Title: Collaborative Research Alliances: Defining and Tracking Outcomes for Researchers and Practitioners

Panel Organizer/Moderator:

Rebecca Carey  
*Education Development Center*

Panelists:

Andrew Seager  
Angela Pazzaglia  
Heather Lavigne  
Julie Riordan  
*Education Development Center*
Abstract Body

Limit 4 pages single-spaced.

Problem / Background / Context:

Description of the problem addressed, prior research, and its intellectual context.

Despite increasing efforts from education researchers to develop and disseminate effective strategies for improving our nation’s schools, some have argued that these efforts have failed to contribute to large-scale improvements (Bryk & Gomez, 2008). As a possible explanation for this apparent shortcoming, researchers have identified the social organization surrounding the research process as problematic (Burkhardt & Schoenfeld, 2003; Coburn & Stein, 2010; Committee on a Strategic Education Research Partnership, 2003; Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002; Kelly, 2006). In particular, these researchers voice concern over the structural and cultural divisions between researchers and practitioners (Coburn, Penuel, & Geil, 2013) and are looking for new ways to collaboratively integrate practitioners into the research process. The Institute of Education Sciences’ (IES) current Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) program signals a federal interest in this type of collaborative research. These contracts are based on each of 10 regional laboratories forming and/or joining research alliances as a context for rigorous analytic work.

Proponents of these emerging collaborative research models argue that involving practitioners in the research process has multiple benefits. First, including practitioners on a research team bridges the gap between research and practice, resulting in a bi-directional reframing of “problems” and research questions (Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007) and a greater likelihood that research findings will be applied to practice (Coburn & Stein, 2010; Roderick, Easton, & Sebring, 2009). By contributing to the research process from the beginning, practitioners develop an investment in and ownership of the work and a sense of trust towards the researchers (Dearing & Kreuter, 2010). This trust is especially important given that district administrators often cite a distrust in research findings (Nutley et al., 2007; Weiss, Murphy-Graham, & Birkeland, 2005; Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Nelson, Leffler, & Hansen, 2009). This distrust can arise from the belief that research is often twisted to support an individual’s or group’s preexisting beliefs (Nutley et al., 2007; Weiss et al., 2005), or that research findings are inconsistent in that similar studies can be found that support very different conclusions (Nelson et al., 2009; Daly & Finnigan, 2011). The increased trust and ownership of research findings engendered by the collaborative research model ultimately makes practitioners more likely to implement the findings in their work (Dearing & Kreuter, 2010).

Second, practitioner involvement in research has been suggested as a way to build the capacity of practitioner communities to incorporate systematic inquiry into regular decision-making processes (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Roderick et al., 2009). Rather than just providing answers to singular problems, collaborative research can foster a much more lasting influence on schools by building practitioners’ capacities to identify indicators of improvement, developing practices that might influence these indicators, and assessing these indicators for evidence of improvement (Roderick et al., 2009). By participating in this collaborative process, practitioners will develop a better understanding of the research process, enabling them to incorporate ways of framing issues that uncover biases and increase the likelihood of learning from decisions and programs, and integrating measurement and
improvement efforts into their daily practice. Despite the rich theory supporting these and other potential benefits of engaging in collaborative research, there is little guidance for defining and measuring these outcomes, and there is little research evidence that practitioners involved in existing collaborative research alliances are experiencing these benefits.

In addition to these hypothesized outcomes for practitioners, collaborative research also changes the role of the researcher. This new role is one in which researchers support the “search for solutions” rather than working independently and producing disconnected findings (Roderick et al., 2009, p. 14). Anecdotal feedback from REL Northeast and Islands (REL-NEI) researchers suggests that work with advisory committees has improved the relevance and efficiency of research projects and, as a result, this collaborative model has changed the way they approach research in general.

**Purpose / Objective of Panel**
*Description of the focus of the research.*

REL-NEI researchers have been working to define and track these hypothesized outcomes of collaborative research. To date, they have conducted two interview studies and one survey study in an attempt to document the outcomes for researchers and practitioners involved in their eight collaborative research alliances. This proposal outlines a panel presentation combined with an interactive group session related to the strategies for defining and tracking outcomes, as well as a discussion of lessons learned from tracking these outcomes for REL-NEI’s research alliances. This session is designed to engage the audience in discussion for the full 90-minute session.

**Content of Panel:**
Four panelists have been chosen to participate in this panel presentation due to their experience working with and tracking outcomes of collaborative research alliances. Proposed panelists for this session are as follows:

- **Angela Pazzaglia, Ph.D.** is a research associate for REL-NEI. Pazzaglia led the design, validation, administration, and analysis of the annual survey of REL-NEI alliance member outcomes, and she is the alliance researcher for the Northeast Rural Districts Research Alliance.

- **Heather Lavigne** is a research associate for REL-NEI. She is currently involved in data collection and analysis around the REL-NEI advisory committee interview study and has conducted measurement work on the REL-NEI alliance member survey.

- **Andrew Seager** is the Alliance Manager on REL-NEI and has led eight teams as they recruited alliance members and developed relationships and structures to build healthy partnerships. Andrew co-led the interview study of REL-NEI alliance members.

