

Establishing & Sustaining Law Enforcement - Researcher Partnerships



Guide for Researchers



NIJ

Final Report

This is one of a set of two companion documents on law enforcement/researcher partnerships. The other document in this set is ***Establishing and Sustaining Law Enforcement – Researcher Partnerships: Guide for Law Enforcement Leaders***

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***Establishing and Sustaining
Law Enforcement – Researcher Partnerships:
Guide for Researchers***

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A. Why Law Enforcement Research?

Researchers who want to contribute to a better understanding of policing are increasingly finding that many police departments welcome them as essential collaborators in clarifying issues to be addressed and improving knowledge about what works in law enforcement. In fact, the National Research Council of the National Academies notes that “policing stands in first place among all criminal justice agencies in the use of the tools of social science, including surveys, sophisticated statistical analysis and mapping, systematic observation, quasi-experiments, and randomized controlled trials.”¹

Although it may seem at times that police and researchers speak different languages, in fact they share key values and priorities. Researchers and law enforcement professionals both pursue knowledge through systematic investigation of the facts and careful assembly of evidence. Police are trained to observe situations, assess conditions and formulate theories based on evidence, skills that are very much akin to the data collection and hypothesis-testing abilities that researchers bring to research situations. Given this fundamental compatibility, action research, in which researchers actively partner with practitioners to solve problems, is a particularly appropriate law enforcement research strategy.

Although some police agencies are wary of research results that could be used to diminish their credibility or to justify decreases in funding, police want to be innovative and successful. Studies of police organizational culture have found that officers at all levels strongly prefer an achievement work culture, in which “employees share a commitment to the attainment of departmental goals” and are encouraged to learn new things.² Researchers partnering with law

¹ Wesley Skogan and Kathleen Frydl, eds., Committee to Review Research on Police Policy and Practices, National Research Council of the National Academies. *Fairness and Effectiveness in Policing: The Evidence*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2004, p. 327.

² Op. cit., p. 2-3

enforcement agencies can help reinforce this achievement culture by enhancing police knowledge of factors contributing to their effectiveness and helping them become critical consumers of research findings. Even more important, researchers can help police reach a deeper understanding of local crime problems that can lead to enhanced police capacities to prevent and respond to crime.

Police personnel who participate with researchers in data collection and analysis and program design are often better able and more willing to implement the findings and recommendations offered by their research partners. As a result, researchers working collaboratively with law enforcement agencies are frequently able to see the effects that their findings have on police policies, procedures and programs. By partnering with police agencies, researchers can experience the satisfaction of seeing that their work is making a difference in police effectiveness and community safety.

Researchers are increasingly finding that action research can withstand peer review, advance careers, and enhance professional reputations. With its emphasis on encouraging the collaborative efforts of many participants, action research produces information from diverse sources that can yield a richer understanding of the issues being studied. Although publication of research articles is not the primary goal of local action research efforts, many applied researchers routinely develop articles for peer-reviewed journals. Navigating the real-world complexities of law enforcement organizations can be challenging, but researchers are finding that it can also be energizing and inspiring. By testing researchers' assumptions and customary approaches to knowledge-building, police partners can foster researchers' creativity, insight and flexibility.

Instead of being perceived as critics who focus only on mistakes, researchers working in partnership with police can help law enforcement agencies document and celebrate their successes while also enabling them to learn from missteps and refine their strategies. By developing trusting and mutually respectful

relationships with law enforcement agencies, researchers can cultivate future research opportunities that will not only support their professional advancement but also contribute significantly to building knowledge about what works in law enforcement.

B. Why Partner?

Not only are partnerships between police and researchers a natural outgrowth of shared values and interests, but they also offer pragmatic benefits to researchers committed to conducting research with and for law enforcement agencies. Partnerships exist along a continuum, from cooperation (short-term and informal) through coordination (longer-term, more formal, focused on particular goal) to collaboration (a durable and structured commitment to a range of common goals).³

Partnership Continuum

Cooperation-----→Coordination-----→Collaboration

To achieve the maximum benefits of partnership with police departments, researchers should seek to establish the strongest form that is feasible given the organizational context.

