

# JournalWatch

Evidence-based Policy & Practice  
Research Bulletin

## Collaborative Partnerships in Research

### Summary points

- There are many benefits for participants engaged in collaborative research partnerships. These include development of valuable insights, expansion of views and roles, improved quality, relevance and usefulness of research, and creating positive community changes.
- The costs and challenges associated with collaborative research partnerships need to be weighed up carefully before engaging in collaboration. These include increased time for development and planning, increased potential for conflict, need for greater flexibility, and a financial investment.
- Developing and maintaining collaborative research partnerships requires trust, clarity of purpose, commitment and mutual benefit.
- Paying attention to collaborative processes is just as important as focusing on good research design and methods.
- The success and effectiveness of collaborative research partnerships requires deliberate and considered action including, early identification of and response to potential obstacles, as well as compatibility of the approach with the subject/topic, skills and styles of the partners, investing time and resources, offering opportunities for capacity enhancement for the community, and identifying and providing strategic opportunities for involvement.
- Evaluation of collaborative research partnerships needs to assess the gains and benefits of the process, as well as the overall impact of the collaboration. Further work is needed into evaluation methodology of collaborative research partnerships.

#### TERMS

**Collaboration** can be defined as 'a relationship between two or more people, groups or organisations working together to define and achieve a common purpose' (56).

The term **collaboration** often refers to the notion of collective actions by individuals or their organisations for a more shared communal benefit than each could accomplish as an individual player (2).

Collaboration is enacted through **partnerships**. The term partnership is often used to encompass all the forms of collaboration (eg. consortia, coalitions and alliances) that bring people and organisations together (52).

The notion of **collaborative research** implies the involvement of non-researchers in the conduct of research, but excludes partnership when it is just for funding or access to research sites (55).

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Inside this  
issue:

Introduction 2

Section 1 2

Section 2 6

Section 3 8

Section 4 17

Conclusions 19

Reviewed  
literature 20

Referenced  
literature 22

Useful websites 22

Appendix 1 23

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## Introduction

*Engagement in partnerships to support the transfer of research into practice and policy is worthwhile, with the benefits outweighing the challenges.*

# Introduction

Collaborative partnerships in research have recently been described as a 'growing trend' (55). Ideas associated with this growth include that the approach can support more rapid development of research (54) and that "research and science have become contested terrain where multiple approaches and perspectives are legitimate and must learn to coexist" (55). More familiar is the idea that these partnerships support transfer of research results into practice and policy (51).

This issue of *JournalWatch* reviews recent literature on collaborative research partnerships that are linked to the transfer of research results into practice or policy. It focuses on collaborative partnerships between academic researchers (university or research institution/unit/centre based) and users of research (practitioners, policy and decision-makers, consumers and community organisations and industry), to identify lessons to support practice in this field. There is no suggestion that all research needs to be collaborative, this approach refers mainly to applied research.

Four key questions guided the review, providing the structure for this issue:

- 1 Why do researchers and other stakeholders engage in collaborative research partnerships? (Section 1)
- 2 What core values and theoretical perspectives guide collaborative research partnerships? (Section 2)
- 3 How are collaborative research partnerships put into practice, and what factors are associated with success and effectiveness? (Section 3)
- 4 What methods and approaches are used to evaluate collaborative research partnerships? (Section 4)

The methods used for the literature search, and the characteristics of literature featured are described in Appendix 1.

## 1 Why do researchers and other stakeholders engage in collaborative research partnerships?

A range of interests as well as practical and ethical reasons were found to influence researchers and other stakeholders to engage in these partnerships. There were also many benefits for all participants who engaged in this approach, including development of valuable insights, expansion of views and roles, improved quality, relevance and usefulness of research and creating positive community changes. The review indicates that engagement in partnerships to support the transfer of research into practice and policy is worthwhile, with the benefits outweighing the challenges (6).

### 1.1 Reasons

Researchers and other stakeholders engaged in partnerships because of the particular opportunities the approach offers, as well as its practical and ethical value. The approach provides opportunities to increase research uptake (51) and/or support participants to apply research expertise to real-world problems (17). It can support participants to make a contribution to their local community (17), and develop new ways to solve problems and make a difference more directly (quickly), through involving new partners and developing new approaches (7). It can also help harness the numerous resources, strengths and skills that exist within communities (28).

## Section 1



The practical reasons for participants' engagement in partnerships included its potential for strengthening conceptualisation of the research project (11), facilitating comprehensiveness of a study (50), producing high quality research (32), developing professional expertise (15) and reaching different partners' common goals (41 & 42). Other reasons included its capacity to blend empirical research and clinical practice (12 & 53) and support the relevance of research to practice and community concerns (48 and 31 respectively). When successful, this approach also was found to overcome mistrust of research and researchers in community settings (38).

The ethical value of collaborative partnerships in research is relevant to all settings. This value is accentuated in Indigenous contexts because of the need to engage in extensive community consultation, negotiation and collaboration to produce research beneficial to aboriginal communities (19). In these settings, partnerships can allow communities to identify areas of concern and give them control of their own lives and communities (19).

## 1.2 Benefits

The benefits associated with researchers and other stakeholders' engagement in collaborative partnerships were largely consistent with their reasons for engagement.

Benefits included more effective efforts to solve common problems and reach common goals (42), the breaking of new ground (7) and the investment of power and control in the participant group (21). The evaluation findings of the American National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network (46) identified that connecting practitioners and researchers had a positive impact on:

- Practitioners and practice, as involvement with research expanded practitioners' views of their field and their role as professionals in it.
- Researchers and research, as involvement of practitioners in research design, implementation, and analysis improved the quality and usefulness of the research.

Benefits from successful researcher/decision maker partnerships included allowing all parties to bring their own unique perspectives and capacity to a joint effort (47). This could happen through the provision of 'original ideas' and expert advice by those involved (44). They also included keeping research 'grounded in reality', by helping to make it more useful to decision-makers and, helping researchers communicate how research was useful (44). Initial collaboration with health decision-makers enhanced later implementation of project outcomes (13).

