

Indicators of Research-Practice Partnership Health and Effectiveness

Updating the Five Dimensions Framework

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Table of Contents

- 1** Introduction
- 7** Dimension 1: Cultivate Trust and Relationships
- 9** Dimension 2: Engage in Inclusive Research or Inquiry to Address Local Needs
- 11** Dimension 3: Support Practice or Community Organization in Making Progress on its Goals
- 13** Dimension 4: Engage with the Broader Field to Improve Educational Practices, Systems, and Inquiry
- 15** Dimension 5: Foster Ongoing Learning and Develop Infrastructure for Partnering
- 17** Conclusions
- 18** References

Introduction

In education research-practice partnerships (RPPs), people with different perspectives work together to understand, study, and develop solutions for persistent challenges in education. RPPs focus on doing research with and alongside their practice, policy, or community partners, focused on local issues of concern.¹ They are a prime example of how long-term collaborative approaches to research can address persistent challenges and systemic inequities in schools and communities.

The field has begun to develop a shared understanding of the broad goals that RPPs share. The RPP Effectiveness Framework developed by Henrick and colleagues in 2017 was a critical starting point, reflecting the perspectives of a wide range of partnerships and RPP leaders of the time.² Almost immediately, evaluators, researchers, and RPPs themselves began to use this framework to think about local RPP work.³ This framework included dimensions of effectiveness and indicators of progress along each dimension, and authors proposed that future work include the development of tools and measures to support the use of the framework.

In 2019, a new group came together for a project focused on designing, developing, and testing tools to understand and support RPP effectiveness aligned with the 2017 framework. Through engaging in this work, it became clear that as the field develops and grows over time, so too must our ideas about what is important to attend to when considering RPP effectiveness. As a result, our work expanded, and we not only identified tools to support RPPs' effectiveness goals but also engaged in an iterative process to revisit the 2017 framework itself.

This updated framework describes aspirational ideas about what is possible and what RPPs might strive towards in their work together. We begin by describing the participatory, iterative process used to update the framework, outlining major changes, and providing a note on key language used throughout.

¹ Farrell et al., 2021; for more on the idea of research with and alongside students, see Cammarota and Fine (2008)

² Henrick et al., 2017

³ E.g., McGill et al., 2021; Scholz et al., 2021; Weddle et al., 2021

We present an update for each dimension, reflecting insights from engagement with a range of RPP participants over the past five years. For each dimension, we also describe indicators that partnerships might use to more deeply understand that dimension within their context and how those indicators could guide progress towards increased RPP effectiveness and health. We conclude by discussing uses of the framework.

This revision is also closely tied to a set of tools, including survey scales, mini-routines, and discussion and reflection questions to help “bring to life” these dimensions within the context of RPPs’ work. Audiences for the framework and tools include:

- Anyone planning for a new RPP
- Members of an existing RPP who are interested in understanding progress toward the RPP’s goals
- Networks of RPPs that are learning together
- Evaluators or thought partners of RPPs
- Teams working on the growing research on RPPs
- Funders of RPPs

RPPs find themselves at a pivotal moment, grappling with their goals, values, and approaches to the work in the midst of great disruption. The past five years have seen rise to important questions of equity and power in RPPs’ efforts⁴ and to the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and conversations around racial justice and racism.

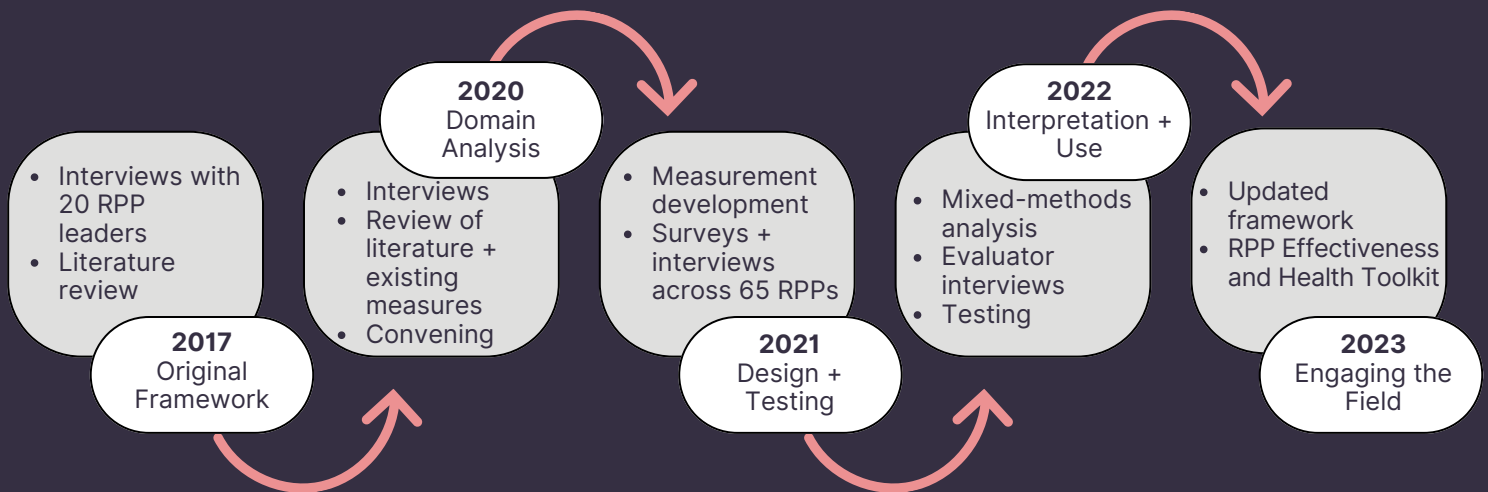
This work has never been more necessary, given the sense of urgency to address inequity, systemic racism, transphobia, and homophobia within K-12 schools, racialized xenophobia within the United States, and the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The revised framework and accompanying tools are designed to help partnerships reflect on their joint goals, consider possible next actions, and drive improvement within their partnerships in ways that will fuel educational change and the transformation of systems more broadly.

