Researchers and practitioners in the justice field have a vested interest in ensuring that research results have an impact on program and policy decisions. The question is how best to make this happen. Criminal Justice Journalists and the Justice Research and Statistics Association organized a special program devoted to this topic at the 2011 American Society of Criminology conference held in Washington, DC, November 16-19. The four panel sessions in this program, "Bridging the Gap between Research and Practice," ran consecutively on Friday, November 18, from 9:30 a.m. - 3:20 p.m.

The panels focused on current issues in four different areas: policing, victimization, corrections, and juvenile justice. Two researchers and two practitioners on each panel engaged in a facilitated discussion that focused on what we know from the research and what we need to know for effective practice. Time was set aside for dialogue between panelists and the audience.

**Policing**

John Firman of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) moderated the session on policing. Panelists included Chief Earl Cook, Alexandria, VA; Chief Thomas Manger, Montgomery County, MD; John Eck, University of Cincinnati; and Lorie Fridell, University of South Florida. The discussion explored both the positive and problematic aspects of collaboration between researchers and practitioners, and panelists identified factors that helped or hindered successful outcomes.

Partnerships and Communication. Chiefs Manger and Cook agreed that practitioners benefit from researchers’ input, but that communication is essential to ensure that the input is relevant to what the police are doing. “In the beginning,” Chief Manger said, “partnerships between police departments and academics were awkward. Police departments just wanted approval for projects, and academics just wanted ‘to help.’ Both sides are much smarter now — we have a better educated police force—and the will to work together is there, which wasn’t always true earlier.” Mr. Firman reinforced the importance of academics and practitioners working together effectively to translate research into policy, and cited the IACP Research Advisory Committee as an example.
Chief Cook said that universities in his community reach out to police departments and work well with them. In many cases his department wouldn’t have started a program without the researchers. He identified another type of communication problem he faces: Police leadership is interested in using research for guidance, but this interest is not being effectively shared within the entire force. “We need translation of research into ‘police speak,’” he said, “because line officers don’t understand what to do.”

Considering partnerships and communication from the academic perspective, John Eck said that the kinds of things academics are interested in are not in sync with the things police are interested in. In addition, researchers take a long time to think about problems—they are supposed to—while police have questions that have to be answered now. And, researchers have to learn how to “write for cops” and in general how to communicate better: “Most academics don’t even write well for academics,” he said. “What is needed is writing in ‘plain English.’”

Lorie Fridell approached research/practitioner partnerships as a three-step process: relevant, high quality research is done; some portion of this research gets translated for and assimilated by police departments; and some of that research is implemented by the police departments. She believes police departments have done the best job of working with researchers in part because of help from agencies such as the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), IACP, and the National Institute of Justice.

**Causes of the Gap: Lack of Money.** Lack of adequate funding was identified as a perennial problem that has a huge impact on the ability to forge researcher/practitioner partnerships and carry out research-based programs. Chief Manager said he has fewer officers than four years ago, that he is cutting essential services, and that this absolutely affects the department’s ability to implement research. Chief Cook agreed, saying that lack of money can slow implementation of programs, which “slide back” if they are not actively being pursued.

**Causes of the Gap: Lack of Understanding and Communication.** Some police departments complain that research is being forced on them, Dr. Fridell said, and that the research is not for them. And academics too often don’t work hard enough with police, she added, to implement the research. Chief Manager also pointed to the importance of trust on the part of police that they won’t be embarrassed by the findings of research.

**Causes of the Gap: Lack of Support.** Universities don’t support dissemination or implementation of research, and academics also don’t get credit for writing in non-refereed publications such as Police Chief.

**Solutions.** Academics should “stay the course,” Chief Cook suggested, and reach out to police departments to offer help. In turn, police departments should work harder to make a collaboration work. Dr. Fridell said that researchers need more data from police departments, and need help to translate research into language police can understand, as suggested by Dr. Eck. In addition, a culture change is needed in police departments so police want to see the research.