In community settings, successful researcher/consumer and community partnerships could contribute to developing strong relationships and valuable insights (1), lead to important scientific findings and, create positive community changes (29). The following benefits to collaboration in community settings were identified by the formal evaluation of a national collaborative initiative in America (the Pew Partnership for Civic Change) (17), which involved nineteen community based organisations and local researchers:

- University faculty members reaped multiple and unexpected benefits from engaging in community-based research. It offered opportunities to apply research skills and knowledge to urgent real-world challenges, acquire new kinds of skills (i.e. in non-traditional research approaches), deepen the civic engagement of individual researchers and share experiences and expertise in different venues with a different set of colleagues.
- Researcher engagement led to greater institutional level university/community action.
- Building partnerships with researchers yielded multiple benefits for non-profit organisations and local governments. For instance, community-based participants identified the role that researchers can play in assisting agency staff in identifying and prioritising their true research needs, and translating these into a well-designed research plan. They also identified the potential of these partnerships to create a powerful hybrid of knowledge that blends practitioners' "on the ground knowledge" with the objective "outsider" knowledge of researchers, as well as offering opportunities to enhance practitioner research skills.
- Supporting partnerships between community agencies and universities has clear benefits

### Section 1

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*Supporting collaborative research partnerships ultimately generates quality research for the funder (decision-maker).*



**Section 1**

*Collaborative research partnerships can offer a more humanistic approach to research because they support treating people as human beings rather than objects to be researched.*

for funders (decision-makers). At a fundamental level, supporting such partnerships ultimately generates quality research for the funder (decision-maker). Furthermore, credible research informs future decisions about funding, and sharing research findings within the funding community multiplies the impact of the research.

In Indigenous contexts the approach can offer a more humanistic approach to research because it supports treating people as human beings rather than objects to be researched (19), and support the translation of scientific knowledge into community benefits (36).

The following benefits for researchers, practitioners, decision-makers and the community were also described in the literature (Table 1).

**Table 1 Benefits for collaborators in research partnerships**

Collaborator	Benefits	Article
Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to the practical experiences of community partners, including what could/could not be done in practice settings; professional contacts with others; and development of research questions and answers that were meaningful.</li> <li>▪ Personal growth and development, such as learning different ways of doing research</li> <li>▪ Evolution of the research program</li> <li>▪ Increased funding options</li> <li>▪ Peer support throughout the project</li> <li>▪ A broader base of expertise to draw on</li> <li>▪ Improved quality of research, leading to increased usefulness of research</li> <li>▪ Continuity of the project, because of broader base of support</li> <li>▪ Development of a project that was both ethical and relevant to the community</li> <li>▪ Greater understanding and appreciation of 'realities' of the decision-maker world</li> <li>▪ Contacts with other decision-makers</li> <li>▪ Personal satisfaction, derived from professional validation of research contributions that are not similarly validated in an academic environment</li> </ul>	8, 19, 32, 37, 50, 44
Practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supported 'reflective practitioner' processes</li> <li>▪ Access to expertise in research methods</li> <li>▪ Increased value and relevance of findings</li> </ul>	8, 12
Decision makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gained a useful 'big picture' perspective on own activities which helped them to be more reflective</li> <li>▪ Enhanced research skills and/or provided professional development opportunities</li> <li>▪ Brought about other current research and provided access to research expertise when other issues came up</li> <li>▪ New contacts with other decision-makers and learning from each other</li> <li>▪ Greater understanding of researcher perspective</li> </ul>	44
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maximised opportunities to tackle problems and identify solutions most likely to enhance quality of care and cost effective health service delivery</li> <li>▪ Offered an opportunity to provide advice to a research project, ensuring questions made sense to potential respondents, and information that was disseminated reached the right sectors.</li> </ul>	37



### 1.3 Costs and challenges

The literature highlights that partnerships were unlikely to develop where fundamental conflict of purpose exists (12). Where there is potential for collaboration however, there are some costs and challenges that intending collaborators need to be aware of. Three studies considering the realities of participatory research processes (1), the problematic features of collaborative research (49), and the evidence in support of partnerships in increasing research impact (51) concluded that:

- Engagement with this approach should be undertaken with full understanding of what it entails, to foster thoughtful design and implementation, and ensure a 'good fit' for context and personnel involved (1).
- It is essential to anticipate the many intricacies and demands of collaborative research and develop mechanisms for transforming its potential costs and challenges into actual benefits (49).
- The costs and rewards of collaborative research can not be measured only in strict financial terms. Potential gains can involve tangible and intangible rewards that substantially outweigh mere financial benefit (49).
- To establish a viable working partnership, it is essential to define the full range of potential rewards and to ensure that they will exceed costs (49).
- Although requiring substantial investments of time, resources and commitment, and subject to a number of possible pitfalls, these partnerships offered great potential to increase research uptake (51).

Exposing the political dimension of collaborative research was another important challenge (9). This related to managing power relations that can dominate the nature and processes of partnership (12).

The following costs and challenges for collaborators were also identified in the literature (Table 2).

**Table 2 Costs and challenges for collaborators in research partnerships**

Collaborator Costs and challenges		Article
Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Took up more time and effort than traditional approaches</li> <li>• Lacked academic rewards compared to other types of research, which may have implications for academic recognition</li> <li>• Required flexible working habits</li> <li>• Could be associated with increased potential for conflicts of interest and opportunities for bias in the presentation of study results</li> <li>• The development phase might be slowed through meticulous attention to implementation issues for research users (that would never have been considered by researchers)</li> <li>• The quality of research done by practitioners might not meet academic requirements and scholarly rigour</li> </ul>	8, 19, 37, 40, 44, 45
Practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required time away from practical duties and responsibilities</li> </ul>	8
Decision makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required time and/or staff time for involvement in the research process</li> <li>• Required financial investment in the research</li> <li>• Required time to communicate with colleagues about the research process, including having to 'sell' the organisation's investment in the research and justify the time required to complete the research</li> <li>• Was associated with the risk of agreeing to a partnership without knowing its impact on the organisation.</li> </ul>	44
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Took up time</li> <li>• Privacy could be invaded</li> </ul>	37

### Section 1

*Engagement with collaborative research partnerships should be undertaken with full understanding of what it entails, to foster thoughtful design and implementation, and ensure a 'good fit' for context and personnel involved.*

*Collaborative research partnerships offer great potential to increase research uptake.*



*Section 2*

*A number of interrelated core values guide the practices and processes associated with collaborative research partnerships.*

## 2 What core values and theoretical perspectives guide collaborative research partnerships?

### 2.1 Core values

The following interrelated core values, guiding the practices and processes associated with these partnerships, emerged from the literature.

