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GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL RESEARCHER-PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIPS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM:

Findings from the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships Study (RPPS)

Advancing Evidence-Based Practice & Policy in the Criminal Justice System

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GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL RESEARCHER-PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIPS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: THE RESEARCHER-PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIPS STUDY (RPPS)

Research has the greatest potential to impact change in practice and policy when (a) it is conducted in collaboration with practitioners rather than conducted by academic researchers alone, and (b) its findings are clearly communicated to the people who influence policy and practice in a useful, easy-to-read format (Block, Engel, Naureckas, & Riordan, 1999; Mouradian, Mechanic, & Williams, 2001). The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) has devoted a great deal of effort to promoting research collaborations[1] with practitioners in the criminal justice (CJ) system. As a result, there have been many successful partnerships. However, the lessons about what contributed to those and similar successful partnerships between researchers and practitioners have not been documented, synthesized, and shared in a way that could inform the development of successful partnerships in the future. Therefore, the goal of this study was to improve our understanding of successful research collaborations between those working within and outside of the CJ system so that these "lessons learned" can be shared to promote the creation of new partnerships and enhance existing ones.

To accomplish these goals, we conducted the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships Study (RPPS) as a two-part study:

Part One: Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with practitioners and researchers in the United States and Canada who self-identified as having at least one past or current "successful" research partnership (though many also had past unsuccessful partnerships). The purpose was to learn from them what they believe made their partnerships successful. Each person was asked to describe the highlights and lowlights of their collaboration(s). Practitioners, as defined by the NIJ for the purpose of this study, were CJ system employees (including administrators of CJ state administrative agencies, SAAs) and those who provide services to CJ system clients. Researchers were those who conducted research but were not employed within the CJ system. Participants were 55 women and 17 men, with 4 to 40 years of experience, employed in a range of settings, including urban, suburban, and rural localities, and including family violence and sexual assault programs, private practice, SAAs such as departments of corrections and local county courts, independent research institutes, and colleges/universities. Forty-nine people participated in individual interviews.

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[1] "Collaboration" and "partnership" are used interchangeably.

Twenty-three people participated in 5 focus groups convened at professional conferences.

Part Two. A web-based survey of CJ system SAAs aimed to (a) determine each state's infrastructure and general experiences regarding research in the CJ system and (b) document lessons learned from past or current successful collaborations with a researcher not employed within the CJ system.

This report focuses exclusively on the findings from Part One of RPPS, the interviews and focus groups. Findings from Part Two, the web-based survey of CJ system SAAs, can be found in "The Role of State Administrative Agencies in Advancing Criminal Justice Research: Findings from the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships Study."

The recommendations in this report come directly from our study of researchers and CJ system practitioners. The recommendations are based on specific examples of how RPPS participants collaborated successfully, overcame obstacles to collaborate successfully, or are suggestions for overcoming obstacles based on their experiences. Recommendations cover topics that span the spectrum of collaborating, such as identifying reasons to collaborate, establishing and maintaining a collaboration, and disseminating the findings of a collaborative project. Examples include:

- Suggestions for identifying a collaborator.
- Characteristics of a good collaborator.
- Suggestions for managing the startup process.
- Considerations for a formal written agreement.
- Facilitators of successful collaboration.
- Barriers to successful collaboration.
- Disseminating findings.

Findings from the RPPS are important to helping new and experienced researchers and practitioners work together on a research project. Knowledge about what makes a collaboration successful can help in all phases of the collaborative process. More effective research partnerships are likely to lead to more meaningful results, which have stronger effects on practice, service, and policy; save time and money; and ultimately contribute to improving advocacy and support for victims and reducing crime and recidivism.

BACKGROUND

Researcher-practitioner collaborations[2] have the potential to enhance how research is conducted and findings are utilized in the criminal justice (CJ) system (Block, 2000; Block et al., 1999). Practitioners have intimate knowledge of the system and its clients. Therefore, findings of research done collaboratively with CJ practitioners, such as CJ system personnel or those who serve CJ system clients, may be more likely than research conducted by academic researchers alone to influence practices and policies, and ultimately contribute to improved advocacy and support for victims and reduced crime and recidivism. Little information has been published about successful collaborations within the CJ system, which is problematic since evidence-based practice is becoming the norm. A search of the National Criminal Justice Reference Service databases using the terms "collaboration" or "partnership" produces nearly 1,000 results. Yet, what this search produces are mostly research articles focused on the results of studies conducted collaboratively; few articles are focused on the actual process of collaborating.

Purpose of the study: To learn more about successful research partnerships in the CJ system, we conducted interviews and focus groups with researchers and practitioners in the United States and Canada. The goals were to:

1. Document critical components of successful research partnerships.
2. Understand the facilitators of and barriers to partnering.
3. Learn how partners balance their individual needs as researchers or practitioners.
4. Learn methods for disseminating results of collaborative projects so that they can be best utilized to effect change.
5. Understand what contributes to sustaining relationships among collaborators.

To foster successful partnerships, we summarize and share the lessons learned from past and current partnerships. The recommendations in this report come directly from researchers and practitioners who partnered successfully to complete a research project (many of whom also had unsuccessful partnerships in the past). They are based on specific examples from RPPS participants who collaborated successfully, overcame obstacles to collaborate successfully, or are suggestions for overcoming obstacles based on their experiences. We hope that these recommendations will promote new partnerships and strengthen existing ones.

