

The author(s) shown below used Federal funds provided by the U.S. Department of Justice and prepared the following final report:

Document Title: **The Role of State Administrative Agencies in Advancing Criminal Justice Research, Findings from the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships Study (RPPS)**

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Document No.: **243917**

Date Received: **October 2013**

Award Number: **2009-IJ-CX-0207**

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This project was supported by Grant No. 2009-IJ-CX-0207 awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication/program/ exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: THE RESEARCHER-PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIPS STUDY (RPPS)	1
BACKGROUND	4
STUDY DETAILS	5
WEB-BASED SURVEY OF SAAS	5
DATA ANALYSIS.....	6
THE INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS.....	6
PARTICIPANTS.....	8
DATA ANALYSIS.....	9
FINDINGS:	10

UNDERSTANDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF CJ SYSTEM STATE ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCIES FOR THE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH.....	10
STAFF	10
RESEARCH MISSION	10
SETTING THE RESEARCH AGENDA	10
SAA COLLABORATIONS	10
FACILITATORS OF DEVELOPING COLLABORATIONS	11
BARRIERS TO DEVELOPING COLLABORATIONS	12
DIFFERENCES IN OPINION/APPROACH	12
PRODUCTS THAT RESULT FROM SAAS COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS.....	12
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING RESEARCHER-PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIPS	14
BUILD RAPPORT – DEVELOP THE RELATIONSHIP	14
ENCOURAGE AND APPRECIATE PRACTITIONER’S ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT	15
CROSS-TRAIN/ ENCOURAGE MUTUAL LEARNING	16
OBTAIN INVESTMENT FROM ADMINISTRATORS TO MOVE A PROJECT FORWARD.....	17
PROVIDE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES.....	18
REVISE “RED-TAPE” REGULATIONS TO SUPPORT COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH	18
ENCOURAGE COLLABORATIVELY DEVELOPED RESEARCH AGENDAS.....	19
REALIZE THE VALUE IN SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS	19
PUBLISH AND PRESENT FINDINGS FOR BOTH RESEARCHER AND PRACTITIONER AUDIENCES.....	20
RPPS LIMITATIONS	21
CONCLUSION	21
APPENDIX A	22
APPENDIX B	41
REFERENCES	45

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the researchers and practitioners who participated in the RPPS for their contributions to this work. Their dedication to collaborative research projects within the criminal justice system has made this project a success. Individuals who participated in interviews or focus groups, and consented to have their names noted publicly, are listed individually below. The names of individuals who completed the web-based survey on behalf of SAAs remain confidential.

Barbara Benoiel, Ph.D., Faculty Member, Walden University and York University in Toronto, Canada.

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Martha Morrison Dore, Ph.D., Director of Research and Evaluation at the Division of Child and Family Services/Riverside Community Care, MA.

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THE ROLE OF STATE ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCIES IN ADVANCING CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

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

The National Institute of Justice has devoted substantial efforts to promoting researcher-practitioner partnerships to advance research in the criminal justice (CJ) system. Until now, little was known about how state administrative agencies (SAAs) in the CJ system promote or facilitate research partnerships between academic researchers and CJ system practitioners or how previous successful collaborations could inform future ones. Therefore, the goal of this study was to improve our understanding of successful researcher-practitioner partnerships between those working within and outside of the CJ system so that their “lessons learned” can be shared to promote the creation of new partnerships and enhance existing ones.

The RPPS was a two-part study.

Part One. A web-based survey of CJ system SAAs aimed to (a) determine each SAA’s infrastructure and general experiences regarding research in the CJ system and (b) document lessons learned from past or current successful collaborations between SAA practitioners and researchers not employed within the CJ system. SAAs in all 50 states and Puerto Rico were contacted to participate. Seventy-five participants from 49 states completed the web-based survey; 41% were administrators or directors of the agency, 35% were supervisors or managers, 21% were front-line or support staff, and 3% were directors of state Statistical Analysis Centers¹ (SAC) on behalf of universities.

Part Two. Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with researchers and practitioners from 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

¹ SACs are funded by the Bureau of Justice Statistics to contribute to effective state policies through statistical services, evaluation, and policy analysis. SAC contracts may be awarded to SAAs or researchers at academic institutions.

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

Recommendations in this report come directly from SAA practitioners and also from researchers and other CJ system practitioners who had at least one past or current successful research partnership. Information from the web-based survey is summarized. 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.