In a dialogue with the audience, the point was made that politicians often use the fact that crime is down to justify funding in police budgets, and that crime analyst positions are often the first to go because the research function is undervalued.
Victimization
Jack McDevitt of Northeastern University moderated the second panel, which focused on victimization. Panelists included researchers Rob Davis, RAND Corporation, and Janet Lauritsen, University of Missouri at St. Louis, and practitioners Susan Howley, National Center for Victims of Crime, and Rob (Roberta) Valente, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

Partnerships and Communication. Panelists echoed their colleagues on the policing panel regarding the importance of communication, and offered examples of how such collaboration could benefit both researchers and practitioners. Janet Lauritsen talked about the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), and said practitioners could provide valuable input—for example, which indicators could give better estimates of crime and if regional or other subnational estimates could be more helpful to practitioners. Rob Davis gave some background on the creation of the NCVS in 1972, which provided important data on victims that had not be available before. He also spoke about his time working as a researcher for a social services agency in New York, where he got to see research put into practice with good effect. Research on the effects of crime on victims—i.e., the linkages between the impact of crime and the effects of trauma—has had an impact in the role of victims in court as well as how certain types of victims are dealt with by law enforcement. Research has also had an impact on criminal justice systems through victims' rights, and has shifted focus to areas such as domestic violence and trafficking. Consequently, there is now less research on homicide and robbery victims.

Roberta Valente called for better “translation” of research language into practice language. She spoke about one successful example—a researcher found 15 domestic violence risk factors, and asked practitioners to turn this into a survey or checklist that could be used in the field. This checklist is now routinely used in Maryland and has cut victimization dramatically. Susan Howley commented that many practitioners have no access to journals and little access to research in the field. They know too little about what is going on in the academic research world and have no idea about the impact of the services they provide. They believe that there is very little research on victims, particularly in the areas of trafficking, electronic fraud, and how to improve the capacity of victim service agencies. Practitioners used to dislike spending money on research, but Congress is now asking for data so there is more support for research among those working in the field.

What Works? Practitioners want academics to tell them “what works,” Dr. McDevitt suggested, and asked the panelists for their comments. Dr. Lauritsen said that one problem is that the “what works” literature is spread over many journals and is hard for practitioners to get a handle on. Summaries of research are needed to help ease this problem. Mr. Davis said a lot of good research was done in the 1970s and 1980s, but money is needed to support new work, including perhaps a research database or government project to synthesize research findings. Ms. Howley said researchers need to talk to practitioners to know what they need to study. Sometimes they look at the wrong thing.

Problems and Some Solutions. Questions from the audience touched upon some areas that still need to be addressed, and elicited some recommendations from the panelists and other audience members.
- Consistent definitions or programs and program outcomes, among other issues, would make it easier for researchers to gather and work with information from providers.
- People trained as “technical assistants” could visit programs, evaluate specific programs, and write reports about what can be learned from best practices and about other lessons learned. How can these reports be used to inform the research and other programs?
• The politics of victimization funding too often make practitioners have to claim their program works, but for researchers this can make it tough to get real answers. "Is the field ready to hear what does not work?" Dr. McDevitt asked.
• Some method for synthesizing the results of research and distributing these results to practitioners in language that makes sense to them is needed.

Corrections
Faye Taxman, George Mason University, moderated the session focusing on corrections. The panelists were Harold Clarke, Commissioner of Corrections, Commonwealth of Virginia; Edward Latessa, University of Cincinnati; Doris MacKenzie, Pennsylvania State University; and Thomas Williams, DC Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency.

Partnerships. After a brief introduction by Faye Taxman, Harold Clarke began the session by talking about researcher/practitioner partnerships, and asked researchers to create long-term relationships with practitioners, acting as a mentor in helping them understand the ways in which research can inform their work.

Ed Latessa said he started as a researcher 20 years ago and gave workshops to practitioners about how to use research. There wasn’t a model then that would translate knowledge into the field well. Now some practitioners use coaches, they audi-tape sessions, and researchers go back into the field and help. He said that this is partly a problem of the discipline; for example, in medicine and other fields, students are placed in the field as part of their study, but not in criminology. Researchers have to come into an agency to understand it and share what they know.

One of the problems in forming partnerships, Doris MacKenzie said, is that the structure of the university prevents academics from reaching out to the community. They are not rewarded in the academic world for doing that, and graduate students are often discouraged from collecting original data. Another problem for long-term relationships is lack of funding, she added. Her boot camp research got started because someone came to her for help, then eventually asked her to evaluate it.

