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# Meeting Report on Stimulating the Adoption of National Institute of Justice Research Results

December 11–12, 2008  
Washington, DC

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# **Stimulating the Adoption of National Institute of Justice Research Results**

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## **Meeting Purpose**

The meeting was convened by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to gain input from various experts and stakeholders on actions that NIJ can take to increase the use of NIJ research results.

## **Participants**

Participants included researchers in the area of criminal justice and representatives from various segments of the criminal justice community (e.g., law enforcement, adjudication, corrections, victims of crime) and NIJ staff.

## **Major Observations**

In addition to focusing on the issues of dissemination and implementation, participants discussed the general role of NIJ in supporting the criminal justice community. In discussing the role of NIJ, participants that NIJ should focus in the following areas:

- Analyze how the research it has supported has impacted crime (e.g., what has been effective, what has not worked). NIJ has not been effective in telling these stories.
- Conduct a survey on the informational needs of practitioners (e.g., what information is necessary to help practitioners increase their effectiveness).
- Compile information and make it available to the criminal justice community, including NIJ-supported as well as nonsupported research and publications in peer-reviewed journals.
- Continue to support basic research.

During the discussion, several themes relating to the dissemination and implementation of research results emerged. These include the following:

- Multiple audiences exist for NIJ research results.
- Information must be tailored to specific audiences.
- Collaboration is key to effective research, dissemination and implementation.
- Practitioners can learn from results of both successful and unsuccessful research efforts.

Participants also noted that other federal agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), are working to identify effective dissemination and implementation models. These efforts can inform NIJ's work in this area.

## **Summary Format**

This summary covers the many issues discussed by participants, including the following:

- Review of current NIJ activities.
- Examples of the effective use of research results.
- Characteristics of specific target audiences.
- Considerations in the dissemination and implementation of research results.
- Recommendations by participants (short- and long-term).
- Background information (summaries of presentations).

## **Review of Current NIJ Activities: Dissemination Strategies and Related Office Functions**

### ***Office of Research and Evaluation***

The Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) comprises three Divisions: Violence and Victimization Research, Crime Control and Prevention Research, and Justice Systems Research. In addition to the work within these three Divisions, NIJ supports work that integrates technology and social science (e.g., DNA in property crimes, eyewitness identification, and crime mapping). All grantees must have dissemination plans in place to promote their research results.

ORE supports multiple dissemination vehicles to promote the results of NIJ-supported research. These include the following:

- A website, with 22 topic pages.
- Publications in scholarly journals. Between 2001 and 2008, 432 articles on NIJ-supported research were published.

ORE-supported research has made an impact in the field of criminal justice. Examples include the use of mental health screens in corrections intake, rape prevention through bystander education, and mandatory arrest for domestic violence. The example of mandatory arrest for domestic violence provides insights into the implementation process. The release of the research results dovetailed with other social trends (e.g., the feminist movement, and more punitive prison sentences). The results received coverage in the mainstream media, including the *New York Times*, and the practices were implemented in various communities. Additional research is still needed to replicate the results in other settings and assess the impact of domestic violence in certain populations. For example, subsequent research has indicated that arrest is effective in some populations but is not as effective in others (e.g., unemployed individuals).

### ***Office of Science and Technology***

The Office of Science and Technology (OST) is made up of three divisions:

- Information and Sensor Technologies.
- Investigative and Forensic Sciences.
- Operational Technologies.

OST is the lead federal agency in the area of criminal justice technology and is charged with:

- Conducting research, development, testing and evaluation.
- Establishing advisory groups to assess criminal justice technology needs.
- Developing performance standards.
- Conducting a compliance testing program.
- Providing technology-related assistance to practitioners.
- Assessing the needs of practitioners by convening technology working groups (TWGs) composed of practitioners with expertise in particular technologies.

Successful program planning requires:

- Effective needs assessment.
- Development of technology program plans based on needs.
- Identification of solutions and creation of tools, if necessary.
- Testing of both operational requirements and field testing.
- Organizational capacity building and outreach.

In the areas of science and technology, innovations often spread by word-of-mouth — people are drawn to new technology. Once it starts spreading, it rarely regresses. An example of this is the use of Tasers, which were rapidly put into use in many communities, even though a complete understanding of their use in various settings and circumstances was lacking.