<b>Thoughtfulness</b>	Before entering into a collaborative research relationship, all parties should think through just what type and degree of collaboration is desirable, bearing in mind their own expectations, strengths and limitations (32).
<b>Realism</b>	The project must match the capabilities, interests and available facilities of those involved; the interests and plans of partners (34).
<b>Selectiveness</b>	Approaches to encouraging user involvement in research should be selected critically and systematically (particularly in community settings) taking into account the diversity of approaches that abound. The approach used can mean the difference between passive community input and active community involvement and enablement (6 & 10).
<b>Commitment</b>	All parties must be committed to the partnership. This is supported by transparent understanding of mutual responsibilities, and is evident in the provision of a supportive, nurturing environment by all parties (15).
<b>Trust</b>	Partnerships should be based on mutual trust and respect, recognising that good communication and relationships cannot be institutionalised nor addressed solely through formal contractual agreements (6 & 34).
<b>Time and negotiation</b>	Building and maintaining partnerships takes time and negotiation (42).
<b>Mutual goals</b>	Establish a common set of mutually agreed goals, which consolidates the partnership and supports an active role by all partners (47).
<b>Mutual benefit</b>	Ensure each partner sees tangible benefits from participation (41 & 47).
<b>Recognition of diversity</b>	Acknowledge that data and findings can be understood and interpreted in different ways, reflecting the diversity of stakeholders who have different structural positions, accountabilities and sensibilities. It requires acknowledgement and honouring of different partners' 'agendas' and recognition of goals and administrative differences (6, 15, 27, 34 & 39).
<b>Flexibility</b>	Partnerships may need to be flexible, particularly around proprietary rights, intellectual property and/or dissemination (34).
<b>Reflection and evaluation</b>	There needs to be ongoing analysis, reflection and evaluation of the partnership (15).



## 2.2 Theoretical perspectives

Collaborative research partnerships can be understood from a variety of theoretical perspectives. One study (49), demonstrated that the principles of social exchange theory can be applied to these partnerships as follows:

- Each participant in collaborative research will strive to minimise the costs of the partnership and to maximise personal rewards from the partnership.
- To sustain collaborative research, the net outcomes of the collaborative partnership must remain positive for each participant; that is, the participant's rewards must exceed his or her costs.
- To sustain collaborative research, the participants' net outcomes from the collaborative partnership must be reciprocal, the partnership must yield approximately equal net outcomes for the agency and research team, and the partnership must yield approximately equal net outcomes for agency administrator and other staff.
- To sustain collaborative research, each participant's net outcomes from the collaborative partnership must exceed the net outcomes that are available from alternative partnerships.

A case study of a partnership between researchers and decision-makers (24) proposed that researcher/decision maker collaborative activity can be best understood from a communicative perspective involving four elements:

- The relational stance that researchers and decision makers assume toward each other – eg. how the partners engage with each other as humans in their respective work, the ideal being treating each other as equals in the research program.
- The purpose at hand that situates occasions for developing and using knowledge – eg. researchers wanting to develop knowledge in a particular investigative area; decision makers wanting to access knowledge for use in particular types of decisions. The overlap constituted a significant core for collaborating in a mutually beneficial manner.
- Knowledge sharing practices for translating knowledge – eg. providing research and management articles, presenting research findings during a project, providing educational resources that assist change efforts in a targeted manner, and sharing research observations.
- Forums in which researchers and practitioners share and access knowledge – eg. regular one-to-one conversations in person, by phone or by email, or workshops, conferences or other forums that create access to a wider audience.

### Section 2

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*Collaborative research partnerships can be understood from a variety of theoretical perspectives.*



### Section 3

*Putting collaborative research partnerships into practice occurs at both the individual or organisational level, and results from paying deliberate attention to collaborative process.*

## 3 How are collaborative research partnerships put into practice and what factors are associated with success and effectiveness?

Setting the core values and theoretical perspectives described in Section 2 into practice is at the heart of the practical steps and process challenges associated with these partnerships. Effective collaborative practice occurs at both the individual or organisational level, and results from paying deliberate attention to collaborative process through selecting appropriate approaches as well as identifying and addressing any associated challenges.

The literature indicates that certain factors associated with success and effectiveness may be more relevant than others to particular types of partnerships. Good intentions are not sufficient to ensure a successful collaborative effort. Reciprocity and mutual benefit, deliberate and considered action to support collaboration effectiveness, and early detection and response to potential obstacles are also significant factors associated with success and effectiveness. In community settings, emphasis is placed on capacity enhancement for the community, as well as community based interest, commitment to collaboration, and action or changes as an outcome of research. System level initiatives can be valuable in contributing to close the gap between research and practice.

Practical approaches and factors associated with success and effectiveness related to three types of partnerships, researcher/practitioner, researcher/decision-maker, researcher/consumer and community are presented below.