Highlights of findings from the web-based survey of SAAs include:

- 70% of SAA respondents reported that their agency/department places great (vs. some or no) value on utilizing findings to inform the agency/department's mission.
- 89% of respondents reported that their agency/department had collaborated with a researcher in the past 5 years.
- For SAA respondents whose agency/department had not collaborated in the past 5 years, reasons were that no opportunity had arisen, resources were not available to collaborate (such as funding and staff), the agency/department had never been approached to collaborate, and collaborating would not benefit the agency/department.
- Factors identified as "most helpful" to developing a collaboration with a researcher were:
 - Available funding, endorsed by 73%.
 - Available researcher, endorsed by 55%.
 - Allocated time for agency/department to collaborate, endorsed by 53%.
 - Agency/department institutional culture that supports collaborations, endorsed by 49%.
- Differences of opinion/approach were encountered by over 70% of respondents who had collaborated; 96% of those respondents said that the differences were successfully resolved.
- Though most SAAs place great value on using research evidence to inform their mission, only 36% of respondents reported products from collaborations that

directly influenced practices, services, or policies:

- 30% reported improved practical procedures.
- 30% reported improved administrative procedures.
- 24% reported improved or new services.
- 22% reported that changes in public policy resulted.

Nine recommendations, highlighted in this report, include:

- Develop the relationship between the researcher and practitioner, integrating the skills of each throughout the process.
- Encourage and appreciate practitioners' active involvement.
- Cross-train, and recognize the value in mutual learning.
- Obtain investment from administrators to move a project forward.
- Provide funding opportunities.
- Revise "red-tape" regulations to encourage collaborative research.
- Encourage collaboratively developed research agendas.
- Realize the value in sustaining relationships.
- Publish and present findings for both researcher and practitioner audiences.

We recognize that there is more to be done at multiple levels to encourage researcher-practitioner collaborations and believe that as changes are considered to advance these collaborations, it is important to be mindful of and account for differences in each state's CJ system and SAAs. Nevertheless, results of the RPPS suggest that research conducted in collaboration between CJ practitioners and academic researchers has greater potential to influence practice and policy than research conducted by academic researchers alone. More effective research partnerships are likely to lead to more meaningful results, which may 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

Evidence from research projects has the greatest potential to impact change in practice and policy in the criminal justice (CJ) system (a) when the projects are conducted in collaboration with practitioners from the CJ system rather than conducted by academic researchers alone and (b) when findings are communicated to those who influence policy and practice in a format that is easily read and understood (Block, Engel, Naureckas, & Riordan, 1999; Mouradian, Mechanic, & Williams, 2001).

Regarding collaboration,² little is known about the ability of CJ system state administrative agencies (SAAs) to facilitate successful collaborations between academic researchers and CJ practitioners. Yet, understanding the capability of SAAs to support or promote research collaboration and their interest in doing so is critical to the success of future collaborations, the resulting findings, and ultimately, their impact on practice, services, and policy.

For future CJ researcher-practitioner partnerships to be as successful as possible, it was important to learn about SAAs' infrastructure to conduct research and support researcher-practitioner collaborations and to document lessons learned from successful research collaborations. By capturing a broad spectrum of experiences from researchers and practitioners in the United States and Canada across multiple state and community agencies, lessons were learned that can inform practices that support collaborations. It is our hope that the information gathered from this study will assist researchers and practitioners in the future to create successful partnerships that influence change.

² "Collaboration" and "partnership" are used interchangeably.

STUDY DETAILS

RPPS was a two-part study:

1. Web-Based Survey of SAAs. SAAs were contacted to provide information about the agency's infrastructure to conduct research and support researcher-practitioner collaborations; respondents were those whose responsibility it was either to oversee the conduct of research in the SAA or to conduct research him- or herself on behalf of the state (which is the case with university-employed directors of Statistical Analysis Centers).

2. Key Informant Interviews and Focus Groups. Academic researchers and CJ system practitioners from the United States and Canada participated as key informants in individual interviews or focus groups to provide information about successful research collaborations.

WEB-BASED SURVEY OF SAAs

The survey was developed collaboratively by the study investigators, SAA research administrators and supervisors, and community practitioners and included open- and close-ended questions as well as check-all-that-apply response options.

A web-based survey was developed to determine if an infrastructure exists in state, regional, and/or local government SAAs to conduct research and/or support researcher-practitioner partnerships. The domains covered by the survey were informed by existing literature (including work by Block, 2000; Block et al., 1999; Lane, Turner, & Flores, 2004; Mouradian et al., 2001), observation of a statewide/CJ system-wide collaborative SAA research group, and discussions between CJ system practitioners and RPPS investigators. Individual survey items and response options were developed by the study investigators, an SAA senior administrator, an SAA division director, and CJ community practitioners. The survey was beta tested, and revisions were made to produce the final survey (see Appendix A for final survey).