Conversely, knowledge about the effectiveness of technology is harder to disseminate, so multiple strategies are necessary. NIJ currently uses several successful mechanisms to deliver various kinds of objective information about technology-based interventions, including the following:

**Standards.** NIJ's Body Armor Standards program effectively disseminates the latest research knowledge into the production of all law enforcement (LE) body armor in the U.S. through the body armor standard, which is the standard is universally used in LE. Standards development is a lengthy and difficult process and requires cooperation of the affected groups. Practitioner acceptance is critical to the successful application of standards.

**Technology assistance.** NIJ's National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) provides direct assistance to LE practitioners. This is a very effective but expensive method of dissemination. NIJ's efforts have always been a small fraction of what would be needed nationwide, but the system has been successful in demonstrating new technologies (e.g., Segway). In practice, these efforts have reflected the "ideal" method of demonstration, and rigorous evaluation with output and outcome measures. NIJ's new Centers of Excellence are designed to overcome this problem.

**Conferences of technical professionals.** These include an alphabet soup of specialized practitioner organizations (e.g., LEIM, NBSCAB, AAFS, IAI, IACP, and MCC) and is a very effective mechanism and is extremely cost-effective. NIJ's convening authority is useful: NIJ conferences on Critical Incidents, Applied Technologies, Trace Evidence, Postconviction, and DNA Laboratory Grantees are all cross-cutting efforts in this area. The growth of specialized criminal justice fields of practice makes this a good approach.

**Training programs.** NIJ's training programs usually follow a train-the-trainer model. Crime mapping is a successful paradigm for this, and NIJ's forensic efforts include a very comprehensive training program, to the practitioner level. OST maintains working relationships to foster this: the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) state training academies, FBI National Academy Associates, the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Community Oriented Policing System (BJA and COPS), and so on. In general, it is extraordinarily difficult to change existing training programs to include evidence-based knowledge and new tools.

Of course, traditional forms of dissemination are also used, including publications and websites, but these passive methods have limited impact in the short term.

### ***Communications Division***

The Communications Division supports NIJ's Offices in the dissemination of research results through a variety of vehicles including websites, print publications, one-page fact sheets, training tools and CD-ROMs, conferences, webcasts, and face-to-face trainings for practitioners.

Communications staff work with ORE and OST staff to identify research results and support "pitches" to the NIJ Editorial Board that include a discussion of the following topics:

- Relevance of the results, identifying their importance and determining whether the research methodology was sufficiently rigorous (i.e., an internal peer review).
- Target audience(s) and primary message(s).
- Communications vehicles.

On the basis of the Editorial Board's recommendations, the Communications Division adds additional recommendations — particularly concerning vehicles targeted to specific audiences — and garners the Director's approval to proceed.

An example of this process is the Communications Division's work to launch two new Missing Persons databases, which will be of interest to both the general public and the LE community. To reach the primary audience of coroners and medical examiners, research articles in various trade publications and journals will be used. To reach the general public, Communications works with the Office of Justice Program's (OJP) Office of Communications to promote research and education in the mainstream media (through press releases and direct "pitches"), including major newspapers and television shows such as "Oprah."

Another strategy used by the Communications Division is adapting previously packaged information for other audiences. For example, a report developed after September 11, 2001, on degraded and small amounts of remains had a relatively small audience. To expand the reach of information in the report, staff created additional tools, such as forms and checklists, that have been used in subsequent disasters, such as the tsunami that occurred several years later.

### **Examples of Effective Use of Research Results in Practice**

Participants were asked to provide specific examples of research results being successfully applied to practice. A selection of the examples provided is listed below.

### ***Direct Supervision in Probation and Parole***

To support the use of direct supervision in probation and parole, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has developed a model that focuses on implementation. Staff and leadership trainings and organizational development help agencies to create the necessary systems to support the practical implementation of a new program. A key aspect in the training is the use of specific instruments. Ongoing support is necessary to institutionalize the policy and practice changes.

### ***Crime Hot Spots***

Research shows that crime concentrates in small geographic areas, and many agencies have adopted practices in response to these findings.

