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**Document Title: Strategies for Successfully Developing and Disseminating Useful Products from Researcher Practitioner Collaborations, Findings from the Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships Study (RPPS)**

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## RPPS STUDY OVERVIEW

**Goal:** To improve understanding of successful researcher-practitioner collaborations<sup>1</sup> between those working within and outside of the CJ system so that the knowledge learned can be used to promote the creation of new partnerships and enhance existing ones.

**Design:** There were two components to this study.

**1. Individual interviews and focus groups** were conducted with practitioners and researchers 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 thought made their partnerships successful. Practitioners, as defined by the National Institute of Justice 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 CJ system employees.

**Participants** were 55 women and 17 men of various racial/ethnic groups. They were employed in a range of settings located in urban, suburban, and rural settings in the United States and Canada, including family violence and sexual assault programs, private practice, and SAAs such as departments of corrections, local county courts, independent research institutes, and colleges/universities. They had 4 to 40 years of experience (average of 12 years).

- 49 people (38 women and 11 men) participated in individual interviews (8 of which were with SAA staff) face to face or via telephone.
- 23 people (17 women and 6 men) participated in 5 focus groups convened at professional or academic conferences.

**Data analysis.** The audio/video recorded interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim. With the aid of a qualitative analysis software package the transcribed files were coded with identification tags corresponding to the RPPS research questions related to the following categories determined a priori: highlights of the collaboration, lowlights of the collaborations, reasons the collaboration was needed, benefits of the collaboration, characteristics desired in a collaborator, characteristics desired in an organization, characteristics of a successful collaboration, facilitators of a successful collaboration, barriers/challenges to a successful collaboration, balancing the needs of researchers and practitioners, products and results of the collaboration, usefulness of resulting products, sustainability of partnerships, advice for researchers, and advice for practitioners. The research team reviewed the coded responses to identify salient patterns or themes.

**2. 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.

**Participants** were those whose responsibility it was either to oversee the conduct of research in the SAA or to conduct research on behalf of the state. Seventy-five participants from 49 states completed the survey, with several states having multiple respondents from different SAA research departments (i.e., department of corrections, office of the courts, etc.). Of respondents, 41% were administrators or directors of the agency, 35% were supervisors or managers, 21% were front-line or support staff, and 3% were university-employed Statistical Analysis Center (SAC) directors<sup>2</sup>.

**Data analysis.** Data were analyzed to present simple descriptive statistics such as an average or the percentage of participants who endorsed a response.

<sup>1</sup> “Collaborations” and “partnerships” are used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

**This brief highlights recommendations for planning and disseminating useful products based on the RPPS, which were derived from the experiences of researchers and CJ system practitioners.**

## 1. During the development stage of the study, discuss the interim and final products and their intended impact.

Discussion of the products to be developed at the outset of the research project facilitates communication, clarifies the expectations of both parties, contributes to designing a project that is sure to answer the questions being asked, and reduces challenges regarding the dissemination of unexpected (and potentially unfavorable) findings. The likelihood for success is greatest when the researcher and practitioner discuss and agree on (a) the products that will result from the study, (b) the intended audience for those products, and (c) the goal of disseminating those products to the intended audience. Additional benefits are gained when this plan is reviewed and approved by higher-level administrators. Naturally, as the project evolves, the draft list of products should be revisited and revised as necessary.

### Products Most Relevant to Practitioners:

- Briefs/Summaries
- Informational Brochures and Fact Sheets
- Publications in Trade Journals
- Internal and Community Presentations
- Manuals
- Toolkits
- Webpage Content

Examples of useful products (beyond final reports and journal articles) include fact sheets, practice and policy briefs, manuals, toolkits, webpage content, and presentations. Collaborators are advised to consider the targeted reader and the amount of time he or she is likely able to spare to read the product.

More than 60% of SAA respondents in the web-based survey portion of the RPPS indicated that anticipated products were strong motivators to collaborate. Collaborations were identified as beneficial when products were decided upon before the project began. Agreement on products that were useful and meaningful to both parties clarified expectations and reduced unexpected challenges at the conclusion of the project. Emphasis was placed on products that were useful to agency administrators, practitioners, and researchers—namely, those that translated study findings into new or improved practices and policies.

## 2. Ensure that products are developed specifically for the people who have the greatest potential to impact change.

To ensure that the study's findings have the greatest impact possible, they must reach those who can make and implement change. Together, the researcher and practitioner should decide which person, or more likely which people, have such influence. A brief list of "people" to consider is: organizational administrators, front-line staff, policy makers, researchers, and funders. Given the different backgrounds and perspectives of the people that the products will be targeted to, it is likely that multiple products will need to be developed to achieve their purpose.

*One academic researcher discussed writing 1- to 2-page summaries for advocates that were targeted and focused on specific issues so that readers could absorb the information quickly. Another academic researcher developed a toolkit with products for multiple audiences that included DVDs, modules targeted toward specific providers, such as rape crisis centers and disability providers, a general module on*

### Products Most Relevant to Researchers:

- Journal Articles
- Conference Presentations
- Books
- Reports
- White papers

*collaboration that provided educational materials, as well as a multimedia module.*

### 3. Develop a dissemination plan to reach multiple audiences.

Eighty-eight percent of SAA respondents reported that the “dissemination of findings” was central to their agency’s mission. Yet, few products were developed that would be accessible to and potentially used by multiple audiences. So that products have the best chance of reaching the intended audience, products should be free and broadly accessible. When planning for dissemination, it is useful to consider the following guidelines:

- Involve upper-level administrators in discussions about dissemination to get their input on avenues for dissemination and obtain their approval.
- Determine if the practitioner organization will permit the dissemination of unexpected findings—particularly those that will not reflect favorably on them.
- Determine who will be responsible for the dissemination of each product: the researcher and practitioner jointly or one party independently.
- Explore the possibility of press releases and other media campaigns.
- Consider historically nontraditional methods of dissemination, including targeted email distribution, listserves, and social media (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook).
- If possible, make full-text documents available for free downloading.

#### References

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One SAA participant emphasized this point.

*“When I think of products now, I think ... everything on the Internet can be downloaded. It, to me, seems almost not terribly useful to do anything other than the Internet for getting [research findings] out to people.”*

– Practitioner/Organization Administrator

### 4. Write in nontechnical language that is understandable to your audience.

Creating products that are easily read and understood by your targeted audience makes it more likely that the information will be used to affect policy and practice. Clearly communicate the real-world relevance of the information, and do so with language that has meaning for your readers. Consider writing materials collaboratively, where the researcher and practitioner both contribute to the content. Note that the practitioner’s work load and time constraints may limit her or his ability to contribute to the actual writing.

- Use simple, direct, declarative sentences.
- Use nontechnical language.
- Use statistics sparingly, and explain them in layperson’s terms when necessary.
- 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.