Representatives from the 50 United States and Puerto Rico were contacted to participate in the web-based survey. Identifying potential respondents was challenging in many states, which was one impetus for gaining a better understanding of the landscape for research within CJ system SAAs. There is tremendous variability among state CJ systems in terms of SAAs and existing research infrastructure. The most effective way to identify potential survey respondents was to contact the directors of Statistical Analysis Centers (SAC), which are funded by the Bureau of Justice Statistics to contribute to effective state policies through statistical services, evaluation, and policy analysis in each of the 50 states

(SAC contracts may be awarded to SAAs or researchers at academic institutions). Each state's SAC director was contacted to learn if a formal state infrastructure existed regarding the conduct of research. If a formal structure existed for a given state, the SAC director provided contact information for those individuals charged with overseeing, promoting, or conducting research within the state. If a formal structure did not exist, the state's SAC director was asked to complete the survey.

Potential participants were sent e-mail invitations to complete the web-based survey. If the survey was not completed within a month of the e-mail invitation being sent, study staff contacted the potential participant by phone to inquire about his or her willingness to participate and/or to learn if there was a more appropriate person to send the e-mail invitation to. The survey asked about:

- The infrastructure within the SAA for conducting research.
- Experiences with and current approaches to collaborating with academic researchers not employed within the CJ system.
- Collaborations developed specifically to examine issues of violence against women (VAW).
- Advice for researchers and practitioners interested in developing or maintaining researcher-practitioner partnerships.

DATA ANALYSIS

Information from the web-based survey was analyzed to provide basic descriptive statistics. The average number of respondents who endorsed a response option (i.e., the mean) or the percentage of respondents who endorsed an option (i.e., the frequency) were calculated in Microsoft Excel or SPSS. This quantitative information is reported in the text and sometimes depicted in bar graphs.

2 THE INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

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.,

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.

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 et al., 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 5 predetermined domains; however, during individual interviews, the interviewer asked these questions only if the participant did not spontaneously mention issues related to a specific domain. During focus groups, the five domains were explicitly asked about. The domains to be assessed and their related probes are included in Appendix B.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted by the RPPS investigators (i.e., Drs. Tami P. Sullivan and Bonnie S. Fisher) mostly at professional meetings and conferences. In some cases, they were conducted 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. Interview and focus group participants provided written informed consent prior to the start of the interview or focus group.

Interviews began with the participant providing information about his or her background and experience and a brief description of the collaborative research project(s) he or she 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 probes 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 collaborating 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 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 discussed in the 90 minutes allotted for each

group, the leader explicitly asked about each of the 5 domains by using the specific questions intended to be probes for the individual interviews.

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 also applicable to other types of research. Therefore, we did not confine our recommendations to VAW collaborations.

The RPPS was approved by the institutional review boards at the investigators' home institutions, Yale University School of Medicine and the University of Cincinnati.

PARTICIPANTS

We invited an initial group of 11 key informants (referred to as participants from here forward) 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 PARTICIPANTS

Beyond the initial group of 11 participants, others were recruited mostly through materials distributed to registrants of CJ-related conferences in the United States and Canada. Some participants were also 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 attended largely by CJ researchers and/or practitioners (i.e., 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 in individual interviews: 29 researchers and 20 practitioners (including the 8 practitioner-participants employed within SAAs). Participants were offered compensation for their time.

- Researchers included criminologists, sociologists, social workers, psychologists, and epidemiologists.
- Practitioners included individuals employed within the CJ system, correctional institutions, 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.

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Five focus groups were conducted, with an average of 4 to 6 participants per group, for a total of 28 participants. Groups were conducted at national conferences/meetings targeting CJ researchers and practitioners, including: 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.

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 B). 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: UNDERSTANDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF CJ SYSTEM STATE ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCIES FOR THE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH

STAFF

Seventy-five participants from 49 states completed the web-based survey; 41% identified themselves as the administrator or director of the agency, 35% as the supervisor or manager, 21% as front-line or support staff, and 3% as a university-employed SAC director. The average years of employment in their respective agency or department was 11. SAAs employed an average of 5 research staff, generally having 1 to 7 staff; some reported as many as 30 staff devoted to conducting research.