### 3.1 Researcher/practitioner partnerships

#### 3.1.1 Putting individual level research/practitioner partnerships into practice

A case study of how to implement successful collaborative partnerships in research (37) identified the importance of exposing and addressing the following factors:

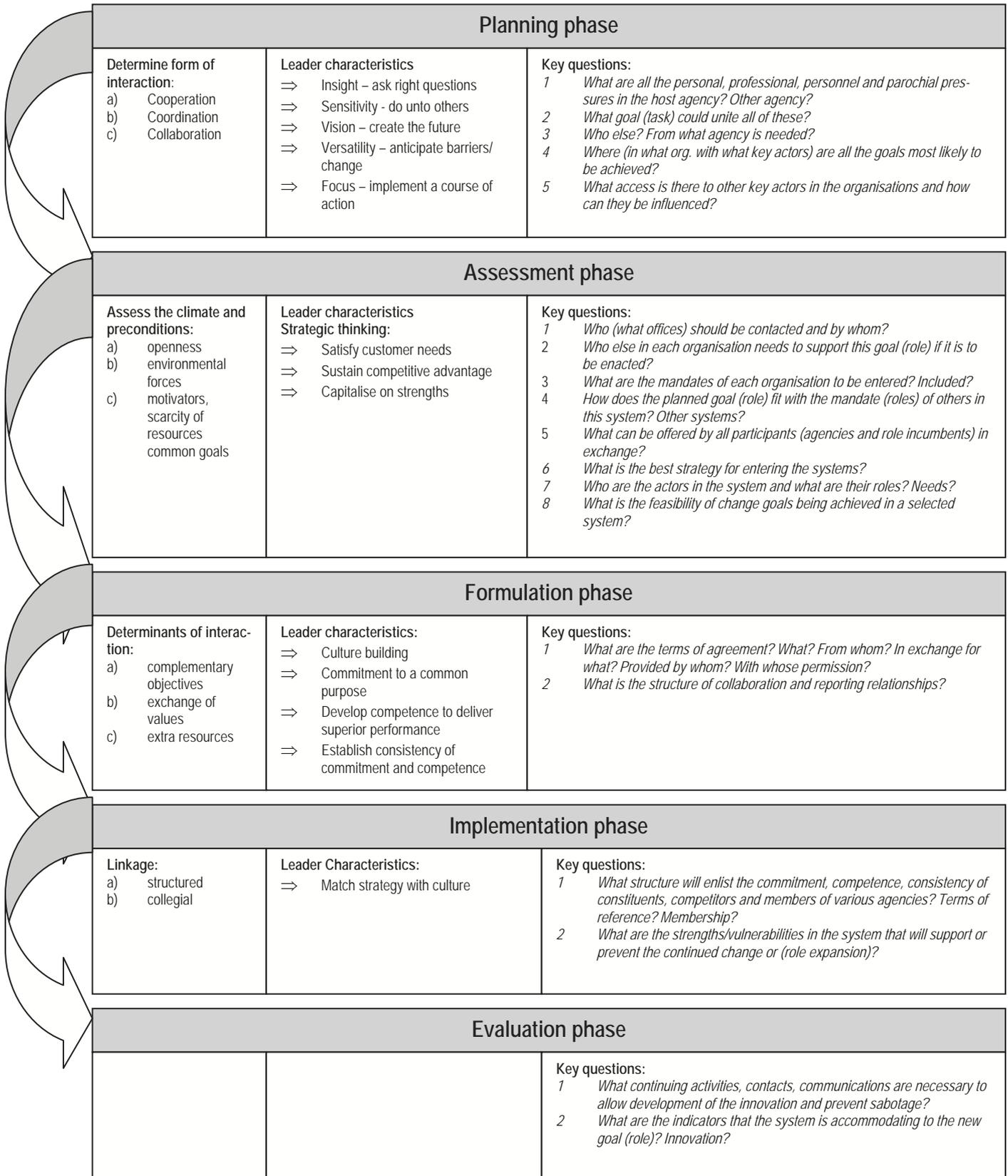
- Existing ideas and beliefs, eg. of elitism (in research settings) and organisational efficiency and effectiveness (in practice settings) (helped by participants confronting this challenge openly and mutually agreeing to persevere, making every effort to avoid typical research- and practice-based jargon).
- Mutual understandings and respect (helped by open exchange of questions, answers, ideas and opinions).
- Differing work orientations of partners (helped by negotiation to ensure all collaborators experienced a sense of achievement and participating organisations were obtaining a return on investment of resources).
- Sustaining interest (helped by regular meetings and feedback, celebration of successes).

The evaluation of the Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network (PDRN) (46) of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, found that at the individual level, practitioners were interested in research. However, the work of practitioners involved in the network was hindered by lack of clarity while the project evolved, lack of PDRN staff and Practitioner Leader time, lack of access to updated information about research projects, limited involvement of some academic researchers, and limited support for professional development in some locations.

Practical steps to guide collaborative practice are provided in the following model (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Practical steps used to guide a collaborative relationship (adapted from Browne, Arpin, Fitch & Corey, 1988, p. 72-73)





### Section 3

*Specific strategies are required for organisations to play a role in effectively connecting researchers and practitioners.*

#### *3.1.2 Putting system level researcher/practitioner partnerships into practice*

At the system level, the following steps to help partnerships close the gap between research and practice were outlined in the literature (35):

- Holding forums to encourage an exchange of ideas and dialogue amongst various stakeholders.
- Providing access to publications that discuss actions arising from collaborative efforts and options for the future.
- Developing initiatives to translate research into practice, eg. promoting participation by all parties in practice improvement collaboratives.

In nursing, a "Collaboratory" (an official linking mechanism) was established to institutionalise the relationship between practice (the College of Nursing) and education (a University based Department of Nursing) for the generation, dissemination and application of knowledge to improve nursing practice (16). A critique of this initiative concluded that it supported creative problem solving, incubation of ideas and innovation, and engagement of nursing staff, faculty and students in development of new products and services to enhance Nursing Education (16).

In general practice and primary health care the use of Research Networks as a form of system level researcher/practitioner partnerships, which could help in achieving a thriving research culture has been explored (25). A critique of these networks (25) identified they should:

- Have explicit aims
- Bring interested people together
- Have academic links
- Complement other research capacity building initiatives
- Be realistic about what they can achieve.

It also identified that it is essential to consider the optimal size of a research network, and to undertake ongoing evaluation and monitoring (25).

The PDRN of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy was established to create and support systematic partnerships between practitioners and university researchers to better connect research and practice (46). The evaluation of the PDRN concluded that specific strategies are required for organisations to play a role in effectively connecting researchers and practitioners. These included:

- Involving practitioners in research and its dissemination so they could become research consumers.
- Focusing on a limited number of research studies – preferably related to practitioner leader's interest or research – to increase ability to help colleagues understand research findings.
- Ensuring researcher and practitioners were committed to working collaboratively to strengthen connections between practice and research.
- Selecting the right practitioner leaders, preferably those with prior research experience or a leadership role within their state, as well as a stable job and a long-term commitment to the field. This was achieved through employing enthusiastic, dedicated PDRN Regional Coordinators.
- Holding face-to-face meetings between network members (researchers, practitioner leaders and coordinators).