⁴ Anderson, 2023; Diamond, 2021; Finnigan, 2023; Ishimaru et al., 2022; Villavicencio et al., 2023

An Iterative, Participatory Process to Framework Revision

2019 saw the launch of a project to design, develop, and test tools to understand and support RPP effectiveness. The team drew on an approach to measurement design called Evidence-Centered Design (ECD).⁵ ECD is sometimes called “validity by design” because it has the potential to ensure alignment among constructs, the observable evidence being collected, and the interpretation of the scores or codes in transparent and principled ways.⁶

The original Henrick et al. framework was the foundation for this work. The first phase (“Domain Analysis”) involved interviews with 29 RPP leaders from different roles and approaches to RPP work, a systematic literature review of studies of RPPs, and a convening with 27 individuals involved in the RPP field. The second phase (“Design and Testing”) included developing and testing multiple iterations of survey and interview questions, concluding with a survey field test of 285 members of 65 RPPs and interviews with 132 members from a subset of 32 RPPs. During the third phase of work (“Interpretation and Use”), we engaged in mixed-methods analysis across survey and interview data, along with interviews with RPP evaluators, to further revise and test measurement tools. This process is shown in Figure 1.



The final results of the project include an updated framework and a toolkit aligned with the revised indicators and dimensions. The toolkit can be found on the National Network for Education Research-Practice Partnerships (NNERPP) website.

⁵ Farrell et al., Under review

⁶ Mislevy, 2007

What is the Same? What is Different?

The revised framework shares many features with the 2017 version:

- It is organized around the *same five dimensions* that reflect a set of desired goals of RPP partners, with indicators that shed light on what progress on each dimension could look like or entail.
- Dimensions and indicators continue to be *relatively general*. How a partnership meaningfully brings any one of them to life will depend on their partnership context, relationships, and goals.

The revised framework also reflects significant shifts from the 2017 version:

- There is now explicit attention to *equity, voice, privilege, and power* across all dimensions and their indicators. This emphasis can be seen, for example, in attention to the meaningful inclusion of voices of students, families, and communities and the ways in which power dynamics unfold within partnership work.
- The framework is designed with a *broad range of RPPs in mind* that vary in their goals, composition, and ways of organizing, per the revised RPP definition from the recent state of the field report (Farrell et al., 2021).
- The language shifts from “researcher” and “practitioner” as set roles towards a *broader range* of possible participants with research, practice, policy, or community perspectives, with an acknowledgment that roles can be fluid.

This iteration of the framework updates the dimensions themselves. This revision does not suggest an order of importance or the potential relationships between dimensions.

A Note on Our Use of Specific Terms and Phrases

We use the language “**in this project**” when defining indicators of RPP health and effectiveness. Members of RPPs shared that it was most useful to think about dimensions of effectiveness by project or line of work because it helped specify project goals, individuals involved, group dynamics, and outcomes. This was particularly true for partnerships with multiple projects, each of which had different goals, members, and group dynamics.

When we say **partners**, we mean the individuals or groups who are centrally involved in the work of the research-practice partnership. Depending on the RPP, this might include people representing different roles or identities: community members, students, teachers, principals, district leaders, state policy leaders, or research-side partners.

We distinguish between “partners” and “constituents.” **Constituents** are those who are implicated in or impacted by the issue at hand but who may not be centrally involved in the work of the partnership.

Research and inquiry are activities in which people employ systematic methods to answer a specific question. RPPs engage in and with research and inquiry in many ways, including reviewing existing literature, engaging in improvement cycles, studying causal relationships, analyzing themes in interview or observational data, developing practical measures, and designing, testing, and iterating on tools.