Findings are reflective of various levels of government/jurisdictions, including:

- Administrative offices of the courts
- State centers for justice research
- Sentencing and crime commissions
- Departments of public safety, corrections, and juvenile justice
- Offices of victim and witness assistance
- Criminal justice information authorities
- Local police units and parole boards
- Court support services

RESEARCH MISSION

Seventy percent of respondents reported that their agency/department places great (vs. some or no) value on utilizing findings to inform the agency/department's mission. When asked about their SAA's research mission, nearly all respondents reported collecting data as a priority (97%), followed by evaluations of the effectiveness of programs, policies, or services (88%), and collaborating with others outside of the agency or department to conduct research (88%).

SETTING THE RESEARCH AGENDA

Most research agendas were determined by the SAA's administrative or executive team (74%), while others were strongly influenced by their state or local government (50%) and their funding sources (34%).

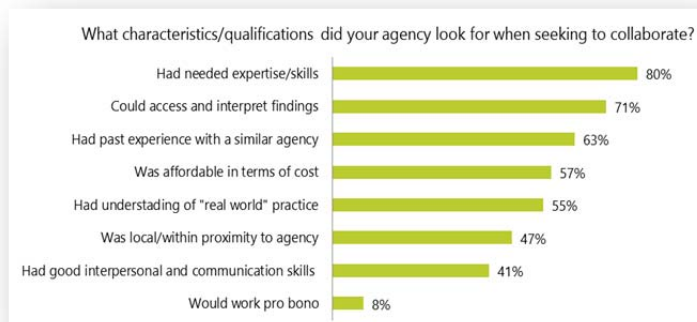
SAA COLLABORATIONS

Collaborations with researchers not employed within the CJ system are common among SAAs. A primary factor supporting the sustainability of these collaborative

relationships was that almost 70% of respondents had positive prior experiences.

- 89% of respondents reported that their agency/department had collaborated with a researcher not employed within the CJ system.
- Of those who had collaborated in the past 5 years, they had done so with an average of 9 researchers on an average of 8 collaborative projects.

SAAAs sought research collaborators who had experience or working knowledge of the CJ system to ensure that findings would be useful.



- 80% of respondents sought a researcher with the needed expertise and skills.

- 71% sought a researcher who could access and interpret research findings/results so they would be useful for practice.

- 63% sought a researcher who had past experience with a similar agency.

- 55% sought a researcher

who had an understanding of how individuals and institutions interact "in the real world."

The need to collaborate with a researcher outside of the CJ system was typically the result of analyses of CJ data (66%) or formed from ideas generated by SAA staff (54%) and requests made by other government agencies such as the governor's office or the state's domestic violence commission (52%).

For those who had not collaborated, reasons were that no opportunity had arisen, resources were not available to collaborate (such as funding and staff), the agency/department had never been approached to collaborate, and collaborating would not benefit the agency/department.

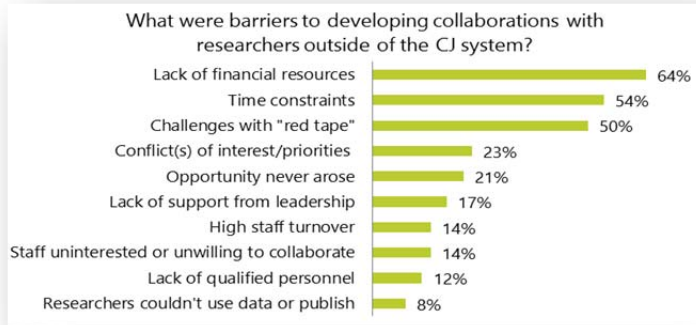
FACILITATORS OF DEVELOPING COLLABORATIONS

Factors identified as "most helpful" to developing a collaboration with a researcher not employed within the CJ system were:

- Available funding (73%)
- Available researcher (55%)
- Allocated time for agency/department to collaborate (53%)

- Agency/department institutional culture that supports collaborations (49%)

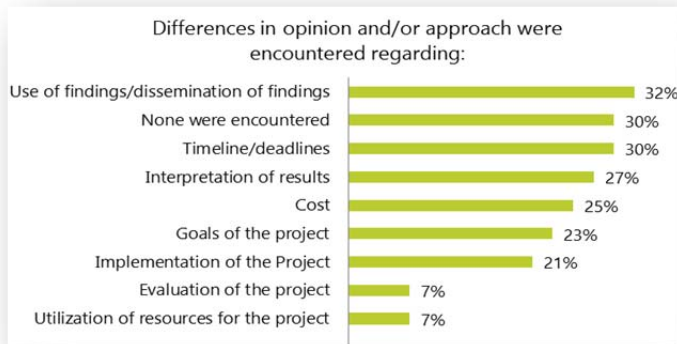
BARRIERS TO DEVELOPING COLLABORATIONS



The most frequently reported barriers to developing a research collaboration included:

- financial resources (64%)
- time constraints (54%)
- "red tape" (50%)

DIFFERENCES IN OPINION/APPROACH



Differences of opinion/approach were encountered by over 70% of respondents. However, 96% said that the differences were successfully resolved.