The work and development of the PDRN were also supported by:

- Training in practitioner research
- The PDRNs internal listserv
- State support and funding
- Practitioners' hunger for information and interaction



- The involvement of National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy researchers

*3.1.3 Factors associated with success and effectiveness of researcher/practitioner partnerships (individual and system levels)*

A study into the conditions that support researcher/practitioner collaboration highlighted a number of factors that are central to success and effectiveness of these partnerships (40). These included:

- Developing ownership
- Managing the affective dimension (emotional labour)
- Managing time and workload
- Reconciling views of learning, teaching, research and reform
- Achieving professional development and educational change through partnerships

Factors associated with success and effectiveness at the individual partnership level, and the system level, are presented in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

**Table 3. Factors associated with success and effectiveness in researcher/practitioner partnerships (individual level)**

Factors	Article
Capacity to collaborate – including a vested interest in the issues, complementary skills and talents and compatibility of work styles and orientations.	37, 43, 49, 50
Good intentions	11
Respect	37
Deliberately developing relationships, including attending to the collaborative process	32, 37, 43
Fostering ownership amongst all collaborators – including having a clear set of agreed expectations about the benefits/outcomes, coupled with securing those benefits/outcomes.	4, 37, 41, 43, 49
Task orientation	4
Taking differences between partners into account - understanding the underlying shared norms and tacit knowledge that arise because partners represent different practice communities.	8
Supporting each other at all levels – including establishing equal partnerships, open exchange of questions, answers, and ideas and reciprocal effort and effective participation by all members	4, 35, 37, 42,
Addressing the politics of collaborative research as part of the research setting	9, 27
Appropriate dissemination of outcomes	4, 42
Policy commitment (time and resources) supporting collaborative activity	32

**Section 3**

*A number of interconnected factors are central to success and effectiveness in researcher/practitioner partnerships.*



### Section 3

Four factors that influence the role played by decision makers in research partnerships are: the stage of the research process, the time commitment required, alignment between decision maker expectations and program needs, and the existing relationship between researcher and decision-maker.

Table 4. Factors associated with success and effectiveness in researcher/practitioner partnerships (system level)

Factors	Article
Sufficient commonality of purpose or interest	30
Relationships for negotiation - including building closer links between researchers and professionals in practice settings, and forums for dialogue and exchange of information & views	7, 12, 30, 33
A culture that makes research central to practice and/or policy, including recognition of unexplored areas of successful practice	7, 12
A multilevel set of activities, which recognise that ultimately the narrowing of the gap will be accomplished by individual researchers working with individual practitioners and organisations.	41
Practitioners' capacity for action and engagement in collaboration	30
Researchers' capacity to effectively communicate and assist users	30

## 3.2 Researcher/decision-maker partnerships

### 3.2.1 Putting organisational level researcher/decision-maker partnerships into practice

Three models of decision-maker involvement in the research process were identified in a Canadian study (44). These models were:

- 1 *Formal supporter* - decision-makers were not actively involved in the research process.
- 2 *Responsive audience* - decision-makers were actively involved in the research process by responding to researcher approaches with ideas, information or tactical advice.
- 3 *Integral partner* - decision-makers were actively involved in the research process as a significant partner in helping to shape the research process.

This study found that involving decision-makers in the research process was perceived to be beneficial across all models of involvement. Four factors influencing the role played by decision makers were: the stage of the research process, the time commitment required, alignment between decision maker expectations and program needs, and the existing relationship between researcher and decision-maker (44). Practical recommendations for future efforts to involve decision-makers in the research process are listed in Box 1.

#### Box 1. Recommendations for facilitating decision-maker involvement in the research process (Adapted from Ross, Lavis, Rodriguez, Woodside & Denis, 2003, p. S2:26)

- Be strategic about establishing partnerships
  - pick and choose whether and how to involve decision-makers
  - find the right person to work with
  - define the goals for decision-maker involvement
- Be intentional about supporting partnerships
  - build in more allowance for involvement activities (time and money)
  - educate participants about their roles
- Be committed to building partnerships
  - build relationships over time
  - invest in relationships



Strategies and activities associated with building organisational level collaborative partnerships between researchers and decision-makers are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Putting researcher/decision-maker partnerships into practice

Practice issues	Strategies/activities	Article
Identification of joint activities and interactions	Scheduled regular meetings under a protected time arrangement, with attendance a priority for both partners	23
Building trust	Open discussion of cultural and procedural differences in an effort to educate each other, defining concepts and terms of engagement.	23
Needs assessment	Development of a joint working plan	23
Clarifying research questions and ensuring research timing fits the policy time-table	Contacting various stakeholders before bidding for funding, to clarify issues and rate the project's likely success. If necessary involving external stakeholders to provide contextual knowledge or methodological expertise	20
Promoting an understanding of research among policy makers	Development of relationships	20
Objectivity and boundary maintenance	Development of clear terms of reference for the advisory committee and a clear definition of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities	23
Disseminating research results appropriately and widely	Creation of a steering committee, involving professional bodies of key beneficiaries	20
	Holding a policy forum to consult with key stakeholders to: share and learn from the research and each others experience, identify what was needed at the local level, agree on desired policy principles and issues and agree on what core elements were required, regardless of approach used.	23
Sustainability (survival)	Strategically building a long term research agenda (which demonstrates commitment to an issue, allows for establishment of a track record and credibility) and focussing on applied research, which provides practical benefits from research efforts	20

Section 3

*Funders [decision-makers] can be more than beneficiaries and/or end-users of research findings. They can play a role in developing collaborative research partnerships.*

The evaluation of the Pew Partnership for Civic Change in America (17) also suggested that funders [decision-makers] can be more than beneficiaries and/or end-users of research findings. They can play a role in developing collaborative research partnerships (17). For example, participants in the evaluation suggested they could:

- Stimulate and support dialogue between stakeholders
- Build momentum and local support for research partnerships by identifying and supporting the early adopters who already exist
- Structure grants so that dollars encourage research partnerships
- Consider commissioning specific research about researcher [university] other stakeholder partnerships and disseminate information about best practice for communities
- Provide funds to ensure research processes do not erode existing resources (i.e. time, meeting spaces, office space, telephone expenses etc.)



