

Research-practice partnerships: A Primer

An education research-practice partnership is a collaborative partnership between researchers and education agencies with the primary mission of generating scientific research that identifies paths for continued improvements in education.

Who are the partners in a research-practice partnership?

- **The research partner is most often a research institution or a university with a deep bench of academic researchers and expertise in cleaning, managing, and storing large datasets.** The research partner conducts long-term research to inform policy and practice and may take on analysis requested by the education partner. In addition, it maintains a data center with readily useable information, publishes datasets for the general public, or could be a conduit for data for external researchers who want to do their own research.
- **The practice partner includes the education agencies: schools, school boards, or the state education agency.** Practice partners inform the research agenda, provide data on an ongoing basis to the research partner, and may determine the rules for third party data access. Each education agency determines the level and complexity of data they provide, but it is customary to share student- and school-level data.

What is necessary to make an education research-practice partnership work?

1. **Build trust between researchers and education agencies.** Without trust, education agencies will be skeptical of findings (and therefore less likely to incorporate them), and less willing to guide research in a direction that informs practice. Building trust means that education agencies and researchers co-define the research agenda and jointly develop data-sharing agreements.
2. **Create an advisory committee that guides the research agenda with a focus on scientific merit and the information schools need.** Advisors should provide a diverse set of perspectives, but they should not be politically appointed, or else the research will not be viewed as independent.
3. **Fund the research with a mix of private and federal grant sources, especially in the long run.** This ensures independent publication rights for researchers and eliminates any perception that research is politically motivated. State or local governments may provide funding as seed money to stand up the partnership and for the initial investment in creating a data warehouse.
4. **Focus on research, not audits or oversight.** Audits are intended to uncover internal control weaknesses, whereas research is intended to provide information schools need. If these two functions are combined, schools will be reluctant to participate in research wrapped up as audit and oversight.

What are the characteristics of other research-practice partnerships?

Characteristic	D.C. (proposed)	Massa- chusetts	Chicago	New Orleans	New York City
Are some datasets made available to the general public?	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Can independent researchers (non-affiliated) access the data?	No	Yes	No	No	No
Does the data sharing agreement require individual project approval?	No*	Yes	No	No	No
Does the research partner conduct audits or oversight?	Yes	No	No	No	No
Do elected representatives directly shape the research agenda?	Yes	No	No	No	No
Does funding come from the city's budget?	Yes	No	No	No	No
Is the research partner housed by a research institution or a university?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Are research institutions or universities represented on the steering committee?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Mandated data sharing with Office of the Auditor

In addition, models like the North Carolina Education Research Data Center primarily focus on creating a data warehouse and making it available to requestors who meet established guidelines (instead of conducting research).