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[2] "Collaboration" and "partnership" will be used interchangeably.

STUDY DETAILS

An initial focus of this project was on better understanding collaborations specific to research on violence against women (VAW). As a result of interviewing researchers and practitioners, many of whom had partnered on non-CJ research projects in the past, we learned that most of the lessons learned are not only applicable to VAW research. Therefore, we have not confined our recommendations to VAW collaborations. Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with researchers and practitioners from academic or CJ and community practice settings in the United States and Canada. The RPPS was approved by the institutional review boards that ensure safety of participants and compliance with study procedures at the investigators' home institutions, Yale University School of Medicine and the University of Cincinnati.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

We invited an initial group of 11 key informants to share their knowledge, experiences, and skills regarding successful collaborations. These 11 individuals were selected because of their known experience and expertise in researcher-practitioner partnerships in the CJ system.

INDIVIDUAL KEY INFORMANTS

Beyond the initial group of key informants (referred to as participants from here forward), others were recruited mostly through materials distributed to registrants of CJ-related conferences in the United States and Canada. Some participants also were recruited via individual e-mail invitations from the investigators based on suggestions of other RPPS participants. Materials distributed to conference registrants explained the purpose of the study and provided contact information for the study investigators. Researchers and practitioners who were interested in participating contacted the investigators. Only those who had self-defined successful researcher-practitioner partnerships in the CJ system were eligible to participate. We focused our recruitment efforts on conferences largely attended by CJ researchers and/or practitioners (i.e., the American Society of Criminology, Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, National Institute of Justice, International Family Violence and Child Victimization Research, End Violence Against Women International, and Ending Domestic and Sexual Violence conferences). In addition, we recruited practitioners employed within government-system SAAs. A total of 49 researchers and practitioners participated, including 8 practitioner-participants employed within SAAs: 29 researchers and 20 practitioners. Researchers included criminologists, sociologists, social workers, psychologists, and epidemiologists. Practitioners were employed within the CJ system, departments of corrections, community organizations, and crime victims services, including

community-based and front-line program staff, victims' advocates, probation and parole officers, managers of state and local judicial system research and evaluation units, sexual assault nurse examiners (SANES), attorneys, and police officers. Participants were offered compensation for their time.

FOCUS GROUP KEY INFORMANTS

Five focus groups were conducted, with an average of 4 to 6 participants per group, for a total of 28 participants. Five groups were conducted at national conferences/meetings targeting CJ researchers and practitioners, including the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, End Violence Against Women International, International Family Violence and Child Victimization Research, Ending Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, and the American Society of Criminology conferences. To recruit participants, investigators sent invitations to conference registrants. Focus group participants were offered compensation for their time.

INSTRUMENTS

The investigators, in collaboration with key stakeholders, developed the interview and focus group questions. The interviews were semi-structured so that the interviewee was given the opportunity to share what she or he believed would be helpful for others to know.

In conjunction with CJ practitioners, RPPS investigators developed the interview and focus group questions to address the aims of NIJ's grant solicitation based on existing information about researcher-practitioner partnerships in general (e.g., Baker, Homan, Schonhoff, & Kreuter, 1999; Mouradian et al., 2001; National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center, May 2001; Riger, 1999) and partnerships within the CJ system in particular (e.g., Block, 2000; Block et al., 1999; Lane, Turner, & Flores, 2004). There were five domains that the investigators intended to discuss with participants:

1. Assessing the need for partnerships.
2. Issues in developing partnerships, including barriers to and facilitators of partnering.
3. Balancing the needs of researchers and practitioners throughout the partnership.
4. Understanding products that resulted and methods for disseminating products.
5. Sustaining relationships.

Specific questions were developed to assess each of the five predetermined domains; however, the interviewer asked these questions only if the participant did not mention issues relative to a specific domain spontaneously during the interview. The interview guide, which documents the domains assessed and the specific questions used to probe if necessary, is included as Appendix A.

METHODS

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted by the RPPS
investigators (i.e., Drs. Tami P. Sullivan and Bonnie S. Fisher). Interviews and focus
groups were conducted mostly at professional meetings and conferences and, in
some cases, at the institutions of the investigators or participants. Some interviews
were conducted via telephone and audio-recorded. Face-to-face interviews were
both audio- and video-recorded. Participants provided written informed consent prior
to the start of the interview or focus group.

The interviews began with the participant providing information about her or his
background and experience and a brief description of the collaborative research
project(s) she or he had worked on in the CJ system; in addition to these
collaborations, many participants also had experience with collaborations outside of
the CJ system and had past unsuccessful collaborations. Next, the interviewer asked
the participant the opening question, "Please describe the highlights and lowlights of
the collaboration," followed up by specific questions only if the participant's reply
didn't cover the domains that the study intended to assess. The interview ended with
the interviewer asking the participant to share advice for researchers and
practitioners new to collaboration about how to collaborate successfully in the future.
Most interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

Focus groups began with the group facilitator (i.e., one RPPS investigator) reviewing
the purpose of the study and focus group and explaining how the group would be
conducted. The same 5 domains assessed during the interviews were assessed in the
focus groups. The main differences between the conduct of the interviews and focus
groups were that in the focus groups (a) the leader did not ask the opening question
about highlights and lowlights of collaborating, and (b) to ensure that each domain
was covered in the time allotted for the group (i.e., 90 minutes), the leader explicitly
asked about each of the 5 domains by using the specific questions intended to be
probes for the individual interviews.