PRODUCTS THAT RESULT FROM SAAs COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Though most SAAs place great value on using research evidence to inform their mission, products that resulted from collaborations do not seem to demonstrate many meaningful, practical products. The most frequently reported product or outcome of collaborations was the written report (96%), which tends to be lengthy and, therefore, read and used by only a few select people.

- 72% of respondents reported they had made presentations to agency personnel, legislature, and/or community.
- 48% reported they had made presentations at professional or academic conferences.
- 15% reported that the project assisted in securing or maintaining funding.

- 36% reported the products from collaborations had directly influenced practices, services, or policies:
 - 30% reported improved administrative procedures.
 - 24% reported improved or new services.
 - 22% reported that changes in public policy resulted.

Taken together, these findings suggest that research is highly valued in SAAs, and many of them enter collaborations with researchers not employed within the CJ system to accomplish their research goals. Factors that contribute to developing the collaborative relationship and having a positive experience include finding an experienced researcher who can present the study findings for the “real world” and having an SAA institutional culture that supports collaboration and has resources, such as time and money, allocated to collaborations. However, there is still work to be done so that the findings of collaborations can have the impact desired since only 36% of collaborations had directly influenced changes in practices, services, or policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING RESEARCHER-PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIPS

IDENTIFYING FACILITATORS

To promote the development of successful partnerships with CJ system practitioners, we also documented and synthesized lessons learned from practitioners and researchers who had collaborated successfully in the past and developed recommendations based on the wealth of information shared by them and SAA respondents. We recognize that not all recommendations are appropriate for or will be feasible in all states, but hope that they and the information that follows will further strengthen SAAs' abilities to advance researcher-practitioner collaborations within the CJ system.

THE DATING STORY

"This was kind of a joke in our relationship about when we first started to meet and talk about this project. 'Okay, we've agreed to date for a little while, and we're just going to see where this goes.' And that was the pilot process of this, and we just kind of continued to talk about 'How is this going? Are we going in the direction that's going to meet your needs?'"

"But then, you know, I felt like she [also] really appreciated what I bring as the researcher in terms of ... understanding the [research] method and what you can and cannot look at. And as the relationship and the pilot work continued to progress and we got to the point of writing a grant to [the National Institute of Justice], I remember calling [the practitioner] and saying 'Ok, this is the next step in our relationship. We're moving from dating into a longer-term commitment here—and are you ready for that?'"—Academic Researcher

I BUILD RAPPORT – DEVELOP THE RELATIONSHIP

There was strong consensus among RPPS participants that it is invaluable to invest time to build rapport and trust in one's fellow 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.

Building rapport and developing trust can be done in many ways, most of which are reflected in what RPPS participants reported are characteristics of a good collaborator. These include a partner who demonstrates:

- Willingness to share control over the project and the Decisions to be made.
- 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 actively seeking practitioners' involvement rather than stick to 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.

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, service, or policy and to share the 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.

2 ENCOURAGE AND APPRECIATE PRACTITIONER'S ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Practitioners in the CJ system play a fundamental role in the development and conduct of research. They, as organization administrators, supervisors, and direct service staff, have the capacity to strengthen the research project, contribute to an environment that supports and promotes research, and ultimately enhance the utility of the study's findings. RPPS participants reported that practitioners' active involvement throughout the duration of the project is critical to its success. Though the level of involvement in successful collaborations can vary tremendously based on the focus or needs of the project and availability of the practitioner(s), involvement ensures that (a) the research questions being asked are those whose answers will help to advance services or policies, (b) obstacles are anticipated and, to the extent possible, avoided, (c) findings are interpreted through the lenses of those who best understand the day-to-day experiences of clients, and (d) the project is manageable within the context of the practitioners' responsibilities and workload. Practitioners' contributions included developing the goals of the study, developing survey questions, administering questionnaires, collecting data, writing reports, and/or developing trainings, manuals, and tool kits—again, depending on their availability.

RPPS participants acknowledged that practitioners may be resistant or unwilling to collaborate due to unpleasant or negative experiences with researchers in the past. Negative experiences can be avoided when researchers and practitioners are given the opportunity to commit to a study that fits both parties' needs, by facilitating balanced contribution from each party, open communication, and respect for each other's professionalism, expertise, and trust. The collaboration has a chance to succeed because the researchers and practitioners are committed to integrating their complementary knowledge and skills, which will ultimately benefit the CJ system and its clients.

