



Building an evidence base for victim services

Building Successful Victim Researcher and Practitioner Collaborations



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What Will You Learn?

Whether you serve crime victims directly or study victimization issues, you have a vested interest in improving the lives of crime survivors—something best achieved when researchers and practitioners work together. In this *CVR Tip Sheet*, you will learn:

- Why research-and-practice collaborations are important to your work
- How to build successful partnerships, overcoming challenges along the way
- Ways to sustain research-and-practice relationships over time

“Together we can do great things.” ~Mother Teresa

Working Together Helps Crime Victims

Researcher-practitioner collaborations are partnerships “in which academics and service providers join together as equals...to develop and implement projects in a long-term relationship” (Campbell, et al., 1999, p. 1141). Victim researcher-practitioner collaborations are increasingly common. Funding agencies are more likely to require researchers and practitioners to work together, and professionals themselves are recognizing the value of collaboration. Victim practitioners on the frontline may best understand the depth and nuances of survivors’ needs, while victim researchers can help maximize the effectiveness of services practitioners provide. By working together in partnership, victim researchers and practitioners can:

- Improve the process of collecting victim information
- Develop practice-relevant research questions
- Pay greater attention to participant safety in research projects
- Increase the diversity and talents of interdisciplinary teams
- Build a stronger sense of credibility to the findings
- Translate findings more clearly to move the field forward

Examples of Victim Researcher-Practitioner Collaborations

- A victim service agency partners with a local university researcher to conduct a program evaluation to understand the impact of their services
- A team of researchers collaborates with a victim service agency to design and implement a study to understand community barriers faced by victims of crime
- A network of researchers and practitioners conduct a needs assessment to identify unmet needs for crime victims in their community

Building Successful Collaborations Takes Work

For victim researcher-practitioner collaborations to be effective, both partners need to think carefully about how to set the stage for success and manage challenges along the way. Successful collaborations can take time, effort, and resources to develop. Luckily, there is a wealth of information about how to foster meaningful partnerships. The *Roadmap for Collaboration* below presents 10 important tips for fostering collaborations that will help you move forward and advance the field of victim services.

Roadmap for Collaboration



1 Base your work in a foundation of trust and respect. The effectiveness of any collaboration is linked to the strength of the relationships behind it. Trust and respect are built over time. To gain trust and respect from your collaboration partners, demonstrate consistently that you are a trustworthy person who is genuinely concerned about their wellbeing. Some of the relationship dynamics between researchers and practitioners can lead to control issues and the potential for exploitation. Many of these concerns can be alleviated by strong, positive, and respectful interactions. Simple ways to build trust and respect are to:

- Show up on time for meetings
- Respond to emails and phone calls in a timely manner
- Hold trusted information in confidence
- Make an effort to get to know partners
- Share preferences for when and where to hold meetings



2 Value multiple forms of expertise. The beauty in researcher-practitioner collaborations is that different types of expertise are valuable to the work that partners do together. Researchers and practitioners often have different training and experiences that may make it difficult to connect, especially if they've had negative experiences with other researchers or practitioners in the past. To make the most of these differences, both parties need to understand the limitations of their own knowledge and value the contributions from each other. It is crucial for partners to view each other as having a unique set of knowledge, skills, and areas of expertise.



3 Understand the job contexts of your partners. If you don't have firsthand experience working in a job context like that of your collaborators, commit to learning about the demands they face in their work. Partners may use different terminology and have different professional training experiences. The accomplishments required for advancement in each partner's career can vary widely. At a practical level, even work schedules can differ between researchers

and practitioners, making it difficult to find time to collaborate. Spend time talking to each other about how you spend your time, how your work is evaluated, what stressors you face in your jobs, and the resources you have—or lack—that impact your ability to do your job. You may also wish to shadow each other by spending a day, or just a few hours, observing activities or attending meetings at each place of work.



4 Invest time in the collaboration process. Researchers and practitioners are busy people! With all the demands on everyone's time, it's hard to add anything extra to everyone's workloads, and fostering strong partnerships takes time. Before you enter these collaborations, be intentional about carving out time to commit to the collaboration process. If you have limited time but still want to be involved in the partnership, be up front about your limitations and how you will be able to be involved. Setting clear expectations from the start can help to avoid hurt feelings later on.



