited to authorized researchers at an institution within the Georgia Independent College Association (GICA), the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), or the University System of Georgia (USG) that provides data to GA•AWARDS.[1] An authorized researcher is a credentialed faculty or staff member responsible for producing research at an institution within GICA, TCSG, or USG. The lead researcher must be an authorized researcher. This eligibility requirement does not pertain to additional individuals who will access the data, e.g. co-authors, graduate assistants, etc.

At this time, GA•AWARDS data may not be used in theses or dissertations.

Prioritization

Requests that align with GA•AWARDS Research Questions or the state strategic goals will receive priority. However, all requests will be considered.

Contact Information

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) facilitates requests for GA•AWARDS data. All questions regarding this process should be directed to GAAWARDS.Support@georgia.gov.

Request Process

Before beginning the application, it may be helpful to review the following documents:

- Application: This printable version of the application contains all questions that must be answered in your request. While it is not necessary to create a Formsite account to access the form, an account is required in order to save application progress and return for later editing. It is recommended that users create a Formsite account in the event that the user is required to revise and resubmit the application.
- Feasibility review rubric: This document provides a guide to criteria considered during the feasibility review. Note that the review may take into account other considerations.

[1] All TCSG and USG institutions provide data to GA•AWARDS. The following GICA institutions provide data to GA•AWARDS: Brenau University, Covenant College, Emmanuel College, LaGrange College, Mercer University, Morehouse College, Oglethorpe University, Paine College, Piedmont College, Point University, Reinhardt University, Spelman College, Thomas University, Wesleyan College, and Young Harris College.

- [Substantive review rubric](): This document provides a guide to criteria considered during the substantive review. Note that the review may take into account other considerations.
- [Security review rubric](): The document provides a guide to criteria considered during the security review. Note that the review may take into account other considerations.
- [Data Dictionary](): This document contains a list and explanation of all available data elements.
- [Template for Requested Variables](): This spreadsheet lists all available data elements. As part of the application, you must select which variables you are requesting and write a justification for each variable.
- [Confidentiality and Data Usage Agreement](): This agreement must be signed and included in the application by all individuals who will access the data, including graduate assistants.

Please note that you must provide documentation of approval or exemption from your institution's IRB in the application. If your institution does not have an IRB, you must explain how your project fits the federal definitions of "research" and "human subjects." [Click here to view these definitions.]()

The figure below provides an overview of the process.

Figure 1: Request Process
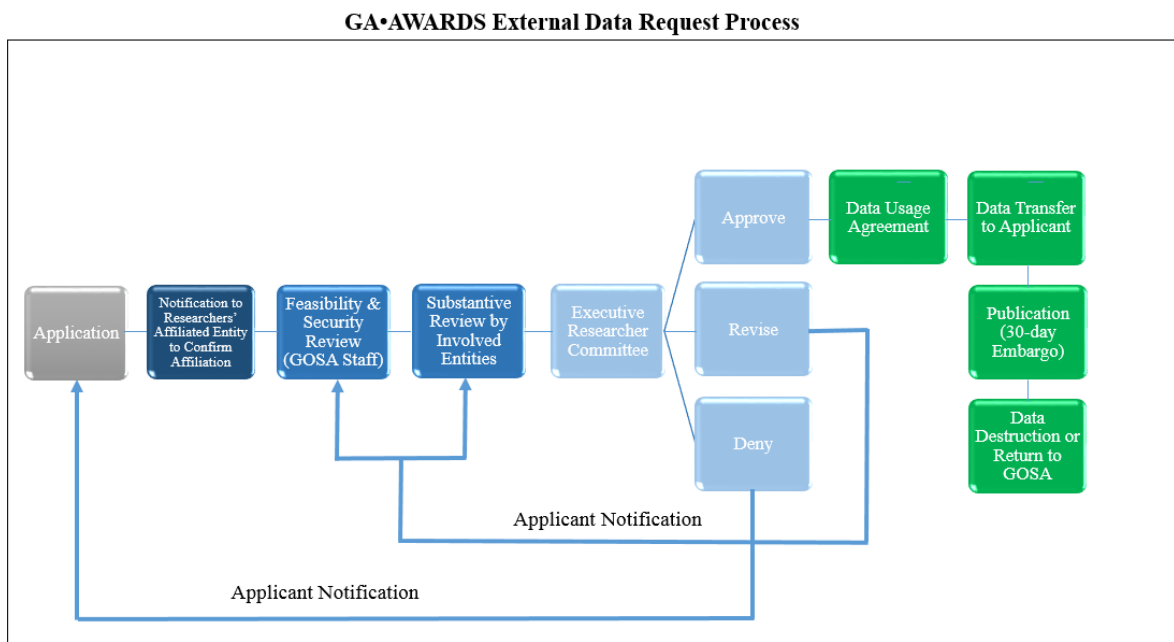
GA•AWARDS is governed by the Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH) and managed by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA). The Data Management Committee (DMC), which consists of the lead data and information officer of each participating organization, provides input and oversight of the activities of GA•AWARDS on behalf of AEAH. A key area of oversight is access to this data system.