- **Julie Riordan** is the Director of Research and Task 4 Lead for REL-NEI. Julie has been instrumental in putting the collaborative research process into place and has overseen all phases of REL-NEI’s activities to track alliance outcomes.

Each panelist will be asked to prepare a brief overview of his or her work assessing collaborative research outcomes. Andrew Seager will discuss interviews conducted with practitioner alliance
members during year one of the five-year REL contract to identify challenges or facilitators of alliance building. Angela Pazzaglia will discuss a survey administered to practitioner alliance members during years two and three of the contract to assess their perceptions of collaborative research outcomes over time, including capacity building, use of evidence, and satisfaction with the alliance. Heather Lavigne will discuss interviews currently in progress with alliance researchers during year three of the contract to gather information about their use of input from practitioner members and how their role and practice has changed in this collaborative environment. Panelists will be asked to focus on their approach to tracking outcomes, including definitions, procedures for gathering data, and descriptive summaries of those outcomes. Panelists will highlight successes and challenges associated with this work along with preliminary lessons learned regarding what factors appear to be associated with better practitioner and researcher outcomes. Each panelist will be given approximately 10 minutes for presentation. Prior to the panel, the moderator will collect an outline of each panelist’s presentation to limit redundancy and to encourage the presentation of new and valuable information from each panelist.

Panelist presentations will be grouped into two blocks with the first focusing on practitioner outcomes (alliance member interviews and surveys) and the second focusing on researcher outcomes (researcher interviews). Each block will be followed by 5 minutes for clarifying questions. Following the panelist presentations and clarifying questions, session attendees will be encouraged to break up into small groups to discuss their own approaches to tracking collaborative research outcomes, as well as their feedback regarding REL-NEI’s approach. Groups may vary in size but ideal clusters will range between three and five individuals. The group’s task is to discuss outcomes that researchers should be tracking, approaches to measuring these outcomes, and the value of tracking collaborative research outcomes for current work and the literature. Some of the questions they would consider are as follows:

- What practitioner outcomes are important to track, and how might we define and measure them?
- What researcher outcomes are important to track, and how might we define and measure them?
- What challenges might you anticipate in defining, measuring, and reporting these outcomes? Are there ways to mitigate these challenges?

As groups are working through each question, panelists will interact with groups and engage in discussion. Panelists will share anecdotal experience and comments with group members as they discuss approaches to defining and measuring collaborative research outcomes. As they interact with groups, panelists will be noting common themes discussed by each group.

Immediately following the 25-minute discussion period, the group will be asked to reconvene for a panelist summary of the discussion across presentations followed by a question and answer session. During the 15-minute summary of discussion, Julie Riordan, the Director of Research at REL-NEI, will be asked to share her experiences related to the questions and comments discussed in small group sessions. Panelists will also contribute their reactions to the small group discussions. The rationale behind this panelist summary is to pull out some of the best conversations from small groups and deliver the contents back to the larger audience. Finally,
during the 15-minute question and answer period, audience members will be encouraged to ask questions of the panelists about their experiences conducting research on alliance outcomes, recommendations for how to define and measure outcomes, and preliminary correlational evidence regarding alliance characteristics that may be associated with better practitioner outcomes.

**Audience Participation Plan:**

Several interactive components have been incorporated into the plan for this panel presentation as described above. The schedule for the presentation is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Range</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:00 – 5:00 minutes</td>
<td>Session Welcome/Panel Introductions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 – 25:00 minutes</td>
<td>Panelist Presentations: Practitioner Outcomes (alliance member interviews and surveys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25:00 – 30:00 minutes</td>
<td>Questions for Clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25:00 – 35:00 minutes</td>
<td>Panelist Presentation: Researcher Outcomes (researcher interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35:00 – 40:00 minutes</td>
<td>Questions for Clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40:00 – 65:00 minutes</td>
<td>Table Teams Discussion with Panelists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65:00 – 75:00 minutes</td>
<td>Summary of Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75:00 – 90:00 minutes</td>
<td>Question and Answer/Closing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The session has been planned into short segments of activity to keep the audience involved in collaborative discussion. The outlined series of activities is designed to promote dialogue and ensure that session attendees are able to gather ideas related to defining and tracking collaborative research outcomes, and, simultaneously, offer an opportunity to ask questions of researchers who have been implementing one approach to tracking outcomes.

**Conclusions:**

*Description of conclusions, recommendations, and limitations, based on findings.*

The goals of this panel presentation are to 1) present results from three REL-NEI descriptive studies exploring practitioner and researcher outcomes in collaborative research; 2) foster a discussion regarding our approaches to defining and measuring these outcomes; and 3) encourage reflection from audience members regarding their current practices in tracking outcomes. By sharing our strategies for defining and tracking practitioner and researcher outcomes in our research alliances and getting feedback from audience members, it is our hope that session attendees will be able to apply some of these processes to their own work. By systematically measuring the hypothesized outcomes of the collaborative research movement, both researchers and practitioners might benefit from an increased understanding about the benefits and challenges associated with this framework, and could eventually undertake additional research assessing alliance characteristics that are associated with improved outcomes.
Appendices
Not included in page count.

Appendix A. References
References are to be in APA version 6 format.