DATA ANALYSIS

Content analysis, a method for interpreting the content of text data through the
systematic classification of coding and identifying themes and patterns (Hsieh &
Shannon, 2005), was used to examine all information obtained from interviews and
focus groups. We used a directed approach that is fairly structured, because we had
predetermined domains that we aimed to have participants discuss (see Appendix A).
All interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were coded
into the 5 preexisting domains, called nodes, using NVivo software (QSR International,
2013). When information did not fit into a preexisting node but lent itself to a new
node, one was created. Therefore, nodes were added or expanded to accommodate

emerging themes and patterns. When coding was complete, themes and patterns were summarized and described for the purpose of reports and products. For brevity's sake, it is not possible to present all of the information learned from RPPS participants. Quotes used in this and other reports based on RPPS data were selected based on clarity and their ability to illustrate a given theme or pattern.

FINDINGS

ESTABLISHING A COLLABORATION

REASONS FOR COLLABORATING

Based on the responses of RPPS participants, there are many reasons that a researcher and practitioner might choose to collaborate. One reason is necessity. For example, more and more often funders are requiring organizations to use programs or implement policies that are evidence-based and/or to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and policies. Therefore, practitioners may need to collaborate to learn the effects of programs, practices, or policies. *"The response to build this rapport [with a researcher] was really driven by our inability to answer key questions to our funders, to legislators, to folks that were looking at 'Why are we investing in your services? How do we know they are effective? And how do we know you're really achieving the results that the public acts and public policies intended?'"— Government-System SAA Practitioner*

Another reason to collaborate is that practitioners and their organizations may believe the findings of a project being proposed by a researcher are important and that the results could benefit clients, staff, and/or the organization as a whole. Collaborating allows researchers and practitioners to combine knowledge and experience from multiple perspectives and systems. RPPS participants reported that this strengthens the research and hence, its results and their ability to influence change. In addition to the positive effects of collaborations on organizations, clients, and policies, the individual collaborators can benefit. Collaborations may improve the skills and understanding of researchers and practitioners; the experience of collaborating can provide a lens for both researchers and practitioners to learn what they might do differently now and in the future. *"I can tell you I've learned far more from them [the practitioners] than they've probably learned from me."—Academic Researcher*

"Seeing the outcome of research and the impact that it can make in your local community and beyond; I don't even have words to describe how great of a feeling that is. So I highly encourage researcher-practitioner partnerships, but with the caveat that for some it may not come naturally to them, you may have to work on that a little bit more in terms of making this work." – Academic Researcher and Senior University Administrator

"Working together is more powerful and together we can affect policy." –Academic

Both researchers and practitioners were able to see change result from their collaborative efforts—and this was true regardless of the reason the collaboration developed. Participants described the production of knowledge and the impact they were making on the lives of others as "amazing results." One participant stated, *"The research is meaningful and is making a difference. And by meaningful I mean that it's usable by practitioners. Practitioners care about it because they've been invested in the process of defining what those questions are, and they're now using it to change practices either at local levels or implementing state policy changes and practices at those levels."*— **Academic Researcher**

"I think [collaboration] is ultimately the way to do research [in the violence against women area]. It is absolutely the way to do research and it's absolutely the way to ensure that the services that you provide are effective."—**Director of an Academic Research Center**

IDENTIFYING COLLABORATORS

Preexisting relationships were characteristic of many successful collaborations among RPPS participants. They explained that it is optimal to have a collaborative relationship in place before the need for one arises. Being able to develop a relationship with potential collaborators over time and prior to project implementation (without the constraints of deadlines etc.) may be invaluable when the need for a collaborative research project arises in the future. This is especially true when the project has a tight timeline such as a short deadline for a grant submission. If the need for collaboration does arise, a well-established relationship to draw upon can strengthen the study and, ultimately, the impact of its findings. As importantly, developing this relationship can lead to the development of research questions or potential projects for which funding can be sought together.

For researchers and practitioners who are new to collaborating, connecting with a seasoned person who can act as a mentor for collaborating throughout the process can be beneficial. Becoming a part of or shadowing an existing collaboration is helpful to learning the process. Finding the right collaborator—one who is committed and genuinely invested in integrating the knowledge and skills of both parties involved—is obviously important to a successful collaboration.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD COLLABORATOR

Both researchers and practitioners reported that a partner with good communication skills was essential for a successful collaboration. This included partners who communicated well by using terminology understood by each of

> "If you're going to do this, it has to become a priority in your work life and, sometimes, your personal life."—Academic Researcher

them and those who were open to critical feedback (i.e., were not defensive). Participants reported that they appreciated partners who were clear without being intimidating or pompous and those who valued back-and-forth dialogue. Other desired characteristics included a partner's willingness to communicate in a straightforward manner and share control over the project and the decisions to be made. Participants identified additional qualities and characteristics to look for in a collaborator in general, including a partner who demonstrates:

- Mutual respect.
- Commitment and willingness to do the work.
- A "can-do" attitude.
- Open-mindedness; the ability to look at things from different perspectives with introspection.
- Investment in the questions and outcomes.
- Willingness to take risks and make changes.
- Strong interpersonal skills.
- Patience.

Additional Characteristics Desired Specifically of Researchers

- Willing to enter a collaboration activley seeking practitioners' involvment rather than sticking with a firm plan already in place.
- Able to communicate effectively using terminology understood by all parties.
- Interested in understanding the organization and its needs.
- Willing to explain the process of research.
- Respectful of service providers and appreciative of what they do.
- Comfortable working with people.
- Not intimidating or pompous.