Traditionally, researchers have often been called in to evaluate the results of changes in law enforcement programs or policies only after they have been initiated, making collection of relevant baseline data difficult if not impossible. Researchers who partner with law enforcement professionals are much more likely to be invited to participate in the planning and design of new policing programs and policies. As design partners, action researchers are able to work with police to carefully define the issues of concern so that policy and program strategies can be targeted more precisely. Research partners can also help police collect essential baseline data before changes are initiated, and work with police personnel to develop evaluation strategies and tools that enable

³ Michael Winer and Karen Ray. *Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey*. St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 2000. p. 23.

monitoring and measuring intermediate results as changes in policies / programs are implemented.

An increasing number of police departments are interested in practicing “evidence based policing,”⁴ a term used to describe organizational policies and decision-making practices that have been developed based on evidence of what works. Policymakers, funders and even community members have come to expect publicly-funded agencies to demonstrate that their policies and practices are proven to be cost-effective. Researchers can assist police leaders with sorting through pertinent research findings as they select the best course of action to ensure their departments’ effectiveness and legitimacy. Action researchers willing to partner with police departments can help them test the efficacy of evidence-based strategies for solving practical problems at the local level.

During the past 35 years, police research became an enterprise funded largely by the federal government.⁵ Since public policymakers are “more interested in evaluation that helps to reform police activity than in description that can be used to explain it,”⁶ federal funding has been directed toward policing research that focuses on problem-solving, i.e., action research. Enactment of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act resulted in a surge of funding for research on policing. The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office allocated \$46.6 million to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to fund 177 grants between 1995 and 2001. Nearly 12 % of the total COPS allocation was used to fund 41 Locally Initiated Research Program (LIRP) projects designed to support action research partnerships between police departments and

⁴ Lawrence W. Sherman. *Evidence-Based Policing*. Washington, DC: Police Foundation, 1998.

⁵ Op. cit., Skogan and Frydl, p. 34-35.

⁶ Ibid.

researchers to solve local police problems or develop and evaluate new approaches to policing.⁷

Although federal funding for police research has declined significantly in recent years, many researchers, policymakers and law enforcement leaders continue to advocate for continued support of research on policing policies and practices. Previous federal investments in research helped to create a community of researchers interested in policing research and police departments that appreciate the value of partnering with researchers. Seattle Chief of Police Gil Kerlikowske observed that researchers can provide police with “critical information on what works to impact crime. . .and help ensure that police departments do not waste shrinking local resources on ill-advised approaches.”⁸ Summarizing the impacts of more than 30 years of police research, Lawrence Sherman, President of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (AAPSS), emphasized that “social science has helped police focus on high-risk places and high-risk times as the key strategy for crime prevention.”⁹ This has helped propel dramatic declines in national crime rates, and he urged that Congress restore and expand funding for policing research.

C. Initiating Researcher-Police Partnerships

For researchers who have not yet established partnerships with law enforcement agencies, it is important to consider how such collaborations are best initiated. The eventual success of action research partnerships depends on a number of interrelated activities, including selecting compatible partners, building working relationships based on mutual respect and trust, structuring the partnership and carefully defining roles and responsibilities of the partners. By attending to these concerns early on, researchers and their police partners can ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of their collaboration.

⁷ Op. cit., Skogan and Frydl, p. 33.

⁸ Chief Gil Kerlikowske, April 2004 news conference, National Press Club, Washington, DC.
<http://www.scienceblog.com/community/older/2004/10/20049057.shtml>

⁹ Lawrence Sherman, April 2004 news conference, National Press Club, Washington, DC.
<http://www.scienceblog.com/community/older/2004/10/20049057.shtml>

Selecting Compatible Partners

Partnerships may originate with personal contacts, e.g., when police personnel meet researchers while taking classes at colleges or universities, or with connections made at professional conferences attended by law enforcement practitioners and researchers. Police leaders may learn of funding opportunities that require researcher involvement and contact a local college, university or research organization. Alternatively, researchers may learn of funding opportunities that would support research partnerships with law enforcement agencies and choose to contact a local police department. Researchers may also be retained as consultants to police departments to work on policy development or planning initiatives that naturally evolve into programs or projects requiring research or evaluation.

