STAGES OF RESEARCH COLLABORATION WITH ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES (APS) ORGANIZATIONS

A Statement by the
National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA)
and the
National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA)

Introduction

Research projects are typically implemented in three stages over the life of the project:

1) Planning,

2) Conducting the study (which consists of gathering, entering, and then analyzing the data), and

3) Results and publication(s).

The staff members involved may change due to the needs of the project at different stages. This outline for Research Collaboration lays out some specific details of what researchers and APS staff may consider at each stage. The variation in detail may be wide, depending, for example, on funding sources, the party conducting the research, and the methodologies to be employed.

Stage 1: Planning

The researcher should meet with key staff at the APS agency as early as possible to discuss the agency's interest and ability to collaborate on a proposed project. It is important to engage agency decision makers (e.g. President or Executive Director, supervisors, lawyers, risk management staff, etc.) early on in the process, in order to address any agency concerns and/or requirements. Not doing so can result in a stalled or canceled project.

Topics for these initial discussions typically include (not in order of priority):

- Consideration of costs and the availability and use of internal and external funding.

- The hypothesis to be tested or descriptive research questions.

- The researcher's qualifications.

- Agency infrastructure that would be available (e.g. staff, facilities, etc.) and necessary to execute the project.

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- How the agency may benefit from the research or future partnership with the researchers.

- Sufficient detail on the project's proposed instruments, methodology and data management procedures so that the agency understands the research activities and their potential impact on agency staff, workload, and clients.

- The form and amount of compensation for agency involvement (e.g. access to agency records, use of agency facilities and equipment, etc.) requested in the project budget.

- How to minimize impact of the research upon agency staff and their adult protection activities and responsibilities.

- Procedures for protection of agency data and agency clients, including:

    - *Client confidentiality, including the use of aggregated data only.*
    - *Informed consent.*
    - *Client right of refusal to participate.*
    - *Response processes for research staff and/or agency staff who encounter unexpected urgent client situations, including additional (previously unidentified) situations of abuse/ neglect/exploitation.*

- Potential use of any existing agency data (e.g., case records, management information systems) that would be available for use in the project. This discussion may include how any data (such as paper records) not already in an electronic data base or otherwise not readily extractable from a database (e.g. in text or comment fields) are to be collected and who owns the data collected.

- Processes for approval by participating agency and the researcher's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which will require a fully developed and detailed methodology.

- Processes and time frames, which can be extensive and time consuming, that will be required for approval of such projects.

- Rules and parameters for the dissemination of the results of the study, including publications and presentations.

- Whether the agency will be asked to provide to the researcher's potential funder a statement of intention to collaborate

Stage 2: Conducting the Study

Ongoing discussions take place as needed, as the methodology is refined and both agency and IRB approvals are obtained. Modifications of instruments and/or

methods may be necessary to meet agency requirements, including legal requirements. The funder may require negotiations as well.

After approval by all relevant IRBs and research review committees, data collection that adheres to the approved standards and parameters can proceed. Any changes in instruments or methodology during execution of the project may require approval prior to their implementation by the agency, the IRB, and the research review committee.

During data collection, the usual practice is for the researchers and APS agency representatives to provide routine progress reports to each other. As issues and problems arise, they are discussed, and suitable and mutually agreeable means of handling them are developed and implemented.

Collected data are coded and entered into either quantitative analyses, qualitative analyses, or both, depending upon the methodologies employed. Data analyses are a labor-intensive part of research and typically are to be undertaken by the research team. Results of the analyses are shared with the involved APS representatives for discussion.

Discussions will be needed concerning the results and their interpretation, with the usual practice being to bring the research staff and APS staff together to work as partners.

Stage 3: Results and Publication(s)

After the data are collected and analyzed, the researchers and the agency representatives typically meet again to discuss:

- The results of the study and its impact upon the hypothesis, i.e., whether the data support or reject it.
- Confirmation of what data derived from the project can be publicly disseminated, and in what manner.
- Final discussion (see preliminary discussion, above) of authorship and attributions for any publications to be developed from the research and its findings.

The laborious task of preparing research reports and articles for publication then occurs, as well as seeking other avenues for distributing the results to the scientific and practice communities, such as through conference presentations.