"As a practitioner partnering with a researcher, I would want that researcher to be understanding of the organization's needs, our necessities to serve our clients first, which sometimes means that policies and procedures that might normally be followed in academia might come secondary to making sure our client needs are met."—Practitioner

Additional Characteristics Desired Specifically of Practitioners

- Interested in and passionate about the research question, process, and outcomes.
- Appreciative of the need to evaluate or build an understanding of the practice and to share that information learned with others.
- Possesses working knowledge of the subject matter, the system, and its "players" and has the ability to work with all involved.

Tips for Practitioners Interested in Finding a Good Researcher Partner

If a collaborative relationship is not already in place, finding the right collaborator can take some time. RPPS participants shared ways in which practitioners can seek partners for collaborative research projects. Practitioners looking for a respected researcher should:

- Ask trusted colleagues at different organizations who may have developed a strong relationship with a researcher or can recommend a researcher based on reputation.
- Search university websites for a researcher with expertise that matches the organization's goals.
- Subscribe to listserves that focus on issues consistent with the organization's mission and the population served.
- Search professional networking websites.
- Attend meetings of area task forces, workshops, and coalitions targeted to the clients served by the organization and/or the mission of the organization (the ease of which will depend on the geographic location of the practitioner).

Tips for Researchers Interested in Finding a Good Practitioner Partner

To find a respected practitioner or organization, researchers should:
- Contact administrators at CJ SAAs to learn if the researcher's interests are in line with the priorities of the SAA.
- Join local task forces or coalitions focused on the issues the research aims to impact to learn if practitioners share these interests/ideas.
- Talk with colleagues who have experience with community- or systems-based research to learn about practitioners who may be interested in collaborating.

DEVELOPING THE COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP AND MANAGING THE STARTUP PROCESS

"Look at what's really going on and deal with that, not an idealized version, not what the literature says, not what you promised [the funder]; you can make a change, but you have to make it within the confines of how the agency actually operates and have respect for current practices in place."
—Academic Researcher

RPPS participants underscored the importance of discussing and agreeing on expectations at the very beginning of the project. Specifically, they described needing clarity at the outset about (a) the roles of practitioners (within the organization) and researchers and (b) expected outcomes of the research. From the beginning to the end of the collaboration, clear communication and documentation are necessary to define who is responsible for which tasks, including data

collection and cleaning, analysis, interpretation, writeup, and dissemination. Related to this, RPPS participants stressed the necessity of establishing and documeting guidelines to ensure client confidentiality and safety. Additional topics include (a) how to proceed if there are unexpected findings (particularly those that may not reflect favorably on the organization, staff, or clients), (b) how to disseminate products so that they have the desired impact, and (c) financial/budget considerations. Practitioners in particular underscored the need to document these expectations in a formal written collaborative agreement such as a memorandum of understanding (MOU). For many participants, communication about these topics and documentation of them substantially reduced challenges experienced.

Consider budgeting for:

- Personnel
- Funding
- Equipment (e.g., computers)
- Software (e.g., data entry and analysis)
- Travel reimbursement
- Printing and copying
- Time (collaborative projects take longer than projects done by researchers alone—and almost always take longer than practitioners initially anticipate)

Discussions necessary for the development of a formal agreement have additional benefits. Collaborators may realize that specific aspects of the study may not be possible because sufficient personnel, funding, or time does not exist. Additionally, establishing the formal agreement at the very beginning can facilitate the grant writing process because having the discussions necessary to develop a formal agreement contribute to the partners being more focused on study details and utilizing the resources needed to successfully complete the project. Based on the experiences of RPPS participants, collaborators should anticipate that it will take at least three months to develop formal agreements and get them "signed off" on by the appropriate administrators (e.g., university grants and contracts offices and organizations administrators or boards of directors).

MAINTAINING A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Maintaining successful collaboration can involve issues and challenges that are different from those related to commencing collaboration. Participants highlighted the facilitators and barriers that defined successful collaboration.

FACILITATORS OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

BUILD RAPPORT AND DEVELOP TRUST

"It's kind of like a marriage—marriage is compromise. Anytime you're involved with people, you have to work with them if you're going to get anything done."—Academic Researcher

There was strong consensus among RPPS participants that it is invaluable to invest time to build rapport and trust in the other person(s). This can be done in many ways—most of which are reflected in the section above on characteristics of a good collaborator. In the face of timelines and deadlines, it can be easy to move quickly through the early stages of a project and miss the opportunity to lay the foundation of trust—but nearly unanimously, researchers and practitioners identified strong relationships based on trust as the most critical element of successful collaborations—namely, having positive experiences collaborating regardless of the results.

MUTUAL RESPECT

Mutual respect was highlighted as a critical component of successful collaborations. Working with others who respect and are interested in what others do, and why they do it, is key. For example, practitioners spoke about working to understand and respect the monotony, rigor, and standardization of research, and researchers spoke about recognizing the need to build on what practitioners already did rather than imposing something from the "outside." Partners demonstrated their respect in additional ways by:

- Being informed.
- Striving for equality.
- Understanding and respecting the knowledge, expertise, and role of the collaborator.
- Learning from each other and gaining insight and knowledge about the other person's "world."
- Being humble.