### ***Eyewitness Identification: Photographic Line-ups***

Research explored the simultaneous presentation of photos versus the sequential presentation of photos. The results indicated that sequential presentation is more effective. Most law enforcement officers have been trained to do simultaneous presentations of photos. Implementing the changes requires agencies to modify their software, purchase more printers, and train officers and staff.

### ***Crisis Response***

There are some circumstances in which providers will be in desperate need of information (e.g., a hostage situation in a correctional facility). In a crisis situation, practitioners will look to literature (and other resources) that address the issue at hand. Behavior of practitioners in a crisis differs greatly from situations that allow for the thoughtful implementation of a practice.

### ***Prosecution of Sexual Assault With Voluntary Intoxication of the Victim***

The research results in this area required a paradigm shift on the part of the criminal justice community. Previously, the focus was on the “date rape” drug, gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB). Research indicates that alcohol played a far more significant role in assaults. Once this was understood in the criminal justice community, tools were developed to address the role of alcohol in sexual assaults.

### ***Decreasing Technical Probation Violations***

In Connecticut, when a program designed to decrease technical violations was shown to be effective, the judicial branch asked the State legislature to implement the program across the State. The role of the judicial branch in calling for the changes was a significant motivator.

### ***Drug Courts***

An initial study in this area was covered in the *New York Times*. The significance of the findings resonated with the Chief Judge of New York State, who promoted the findings. This resulted in uptake by other criminal justice officials and organizations.

### **Lessons Learned From Examples:**

- Institutionalization of new practices takes significant and ongoing support.
- Practitioners need a sufficient understanding of the evidence-based practice to be implemented, so they can educate their fellow practitioners about the practice.
- Influential peers can play a significant role in uptake. They should be targeted and cultivated for their value as communicators.
- The target audience must be receptive to change.

### **Target Audiences: Issues That Impact the Intake of Information**

Participants identified some characteristics of audiences targeted by NIJ.

#### ***Law Enforcement/Police***

- Decision-makers are often risk averse (i.e., reluctant to make decisions that may have a negative impact).
- Implementation of new practices can have a ripple effect across an agency. New practices may require change at multiple levels, which may be met with resistance.
- Professional training (for both management and officers) does not teach skills in analysis and the application of research results, so this type of training is necessary.

#### ***Prosecutors***

- Prosecutors fear making a mistake that will result in a miscarriage of justice or in the community being less safe.
- To implement new practices, leadership must be open to incorporating research results.
- There is limited time to explore new practices and research results.
- Prosecutors do not understand the “language of researchers.” Research results must be distilled into a language that is easy to understand, and their relevance must be explained.
- Negative experiences in the past have resulted in a mistrust of the research community.
- A more nuanced way to measure success (e.g., something other than convictions) is required.
- Materials targeting prosecutors must reflect an understanding of law and the challenges facing prosecutors (the work culture).

#### ***Judges***

- Judges do not receive specific training on how to be judges — they learn on the job.
- Judges are generalists — they may have some types of cases only once in their careers or never at all.

- Judges are often receptive to small changes that can be replicated across a system but are sensitive to the cost of implementing new practices.
- Judges can be powerful leaders in the criminal justice community when the time comes to make changes.
- Results cannot always be generalized — what works in one courtroom will not necessarily work in another.

### **Corrections**

- The current fiscal crisis will result in funding cuts and the adoption of new strategies in the interest of cost-effectiveness, which presents an opportunity for the promotion of evidence-based practices.
- The reasons for adopting a practice (e.g., that it will result in cost savings but not necessarily better outcomes) must be clearly conveyed.
- Researchers must understand the realities of conducting research in correctional facilities (e.g., security concerns) and observe the rules of each facility.

#### **Demystifying the Research Process**

*Using Evidence: How Research Can Inform Public Services*, by Sandra M. Nutley, Isabel Walter and Huw T.O. Davies, was recommended as a valuable tool in helping various audiences (e.g., researchers, funders, practitioners and policymakers) to assess the impact of research.

