Towards Research-Informed Practice and Practice-Informed Research: Lessons from Wisconsin

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Child Care and Early Education Policy Research Consortium
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Building Blocks for Academic/Agency Partnerships

• Partnerships require infrastructure and resources to support sustained engagement
• With engagement, partnerships can develop trust, and a **shared understanding** of…:
  – Useful and interesting questions
  – Appropriate methods
  – Satisfactory answers

  ...and how these vary across different partners
Wisconsin Example:
UW IRP and Wisconsin Human Services Agencies

• **IRP History**: Created in 1966 during the War on Poverty to support basic research, training, and evaluation of anti-poverty policy

• **IRP Funding**: IRP core infrastructure funded by U.S. DHHS and the UW; research projects funded by grants and contracts from foundations and state and federal agencies

• **Resources**:
  – Researchers: IRP staff supported through specific project funding; IRP Faculty Affiliate supported through specific projects and as part of their faculty appointment
  – IRP Research support staff: includes specialize programmers with expertise in Wisconsin administrative data
  – Data Core: Integrated administrative data system, evolved from a series of large-scale evaluation projects conducted by IRP for the State of Wisconsin; designed to maximize the utility of administrative data for research and program evaluation
Logic of Collaboration

Collaboration Supports Policy Development and Academic Research

Wisconsin State Agencies
- Policy issues
- Innovative programs
- Real-world experience
- Data
- Funding

IRP University of Wisconsin-Madison
- University resources
- Technical expertise
- Long time horizon
- Funding
To create the data system:

- State of Wisconsin agencies (DCF, DWD, DOC, DPI, DOR, and others) provide data
- IRP provides specialized programming staff, technical support staff, specialized hardware and software
- Funding is provided by UW, grants and contracts from federal sources (often in response to joint UW/Agency proposals), state grants and contracts, and foundations
Administrative Data Infrastructure: Partnership Product and Input (2)

To identify the questions of interest:

• IRP staff and faculty affiliates meet regularly with agency leadership and staff
• Sustained research agreements for specific programs (e.g. Child support, child welfare)
• Regular briefings and opportunities to check in
• Contracts for specific programs and projects (e.g. Educational disparities, CSPED evaluation)
• Quarterly “Learning Exchange”
• Ad-Hoc TA provided by IRP staff and faculty (some state funded, some not)
• Ad-Hoc consultation provided by state agency leadership and staff
The IRP Data Core requires and sustains the partnership:

• Provides a unique resource for agencies that cannot otherwise link and analyze across systems: sustains state support of Data Core data access and funding

• Provides a unique data resource for research that cannot otherwise be completed: sustains commitment and interest of academic researchers

_Yours, mine, and (increasingly) ours._
Institutional Constraints Shape the Partnership

• **Example 1:** Data may only be used to inform policy and program administration. State agencies are not permitted to provide data access for research not relevant to the agency’s mission, so researchers need to understand and explain utility.

• **Example 2:** Research results must be made public. IRP faculty and staff are not permitted to submit research for clearance by funders, so agencies must value and accept independence.
Examples of Collaborative Projects

- Educational outcomes for children in foster care
  - Seed: Agency request for TA

- Child Welfare/Child Support Collaboration
  - Seed: Staff question (during WTG Fellowship, following Federal support for data construction)

- National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED)
  - Seed: Federal RFA

_Each has (or is expected to) support policy innovation and academic research products._
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