MUTUAL LEARNING/CROSS-TRAINING

"'Go hang out with the other camp.' So if you're a practitioner, go hang out with a researcher. If you're a researcher, go hang out with a practitioner because, I think, collaborations are easier if you can get a better sense of what the other camp is doing, I think—getting more exposure, sort of cross-pollinating in these two camps."—Academic Researcher

"Think about the goals of your study and step into the practitioner's shoes and see how your goals are going to fit for the practitioner and from there, think about when you should collaborate and when you shouldn't collaborate." – Academic Researcher

According to RPPS participants, mutual learning and the respect that emerged through this process was a highlight of collaborating. This was often referred to as "walking in the shoes of." Participants spoke about the need for and benefits of researchers learning what practitioners do and the system in which they do it at the very beginning of the project. Researchers reported that they spent time shadowing practitioners and training from practitioners'

perspectives. Training included direct observation of practitioners' daily work, attending board and staff meetings, and sitting in on case conferences, among many other tasks and obligations. Practitioners explained that their researcher counterparts who took the time to learn about practitioners' daily responsibilities, the system in which they worked, and the clients they served were more realistic about the type of research that could be done. Further, RPPS participants shared that researchers who learned the practitioner's system had more opportunities to consider the development of more practical and meaningful products.

Collaborations also benefited when practitioners saw the project from the perspective of researchers and learned about research methods. Practitioners who were trained in basic research methods were better able to understand decisions made and the limitations of research, and hence contributed more to the study. Research training in this context may be done by an experienced practitioner or researcher or done jointly and can be attended by a range of staff, from higher-level administrators to direct service staff. Training can focus on designing a research study; developing meaningful questions; statistically analyzing data; accessing/collecting and managing data; and interpreting, writing up, and disseminating findings. A practitioner explains his desire for his staff and himself to be trained so that they are empowered in the future: *"Instead of having graduate students do the data collection, have my staff help you with the data collection. Have my staff help you, learn how to clean the data, learn how you code things, learn how you conduct certain analysis, so that we leave with some tools." — Government-System SAA Practitioner*
Through mutual learning experiences, researchers and practitioners were better able to design studies that asked meaningful and targeted questions and where the demand on practitioners' time was reasonable.

OPEN COMMUNICATION
A central component of collaborations marked by success, according to RPPS participants, was continual open communication. Open, effective communication contributed to the strength of the relationships between researchers and practitioners and completing the project to satisfaction. Keeping all parties involved and "in the loop" with information, providing feedback on the project status, and providing recognition and showing appreciation for the work being done were methods identified for optimal communication. Researchers and practitioners talked about the benefits of collaborators checking in with each other throughout the process to ensure that the collaboration was still "working" and that the project was still meeting the needs of all involved. Ongoing and open dialogue enabled collaborators to establish project goals and revise them throughout the process. RPPS participants highly valued collaborators who were willing to disagree and communicate their disagreement respectfully. Participants noted that the use of

"We gotta have some shared language or you've got to work really hard to hear what the other person is saying."—Practitioner, Senior Administrator of a Community-Based Organization

jargon by either the researcher or practitioner could be problematic and that a shared language that enables clear understanding is recommended. These practices facilitated rapport and relationship building and minimized delays to project completion.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

Having concrete and practical resources already in place at the practitioner's organization before the collaboration began was identified as a benefit to collaborating—though this wasn't consistently the case for RPPS participants. The startup process was easier and moved along more quickly when practitioners and other organizational staff were knowledgeable about and generally committed to collaborations. Similarly, researchers who had previous experience working with practitioners and CJ organizations were more prepared to meet the challenges that arose. Related to this, organizations that were familiar with institutional review board (IRB) processes were able to formulate an appropriate plan to protect study participants/clients and provide input into the IRB application process, which is often experienced as a challenge in collaborations (see Barriers section below).

COMMITMENT

It is worthwhile to mention, albeit briefly, that encouraging investment among administrators, supervisors, *and* front-line staff and obtaining formal organizational commitment to the project strongly contributed to their successful completion, according to RPPS participants. Participants talked about getting administrators and staff invested by explaining the need for the project and how the outcomes could benefit the organization, its clients, and staff.

FUNDING

Knowingly stating the obvious, RPPS participants identified having grant funding in place to support a collaborative research project as a facilitator of successful collaborations. However, participants also reported many successful collaborations for which there was no project-specific funding. In some cases, researchers may be able to collaborate "in kind" (i.e., without monetary compensation for their time), though this varies and is largely determined by the policies and structure of the researcher's institution. Securing a small amount of funding to establish the structure of collaboration and the feasibility of a project (i.e., "pilot funding") provides partners with preliminary information that could be used to justify additional funding on a larger scale, or obtain a commitment from higher-level administrators.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Regardless of how experienced or prepared researchers and practitioners were to collaborate, setbacks occurred, as they do in most research projects. Awareness of potential challenges inherent in collaborative work goes a long way toward avoiding those challenges or minimizing their influence on the project. Knowledge about barriers prepares collaborative teams to tackle issues as they arise and work out solutions amenable to all parties. The following were commonly reported challenges and barriers: time, IRB processes, staff turnover, funding, bureaucracy, and the needs of individual collaborators.