### **Disseminating and Implementing NIJ Research Results**

Participants provided suggestions on how NIJ can improve efforts to disseminate and implement its research results. Their suggestions are grouped by the following topic areas:

#### ***Tailoring Messages to Multiple Audiences***

- There are multiple audiences for NIJ research results, including researchers, practitioners and policymakers.
- Messages, language and information must be tailored to specific audiences (e.g., messages targeting prosecutors should reflect an understanding of legal education).
- Researchers are often not the best people to communicate results. Someone must translate the findings into a language understandable to the target audience.
- Specific audiences should be asked about what types of information they need (e.g., policymakers are interested in public safety and cost savings).

#### ***Collaborating***

- NIJ should help other organizations disseminate their research results (both research and policy related).
- A constituency group that supports an evidence-based practice can aid in the dissemination and implementation process.

- Dialogue should be promoted. Practitioners should not just passively receive the information — they can contribute to the discussion.
- Practitioners can partner with others (e.g., academics) to conduct research within their own agencies and thus answer their own research questions.
- Collaborative research models are necessary.
- The process of identifying needs should involve all stakeholders (researchers, policymakers and practitioners). Researchers alone should not determine what should be studied; however, they can help policymakers and practitioners frame the research questions.
- The research process should be a team effort — practitioners and policymakers should be involved at the very beginning of the process. NIJ should require evidence that planning of the study has been a collaborative effort.

### ***Assessing the Evidence***

- Researchers should determine when there is sufficient evidence to support the adoption of a specific practice (i.e., What is enough evidence?). An ongoing issue related to the implementation of research results is: How much supportive evidence is necessary before implementation of a practice or intervention should be recommended?
- Policymakers and funders need to know what to do when the knowledge is limited. A decision-making framework could help them address various levels of knowledge, such as events that require an immediate response when knowledge is limited (e.g., the foreclosure crisis) versus the implementation of evidence-based practices.
- Practitioners are capable of assessing the evidence if they have access to it (they will actively seek out or modify approaches that are applicable to their settings).
- The body of research continues to evolve, and new findings will impact previously implemented interventions. Both researchers and practitioners can contribute to increasing the body of evidence.
- Ethnography can be an effective approach to chronicling the implementation process. This can provide insights into facilitators and challenges as well as variations across specific populations and settings. Comparative case studies can also be effective in communicating information about the process of implementing an intervention.

### ***Learning From Failures***

- Even for “successful” practices, challenges should be identified.
- Research results should be disseminated, even when the study fails or when there are problems with the results. Practitioners need to know about what does not work and what challenges may be encountered during implementation of a practice.
- Information on unintended consequences, especially if they can be harmful, should be disseminated.
- Researchers and practitioners should be encouraged to talk about their failures. Although people are reluctant to do this, failures can be valuable learning experiences for others.

## ***Packaging and Disseminating Findings***

- Practitioners are most interested in how to implement the findings from research and not in specific research results (e.g., journal articles and reports). Key elements for implementing a practice or approach must be identified; it should not be a cookie-cutter approach. These elements can then be tailored to specific settings.
- Training will be necessary to support the implementation of new practices.
- The focus is on how to operationalize practices (sustained implementation).
- Messages must be disseminated through multiple media (publications, journal articles, websites and training tools).
- Messages must be repeated.
- Develop a “What Works” repository. Standards for the inclusion of research results and materials also need to be developed.
- The National Institute on Drug Abuse/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (NIDA/SAMHSA) approach can serve as a model. It focuses on “translating” results and creating toolkits to assist practitioners in the implementation of practices.
- Coverage in the mainstream media (earned media) should be sought when appropriate and is an effective way for reaching multiple audiences (e.g., policymakers, practitioners and the general public).
- Conferences and meetings are effective ways to disseminate results and information on implementation experiences. They also provide an opportunity for practitioners to talk to researchers.
- Distance-learning approaches are effective and, often, less expensive.
- Tools for practitioners should not be developed by researchers but instead by people who can effectively communicate the key information to practitioners.
- Although practitioners may feel a responsibility to keep up with new research findings, this can be difficult because of time limitations.

## ***Other Ways to Facilitate Adoption and Implementation of New Practices***

- Support site visits to demonstration projects for practitioners. Although they are expensive, site visits can be a very effective way to learn about implementation of a specific practice.
- Conceptual models can assist in the implementation of practices.
- Practitioners need resources to plan and implement new practices.
- The focus should be not only on the end result of research but also on the formative impact of the research and how to improve the overall process.
- Self-assessments and indicators in a specific area could help practitioners to implement evidence-based practices.