Regardless of how the initial contact between researchers and police occurs, it is important that researchers attend to the potential police partner's openness and commitment to the value of research. Police departments that have implemented community and problem-oriented policing are more likely to be familiar with the problem-solving process that is the foundation of action research: problem identification and analysis, response development and implementation, and impact assessment.

Researchers should ascertain the issues, concerns or problems that the police department would like to address with action research. If police leaders' commitment is uncertain, or researchers' interests are not congruent with expressed police priorities, then the partnership will probably not be fruitful or long-lived. Because long-term partnerships are more likely to be productive and sustainable if the research and police partners are located in the same vicinity, researchers interested in sustainable collaborations should aim to partner with police departments in the same community, region or state.

Building Working Relationships

To be effective, researcher-police collaborations require that each partner earn the trust of the other, which in turn requires that each party understand the values and priorities of the other, recognize commonalities and respect differences. Some police departments are suspicious of the motives of researchers, either because of negative past experiences or simply because researchers are “outsiders” who may not understand the demands and challenges of police work. Overcoming this suspicion requires that researchers beginning new partnerships with police:

- practice active listening, allowing their police partners to speak about their experiences, concerns and ideas before sharing their own views;
- start where police partners are, which is often in a reactive, crisis-response mode, and help them to slow down and consider the bigger picture of strategic problem-solving;
- develop an understanding of each other’s vocabulary/language that will enable the partners to clearly communicate about shared priorities and concerns; and
- understand that some police personnel may initially not trust “outsiders” to collect and analyze data on police programs due to negative past experiences.

Other approaches that have been successfully employed by researchers to better understand and build mutually respectful relationships with their police partners include going on ride-alongs with police officers, conducting individual interviews with key staff department-wide at all levels, and arranging to spend time working out of spaces in department buildings. If there is a strong police union, researchers should work to gain the trust and support of its leaders. Some LIRP researchers emphasize the importance of accommodating department requests for assistance that are technically outside of the scope of the research effort; keeping the research process and results out of the headlines; giving credit to police partners in written products and public presentations; and following

through on providing police with the information, reports and/or assistance that was promised.¹⁰

Building mutually respectful, trusting working relationships takes time and energy, but it is absolutely essential to successful action research. Researchers must be convinced that they have as much to learn from police officers as the police can learn from them. By choosing to collaborate in examining police policies and practices through action research, both researchers and police are taking professional risks, and they must trust one another to act in good faith and with professionalism at all times.

D. Organizing Partnerships

Establishing a productive research partnership requires that researchers work with police leaders to carefully define goals, expectations, roles, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms. This is especially important if the partnership involves multiple agencies and/or if the partners want it to be sustainable for a long period of time.

There is no single partnership model that will be effective and sustainable across all police departments. Researchers wishing to initiate a partnership with one or more police agencies should weigh the benefits and challenges of various approaches. Multi-agency partnerships, in which one research organization works with several police departments, provide opportunities to examine the effects of organizational culture on the effectiveness of problem-solving strategies. However, if police agencies do not already agree on the problems which must be investigated, researchers must be prepared to facilitate cross-agency consensus-building.

Contextual factors, including:

- the size of local police departments,
- the scope of issues they are interested in examining,

¹⁰ Tom McEwan. *Evaluation of the Locally Initiated Research Program*. Alexandria, VA: Institute for Law and Justice, September 2003, p. 160-161.

- their organizational compatibility, and
- the availability of resources to support research efforts,

will likely determine whether it is feasible or desirable for researchers to work with more than one police department. Researchers willing to develop multi-agency partnerships involving small police departments that have not traditionally participated in research may well produce findings that significantly expand the knowledge of what works in policing.

Whether working with one or several police departments, researchers will likely find themselves playing “matchmaker”¹¹, recruiting other researchers and students as needed to accomplish evolving research goals. University-based researchers can employ students to enhance the cost-effectiveness of police research, but should be aware that law enforcement partners may find students’ short-term involvement, limited goals and relative inexperience frustrating. On the other hand, most graduate and undergraduate students who have participated in law enforcement action research have appreciated and benefited from the real-world educational opportunity.

Some researchers involved in long-term partnerships with police have found that maintaining office space in or near police facilities helps to build trust and enhance their understanding of local police culture. Staff sharing, with researchers becoming employees of police agencies and/or police personnel being temporarily assigned to the research organization, can also strengthen the partnership and enhance the research capacity of both organizations.