3 CROSS-TRAIN/ ENCOURAGE MUTUAL LEARNING

“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

“We gotta have some shared language or you’ve got to work really hard to hear what the other person is saying” —Practitioner of a Community-based Organization

“There has to be a respect for what I do and I have to respect what they do. And that allows us to have very clear expectations; we can understand where each one is coming from in terms of how we see that issue.” —Academic Researcher

According to RPPS participants, mutual learning and the respect that emerged through this cross-training 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 about the practice itself at the very beginning of the project. Researchers reported that they spent time shadowing practitioners and training from practitioners’ perspectives. This included direct observation of practitioners’ daily work, attending board and staff meetings, and sitting in on case conferences, among many other things. 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 learning the practitioner’s system gave researchers 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 can be 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 cross-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, RPPS researchers and practitioners said they were better able to design studies that asked meaningful and targeted questions where the demand on practitioners’ time was reasonable.

4 OBTAIN INVESTMENT FROM ADMINISTRATORS TO MOVE A PROJECT FORWARD

The investment and support of administrators such as SAA senior administrators, state legislators, board members of nonprofit organizations, executive directors, and chairpersons of academic departments can significantly influence and advance a collaborative project. For example, administrators supported collaboration by advocating for research projects and highlighting their importance to policy makers and other administrators, *“So that becomes our job as administrators to, frankly, sell the importance of these efforts to the legislature, to the chief court administrator, that these are key—that this is key for us to maintain the quality of our work.”*—Government-System SAA Senior Administrator. The investment of administrators often added an additional critical perspective to the development and implementation of the research project, advocacy for project funds, effective

Create or adjust policies to facilitate and advance project startup, such as making internal funding available, revising “red-tape” regulations, and encouraging front-line staff to provide input in setting the research agenda.

dissemination of products, prevention of time-consuming obstacles, and opportunities for the creation of future collaborations. Additional benefits to having administrators invested in the collaboration were: (a) challenges with “red tape” were reduced, and (b) turnover of front-line supervisors and staff had less of an impact on the research than it might have otherwise. Few participants talked about how to encourage investment

among administrators. Rather, most spoke about collaborations where investment already existed before the specific project began because either (a) administrators valued research and recognized its benefits, (b) administrators initiated the research project/collaboration, or (c) well-established relationships existed between the researchers and the SAAs.

5 PROVIDE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Research funding was a central concern for RPPS practitioners. “Inadequate internal funding” was identified as a substantial challenge to collaborating with an academic researcher and, more specifically, was identified among participants who had not collaborated as a primary reason collaboration had not occurred. Among practitioners who had collaborated with academic researchers, more than half sought a collaborator who was “affordable in terms of cost.” Moreover, 75% of participants ranked the “availability of funding” as the most helpful factor in facilitating future collaborations. Because only 24% of participants reported being able to obtain external funding, it could be helpful for SAAs to develop practices that allow CJ staff to directly apply for external research grants or provide incentives for state-funded colleges and universities to encourage collaborative relationships with CJ staff.

6 REVISE “RED-TAPE” REGULATIONS TO SUPPORT COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

One SAA practitioner stated that SAA practitioners “welcome the opportunity to participate in collaborative research but often run into logistical snags between public- and private-sector administrative differences in how data can be accessed, etc.” “Logistical snags” or “red-tape” issues, as they were often called, included difficulties in applying for and obtaining funding (both internally and externally); attaining approval for research projects from institutional review boards (IRB) that ensure safety of participants and compliance with study procedures; and encountering barriers related to collecting, accessing, and analyzing data. For example, one SAA research administrator emphasized that problematic policies prohibited her from seeking and identifying a researcher collaborator in time to respond to a federal solicitation for research grant applications. Her state’s procurement process requires that a request for applications be issued in order to award a contract for a researcher’s services. This requirement that the request “go out for bid” is unreasonable against a grant application deadline that often is only 8 weeks from the grant announcement, given that the procurement process itself can take 6 weeks or more in some states. To facilitate successful researcher-practitioner collaborations, state-level governments should review procurement and other policies to determine the extent to which they prohibit collaborations in this regard. RPPS participants expanded on “red-tape” barriers, stating that restrictive timelines and longer-than-expected IRB processes may feel intimidating and overwhelming to staff who are interested in developing collaborative projects. Unfortunately, few if any recommendations for overcoming these barriers were made. One government-system SAA senior administrator’s thoughts seemed to be the sentiment of many participants: “We try to avoid the red tape.” This underscores what other

participants recommended— that collaborators should learn about potential “red-tape” issues during the development stages of a project. Related to this, ideally, agencies should assess for these potential hindrances and formulate plans to adjust the policies or how they will adapt to these policies. Identifying these processes as potential limitations will encourage researchers to collaborate with CJ system SAAs.