Thomas Williams said he had worked with Dr. MacKenzie on programs, and spoke about some of the factors that make a collaboration work well. Researchers should understand the program when they come in. Communication is important, and regular meetings should be scheduled. He thinks there should be some sort of peer review between academics to make sure academic methodology is proper. He also encouraged researchers to be aware of the politics often attached to programs.

Understanding the Research Process. Dr. Taxman asked the practitioners to comment on whether practitioners want to understand the research process. Mr. Williams said they want to make sure the methodology is good, particularly since they are making operational decisions based on the research. He said that one issue is that practitioners want help, but do not always know what questions to ask. He requests a written document to make sure everyone is on the same page. Mr. Williams also noted the importance of practitioners understanding the preliminary findings, and said that academics should keep formulas and fancy statistics out of the narrative.

Appreciation for the Research Process. Dr. Taxman next asked the academics about what they could do to facilitate the importance of academics doing that kind of work. Dr. MacKenzie offered the example of a partnership grant in Pennsylvania funded by the National Institute of Justice. A faculty member
works part time at the Department of Corrections. The academic gets to know the program and also has
the benefit of being able to use the data in his/her research. Dr. Latessa pointed out that fields such as
engineering or medicine routinely do this type of work. Mr. Williams said he is always looking for an
academic to come in and work in his program.

Use of Research. One questioner from the audience asked whether practitioners use research on a day-
to-day basis. Both practitioners said they do not, though one said he has interns or others read research
and if something looks relevant they consider it.

Juvenile Justice
Stan Orchowsky, JRSA’s Research Director, moderated the fourth panel, which focused on
researcher/practitioner partnerships in juvenile justice areas. Panelists were Tammy Brown, Maryland
Department of Juvenile Services; Jeffrey Butts, John Jay College of Criminal Justice;
Nancy Gannon Hornberger, Coalition for Juvenile Justice; and Mark Lipsey, Vanderbilt University.

Many of the themes discussed earlier in the day were touched on by these panelists as well: the need for
strong partnerships between researchers and practitioner, the need for researchers to talk to practitioners
in language they can understand, the lack of guidance practitioners feel and their wish for evidence-
based programs they can follow. One of the practitioners commented that they are like marathon
runners, and researchers are the ones on the sidelines holding water bottles. The runners are exhausted
and need help, she said.

Jeffrey Butts commented that the bridge between researchers and practitioners has to allow movement
both ways. Those on both sides of the bridge know a lot, but they know different things. He noted that
there is a difference between academic researchers and "professional" researchers—i.e., those who work
in agencies and organizations. "Rigor" does not equal useful, suggesting that academic researchers do
not always understand how to work with practitioners in a way that contributes to research findings
being used.

Mark Lipsey gave an overview of research on juveniles based on a meta-analysis of 600 research
projects. He observed that we have drifted into a pattern where evidence-based practice means name-
brand programs. His findings indicate that some no-name programs can be just as good. The question is
how to transmit that knowledge to practitioners—there are research tools and instruments that can be
used in practice.

Tammy Brown said that Maryland has had a drop in juvenile homicides, but they don't know whether it
is attributable to programs or not. She added that practitioners need to know what data they need to
keep so evaluations can be done.

Nancy Gannon Hornberger spoke as a juvenile justice reform advocate and highlighted that advocates
and the Coalition for Juvenile Justice use science to change policy and practice—e.g., the research on
brain maturation supported the abolition of the juvenile death penalty by the U.S. Supreme Court. She
said that it is important for researchers to communicate what they know to advocacy organizations; the
problem is that shared language and definitions are needed to understand each other. She also lamented
the lack of implementation research, and noted that randomized control trials, the gold standard for
researchers, may be "scary" and costly for practitioners. Ms. Gannon Hornberger said there is a need to
know more about the impact of incarceration and detention on youth, families, and communities— in
human and economic terms. She also called for more research on what alternatives to detention work best for kids, and the value of family involvement.

**Communication and Collaboration**

Among the closing remarks, Dr. Lipsey commented that communication between researchers and practitioners is dependent on a relationship; he cited the example of teaching hospitals as a successful model for academics and agencies to follow.