We use the language of **power and privilege** dynamics to reflect the dynamic interplay of multiple relevant social locations, roles, and identities:

- Individual or group identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, language, religion, sexual orientation, cultural affiliation, or special needs)
- Professional or organizational hierarchies (e.g., graduate student and Principal Investigator, teacher and district leader)
- Organizational affiliations, identities, roles (e.g., university vs. school district)
- Local and broad socio, political, and historical context

These dynamics are not unidimensional; there is “intersectionality” across these identities or roles that emerge within RPP settings. These dynamics can play out differently depending on the context. For instance, a tenured researcher in a university setting may have more perceived power over designing a research agenda but very limited power in advancing a particular school district policy. Finally, all dynamics above have roots in inequitable historical, cultural, and social structures and systems that must be understood in local context.

Dimension 1 **Cultivate Trust and Relationships**

RPPs prioritize and focus on developing trusting relationships within a diverse group of individuals and organizations. Trust and relationships support meaningful collaboration among diverse groups working together to address complex issues in education. A focus on cultivating trust and relationships across communities is critical for repairing decades of damage of education research being done “on” as opposed to “with” students, teachers, schools, districts, and communities.

Developing and nurturing relationships is an ongoing process that needs attention throughout the life of the partnership, especially during times of change like staff or leader transitions, shifts in priorities, or the introduction of new members into the RPP.

Rather than a standalone activity, cultivating and growing trust happens through the work done together. It can take root when partners collaborate regularly, honor their commitments, communicate effectively, raise and address conflicts as they arise, and contribute to decision-making. Building trust also depends on team members supporting one another not only within the partnership but also in their personal and professional lives outside of it. This work may involve learning about and responding to one another's unique contexts, needs, values, and constraints.

Cultivating trust requires a deliberate focus on power and privilege dynamics, given that partnerships bring together individuals, organizations, and communities with diverse levels of social and political influence, varying histories of marginalization, and a range of prior experiences. Addressing these differences means encouraging meaningful participation among partnership members, especially those with less power historically, rather than simply striving for an "equal voice" for all.

Dimension 1 **Cultivate Trust and Relationships**

In this project, partners...

1A

WORK TOGETHER

Partners routinely work together.

1B

FOLLOW THROUGH

Partners follow through on commitments.

1C

VALUE DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Partners feel they can express their opinions and encourage different perspectives.

1D

NAVIGATE CONFLICT

Partners feel safe to raise concerns, and they address challenges and conflicts in a constructive manner.

1E

INTERRUPT PROBLEMATIC POWER AND PRIVILEGE DYNAMICS

Partners identify power imbalances within the partnership and develop strategies to manage or interrupt these dynamics.

1F

INVEST IN ONE ANOTHER'S WELFARE

Partners are invested in one another's personal and professional welfare and well-being.

1G

NAVIGATE BROADER DEMANDS AND CONSTRAINTS

Partners understand and accommodate one another's unique contexts, needs, values, and constraints.

1H

ACKNOWLEDGE CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Partners acknowledge and respect the historical experiences and backgrounds of partnership members and their communities.

Dimension 2 Engage in Inclusive Research or Inquiry to Address Local Needs

A central activity of RPPs is engagement in research and inquiry. RPPs prioritize the needs of practice and community partners by engaging in inclusive research or inquiry aimed at improvement and transformation. Consequently, there are implications for how research is designed and conducted within a partnership, including considerations about who is involved, how data are collected, managed, and accessed, and decisions about where resources go.

This explicit shift towards a more democratic approach of research and inquiry creates greater opportunities for diverse participation and engagement. Efforts are made to connect with broader constituents, even if they cannot be physically present, and to ensure genuine representation of their viewpoints. Processes or structures for involving groups take into account power and privilege dynamics.

When RPPs engage in inclusive research or inquiry to address local needs, they actively seek diverse perspectives, engaging with constituents while addressing cultural and power dynamics to shape research questions.

The research is purposefully co-designed to guide practical actions in the community, practice, and policy domains, going beyond academic pursuits. Partners carefully balance methodological rigor with the practical feasibility of conducting research in the local context, and they commit the necessary time, finances, and human resources for meaningful participation.

They strive for inclusivity by involving relevant perspectives and constituents, elevating historically marginalized perspectives, and addressing cultural and power dynamics that can arise through the research and inquiry process. These actions have the potential to reshape how research and inquiry are designed and carried out across all phases of the research and inquiry process.

Dimension 2 Engage in Inclusive Research or Inquiry to Address Local Needs

In this project, partners...

2A

DESIGN RESEARCH QUESTIONS THAT PRIORITIZE LOCAL NEEDS AND CONTEXT

Partners prioritize developing research questions and agendas that are directly relevant to local practices, policies, and community priorities.

