

Innovative Prosecution Solutions Learning Community

Part III: Research-Practitioner Partnerships

Key Takeaways

As home of the IPS Research and Evaluation Training and Technical Assistance team, RTI International has developed a webinar series to support the creation and ongoing engagement of a learning community of local researchers and practitioners interested in discussing evaluation-related topics, sharing methodological techniques, and addressing problem-solving challenges in carrying out applied research. The third webinar in this series was held on February 19, 2020. Participants discussed their experiences with researcher-practitioner partnerships in IPS and previous projects.

Some of the key take-aways from the discussion include the following:

Initiating and fostering partnerships: Several webinar participants reported that their IPS partnerships grew from outreach by practitioners to local universities and from positive partnership experiences on previous projects. Participants cited careful planning about the partners' work together — from defining the nature of the public safety issue to be addressed to developing the prosecution strategy and evaluation plan and measures — and open communication as key to initiating and fostering partnership. Participants described having frequent, regular meetings to keep the partners “on the same page” over the course of the project. Frequent communication also built rapport and trust between the partners. This collaborative spirit helped the partners problem-solve when they encountered barriers during implementation of the strategy or evaluation and develop effective ways to promote evaluation findings to support sustainability of the IPS project.

Partnership successes: Participants discussed the benefits of cross-training or “interactive knowledge exchange” between research and practice partners to ensure the viability of the IPS project. Through cross-training, researchers increased their understanding of prosecution practices (*e.g.*, other strategies that might impact the success of the IPS project), and prosecutors' needs (*e.g.*, what are the pressing crime issues in this community) and limitations (*e.g.*, why randomization is not possible), which strengthened the evaluation design and execution. For practitioners, cross-training increased their understanding of evidence-based or promising prosecution strategies, as well as research methods (*e.g.*, what is the role of an Institutional Review Board (IRB), why is IRB review and approval necessary), which helped improve their data collection practices and analytic capacity and build data-sharing relationships with local agencies. In sharing evaluation findings, research partners also serve as conveners of practitioners and policymakers outside of the prosecutor's office which helps strengthen relationships among these stakeholders.

Partnership challenges: Turnover of staff critical to the IPS project in the prosecutor's office or police department, and data access (including cost) issues were noted as challenging for research partners. Practitioners noted being challenged by competing demands on their limited budgets — for example, spending money to prosecute cases or to evaluate prosecution approaches to improve policies or practices.

Sustainability: Participants noted that partnerships can be sustained when they yield mutually beneficial results, “***practice-informed research and research-informed practice.***” Support from leadership within the prosecutor's office, as well as leadership's appreciation for data, data analysis, and independent

evaluation, were also noted as critical to sustaining the researcher-practitioner partnership. With respect to sustaining the IPS project, researcher-practitioner partners can be a formidable team in using positive evaluation findings — through policy briefs, executive summaries, and co-presenting at public forums — to generate support for funding beyond the life of the IPS/BJA grant.

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