TIME

According to both researchers and practitioners, most phases of collaboration took longer than anticipated. One researcher describes collaborative research as a marathon and noncollaborative research as a 100-yard dash. Additionally, research takes longer than practitioners typically imagine. It is important to consider time as a resource and incorporate a buffer in the timeline to deal with delays and setbacks. Budgeting for additional time, which often coincides with needing additional funds, will help to avoid frustration down the road. *"However hard you think it's gonna be, its really gonna be a lot harder than that."*—Academic Researcher

> "And from the practitioner's point of view, this is a project that needs to be done in the next month and can be done in the next month. And in my view, nothing gets done in a month; nothing gets done really in three months, or sometimes a year."
> —Academic Researcher

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

Ensuring confidentiality and safety of study participants should be paramount. RPPS participants commonly experienced delays as a result of the length of time it takes to obtain IRB approval for projects. This process and related delays were often new concepts to practitioners. Therefore, it is wise to ensure that all partners are informed about the IRB process and potential challenges. Learning, in the initial stages of the collaboration, about legal and ethical issues unique to the CJ system and the study population can help to overcome these challenges. According to RPPS participants, ensuring confidentiality and safety of project participants and considering access to data are critical. Regardless of all other factors, without IRB approval from the researcher's institution (and perhaps from the organization's research oversight committee), the project cannot move forward.

TURNOVER

Another common barrier to successful completion of projects was staff turnover. Practitioners involved at the beginning of a project were not necessarily with the organization to see the project through to the end. This turnover frequently resulted in a need for hiring, retraining, and/or "restarting,"

"Well, that lead prosecutor who was the supervisor—that person turned over seven times. So, there are just multiple ways that we couldn't get everybody to coalesce and then get momentum going. It just kept restarting, and restarting, and restarting."—**Academic Researcher**

RPPS study participants therefore recommend to (a) be prepared for this to happen and (b) engage practitioners in the project across the spectrum of direct service staff to higher-level administrators.

FUNDING

RPPS participants also recommended having a backup plan for how the project will continue in case funding runs out before anticipated. This plan may include specifics on how support for activities such as product development or dissemination of materials can continue unfunded. In situations where funding is a necessary component of the project, this may not be possible.

BUREAUCRACY

RPPS participants reported that there are limitations to the scope and activities of collaborations as the result of what many called "red tape." Because of policies, regulations, or agency requirements, collaborators may not be able to obtain the information they need to answer particular research questions. Funders may dictate or restrict who can collaborate, what data can be collected, and what the end products must be. Further, timelines may be set that differ from what is feasible or agreed upon. In cases where funding and other regulations exist, it is important to consider the scope of work within the parameters set and to have discussions with administrators early on in the collaboration about what is feasible.

"I'm very much about open communication. So it's 'tell me what you need and we'll tell you what we need.' And then we can just go from there. That's basically what really has helped us – is being able to have that open communication and say, 'look we want to work together, we need to work together. So let's just lay it all out on the table and go from there. We'll tell you what we can do and ya'll will tell us what you can do and move from there.' And that has been invaluable in being able to work with researchers and both of us being able to get what we need from each other."
—Community-based Practitioner

BALANCING THE NEEDS OF RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS

Investment in the project is best accomplished when the needs of both researchers and practitioners are met and there is some sort of gain for all involved. Investing time and energy into a project that is expected to result in a satisfactory outcome was identified as an important reason to "buy into" a project. However, the varying and sometimes conflicting needs of researchers and practitioners can be a barrier to a project's successful completion.

For researchers, especially those in academic settings, publishing study findings in peer-reviewed journals and obtaining grants are crucial, as these are means to maintaining employment and being promoted. RPPS participants reported that, at times, these needs are inconsistent with practitioners' needs. Practitioners need products that are translatable and written in lay language, which can be challenging and time consuming for researchers. Practitioners need results to inform and improve practice and policy and to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs. It is important for collaborators to be aware of these needs and to discuss them at the start of the collaboration. Study participants stated that being explicit and identifying expectations at the beginning of the process and presenting what one hopes to gain from the collaboration is one way to ensure all collaborators get what they need.

> "The best approach to establishing a successful partnership is open communication. It is essential for researchers and practitioners to continually communicate about their needs, because the academic needs or goals might be very different from the practitioner needs or goals."—Academic Researcher

> *"As an academic, I might need to publish or teach and be a guest speaker, so there has to be that give and take [in the collaboration]. There has to be that recognition [between the researcher and the practitioners]. I can provide for you all something, but I may need something in return."—Academic Researcher*

COMPLETING THE COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

RESULTS, PRODUCTS, AND THEIR DISSEMINATION

To increase the likelihood that findings from collaborative research are translated to new or improved practices, services, and policies, findings need to be communicated in more than just a "final report." RPPS participants explained that planning before the study began for the development and dissemination of useful products was beneficial. Products and their dissemination should be discussed and agreed upon at the outset of the collaboration and should be included in the formal written agreement. According to RPPS participants, discussion at the outset facilitated communication, clarified the expectations of both parties, ensured the project would answer the questions being asked, and reduced challenges to dealing with unexpected (and potentially unfavorable) findings. According to participants, the likelihood of success was greatest when the researcher and practitioner discussed and agreed on the products that would result from the study findings, the targeted audience of those products, and the goal of disseminating those products to the targeted audience. Additionally, they reported that it was beneficial to have the plan for products and their dissemination reviewed and approved by higher-level administrators.