## ***Changing the Culture***

- Traditional training methods must be changed. Training must become more effective.
- Analysis of research results is not included in the professional training for law enforcement officers, but it should be.
- Research results must be better integrated into education and training programs. For example, Taser International developed most training materials for the Taser. However, the results of other Taser research have not been included in these materials or disseminated through other media.
- Practitioners should be encouraged to participate in and dedicate some of their resources (e.g., funding) to research, and be encouraged to answer their own questions.

## **Participants' Feedback**

### ***Short-Term Recommendations***

#### **Partnerships**

- Promote (e.g., incentivize) research–practice partnerships.
- Promote partnerships at various levels (e.g., state and community) and tailor messages to each level.
- Prioritize partnerships and collaborations when evaluating applications and proposals.

#### **Research**

- Conduct surveys of criminal justice system leaders and researchers to identify the most innovative practices (i.e., What is the most important innovation in your practice?).
- Survey the policymakers about the areas where they need additional information, and solicit proposals in response to the identified needs.
- Survey the agencies within the criminal justice system to determine:
  - What initiatives (i.e., changes in practice or policy) took place in the last year.
  - The source of the innovation, and the support for its implementation.
  - Whether an evaluation strategy is in place or is planned.

#### **Dissemination**

- Improve the graphic design of NIJ materials (e.g., more appealing and more reader friendly).
- Improve communication with grantees and stakeholders (e.g., update mailing lists, e-mail lists and listservs).
- Seek greater coverage of NIJ research results in the mainstream media (e.g., press conferences conducted by the Attorney General).
- Develop short, concise publications (e.g., reports, issue briefs and Web content) for disseminating information to practitioners.

- Focus on the following areas of research for NIJ publications:
  - Analyzing research studies and helping practitioners to interpret the strengths of the studies.
  - A handbook for practitioners (e.g., how to adopt or adapt a practice, and how to improve supervisory practices).
  - Publications produced jointly by the NIJ grantee that conducted the research (focusing on the study) and the practitioner in the field (focusing on the implementation issues).
  - Synthesizing research findings in a specific topic area (e.g., topic summaries, meta-analyses and literature reviews).
- Focus more attention on regional conferences and on creating communities of practitioners who are interested in research results.
- Partner with nontraditional practitioners, such as the National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the Council of State Governments (CSG), and legislative fiscal officers to disseminate research results that can inform the short-term decisions impacting the criminal justice system.

## **Implementation**

- Focus on the organization's readiness to adopt a specific evidence-based practice. This is more than a needs assessment — it is a reality check on how useful it would be to invest the effort and resources required to adopt the practice.
- Fund ongoing solicitations for special implementation projects for research that results in actionable policy or practice.
- Support the creation of a framework for practitioners to help them assess research results and the appropriate responses.
- Engage researchers and practitioners from a variety of settings in dialogues about research needs and avenues or barriers to implementing evidence-based practices.
- Develop tools for practitioners that provide information on implementation (e.g., toolkits).
- Develop tools that focus on decisionmakers.

## ***Long-Term Recommendations***

### **Partnerships**

- Encourage more researcher–practitioner partnerships throughout the research process.
- Study various models of collaboration, such as practice partnerships, to understand what types of partnerships are most likely to result in research that gets applied in the real world.
- Encourage universities to teach models of collaboration.
- Re-institute the Locally Initiated Research Partnership (LIRP) program and provide small seed grants or matching funds.

### **Research**

- Fund research on the processes of dissemination and implementation (e.g., Where and how do decision-makers get information, and under what circumstances do they incorporate or reject research results?).

- Fund studies to explore when and how practitioners use research evidence. This includes:
  - What types of results are used.
  - How results are applied.
  - What helps or hinders the use of research results.
  - Why some organizations are better than others at making use of research results.