Defining Roles and Responsibilities

Many research partnerships have been founded based on a personal relationship between a researcher and a police practitioner. While that may be a powerful impetus for forming the partnership, if either individual becomes unavailable, the partnership may not be sustainable. To avoid this eventuality, the LIRP evaluation recommends that research-related roles and duties be assigned to

¹¹ McEwan, Op. cit., p. 193-197.

positions rather than individuals in both the police department and the research organization.¹² Then when turnover occurs (as is common in both police agencies and research teams), the continuity of the partnership between the organizations can be assured.

“Job descriptions” for researchers and their police partners should specify not only who (by position) will be involved, but also the specific research tasks and products for which they will be responsible or to which they will contribute, and the ways in which they will accomplish these responsibilities. This is important not only for clarifying mutual expectations, but also for communicating to incoming members of the research team what their role in the project will be. These job descriptions will likely change over time, as initial objectives are achieved and new goals evolve.

Written partnership agreements are another way that researchers can ensure the stability of their working relationships with police departments. These partnership agreements, which may also be called declarations of cooperation or memoranda of understanding, serve to:

- indicate that overall responsibility and accountability for research are shared by the partners
- state shared values and goals and
- describe the nature and extent of operational cooperation/collaboration.

The least formal agreements might simply be statements of shared accountability and general goals, while more formal agreements detail the roles and responsibilities of the partners and spell out clearly the operational, staffing and funding commitments of each. By formalizing partnerships through written partnership agreements or memoranda of understanding, researchers and police can create a reference point to guide the decisions and activities of all those who participate in the research partnership. Research and police partners should take

¹² McEwan, op. cit., p. 154.

care to craft agreements that do not constrain their flexibility to respond to changing policy situations and research priorities.

E. Implementing Partnerships

Researchers partnering with police agencies must not only build and sustain working relationships, but also guide the development and implementation of a research agenda. This requires collaborating with police leaders to define research goals and objectives, establish an action plan and timeline, put in place a communications protocol, and plan for sustainability.

Engaging Police Personnel in Research

Initially researchers must work with the Police Chief and command staff in order to organize a research partnership. Once a partnership is established, however, successful implementation of action research requires that researchers invite and facilitate line staff participation. Researchers can help police personnel develop a sense of ownership by involving them in setting the research agenda, devising tools to collect information, and helping to collect relevant data. Although researchers will likely be primarily responsible for data analysis and report preparation, police personnel should also participate in these essential steps.

To engage police personnel as partners, researchers must counter the belief of some staff members that research is a distraction from essential police work that will not yield useful results. Researchers also must reassure police personnel who fear that research results will be used against them or their agency. By helping police personnel see what they can get out of research, researchers can help to defuse the suspicions of police personnel and begin to engage them in the research process.

Some of the benefits that law enforcement staff members are likely to experience from participating in action research are:

- Enhanced problem-solving skills

- Information about policies and practices that have proven effective in promoting public safety
- Opportunities to test their innovative ideas in controlled settings
- Increased capacity to fine-tune long-standing procedures and practices

Police personnel will learn most effectively about these and other benefits through hands-on participation in research involving their agencies.

Setting the Research Agenda

Researchers should work with their police partners to define relevant research issues. Police departments prefer to focus on resolving practical problems affecting their ability to ensure public safety. Researchers can help police identify problems that can be solved (i.e., there is sufficient reliable data to address the issues, and likely solutions are feasible given current resources and policy factors).

Police practitioners have insights into crime problems that can become a productive focus of research partnerships. Researchers must commit to respectfully listening to police personnel in the course of setting research agendas, and as new knowledge leads to redefining the questions of interest. Focus groups and individual interviews with police staff are effective methods of eliciting their input regarding problems they face and what they believe is working well.

Researchers should recognize that police personnel do not usually have the luxury of reflecting on the larger picture as they are called on to respond to specific crises and incidents. Research partnerships offer the opportunity for researchers to help their police partners become more comfortable with strategic thinking.