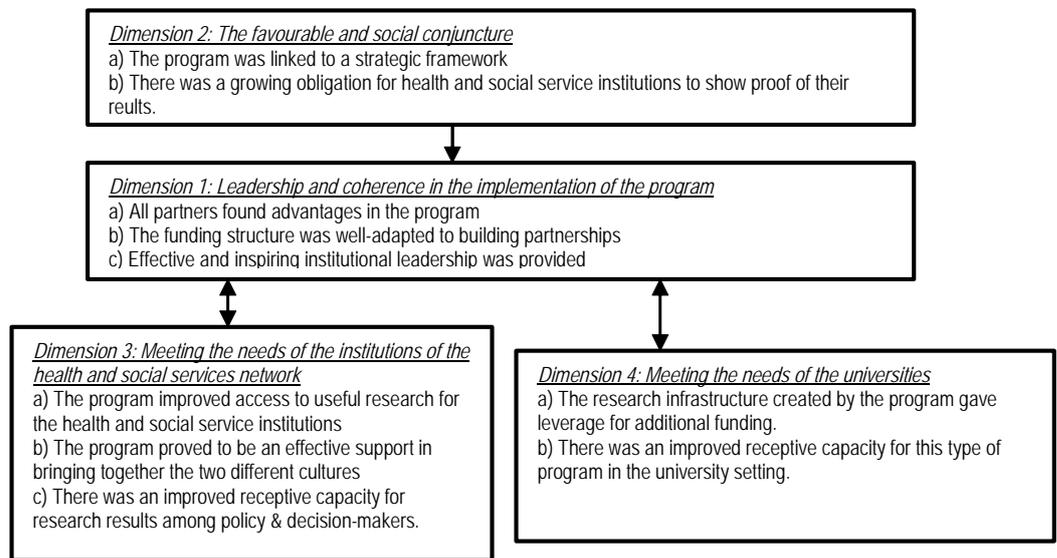
Section 3

Building collaborative research partnerships between two organisations requires an investment of time and resources on both sides.

3.2.2 Factors associated with success and effectiveness of researcher/decision-maker partnerships (individual and systems levels)

Successful promotion of decision-maker involvement in the research process should involve helping researchers and decision-makers identify strategic opportunities for decision-maker involvement, and support for the associated costs (44). The importance of users of research (in this case decision-makers) being able to articulate their needs clearly is also an important determinant of effectiveness (47). An original study (3) identified the following four dimensions related to the success of a research partnership program (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Dimensions and factors related to the success of a research partnership program (Adapted from Antil, Desrochers, Joubert & Bouchard, 2003, p. S2:42)



This study also identified key reasons for the successful implementation and growth of the collaborative research program. These are presented in Box 2 in rank order (1=highest importance; 10= lesser importance).

Figure 2 Dimensions and factors related to the success of a research partnership program (Adapted from Antil, Desrochers, Joubert & Bouchard, 2003, p. S2:42)

- 1 Everyone found advantages
- 2 Linking of the program to a strategic framework
- 3 Adapted funding
- 4 Infrastructure as leverage for funding
- 5 Institutional leadership
- 6 Obligation of results
- 7 Access to useful research
- 8 University receptive capacity
- 9 Effective support in bringing the two cultures closer together
- 10 Receptive capacity of policy and decision makers

Factors associated with the effectiveness of linking research and policy at the organisational level emerged from one case study that reflected on linkage and exchange at the organisational level, as a model of collaboration between research and practice (23).

- Building partnerships between two organisations requires an investment of time and resources on both sides.
- The aim is to create repeated opportunities to work together and to establish an environment of open communication, mutual respect and trust.



- Safeguards are needed in these types of interactions (relationships) to protect the integrity of each partners commitments, loyalties and responsibilities.
- Working in interactive ways presents challenges that must be recognised and managed in order to preserve the partnership and to maximise the gains in knowledge exchange.

### 3.3 Researcher/consumer and community partnerships

#### 3.3.1 Putting researcher/consumer and community partnerships into practice

Research in partnership with consumers and community requires ongoing attention to physical detail and to process, to a degree that is unusual compared to many other forms of research (1). The evaluation of the Pew Partnerships for Civic Change concluded that research partnerships can be forged in any community, but that realisation of their potential depended on establishing good connections between local organisations and educational institutions and visa versa (17). It concluded that three steps are necessary to support these partnerships:

- 1 *Access*: including deliberate and conscious efforts to address barriers between universities and the community
- 2 *Rewards*: including stipends to community partners for community research, acknowledging the value of community research within the higher education community, and providing resources to defray the costs of research for community based organisation
- 3 *Visibility*: that spotlights the potential of the existing successful models and potential of these partnerships and inspires stakeholders to launch their own partnerships

Activities identified in the literature as critical to effective practice and the establishment of partnerships in community settings are listed in Table 6.

**Table 6. Activities critical to effective collaboratory research practice in community settings**

Activities	Article
Consideration of multidisciplinary approaches	6, 38, 48
Sharing decision making	
Defining principles of collaboration	
Establishing research priorities	
Securing funding	
Gaining legitimate entry into a community (due to suspicion etc.)	
Defining issues of boundaries related to authority and power (protective of turf, and threatened by outside researchers)	
The use of evaluation strategies that are consistent with the overall approach taken in the academic/practice/community partnership	
Being aware of partnership maturation and associated transition periods	

Effective collaboration with minority communities, eg. communities of colour in America, requires a specific focus. In particular, a paradigm shift from traditional practices to an approach that involves the following five dimensions (31):

- Acknowledging community contributions
- Recruiting and training minority people to participate in research teams

### Section 3

*Collaborative research partnerships can be forged in any community, but realisation of their potential depends on establishing good connections between local organisations and educational institutions and visa versa.*



**Section 3**

*Interest and commitment from at least a core group of community members, together with broader community responsiveness to collaboration and a shared vision or willingness to develop it are particularly relevant to successful researcher/consumer and community partnerships.*

- Improving communication
- Sharing power
- Valuing and respecting diversity

In Indigenous contexts, guidelines/frameworks for negotiation about collaborative research partnerships between Indigenous communities and researchers should reflect the Indigenous holistic view of health and the relationship between physical health outcomes, the social determinants of health, and a respect for the integrity of each indigenous community (26).