### **Dissemination**

- Tailor messages to the specific audience.
- Encourage the development of a publication (either by NIJ or another entity) that serves the entire criminal justice system.
- Support meta-analyses and literature reviews, which often are more influential with practitioners; package the research results in an easily digestible manner.
- Provide opportunities (meetings) for practitioners to work together to determine how to adopt or adapt recommended practices. Sessions (workshops) could be conducted by practitioners who have successfully adopted new practices.
- Use multiple vehicles in various settings to disseminate research results beyond the researchers' and practitioners' communities.
- Study the diffusion of innovation in criminal justice as a whole.

### **Implementation**

- Build the capacity of law enforcement practitioners to incorporate research results (e.g., university criminal justice and police academy curricula, and major professional training venues).
- Using implementation models, create and leverage resources to implement a framework for knowledge development, demonstration and full-scale adoption of evidence-based practices within priority areas (carried out in conjunction with practitioner organizations).
- Fund "Genius" awards to support implementation-related research (i.e., \$250,000 of support over 3 years, no strings attached).
- Identify model programs, and foster their development. Encourage other practitioners to contact and learn about the model and to implement their own programs.
- Study implementation in terms of research activities (i.e., what works, and what results in failure).
- Focus on process use and how the evaluation process can be carried out to bring about the desired changes. Explore both the skills necessary to implement the changes and the attitudes relating to the changes.

### **Feedback Loop**

- Collect information from the field on an ongoing and systematic basis on the impact of research over the years. Publish information, and disseminate it widely. Use the information to gain support (i.e., building an effective constituency for criminal justice research).
- Develop a process (e.g., survey) to receive input from practitioners (e.g., practice-related questions, "need to know" issues).

## Background Information: Providing Context to the Discussion

### ***Building the Science of Dissemination and Implementation***

*David Chambers, Ph.D.  
Chief of Services Research  
National Institute of Mental Health*

**Dissemination:** Targeted distribution of information and intervention materials to a specific public health or clinical practice audience.

**Implementation:** The use of strategies to adopt and integrate evidence-based health interventions and change practice patterns within specific settings.

— Adapted from Lomas (1993)

Although the primary focus of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is basic and clinical research exploring the treatment and prevention of mental illness, the Institute's strategic plan includes an objective focused on closing the gap between the development of new, research-tested interventions and their effective and widespread use in the field. Specifically, the Institute is seeking to:

- Understand factors that affect access to services, quality and cost of services.
- Understand means by which effective interventions are disseminated and implemented.
- Strengthen partnerships between NIMH and stakeholder groups.

In the healthcare field, the process of disseminating and implementing the results of research can take many years — it takes 17 years to turn 14 percent of original research to the benefit of patient care. Many research efforts fail to yield valuable results. Even when the results are valuable, they may not be applicable in all situations and settings. Common assumptions about the application of evidence-based practices can limit their uptake.

These assumptions include the following:

- Evidence presented to an audience will lead directly to change.
- Evidence is irrefutable, permanent and unchangeable.
- Context is irrelevant to change.
- Decisionmaking is a rational process.

In communicating evidence, it is important to recognize the subjectivity of the evidence and how the significance of the evidence must be communicated to the targeted audience. The message may vary from audience to audience, and communication efforts can be hindered by limited resources, professional resistance, and indifference on the part of the target audience.

Getting evidence-based interventions into practice is a multistep process. NIMH uses a synergistic, three-step model:

- **Science Push:** Document, improve and communicate the intervention for wide population use.
- **Delivery Capacity:** Build the capacity of relevant systems to deliver the intervention.
- **Market Pull/Demand:** Build a market and demand for the intervention across various stakeholders (e.g., researchers, providers, consumers, payers and policymakers).

The ultimate goal of the model is improving the health and well-being of the target population.

These factors can impact the uptake of an evidence-based practice:

- Access and engagement of the target audience, families and peers.
- Organizational structure and climate (e.g., culture, structure, practice-setting characteristics).
- Provider knowledge and behavior.
- External factors (e.g., policy, financing, and attitudes and behaviors of local stakeholders).

The impact of these factors may vary, depending on the targeted level for uptake — national, state, community, organizational or consumer.

Uptake at each of these levels presents unique challenges — extrapolating from one level to another is not effective.

The following are key components of an effective system for bringing an evidence-based intervention into practice:

- Data-driven decisionmaking.
- Fostering a culture of learning and growth within organizations. Effective adapters are often successful organizations.
- Participation.

