

A Review of Micro-Grants for Research Data Acquisitions in University Libraries

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Introduction

For libraries and the employees who inhabit them, it can sometimes feel as though the only constant reality is a lack of funding (see Exhibit A). As Lisa Hinchliffe (2022) noted, “[Within the University] scholarly output continues to grow while library budgets shrink.” A real “counterweight” to this pre- and post-COVID, reimagined services are helping some libraries weather budget uncertainties and related financial constraints (Cox, 2023). One of those services—purchasing research data through the lens of scholarly research and creativity—is an example of how some libraries are navigating uncertainty. As noted by Foster et al. (2019), “If the maxim of “doing more with less” [is the new normal], librarians may have to choose between traditional activities and emerging services.” When buying research data facilitates partnering with campus stakeholders, piloting micro-funding opportunities via library research grants may be a risk worth taking.

Listed here is a compilation of research data grant programs offered at university libraries in the United States. These awards are unique in that they reflect the importance of data for research and creative endeavors. While most libraries have been licensing databases and electronic resources since the birth of the internet, few libraries have developed a “data purchase program” at scale.

This list could be helpful for any data management librarian, collections strategist, or library director scoping micro-grant services in research libraries.

University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign Library – Data Purchase Program

Purpose: To purchase numeric, spatial, or textual data for research by soliciting applications from campus faculty and students for “small” commercial datasets (Sheehan & Hogenboom, 2017). Cost-sharing with other campus units is permitted.

Amount: Up to \$23,000 available; No more than \$5,000 per researcher per year

Florida State University – Robert B. Bradley Library Research Grants [Active]

Purpose: To support the research and creative work of faculty with new library acquisitions accessible for the whole FSU community. Prioritization is given to applications that enhance specific research programs and the creative activities of faculty members (Florida State University, n.d.).

Amount: Up to \$100,000 available to fund mini-grants; Generally \$500-10,000 per proposal

Past recipients: Markit Securities Lending Data; Thomson Reuters’ Lipper Hedge Fund Database

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University of Michigan Library – Data Grant Program [Active]

Purpose: To provide data grants to Michigan-affiliated researchers through one-time purchases. Only data that can be licensed campus-wide is considered (University of Michigan Library, n.d.).

Past Recipients: Eora Global Supply Chain Database; Gallup Analytics; CoreLogic Parcel Level Data

University of Arizona Libraries – Data Grant Program [Active]

Purpose: Intended for the purpose of purchasing commercially available data sets. Awardees are asked to submit a research artifact to the UA data repository (ReDATA) and acknowledge the UA Libraries' support in any resulting publications (University of Arizona Libraries, n.d.).

Past Recipients: Illumis Lobbying Registration Data

Johns Hopkins University Libraries – Data Grant Program [Active]

Purpose: To purchase datasets for departments or research groups. Awardees are required to give a short brown-bag style presentation about how they used their acquired data. Only data that can be licensed campus-wide is considered (Johns Hopkins Libraries, n.d.).

University of Rochester, River Campus Libraries – Data Set Grant Program [Active]

Purpose: To offer grants to current undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the Arts, Sciences & Engineering, Warner School of Education and Simon Business School to support unique, out-of-reach data needs for their independent studies (University of Rochester River Campus Libraries, n.d.).

Amount: Up to \$2,000 (per individual or research team)

University of Southern California Libraries – Data Research Grant Program [Suspended]

Purpose: To purchase research data on behalf of faculty and graduate students in order to provide campus-wide access to data and increase the libraries' impact on data-driven research on campus. Only data that can be licensed campus-wide is considered (University of Southern California Libraries, n.d.).

Past Recipients: National Population Census of China

University of Denver Libraries – Collection Development Grant Program [Active]

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Purpose: To ensure that the Libraries continue to support current teaching and research at DU. Faculty may submit University Library Association (ULA) grant proposals, as may graduate and undergraduate students so long as they have a faculty sponsor. All materials purchased with ULA funds are housed in the Libraries as part of the collections (University of Denver Libraries, n.d.).