Defining Research Goals and Objectives

Partners must together define short-term and long-range research goals related to the problems and issues on which they choose to focus. If the partnership is

intended to be long-term, then it is particularly important to define interim goals and objectives that will help the partners document that they are making steady progress toward longer-term partnership goals.

Researchers should work with police to highlight the underlying factors that may be contributing to problems identified by police so that these factors can be more precisely targeted for change. Police will also be able to highlight effective practices that already achieve good results, so that knowledge of the factors that foster these positive outcomes can contribute to problem-solving. This practice of “appreciative inquiry” has become a widely accepted method of discerning the key contributors to successful outcomes and applying them to promote positive organizational change.¹³

Researchers familiar with logic modeling techniques can help their police partners develop “road maps” linking resources to be invested in solving a problem to the desired short and long-range outcomes of a policy or program initiative. The process of defining goals and objectives for action research efforts should encourage partners’ creativity and flexibility. Learning from mistakes is as important as is applying lessons derived from successful programs or practices. Research goals and objectives will evolve over time as the issues of concern to police and the local justice system change.

Establishing Research Action Plan and Timeline

Researchers should work with their police partners to develop research designs that minimize intrusiveness while still producing the intended results. Partners should collaborate to develop appropriate tools and methods to collect necessary baseline and follow-up information, and decide which kinds of information should be collected by each of the partners.

The partners should clarify who will have access to any data collected for the research process, how the data will be used, and the ways individual privacy and

¹³ David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney. *A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005.

confidentiality will be protected. Attending to these concerns will help researchers successfully pass the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process required for all research that involves human subjects. Researchers should inform their police partners that the IRB review process can be lengthy and complex and that the startup of research efforts may be delayed if the IRB requires modifications in research design or data collection approaches.

To honor police partners' need for timely feedback, researchers should work with them to set interim research goals, specify when research reports will be produced, and celebrate joint accomplishments on the way to achieving long-range goals. Researchers must also educate police partners on the time it can take to get funding for research, clarify issues, develop research designs and tools, collect and analyze data, and produce reports. Research timelines should build in periodic review of partnership agreements. As research agendas evolve, so should the ways that researchers and police departments work together to achieve research goals.

Safeguarding Objectivity and Credibility of Research

Action researchers who collaborate with police to conduct research on policing practices and other issues must take precautions to ensure their objectivity. It is possible to earn the trust of police leaders and staff while also maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. Researchers must be particularly careful to avoid contributing to or participating directly in investigating or prosecuting individual suspects/offenders.

It is researchers' "outsider" perspective on policing issues that is one of their most valuable contributions to law enforcement research. It is vital for researchers to bring their knowledge of research findings and their unique analytic abilities to their dialogue with police. In a mutually respectful partnership, researchers and police will be able to "agree to disagree" in constructive ways to arrive at a research agenda that weaves practical

experience together with analytic expertise to produce effective change strategies.

Researchers' credibility with police will be enhanced by successfully collaborating with police agencies. By balancing objectivity with insight into police work, researchers will be able to apply their knowledge to promote positive changes in police practices. Police personnel who work with researchers learn that their questions often help to clarify underlying issues and stimulate creative thinking that helps police resolve real-world problems.

Attending to Political and Organizational Factors

Researchers must be aware that for many police leaders and line staff, participating in research is a risk, and they may need reassurance that the results will be worth putting their careers or reputations on the line. Police staff members who have achieved positive outcomes through partnering with researchers will be the best ambassadors to their peers, helping to allay suspicions and focus energy on generating useful knowledge.

If research findings point to the need for policy or program changes in a police department, researchers may offer guidance but should never prescribe police responses to those findings. When positive outcomes of change efforts are documented through action research, researchers should take care to give appropriate credit to all who contributed to designing the change strategy, implementing the changes and evaluating their impacts.

Although partnership agreements structure and stabilize collaborations between research organizations and police agencies, it is important that individual researchers and police personnel maintain working relationships based on mutual trust and respect. It is these relationships that will enable research partners to weather challenges and emerge with an even stronger commitment to learning together about what works in law enforcement.

Fostering Ongoing Communications

Researchers should collaborate with their police partners to develop a communications protocol that will both facilitate internal dialogue between the partners and prescribe the ways research results will be shared with others. This protocol should address the 'who', 'what' and 'when' of communications between the partners and with other agencies and the public.