Important “lessons learned” in applying research to practice:

- Context counts.
- Evidence is subjectively constructed.
- Selecting the correct target audiences and tailoring the messages are critical.

There are various ways to encourage the uptake of evidence-based practices. Where the evidence or data come from is important and, if possible, should reflect real-world practices. This increases the applicability of the practice. Such findings are more likely to resonate with decisionmakers, as they are more likely to reflect the realities confronting the organization. The practices should also be linked to ongoing quality improvement and assurance activities. The

goal should be to use all available evidence in decisionmaking and implementation. In addition to utilizing all available evidence, the uptake organization should foster a culture of learning and knowledge development. There should also be a feedback loop across policy, research and service provision that can inform future activities.

Since 2001, NIMH has supported dissemination research. Various challenges have been encountered in this process of promoting dissemination. In particular, there is a lack of a common language and significant variability in terminology, which makes it difficult to communicate ideas and findings. There are also few opportunities to present and publish results relating to dissemination, especially since many dissemination processes are perceived as failures. Researchers do not want to discuss their perceived failures, even when others can learn from their mistakes. There is also limited awareness about the need for this type of research and a minimal capacity in the field to conduct it. More leadership is needed from NIMH to move this area of research forward.

#### **Possible Model: Cancer Control PLANET**

The Cancer Control PLANET (Plan, Link, Act, Network with Evidence-based Tools) is designed to walk users through the decisionmaking process and help them to determine what types of interventions may be useful. It is a portal that provides access to data and research-tested resources that can help planners, program staff and researchers to design, implement and evaluate evidence-based cancer control programs.

Currently, NIMH is supporting dissemination and implementation research studies in multiple areas. These include:

- Use of a community development team approach to implement effective practices.
- Testing effective reimbursement for interventions.
- Utilizing quality improvement cycles to incorporate research into practice.
- Predicting use of interventions through organization culture and climate.
- Using decision-support tools to improve uptake.

Areas where additional research is necessary include:

- How to disseminate knowledge to various stakeholders.
- Implementation of evidence-based practices across various settings (i.e., fidelity v. adaptation).
- How to determine if interventions used in practice are optimally effective.
- Development of interventions that address implementation issues from the beginning.

## ***Thoughts on Dissemination and Implementation at NIJ***

*Todd R. Clear  
Distinguished Professor  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice*

Dr. Clear was asked to develop an essay addressing impediments to dissemination and implementation of the results of NIJ-supported research. The essay was distributed to participants before the meeting to inform the discussion.

There are three kinds of research outcomes; depending on the kind of research under consideration, dissemination and implementation issues will differ. Dissemination of findings from the first two types of research is less challenging. Research findings can be effectively disseminated in journals and through the publication of papers at forums — researchers are anxious to disseminate the results of their work and are avid consumers of research findings and applications. Research techniques, which can improve practice, are in demand in the field.

### **Research Outcomes**

**Research Findings:** Results of studies that find relationships, patterns, or even causalities related to topics within crime and justice.

**Research Techniques:** Advances in measurement or technical strategies, such as new classification instruments or database management methods (e.g., application of policy).

**Program Evaluations:** Studies of the effectiveness of program innovations or of longstanding programs.

People are anxious to obtain these results. Essentially, the outcomes of these two types of research are in demand, and NIJ currently has effective methods in place to disseminate them.

The results of program evaluations present a greater challenge since when assessing programs, both effective and ineffective practices can be identified. One of the greatest challenges is determining what standard should be used to decide when the evidence about a given practice is sufficiently strong to merit greater dissemination to the field. This challenge can be compounded when the research is conducted at a single site — with a unique context, target population, and resources. In reality, multiple evaluations in different settings and with different target populations may be required to justify a strong level of confidence. However, the more studies conducted, the greater the possibility for variation in outcomes, including negative outcomes.

There are models for the effective dissemination and allow potential users to focus on their particular circumstances. implementation of the findings of program evaluation. Strategies that allow researchers and practitioners to exchange ideas about successful implementation strategies, possible modifications, and potential challenges

It is important to remember that program evaluation can also reveal that certain practices and programs are ineffective. Often, researchers are less eager to disseminate findings on what does not work. However, these findings can be as important as those relating to effective approaches. This is especially true if the programs or practices have been widely implemented.