5 Develop a shared understanding of goals. When partners in a researcher-practitioner collaboration have a shared vision for what the collaboration will produce, they can unite around a common set of goals to guide the process. Although collaborations may help each partner achieve individual goals, to maximize the success of the collaboration, the *shared* goals among partners should be the guiding force behind the partnership. Therefore, it is important for partners to identify shared goals and commit to working together to achieve them.



6 Distribute resources in an equitable manner. In many cases, the funding for collaborative projects is limited while the project and the collaboration can be expensive and demand a lot of time for all partners. When financial resources are available to support researcher-practitioner collaborations, it's important to provide meaningful financial and other support to both partners. In practice, this may mean the non-funded partner receives a stipend for their time or the funded partner dedicates an assistant to help the other with project activities. It may also mean that the non-funded partner receives something else of value, such as staff or student training, participation in the partner's fundraiser, the development of revised materials, or author credit in a published article. Whenever possible, both partners should ensure that each receives resources to compensate for their time on any project, as well as additional support to minimize demands the work may create for them.



7 Involve all partners throughout the process, with clearly defined roles. Teamwork is key to successful collaborations, and the more each partner is involved in project goals and decisions, the more both will feel valued and the stronger the collaboration will become. For example, both partners may help

determine what questions to address, how to design a project, the best way to collect data, and how to interpret findings. Successful partnerships also require that each partner's roles are clearly understood. This allows each person to understand what is expected of them, as well as what they can expect of their partners. To solidify roles and responsibilities, it may be useful to draft a *memorandum of understanding* (MOU) that outlines project plans and ensures that everyone understands their role. With or without an MOU, it is helpful at the end of team meetings to spend a few moments reviewing next steps and what tasks each partner will do.



Be flexible and use positive relationship management skills. Relationships of all kinds can be tricky, and this is no less true for researcher-practitioner collaborations. Because researchers and practitioners are coming from different backgrounds, these relationships can be difficult to navigate at times. Therefore, it's useful to practice positive communication and effective conflict management skills to strengthen these relationships. Similarly, be flexible for the evolution of the collaboration over time. Just like any relationship, researcher-practitioner collaboration can (and should!) change over time. Sometimes, partners are making equal contributions, whereas at other times, there's a give-and-take, with partners making sacrifices for the sake the collaboration.



Address safety and ethical concerns in a collaborative way. When doing research that involves victims of violence and abuse, it's important for everyone involved to put the safety of this vulnerable population at the forefront of all decisions. For example, sometimes the strategies used to design a methodologically-strong project may be difficult to carry out in practice settings, such as using extensive survey questionnaires. Collaboration partners can work together to plan research procedures that address all relevant safety considerations and follow ethical standards for conducting research and practice.



Share collaboration findings in ways that are relevant for both partners. When collaboration projects result in findings for the field, both partners should ensure those messages are translated in ways that are relevant to researcher *and* practitioner colleagues. Researchers may be most apt to access findings in a published journal article or report, while practitioners may prefer a short, non-technical summary. Partners of each type can benefit from presentations at conferences and trainings, or through electronic sharing of findings, such as email, social media, a website or a blog. Another way to help spread project findings and interpret them in ways that are meaningful to both partners is through co-authorship of reports, co-presentations at conferences, and joint interviews with media. Shared involvement in dissemination can help each partner highlight the impact of their work on both victim research and service provision.

Building and Sustaining Collaborations over Time

Researcher-practitioner collaborations offer many benefits for the field. By working together, partners can leverage their unique and collective strengths to generate work that is meaningful for practice and grounded in solid research methodologies. However, just because these collaborations offer many benefits, does not mean that they are simple to build and maintain! In this fact sheet, we've looked at strategies that researchers and practitioners can use to get the most out of their work together.

To build successful partnerships, it's important for everyone involved to be intentional about developing strong, positive relationships in which everyone is respected and valued. By working together, victim researchers and service providers can expand their influence on the field and carry out high-impact work that helps improve services to crime victims nationwide.

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