**3.3.2 Factors associated with success and effectiveness of researcher/consumer and community partnerships**

Factors highlighted by the review that support successful research partnerships between researchers and consumers and community are presented in Table 7. Factors particularly relevant to consumer and community partners are presented in Table 8.

**Table 7. Factors that support successful partnerships between researchers and consumer and community partners**

Factor	Article
Adequate funding for research partnerships – including policies supporting planning grants, long range funding, initial and ongoing funding for infrastructure, funding directly to community based organisations as well as universities and funding for comprehensive approaches	1, 28
Anticipation and planning for potential obstacles, including early detection and response to unforeseen obstacles and giving sufficient thought to the costs and limitations of collaborative research	1, 29
Compatibility of collaborative research approach with subject/topic, skills, and professional style of researchers and its fit with organisational context – i.e. its concurrence with organisational goals, purpose and methods	1, 18, 48
Time to develop project and maintain involvement	1

**Table 8. Factors particularly relevant to consumer and community partners that support successful collaborative research partnerships**

Factors	Article
A culturally sensitive research approach	48
Interest and commitment from at least a core group of community members, together with broader community responsiveness to collaboration and a shared vision or willingness to develop it	1
Joint involvement throughout the project - including significant input	18, 48
Communication – including time and care in communicating thoroughly, with lack of communication seen as a major barrier to successful collaboration	18
Capacity enhancement - including development and training for community-based research partners, and provision of opportunities for participants from the broader community to learn and develop their own capacity	18, 28, 48
Benefits and reward structures for community based research partners	28
Commitment to action or change as an outcome of research	18



## 4 What methods and approaches are used to evaluate collaborative research partnerships?

### Section 4

This review found very little literature covering the evaluation of collaborative research partnerships that support the transfer of research into practice. The available literature did, however, raise several important points in relation to evaluating collaborative partnerships:

- That collaboration should be viewed as a process as well as an outcome. If the centre of attention of effectiveness is focussed solely on outcomes, the gains and benefits of the process that multiple partner groups go through may at best be underestimated, and at worst forfeited (2).
- It is important to increase the precision and context of appraising the effectiveness of collaboration, which it is argued, will reduce the nature of inconclusive evidence and improve the practice of partnerships, coalitions and joint working (2).
- It is important to be able to determine at an early stage whether partners are making the most of collaboration (52).

*Approaches to evaluation of collaborative research partnerships should view collaborative as a process as well as an outcome.*

### 4.1 Evaluating collaboration as a process or as an outcome

The evaluation of two large projects (17 & 46) highlighted how evaluation of collaborative research partnerships could be put into practice in the different dimensions of process or outcome. The Pew Partnership for Civic Change evaluated the collaborative research process for partners involved in its program (17). To do this, a longitudinal evaluation was implemented (17). Key program staff members were surveyed from each of the nineteen community based sites, along with their associated local research partners – by mail, phone, and over the internet – twice in 2000 and once in 2001 and 2002 (17). The focus of this evaluation was on:

- Their experiences of the program,
- Their reasons for deciding to participate in the program,
- The benefits and challenges all parties experienced from collaboration, and
- Any lessons and recommendations to guide future activity.

In contrast, the evaluation of the PDRN of the National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) in America focussed on the effectiveness of the network in connecting research and practice during its five-year existence (46). This evaluation focused on:

- The scope of the work undertaken during the PDRN, including the most important factors that supported and hindered the PDRN in its work.
- The impact of the PDRN on practitioners, programs, states, researchers and NCSALL – in terms of their practice and development.
- The lessons learnt about connecting research and practice that would inform a larger, national effort for the field as a whole.

It used a participatory evaluation design, involving everyone in the PDRN playing a role. Data were collected using mixed methods – ‘stories’ about the scope of activities, document analysis of practitioner leaders reports over time, and interviewing of all who participated in or were connected with PDRN to gather information about barriers and supports and how the PDRN affected them personally. Once these data were collected and organised a final national meeting was held to examine and analyse all the data and information (tying findings to each



## Section 4

*The challenges that confront evidence on collaboration relate to the diversity of perspectives, multiplicity of conceptual factors, and difficulty in measuring notions that can cause methodological difficulties.*

of the overall evaluation questions) and to reach conclusions and recommendations about the best ways to connect practice and research to guide NCSALL's future efforts.

### 4.2 Increasing the precision and context of appraising effectiveness of collaboration

The challenges that confront evidence on collaboration relate to the diversity of perspectives, multiplicity of conceptual factors, and difficulty in measuring notions that can cause methodological difficulties (2). An associated issue is the difficulty understanding what constitutes evidence in this area, in light of the fact that the randomised controlled trial, regarded as the gold standard in medical research, does not readily lend itself to testing the effectiveness of collaboration (2). This is important because evaluation, like all scientific enquiries, depends on the legitimacy of its procedures to justify its findings and produce credible conclusions (2). In light of increasing evidence that evaluation must take into account the context within which the policy or program is located, it was suggested that the notion of realistic evaluation, like that proposed by Pawson and Tilley (1997), is one approach that provides a useful perspective for measuring the effectiveness of collaboration (2).

Who should conduct evaluations of collaboration is another dilemma, i.e. what are the pros and cons of commissioning external versus internal evaluators? Regardless of the approach, sound evaluations are grounded in clear and appropriate values (principles, attributes or qualities held to be intrinsically good, desirable and important) and criteria (standards on which to base judgements) (2). Effective frameworks for evaluating and improving collaborative efforts therefore require the use of diverse and reliable research tools that incorporate process measures as well as intermediate and longer term outcome measures (2).