7 ENCOURAGE COLLABORATIVELY DEVELOPED RESEARCH AGENDAS

The research agenda of CJ agencies was most often developed by SAA administrative staff, state, or local governments and funding agencies, which limited the contributions of front-line staff members who had a unique and valuable perspective of the CJ system and clients. According to RPPS participants, to facilitate collaborations that have the potential to meaningfully change practice and policy, SAAs should include practitioners at multiple levels in developing the research agenda. Promotion of brainstorming and mutual engagement among practitioners from multiple organizational levels and areas of focus will likely strengthen research agendas; this will contribute to personal investment in the project and a more comprehensive research plan, and be more likely to appeal to all staff involved (data collectors, analysts, etc.).

8 REALIZE THE VALUE IN SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Though collaborative projects can be time consuming and lengthy, sustaining relationships throughout and after the project period may be as important as developing the collaboration. 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 an existing collaboration, such as the learning/knowledge that is left when the project has been completed. For example, researchers or practitioners entering the collaborative process bring 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, leaving valuable skills may result in a continued relationship or follow-up project. This recommendation is directly related to recommendation 7 in this report, *Mutual Learning/Cross-Training*, and to the SAA practitioner’s sentiment already stated (but worth repeating):

“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.”

9 PUBLISH AND PRESENT FINDINGS FOR BOTH RESEARCHER AND PRACTITIONER AUDIENCES

Creating products that are easily read and understood by the intended audience makes it more likely that the information will be used to influence practice, service, and policy. Have draft and final products reviewed by both researcher and practitioner peers to ensure that the intended meaning is clearly communicated and findings are appropriately interpreted.

Disseminating findings was critically important, as 88% of SAA respondents in the web-based survey reported that the “dissemination of findings” was central to their agency’s mission. To ensure that the study’s findings have the greatest impact possible, it is critical that they get into the right hands, so to speak. Creating products that are easily read and understood by the intended audience makes it more likely that findings will be used to influence policy and practice. Have draft and final products reviewed by both researcher and practitioner peers to ensure that the intended meaning is clearly communicated and findings are appropriately interpreted.

When planning for dissemination, it is useful to do the following:

1. Involve upper-level administration in discussions about dissemination to get their input, obtain approval, and determine if the organization will permit the dissemination of unexpected findings—particularly those that reveal unfavorable results.
2. Determine if responsibility for the dissemination of each product will be shared by the researcher and practitioner or done by one party independently.
3. Consider historically nontraditional methods of dissemination, including targeted e-mail distribution, listserves, and social media (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook).
4. Explore the possibility of press releases and other media campaigns.

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 5 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.

CONCLUSION

Researcher-practitioner partnerships contribute to responsible research whose findings directly apply to practice and inform decision-making about distributing resources and funding future research studies. SAAs can facilitate the development and sustainability of researcher-practitioner partnerships by adopting a team approach among all levels of organizational staff and adjusting policies to promote project startup and foster relationship with researchers not employed within the system. Through the commitment and investment of practitioners and their agencies, research collaborations can enhance evidence-based practice and intervention, and inform legislative changes. Finally, by widely distributing project findings, researcher-practitioner partnerships can promote the development of new partnerships and, ultimately, contribute to changes in practice and system policy, and to improvements in advocacy and support for victims and reductions in crime and recidivism.

APPENDIX A

Web-Based Survey of SAAs

PURPOSE:

The National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) support of researcher-practitioner collaborations has produced many successful collaborations that have substantially impacted criminal justice (CJ) practice and policies; they also have produced some unsuccessful collaborations. Regarding researcher-practitioner collaborations at the government systems level (e.g., state government office or agency, county government office or agency), little is known and next to nothing has been documented about the ability of government systems to support researcher-practitioner collaborations. In part, the lack of documented information is related to the tremendous variability and complexity among government systems. Therefore, we are conducting a research study to document and synthesize information regarding researcher-practitioner collaborations to improve practice and policy and ultimately, prevent crime and recidivism.