Traditionally, researchers prefer to wait until all the evidence is in and analyses are completed before issuing a report on their findings. However, researchers partnering with police agencies to evaluate results of program changes should commit to providing interim analyses that allow police to adjust their policies and practices as initiatives are being implemented. Researchers who use "bottom up" briefings¹⁴, sharing initial findings with groups of police line staff most closely associated with the research effort to ask for their input before sharing the results with police leaders, find that this is an excellent way to build trust while also improving the accuracy and utility of research reports.

Researchers will sometimes have to say things that police would rather not hear, and it is essential that researchers report "bad news" in ways that will promote positive change rather than defensiveness. If research findings suggest that a particular police policy or program is not having its desired impact, researchers should inform police as soon as possible, and be prepared to offer plausible alternatives to current practices, while reassuring them that negative findings will not be prematurely published or publicized.

Before submitting articles or final project reports for peer review or publication, researchers should submit drafts to their police partners for review. In addition to building trust between partners, this practice can help ensure that the reports are factually accurate, and will enable researchers to incorporate practitioners' perspectives in published findings and recommendations.

¹⁴ Wesley Skogan. The Challenge of Timeliness and Utility in Research and Evaluation. Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research, November 12, 2003, p. 4.

In addition to preparing articles for academic journals and other research-focused publications, action researchers should develop written research summaries for police practitioners that are both timely and easy to understand and act upon. Researchers should also assist police with composing reports on the research process and results that are appropriate for other target audiences, including other justice system agencies, elected officials, the media, business and faith community leaders, and citizens.

Planning for Sustainability

Not every research partnership will be long-term, but if researchers are interested in establishing long-term partnerships with police agencies, the partners must plan for sustainability from the beginning. Sustainability considerations should be incorporated into partnership agreements, communications protocols and research agendas. The Finance Project, which studies the factors contributing to successful community-based partnerships, identifies eight key elements of sustainability, adapted here to focus on researcher-police partnerships:¹⁵

Vision: Developing a shared vision, goals and objectives for policing research.

Results orientation: Demonstrating success through measurable outcomes, especially interim indicators of progress.

Strategic financing orientation: Identifying resources needed to sustain research activities and strategies to obtain them.

Adaptability to changing conditions: Adjusting to changes in crime trends, new evidence-based practices, and organizational and political contexts.

¹⁵ The Finance Project. Sustaining Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Key Elements for Success. Washington, DC. April 2002.
<http://www.financeprojectinfo.org/sustainability/default.asp>

Broad base of support: Building a broad base of people within and outside of the research and police organizations who value the work of the research partnership.

Key champions: Obtaining the support of police, research and other leaders willing to use their influence to support and stabilize the research partnership.

Strong internal systems: Establishing a partnership agreement that specifies roles and responsibilities, and a communications protocol that supports clear and open internal and external communications.

Sustainability plan: Clarifying how the partners want the research partnership to evolve in the future.

Research and police leaders can use these sustainability factors to periodically assess their partnership, and identify areas that need strengthening to ensure the longevity of the research initiative.

Not all researcher-police partnerships can or should be sustained indefinitely. If a research partnership becomes non-productive and cannot be re-invigorated, or if personal or organizational incompatibilities become insurmountable, it is important for the partners to acknowledge this reality and devise a means to formally end the collaboration. Whatever the reasons for the ending, it is essential that the accomplishments of the partnership are documented and acknowledged, and that contributions of key individuals are recognized.

F. Assessing Partnerships

The sustainability factors summarized above provide one framework that can be used to assess the success of researcher-police partnerships. Researchers should also provide for ongoing monitoring of the partnership's progress toward its specific goals. Mechanisms to record the establishment, development and achievements of the partnership should be put in place early on and used to measure its success over time. The partners should measure their performance

against expectations in both *process* (how they work together) and *results* (what the partnership accomplishes).

At the process level, partners should continuously assess the quality of their communications and the breadth of police participation in the research initiative. At a fundamental level, a process evaluation of the partnership should ask whether both partners are satisfied with their working relationships, and offer feedback that can be used to make necessary improvements.