Amount: Up to \$3,000 per proposal

University of Notre Dame – Library Acquisitions Grant Program [Suspended]

Purpose: To provide University resources to fund library acquisitions (LA) in support of research, scholarship, and creative endeavors. The program is not meant to replace the normal means of enhancing the library's collections but to provide a means of responding to unique opportunities or challenges. The LA program is intended to augment library acquisitions primarily for research, not teaching (University of Notre Dame, n.d.).

Amount: Requests range between \$25,000 and \$150,000

Old Dominion University Libraries – Faculty Research Grant Program

Purpose: To provide mini-grants for faculty to utilize new library acquisitions while they develop work within their fields of expertise (Old Dominion University, 2021).

Amount: Up to \$50,000; Generally \$500-10,000 per proposal

In general, “library budgets depend on the library dean’s talent for negotiation and the university administration’s disposition toward libraries” (Kim, 2023). Since it’s a cliché to say that a library’s value to a university is hard to measure, and since library budgets and collections are doomed to uncertainty, microgrants for research data can serve as a valuable rebranding of a service that many research libraries already offer. As academic libraries evolve and colleges clamor for rankings, services that facilitate the acquisition of unique research data as a fundamental collection development strategy may become commonplace.

A final note: Many faculty and student research grants (e.g. Seed grants, etc.) are already provided by campus units that include Academic Senate, Office of the Provost, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, or other Offices for Research. It’s important to consider whether your university library should be leading this practice of grant-funded data acquisitions or following someone else’s lead.

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Exhibit A.

Institution	Total library Expenses 2019-2020	Total library materials/services expenses 2019-2020	Total library Expenses 2022-2023	Total library materials/services expenses 2022-2023	Number of librarians and professional staff 2022-2023
Harvard University	\$193,512,504	\$47,631,235	\$162,603,770	\$43,421,462	466
Yale University	\$106,619,255	\$38,627,186	\$95,818,776	\$29,277,252	246
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor	\$87,585,593	\$29,230,104	\$88,047,977	\$29,913,101	215
Stanford University	\$115,558,767	\$34,978,501	\$78,373,131	\$26,066,045	203
Princeton University	\$62,936,874	\$32,884,167	\$76,057,728	\$35,476,087	188
University of Pennsylvania	\$66,188,704	\$23,175,717	\$74,452,081	\$27,257,589	197
Columbia University	\$74,101,620	\$32,789,742	\$72,665,822	\$33,189,076	211
University of California, Los Angeles	\$70,387,611	\$18,479,203	\$69,886,190	\$19,430,929	171
University of California, Berkeley	\$70,449,079	\$21,588,999	\$69,556,705	\$21,570,833	239
New York University	\$62,670,292	\$27,482,574	\$63,884,269	\$29,885,050	207
Cornell University	\$61,487,503	\$18,088,655	\$56,129,183	\$17,455,801	160
University of Texas, Austin	\$56,228,907	\$21,880,424	\$53,849,556	\$24,450,470	155
Johns Hopkins University	\$51,084,741	\$22,771,865	\$52,159,554	\$24,058,538	131
Duke University	\$52,101,811	\$24,372,872	\$48,675,594	\$19,819,547	219
University of Washington, Seattle	\$52,609,349	\$19,882,104	\$48,132,981	\$17,127,055	167
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	\$48,417,633	\$20,831,504	\$48,123,061	\$21,379,944	179
University of Chicago	\$36,017,296	\$18,642,986	\$37,346,444	\$19,802,624	60
University of California, San Diego	\$37,882,654	\$8,024,258	\$37,204,874	\$8,602,019	118
Northwestern University	\$41,507,910	\$15,936,227	\$32,334,714	\$14,008,988	105
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	\$31,588,539	\$12,095,789	\$30,405,364	\$11,096,909	93

^ This data provides an update to an earlier graphic from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2014). Data is meant to provide a snapshot of university research libraries' budgets pre- and post-Pandemic, based on annually reported IPEDS data.

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