PROCEDURES:

You have been sent the link to this survey because you were identified by someone in your state as the go-to person for understanding the conduct of research in your government agency/department. Your participation in the study will involve completing a web-based survey to describe your agency/department's infrastructure for and experiences with supporting researcher-practitioner collaborations. We anticipate that your involvement will require less than 10 minutes to answer all survey questions.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There is no risk to participating in this survey. Although this study will not benefit you personally, your contribution will greatly benefit future researcher-practitioner collaborations in the criminal justice system. By providing information on the infrastructure to support researcher-practitioner collaborations and on the collaborations themselves, you will enable the documentation, synthesis, and dissemination of lessons learned from past or current collaborations that can inform much needed recommendations. In turn, your participation will facilitate the development of a toolkit by the National Institute of Justice.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

All of your responses will be held in confidence. Only the researchers involved in this study and those responsible for research oversight will have access to the information you provide. Your responses will be numbered and the code linking your number with your name will be stored on secure servers and encrypted computers. NO AGENCY OR INDIVIDUAL WILL BE IDENTIFIED in any summaries, reports or other publications resulting from this study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate, to end participation at any time for any reason, or to refuse to answer any individual question without penalty. By completing the web-based survey, you are knowingly consenting to participate.

QUESTIONS:

Before you agree to partake in the study, please ask any questions about any aspect of this study that is unclear to you; If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you should contact Principal Investigator Dr. Tami Sullivan at Tami.Sullivan@yale.edu or (203) 789-7645 or Professor Fisher at Bonnie.Fisher@uc.edu or (513) 556-5828.

If you would like to talk with someone other than the researchers to discuss problems or concerns, to discuss situations in the event that a member of the research team is not available, or to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact (a) the Yale University Human Subjects Committee, Box 208252, New Haven, CT 06520-8252, (203) 436-3650, human.subjects@yale.edu. Additional information is available at <http://www.yale.edu/hrpp/participants/index.html> or (b) the Chairperson of the University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board at (513) 558-5259. Or, you may call University of Cincinnati Research Compliance at (800) 889-1547, or write to IRB, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45221.

1. Agreement to Participate:

I have read the above information, have had the opportunity to have any questions about this study answered and agree to participate in this study.

Yes, I agree to participate

No, I decline to participate

2. Assessing Existing Infrastructure

Please use your scroll bar to view and respond to all questions on this page.

2. Please Enter Your Agency/Department's Contact Information:

Agency/Department Name:

City:

State:

3. What is your role within your agency/department:

Administrator/Director

Supervisor/Manager

Front-line or support staff (e.g., data analyst, technical support, program supervisor)

Other (please specify)

4. How many years have you been at your agency/department?

Years

5. How many years have you been employed in your current role?

Years

6. What is the level of government or jurisdiction of your agency/department:

Federal

State

Regional within state

County

City/Local

Other (please specify)

7. What best describes the relationship between your state's Statistical Analysis Center (SAC) and your agency/department?

- We are the SAC
- SAC is affiliated with my agency/department
- SAC is not affiliated with my agency/department
- Don't know if we are affiliated with the SAC
- Don't know what the SAC is

8. What is your agency/department's mission regarding the conduct of research and utilization of findings? (Check all that apply)

- Collect data
- Evaluate effectiveness of programs, policies, or services
- Disseminate findings
- Liaison with other criminal justice agencies (e.g., police, victim services, probation, etc.)
- Promote/fund new research
- Collaborate with others outside of your agency/department to conduct research
- Translate research to programs or policies
- Other (please specify)

9. How much does your agency/department value:

	Values a Great Deal	Values Somewhat	Does Not Value at All
Conducting research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collaborations with researchers employed by the criminal justice system (but outside of your agency/department)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collaborations with researchers not employed by the criminal justice system	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Utilizing research findings to inform agency/department's mission	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Publishing findings with researchers outside of your agency/department	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Which of the following are concerns your agency/department has about participating in a collaboration with a researcher from outside of the criminal justice system. ****For the purposes of this study, NIJ has defined "researcher" as someone who studies issues in the criminal justice system or with offender or victim populations but who is employed outside the criminal justice system (i.e., the person is not an employee of the criminal justice system per se).** (Check all that apply)

- No authority to collect data or do research
- Poor data quality
- Staff not interested
- Staff not properly trained
- Inadequate internal funding
- Challenges with "red tape"

Other (please specify)

11. What resources are available to your agency/department to encourage collaborations with a researcher from outside of the criminal justice system? (Check all that apply)

- Internal staff expertise
- Contracted/external expertise
- Time allocated for research collaboration
- Assistance with grant development
- Internal funding
- External funding
- Opportunities to meet/establish relationships with researchers outside agency/department
- Informational and statistical trainings
- Close location to a university or "research think tank"
- Other (please specify)