### 4.3 Making the most of collaboration – A tool to support effective collaboration

The premise behind the formation of partnerships is that they can enhance the capacity of people and organisations to achieve common health and health system goals (52). A national study designed to examine the relationship between 'partnership synergy' and six dimensions of partnership functioning (leadership, administration and management, partnership efficiency, non-financial resources, partner involvement challenges and community-related challenges), concluded that partnership synergy was most closely related to leadership effectiveness and partnership efficiency. Partnership synergy is defined as the extent that the perspectives, knowledge, and skills of diverse partners are combined in a way that enables the partnership to think in new and better ways about how it can achieve its goals, plan more comprehensive integrated programs and, strengthen its relationship to the broader community (52).

The results of this study guided the development of a web-based self-assessment tool for partnerships ([www.partnershiptool.net](http://www.partnershiptool.net)). The tool is designed to help partnerships determine how well their collaborative process is working and to identify problems that should be addressed and strengths that should be build upon to make the most of collaboration (52).



## Conclusions

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## *Conclusions*

Collaborative research partnerships are increasingly used to support transfer of research into practice or policy, at both the individual and system levels. There is a wealth of experience available to inform future practices in this area. However, there is a lack of formal evidence to guide evaluation activity that quantifies the impact of these partnerships on transfer of research into policy and practice.

When researchers and other stakeholders engage in collaborative research partnerships successfully, they derive benefits that fulfill their reasons for engagement, despite the particular costs and challenges associated with that engagement. Collaboration has the potential to offer valuable tangible and intangible outcomes. Core values associated with the approach include thoughtfulness, realism selectiveness, commitment, trust, time and negotiation, mutual goals and benefit, recognition of diversity, flexibility and reflection and evaluation. The quality of the relationship is central to collaborative practice.

Collaborative research partnerships can be put into practice at either the individual or system levels. Successful collaborative practice depends upon implementation of approaches that are congruent with achieving the core values described above. A variety of models and initiatives have been proposed to support both individual and system level engagement in collaborative research partnerships. Regardless of the collaborators involved, deliberate and considered action is necessary to support partnership success and effectiveness, including early detection and response to potential obstacles. Crucial to success and effectiveness are ensuring the compatibility of the approach with the subject/topic, skills and styles of the partners, as well as investing time and resources, offering opportunities for capacity enhancement for the community, and identifying and providing strategic opportunities for involvement.

Little systematic evaluation is currently being undertaken of collaborative research partnerships with a focus on transferring research into practice or policy. Evaluation needs to consider collaboration as both a process as well as an outcome. Focusing solely on outcomes can lead to the gains and benefits of the process for those involved being overlooked or underestimated. It is important to be able to determine whether partners are making the most of collaboration. Further work is also required to ensure the effect of context is addressed by these appraisals.



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## Useful websites

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### CANADIAN HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH FOUNDATION

<http://www.chsrf.org>

### CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES PARTNERSHIP SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL

<http://www.partnershiptool.net>

### EVALUATION VALUES AND CRITERIA CHECKLIST

[http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/values\\_criteria.pdf](http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/values_criteria.pdf)

### PEW PARTNERSHIP FOR CIVIC CHANGE, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA, USA

[www.pew-partnership.org](http://www.pew-partnership.org)

### PRIMARY HEALTH CARE RESEARCH AND INFORMATION SERVICE (PHC RIS)

[http://www.phcris.org/resources/research/research\\_frameset.html](http://www.phcris.org/resources/research/research_frameset.html)

See 'Articles of interest' – Smith et al. Pdf.



# Appendix 1 Search methods used and characteristics of articles featured in the review

*Appendix 1*

## A) Methods

The search for relevant literature relied on electronic journal databases (Medline, Cinahl, Eric, Sociological Abstracts, Austhealth and Current Contents), The Australian Journal of Primary Health (not indexed on these databases) the Australian General Practice Evaluation Program database (GPEP), and recommendations from colleagues in general practice and primary health care with knowledge of health services research. Search terms included key words defining the activity (collaborative research; research partnerships; collaboration; partnerships; teams; cooperation) and its focus (dissemination; research transfer; knowledge translation; research to practice; evidence-based practice; outcomes; implementation; uptake; usage and use of [research]). Literature was excluded if the focus was on collaborative partnerships between multi-disciplinary teams in research settings, or on collaborative partnerships outside the research setting, like those established between practitioners and other stakeholders to implement an intervention.

## B) Characteristics of the literature

The majority of articles included were published in peer-reviewed journals, however some additional articles/reports were included (17, 18, 21, 39, 40, 46) because of their relevance to the topic.

### B1) Research approach

Type	Article reference
Original study (n=8)	3, 14, 18, 21, 31, 40, 44, 52,
Review (n=3)	2, 28, 51
Case study (n=29)	1, 4, 7, 11, 12, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 32, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 53
Critique/essay (n=11)	5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 25, 30, 33, 35, 41
Evaluation (n=2)	17, 46



Appendix 1

B2) Partnerships featured

Definition	Field of practice/interest	Article reference
Researcher/practitioner	General practice, primary care, family medicine, nursing, Acute care (hospital) clinicians, home care and health promotion	2, 5, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 21, 25, 30, 32, 37, 42, 43, 46, 50, 52,
	Social work, substance abuse, speech pathology, social service/care	7, 12, 27, 35, 41, 49, 51, 53
Researcher/consumer or general community	-	1, 6, 10, 28, 29
Researcher/ Indigenous people or communities of colour	-	18, 19, 26, 31, 36, 38, 39, 48
Researcher/community based organisation (NGO)	-	17
Researcher/policy decision makers/manager	Public health policy, policy analysis, health system management	3, 13, 20, 22, 23, 24, 44, 47
Researcher/school staff/ students	-	33, 40
Researcher/industry personnel	Pharmacoeconomics, science	34, 45
Professional organisation/state based organisation	General Practice	4

B2) Partnerships featured

Country	Percentage
America	45%
Australia	23%
Canada	15%
Britain	15%
New Zealand	2%

# JournalWatch - Scope & Purpose

With the aim to inform primary health care policy and practice in Australia, this research bulletin summarises examples of key recent research findings identified by the author. Feedback and suggestions for *JournalWatch* are welcomed by the:

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