Practitioners stressed the importance of researchers understanding that realistic practice, service, and/or policy recommendations must come from the collaboration. Practitioners also emphasized that information related to findings must be given back to them in a way that helps them do their jobs better—a true measure of a successful collaboration. Examples of common products included fact sheets, practice and policy briefs, manuals/toolkits, web page content, and presentations. Different departments within the CJ system (e.g., law enforcement, corrections, and court operations) should be given access to results and products regardless of whether they actively participated in the collaboration—especially when findings impact the department's responsibilities or the clients they serve. RPPS participants shared the following advice about products and their dissemination:

- Discuss the interim and final products to be developed and their intended impact during the study development phase.
- Ensure that products are developed specifically for the people who have the greatest potential to influence change *and* consider the amount of time they have to read these products.
- Develop a dissemination plan at the outset of the research project to reach multiple audiences.
- Write in nontechnical language that is understandable to your audience.

SUSTAINING THE COLLABORTIVE RELATIONSHIP

For collaborative relationships that are specific to a given research project, the need to collaborate will end when the project has been completed. In some cases, collaborators may choose to continue the relationship and develop another project or maintain the relationship because the collaboration was a positive experience.

Sustainability was defined by RPPS participants in ways other than the continuance of the collaboration, such as the learning/knowledge that is left when the project has been completed. For example, a researcher or practitioner entering the collaborative process brings a valuable skill set. Elements of that skill set can be shared or taught, so that others can learn and continue to use that knowledge and those skills as part of their work. In addition, sharing valuable skills may result in a continued relationship or follow-up project. Giving practitioners the tools to implement recommended changes will set the stage for a mutually satisfying and potentially sustainable partnership.

RPPS LIMITATIONS

Findings of the RPPS should be considered in the context of the following limitations:

• "Successful" collaborations were self-defined and not based on specific, objective criteria.

• The study investigators predetermined the five domains to be assessed in the interviews and focus groups.

• We used a deductive approach to content analysis, which tends to be less descriptive overall because analysis is somewhat limited by the predetermined domains.

• Participants were self-selected.

RPPS PRACTITIONER: CASE EXAMPLE

Monica Mendez, Practitioner
Harbor House of Central Florida

Harbor House of Central Florida is an organization that provides a wide range of services for domestic violence survivors and their children. Ms. Mendez, the manager for community engagement, maintained many relationships with CJ system practitioners and researchers at local universities. She shared her experiences and the factors that contributed to her successful research collaborations.

- She was active in the local domestic violence task force where members, including researchers, discussed needs to collaborate, conduct research, and develop grants in an effort to support the work being done on behalf of survivors and to move their work "forward".

- She worked with Harbor House's CEO to bring a researcher onto their Board of Directors to be responsible for reviewing the many requests to collaborate they receive from researchers. This Board member was responsible for determining if the collaboration would benefit the organization and therefore, should be allowed to move forward.

- She worked with her research collaborators and their academic institutions to train graduate students and researchers about how to approach nonprofit agencies when looking to collaborate.

- She valued direct, open communication with her collaborators, including honest discussions about their needs, "let's just lay it all out on the table and go from there."

These and other experiences strongly contributed to valuable, satisfying, productive research collaborations for Ms. Mendez, Harbor House, and their clients.

RPPS RESEARCHER: CASE EXAMPLE

Rebecca Campbell, Ph.D., Professor
Michigan State University

Dr. Campbell, a community psychologist, has been doing collaborative research on sexual violence for 22 years. She studies how the legal, medical, and mental health systems and rape crisis centers serve the needs of rape victims. She described a fundamental principle of her research, "the work needs to be collaborative and it needs to be responsive to the community and to practitioners." She shared details of a collaborative relationship with practitioners in a rape crisis center program and sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) program that began in 2003. She spoke about many experiences related to and factors that contributed to her successful research collaborations.

- She and her practitioner collaborators established a relationship before the need for a research project arose, "we met for lunch, sort of clicked, and it went all the way up to federal grants."
- She operated under the belief that one of the greatest facilitators of a successful collaboration is, "To be excited about it, to have that enthusiasm. We really want to improve patient care. We really want this to work for survivors."
- She balanced her needs with the needs of the practitioners. First, the practitioners needed to examine the extent to which their child-focused program was consistent with standards set by the American Academy of Pediatrics for the care of sexually abused children. These needs were in contrast to her needs as an academic researcher focused on adults. However, she chose to collaborate to examine the care of children because the collaborative relationship was strong and she appreciated the need of the practitioners.
  - Dr. Campbell spoke about the benefits of collaborating on this project, "The highlight was that I learned so much… I published great papers off of that. I went to great conferences. I learned a lot. I got what I need as an academic from it."
- She talked with collaborators at the outset of the project about the possibility of findings that could reflect negatively on their organization.
- She develops and disseminates products that are useful to practitioners, "for my practitioner colleagues and collaborators we always start with building the PowerPoint of what the results are, and that's something that I give to them that they can use in presentations – or they can ask me to come do it."

Her advice to researchers facing difficulties with collaborating is to push back

against the challenge and face it. "Just try it, what is the worst that could happen?
It'll blow up. OK, keep going. Just make sure you have IRB coverage, and that you
didn't do anything unethical. Stuff blows up. Happens all the time."

SUMMARY

This report shares findings and recommendations from the RPPS which aimed to
document and synthesize lessons learned from researchers and practitioners who
had collaborated successfully on a research project in the CJ system. It summarizes
the feasibility, benefits, and challenges of successful researcher-practitioner
partnerships. We hope the information in this report contributes to the
development of highly successful researcher-practitioner partnerships where
strong relationships are established and maintained, facilitators are many, barriers
are few and their effects can be minimized, and where results directly impact
practice, service and/or policy and improve the lives of individuals.