Members of the DMC designated a lead researcher from each of their respective organizations to form the Executive Researcher Committee (ERC) to develop an external request process for de-identified, student-level data. The goals of this process are to:

- Increase high-quality use of Georgia education data;
- Maximize data security;
- Protect privacy;
- Maintain public trust;
- Ensure appropriate use of education data accessed through process; and
- Minimize work burden for agency staff, where possible.

Application

The application is available online here. To view a list of all questions in the application, click here. Please note that users may not be asked all questions, depending on answers to previous questions.

GOSA will only process applications completed through the online application system. After GOSA receives a complete application, it will contact the representative from the applicant's affiliated organization to confirm that he/she is an approved researcher. For example, if a researcher at College Y within TCSG completes an application, GOSA will contact TCSG to confirm that the researcher is responsible for conducting research at College Y.

Only proposals submitted by authorized researchers will continue through the process described below.

GOSA will notify applicants via email of the results of this eligibility review.

Feasibility Review

If the applicant is a confirmed authorized researcher, GOSA staff will conduct a feasibility review based on the following criteria:

- Existence of data element(s)
- Analysis required to extract the data
- Known data constraints/issues
- Data availability
- Processing time

Security Review

GOSA staff will conduct a review of the data security measures the applicant outlines in the proposal based on the following criteria:

- Physical access controls
- Logical access controls
- Encryption

- Network security
- Workstation security
- Data destruction plan

If the proposal is deemed "unsatisfactory" on any criterion, the application will be denied. It is highly recommended that applicants work with IT staff when answering security-related questions. The application questions regarding security measures provide some guidance on appropriate levels of security. You may find additional information about the ISO/IEC 27001 security standards here.

Substantive Review

The ERC member from each participating agency with data involved in the request will conduct an independent substantive review based on the following criteria:

- Alignment with state strategic goals and/or GA•AWARDS Research Questions
- Evidence of understanding of requested data elements
- Clarity of research question(s)
- Appropriateness of study design to answer research question(s)
- Research and writing competency (CV for all involved researchers)
- Overall contribution to research

Executive Researcher Committee Review

At its quarterly meetings, the ERC will discuss the proposals that have undergone all three reviews (feasibility, security, and substantive). GOSA will notify each applicant via email when his/her proposal is on the list of proposals up for possible discussion at the next ERC meeting. The queue for discussion will be based upon date of submission.

The ERC will discuss as many proposals as time allows. All remaining proposals may be discussed at the next quarterly meeting, as time and workload allow.

Each request will have one of three outcomes:

- Approve
  - o Researchers at all entities with data involved in the request must approve the request for it to proceed.
  - o The ERC may issue a "Caveats for Approval" document when an application is approved. This document contains known issues with data elements and other issues against which the ERC wants to caution researchers.
- Revise
  - o Applicant will have the opportunity to revise the application and return for review at the next Executive Researcher Committee meeting.
  - o GOSA will provide the applicant with a "Revise and Resubmit" document that contains information on what revisions are required. In this document, the applicant must explain how he/she made the requested changes.

- After these changes are made, the applicant must fill out a new application in the online application system and upload the completed "Revise and Resubmit" document when prompted.
- Deny
  - Applicant must submit a new application for any future consideration.

Applicants will be notified of the outcome via email.

Click here for the dates of upcoming ERC meetings.

Data Access

Once the application is approved at the ERC meeting, GOSA will determine prioritization based upon GOSA staff workload and other pending requests. GOSA will communicate with the approved applicant of the schedule of data access. Data transfer will occur via a secure FTP site. To view the requirements of the secure FTP site, click here.

Data must be stored in accordance with the Confidentiality and Data Usage Agreement.

Merging GA•AWARDS Data with Other Data Sources

Researchers may request that other data be merged with GA•AWARDS data . However, information on this merge must be included in the approved proposal *and* agreed to in writing by GOSA. If the researcher determines that he/she would like to merge data sources after receiving the data, he/she must submit an amended proposal to GOSA for approval.