An important consideration in the field of criminal justice is the risk-averse environment, which can result in a resistance to changing existing practices. An aversion to risk can occur at all levels — from policymakers to line staff. In an environment where mistakes can have consequences that impact both public and personal safety, there can be a reluctance to try new things.

Another important consideration is the time required to bring about change. The Ottawa Model was developed to address the adoption of evidence-based practices in health care, which is very market driven and outcome sensitive. The developers caution that adoption can take longer than expected, especially in large agencies. Given the challenges in the criminal justice

**Ottawa Model:**

- Diffusion is necessary but not sufficient.
- Dissemination is necessary but not sufficient.
- Education is necessary but not sufficient.
- Multiple ongoing strategies are necessary.
- Effective strategies may differ among professions and consumers.
- Adoption and use of evidence takes longer than anticipated, especially for large groups.
- A conceptual framework to guide implementation may be useful.

system, adoption may occur at a slow pace.

Another area where the consideration of dissemination and implementation is important is policy (i.e., exploring policy-related areas in criminal justice where the evidence is sufficient to support widespread adoption of new policies). Given the nature of this research — that it is inherently political — involvement by NIJ is most likely inappropriate. However, researchers in the field of criminal justice will likely continue to address policy issues. Important considerations in the distribution of these types of findings include the following:

- Topic must be timely, understandable and relevant.
- Understand the audience and its legal, political, institutional and resource constraints.
- Current literature on “what works” must be supplemented with literature on program implementation.
- Rigorous research, especially randomized experiments, has an impact.
- Researchers have a role in public policy, but this role will not be likely to fundamentally change the justice system.

- In his essay, Dr. Clear drew the following conclusions:
  - If the dissemination and implementation problem involves a research finding about the nature of crime or justice, there is already a strong and widely distributed dissemination mechanism: peer-reviewed journals. NIJ might give more importance to rewarding principal investigators who publish their findings in good peer-reviewed outlets, but otherwise, there is already a powerful incentive structure for the spread of good work of this type. The key is to make sure that the studies funded by NIJ are important to the scientific community.
  - If the dissemination and implementation problem involves “what works” programs, there are several threshold problems requiring initial consideration, including whether the evidence about the program is sufficient to demonstrate that it truly “works.” When this threshold standard is met, the most proven methods involve interactive training programs of the type NIJ does not ordinarily offer. It might be wise for NIJ to partner with other organizations, such as the National Institute of Corrections, to support the dissemination and implementation work those agencies already do. For NIJ to undertake this kind of dissemination and implementation work on its own would be to risk redundancy and poor methods.
  - If the dissemination and implementation problem involves policy, there are strong political considerations that weigh against NIJ being heavily involved in State and local policy initiatives.

## **Factors and Conditions Influencing the Use of Research by the Criminal Justice System**

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Mr. Innis provided an overview of an article he published along with Ronald S. Everett of the University of Alaska Anchorage in the *Western Criminology Review*. NIJ's current efforts to move research results into practice have been successful in some areas, and NIJ can build on these successes. However, NIJ should not be telling practitioners how to do their jobs. The research community must be more humble in interactions with researchers — they do not have all the answers.

In efforts to disseminate information to the field, the quality of the information is a key factor. If the information (i.e., the product) is valuable, the target audience will be receptive. However, it still must be marketed.

To be effective in marketing, an effective business model is necessary. NIJ's current business model focuses on science — funding basic research. However, it must also address applied research, which involves working with the materials on hand to bring about the necessary changes. The end goal of practitioners is solutions for the problems they face in their agencies.

A more effective business model for NIJ should include the following:

- Cultivation of suppliers (researchers).
- Empowerment of NIJ staff (strong review).
- Cultivation of markets (identification of paths to practitioners).

Partnerships can be effective in bridging the gap between researchers and practitioners. Many practitioners feel that they lack informational resources. When researchers are embedded into practice settings, they also need support. For both researchers and practitioners, the most effective way of communication is a dialog. However, practitioners do not need researchers to explain every aspect of their research. They want to hear the critical findings and how they impact their work, with the opportunity to continue the discussion if it is relevant.