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

_____, I'D LIKE TO BEGIN BY ASKING YOU TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF

- your name
- role within your organization
- the organization for which you work
- # of years in field,
- # of researcher-practitioner partnerships in the CJ system that you have been involved in

_____, CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH VAW RESEARCHER-PRACTITIONER COLLABORATIONS IN THE CJ SYSTEM, INCLUDING DESCRIBING THE HIGHLIGHTS AND LOWLIGHTS.

ASSESSING THE NEED FOR PARTNERSHIPS

DESCRIBE WHY A CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCHER-PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIP WAS NEEDED TO DO THE PROJECT YOU WERE INVOLVED IN?

PROMPT, if needed: Was the partnership required by a grant funding award? If so, did you get to choose the research partner?

WHAT WERE THE MAIN BENEFITS OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCHER-PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIPS?

- PROMPT: Why are criminal justice researcher-practitioner partnerships useful?

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS/QUALIFICATIONS DID YOU LOOK FOR WHEN LOOKING FOR A RESEARCHER/PRACTITIONER TO COLLABORATE WITH ON A PROJECT? IN AN AGENCY/ORGANIZATION?

- PROMPT, if needed: What have your experiences taught you about how to distinguish a "good" researcher/practitioner from a not-so-good one?

Additional prompt questions if needed:
- Describe the nature of this partnership.
- Describe the purpose(s) of the partnership.

- For what reason(s) did you, as a researcher/practitioner, enter a researcher-practitioner partnership focused on violence against women?
- Describe the nature of this partnership in terms of commitment by researcher and practitioner. Was the partnership required by a grant funding award? If so, did you get to choose the research partner?
- Was the research evaluative in nature (i.e., evaluating a program)? If you did not initiate the partnership, what "sold" you on it? If you did initiate the partnership, how did you "sell" it to the other organization?

- Who has usually initiated the partnership—the researcher or the practitioner?

- What was the process for identifying the goals/objectives of the partnership? Did you use a logic model to plan the research process? If the research was grant funded, did the grant stipulate specific goals for you?

ISSUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
INCLUDING BARRIERS TO AND FACILITATORS OF PARTNERING

DESCRIBE WHAT CHARACTERISTICS DEFINE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP. WHAT FACILITATES A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP?

- What personal/professional/organizational factors were most helpful to developing a successful partnership?
- What was the most helpful to successful partnering? Time? Money/funding? Personalities? Interpersonal relationships? Career goals? Institutional/cultural? Hiring someone specifically for the partnership?
- What was a specific example of a noted success?
- What unanticipated benefits did you experience?

DESCRIBE THE GREATEST BARRIERS OR CHALLENGES TO DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP.

- What was the biggest obstacle/challenge about working with a researcher/practitioner specifically? Time? Money/funding? Personalities? Career goals/mobility? Self-interest? Goal conflict? Too many partners involved? Not enough human resources? Fear of what the research might reveal about a community?
- What was a noted failure?
- How did the partners overcome obstacles/challenges?
- What difficulties or issues did you experience during the partnership? How were these resolved?

Additional prompt questions if needed:

- What differences in opinion or approach did you encounter? Were the differences/tensions resolved? If so, how did you or the partners resolve these differences? What were the challenges expressed by each party? If the differences were not resolved, did the partnership with that person/organization continue?

NEEDS OF THE RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS AND BALANCING THESE NEEDS THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS

WHAT WERE THE NEEDS OF RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS? ARE THEY THE SAME? DIFFERENT?

HOW WAS BALANCING THE NEEDS OF BOTH PARTIES ACHIEVED?

WHO DO YOU THINK IT BENEFITED THE MOST? WHO BENEFITIED THE LEAST? DESCRIBE WHY.

WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT METHODS FOR DISSEMINATING AND TRANSLATING RESULTS THAT ARE USEFUL AND BENEFICIAL TO BOTH PARTIES

WHAT PRODUCTS/RESULTS WERE PRODUCED FROM THE COLLABORATION?

HOW USEFUL WERE THESE PRODUCTS?

- For practitioners: Were there materials produced that your organization could use in achieving its mission (i.e., reports for funders, brochures for victims, etc.)?
- For researchers: Were there materials produced that you could use to further your career (e.g., publications for tenure, service credit toward tenure)?

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PARTNERSHIPS

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PARTNERSHIP ONCE THE WORK WAS COMPLETED?

DID YOU DO SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING FOR THIS PARTNERSHIP?

- Were you hoping to sustain/continue collaboration? (as appropriate)
- What interfered with the ability to sustain the collaboration/inhibited the sustainability of the partnership?

- What are the primary factors that supported the sustainability of the partnership?

LAST SET OF QUESTIONS

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR RESEARCHERS WHO MIGHT BE INTERESTED
IN DEVELOPING THEIR FIRST PARTNERSHIP/MAINTAINING A LASTING
PARTNERSHIP/ENDING ON A POSITIVE NOTE WITH A PRACTITIONER IN THE
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM?

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR PRACTITIONERS WHO MIGHT BE
INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING THEIR FIRST PARTNERSHIP/MAINTAINING A
LASTING PARTNERSHIP/ENDING ON A POSITIVE NOTE WITH A RESEARCHER IN
THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM?

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