If you plan to merge external individual-level data with GA•AWARDS data, you must notify GA•AWARDS staff in the initial application. If approved, you must also provide the data to GA•AWARDS staff, who will merge the data with GA•AWARDS prior to transfer. GA•AWARDS uses a data matching algorithm to consolidate data across multiple participating agencies. Personally identifiable information (PII) is removed immediately after the person matching and a unique identifier (the GA•AWARDS ID) is applied. Because the GA•AWARDS ID is unique to GA•AWARDS and GA•AWARDS cannot provide PII to researchers, GA•AWARDS staff must complete the data merge. Please note that under no circumstances may GA•AWARDS release PII to researchers, and staff may refuse to merge the outside data if it is believed the merge may potentially result in the release of PII. Also, please be aware that any requested data matching may significantly increase the processing time for your proposal, and, in some cases, could result in the denial of the request if matching is determined not to be feasible.

Publication Requirements and Embargo

All publications, reports, and publicly available information related to research, including preliminary project descriptions and draft reports, shall involve only aggregate data and no personally identifiable information or other information that could lead to the identification of

any individual. Researchers may not publish any data or results for subgroups of individuals with an n-size less than 10.

An electronic copy of *each* report or presentation produced using GA•AWARDS data must be sent to GOSA (GAAWARDS.Support@georgia.gov) at least 30 calendar days prior to presentation or submission for publication. If the researcher sends multiple iterations of the same report or presentation, the researcher shall identify what changes have been made since the previous version sent to GOSA.

GOSA will forward these reports or presentations to the participating agencies whose data are used in the project. Representatives from these agencies will determine whether the report or presentation aligns with the approved proposal. If so, GOSA will notify researchers that they may proceed with presentation or submission for publication. If the report or presentation does not align with the approved proposal, it shall not be presented, published, or submitted for publication, as detailed in the Confidentiality and Data Usage Agreement. In the rare instance in which the participating agency does not respond to GOSA's request for review within 30 days, GOSA will notify the researcher as such and the researcher may proceed with presentation or submission for publication.

Each report or presentation must contain the following language that recognizes that the data are provided by GA•AWARDS and that all expressed opinions and errors are the author's and do not represent the views of the GA•AWARDS or any of the participating agencies:

"The contents of this report were developed using data provided by Georgia's Academic and Workforce Analysis and Research Data System (GA•AWARDS).   However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of GA•AWARDS or any of its participating organizations, and you should not assume endorsement by the GA•AWARDS or any of its participating organizations."

Researchers may not use the logo for GA•AWARDS without written permission from GOSA.

Revisions to Approved Applications

If an approved researcher seeks to answer additional questions using the provided GA•AWARDS data that are not listed in the original application, he/she should send a short description of the new questions to GOSA (GAAWARDS.Support@georgia.gov). The participating agencies whose data are included in the request will determine whether the new questions constitute a new project or whether they can be included in an addendum to the current project.

Researcher Feedback

Upon completion of their project or upon receiving a project extension, researchers must complete a feedback survey to help improve this process. GOSA will provide researchers with the link to this survey.

Researchers also agree to provide other feedback upon request. For example, GOSA may ask that researchers provide a review of the data elements used in their projects.

GOSA encourages all data users to report any issues they encounter in the data. Please send a short description of the issue to GAAWARDS.Support@georgia.gov.

Data Destruction

As described in the Confidentiality and Data Usage Agreement, the data must be destroyed, as all copies and derivative or merged files twelve months from the date the Agreement is signed by GOSA's Executive Director or 45 days after it is no longer needed to perform the study or research covered by this agreement, whichever occurs first. However, an extension may be granted by written agreement of the parties.

Projected Timeline

The timeline below is a rough estimate of the number of days required for each step. The actual time elapsed will vary by proposal, depending on the nature of the proposal, GOSA's workload, other pending requests, and the workload and schedule of the ERC.

Eligibility Review: Up to 30 days after application submission

Feasibility/Security/Substantive Review: Up to 90 days after eligibility is established

ERC Review: Up to 270 days after feasibility/substantive reviews

Data Access (if approved): Up to 120 days after the ERC review

Failure to Comply with Requests and Requirements from Participating Agencies

Researchers who fail to comply with requests from the participating agencies may be prohibited from receiving GA•AWARDS data in the future. Examples of these requests include:

- Completing a feedback survey
- Reviewing of data elements
- Feedback on data discrepancies
- Providing the final product of the proposal for use on agency websites
- Providing derivative files and all data files resulting from merges or matches