Researchers and police should also systematically assess whether policy and program changes instituted as a result of their research are having the desired results. The partners should define short-term, intermediate and long-range performance measures that will permit them to adjust their strategies over time to maximize success.

G. Action Agenda

Researchers interested in forging and sustaining rewarding partnerships with law enforcement agencies must cultivate openness, flexibility and creativity. There are several key steps that researchers can take to ensure the success of these partnerships.

Reach out to law enforcement agencies in your locality and state.

Develop working relationships with police leaders by inviting them to attend workshops or conferences on topics of mutual concern. Offer to provide training to police employees about evidence-based policing practices. Researchers employed by colleges and universities should keep local law enforcement agencies informed about relevant course offerings and degree programs, and invite experienced police officers to participate as instructors whenever appropriate.

Researchers wishing to establish long-term research partnerships with law enforcement agencies must have a broad research agenda rather than focusing on specific projects or issues. Although researchers may

initially choose to form a partnership with a police agency to focus on a few critical issues for a limited time period, establishing sustainable partnerships requires researchers to place their work with police departments within the context of a long-term research agenda. Although researchers can certainly contribute to resolving pressing policing problems, researchers can often be of the greatest assistance to law enforcement by helping to investigate the origins and impacts of these problems rather than simply responding to the “crisis of the day.”

Remember that police departments need to hear about interim findings as research initiatives are being implemented.

Law enforcement leaders want to use research findings to continuously enhance their effectiveness rather than waiting for researchers to complete their final analyses. Researchers should build in opportunities for briefings that invite police personnel to provide feedback about researchers’ observations and tentative conclusions, and prepare their police partners for failures as well as successes. When negative findings emerge, researchers and their police partners should use this as an opportunity to learn “about inaccurate pictures of current reality or about strategies that didn’t work as expected”¹⁶, and to retool police practices and/or the research agenda as appropriate.

Clarify communication protocols and publication agreements early on in the research partnership, and revisit these assumptions as necessary.

Researchers should retain their rights to publish research findings as they see fit, but they should also submit articles intended for peer review or publication to their police partners for review and comment. In addition, researchers should provide law enforcement agencies with user-friendly summaries that meet police agencies’ needs to inform elected officials, justice system colleagues and the public about research efforts in which they have

¹⁶ Peter M. Senge. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday, 1990, p. 154.

participated, giving credit to police partners for their contributions to research processes and outcomes.

Explore a variety of sources of funding for law enforcement research.

With federal funding for research on policing shrinking, it is imperative that researchers look to other public and private sector sources for sustainable support. State and local governments concerned with the cost-effectiveness of investments they are making in law enforcement may be persuaded to fund policing research that promises to improve outcomes with limited or no additional resources. Larger police agencies with their own crime analysis, planning or research units may be interested in contracting with external researchers to work on aspects of their overall research agenda. Researchers may also be able to develop multi-agency partnerships with a number of small police departments that each contribute resources (staff time, information, funds) as they are able to a collective research initiative.

Be willing to engage researchers from a variety of disciplines and organizations as the research partnership evolves.

Law enforcement research efforts can benefit from the perspectives of researchers trained in a wide range of fields, including criminology, economics, sociology, psychology, public policy analysis and urban planning. Policing research can also be enhanced by the participation of individuals trained in fields such as information technology, organizational development, management auditing, computer science, engineering and architecture. Researchers are often in the best position to know when other specialists' knowledge and skills are necessary to advance their law enforcement research agenda, and lead researchers must be ready to share the many rewards of policing research with their research colleagues.

When using students as research assistants, provide them with relevant training and continuous supervision.

Inexperienced students, no matter how knowledgeable they may be in their field of study, can inadvertently damage the trust between researchers and law enforcement and reduce the

credibility of research results. Senior researchers must be willing and able to devote sufficient time to helping students meet the challenges of real-world research while also helping them learn to become trusted participants in research partnerships with police professionals.

Recognize when a partnership with a police department has run its course and take steps to end it that will preserve the potential for future research collaborations. Researchers should be alert to signs that a partnership has achieved its full potential, and be prepared to work with law enforcement colleagues to close out their work together in an orderly and mutually respectful manner. Police departments that have experienced a successful research partnership which ended well will be much more willing to enter into another collaboration with researchers when the time is right.

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