2B

INCLUDE RELEVANT PERSPECTIVES IN DEVELOPING RESEARCH OR INQUIRY QUESTIONS

Partners actively seek to involve a diverse range of perspectives in shaping the research agenda and questions.

2C

ENGAGE IN RESEARCH OR INQUIRY FOR ACTION

The research and inquiry activities are designed to inform and guide community, practice, and policy actions.

2D

BALANCE RIGOR AND FEASIBILITY

The research or inquiry designs are carefully crafted to strike a balance between methodological rigor and the practical feasibility of conducting research in the specific local context.

2E

INVEST ADEQUATE RESOURCES AND CAPACITY

Partners have the necessary time, financial resources, research tools, and human capital to engage meaningfully in the research and inquiry process.

2F

INCLUDE RELEVANT PERSPECTIVES IN THE RESEARCH AND INQUIRY PROCESS

Partners ensure that individuals with a range of perspectives and roles that are relevant to the research and goals are included in the process to the extent that they are willing and able.

Dimension 3 **Support Practice or Community Organization in Making Progress on its Goals**

RPPs collaboratively work towards educational improvement and transformation with their practice or community partners by supporting them in making progress on their goals. This commitment shapes how RPPs identify what to work on and how research and inquiry results are shared and used across the practice or community partner organization in service of learning and decision-making.

Ultimately, partnerships aim to engage in research in order to directly advance the goals of the practice or community partners and their respective organizations.

Partners in RPPs align their goals with priorities identified by the practice or community organization. They ensure that individuals with relevant perspectives and authority are included in goal setting or revising. Efforts are made to connect with broader constituents, even if they cannot be physically present, and to ensure genuine representation of their viewpoints. Processes or structures for involving interested and affected parties take into account power and privilege dynamics.

Partners facilitate joint sensemaking and learning opportunities, combining research, local wisdom, and practical knowledge to inform their next steps. They work to understand the local context and decision-making processes of the practice or community organization and redesign their work accordingly. Partners engage the broader practice or community organization in research and inquiry results, including them as an information source for decision-making alongside other considerations.

Dimension 3 Support Practice or Community Organization in Making Progress on its Goals

In this project, partners...

3A

ALIGN GOALS WITH PRIORITIES OF THE PRACTICE / COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Partners work towards objectives that are aligned with the priorities identified by the practice or community organization.

3B

INCLUDE RELEVANT PERSPECTIVES AND AUTHORITY IN GOAL SETTING AND REVISING

Partners ensure that individuals with relevant perspectives and authority are included in goal setting or revising to the extent that they are willing and able.

3C

ALIGN WORK WITH THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Partners understand decision-making processes and the local context of the practice or community organization. The partnership aligns its work to the dynamics of the practice / community organization, including timelines, pace of work, leadership turnover, and other evolving needs.

3D

LEARN TOGETHER THROUGH COLLABORATIVE SENSEMAKING

Partners organize opportunities for joint sensemaking and learning both within the partnership and with broader constituents. Opportunities are designed to bring together ideas, findings, and tools from research or inquiry, local wisdom, and practical knowledge to inform next steps.

3E

INFORM DECISION-MAKING WITH IDEAS FROM RESEARCH

Partners engage the larger practice or community organization in research or inquiry results such that results can inform decision-making alongside other considerations like practical realities and constraints, values, or existing policies.

3F

ADVANCE THE PRACTICE/ COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION'S GOALS

The partnership's efforts have a positive impact on the goals of practice or community partners and their respective organizations.

Dimension 4 Engage with the Broader Field to Improve Educational Practices, Systems, and Inquiry

In addition to supporting the goals of practice or community organizations, RPPs can have a commitment to supporting broader efforts to improve education. In this vein, RPPs can contribute to the cutting-edge knowledge base on educational change and transformation in ways that elevate, honor, and give voice to insights from community and practice partners.

This dimension uses the word "engage" in addition to "share" to indicate that this aspect of the work is not just a one-way sharing of knowledge but instead a bi-directional learning opportunity. Engaging with others outside of the partnership provides opportunities to learn and listen to others and make sense of how educational strategies can be adapted and adjusted in different contexts.

This knowledge takes various forms, including research-based findings, theories, practices, strategies, frameworks, and tools. Knowledge about partnership dynamics and research methods can also be valuable for external audiences. Partners engage others in this knowledge through different channels and formats, including research-oriented, policy/practice-oriented, and broader/public contexts.

Partners across roles and organizations engage in the sharing process as they want and are able. RPPs strategize about the different audiences that might benefit from sharing or engagement, including those typically excluded from educational change initiatives.

Decisions about sharing locally developed knowledge externally involve input from all partners, addressing aspects like what to share, how to share, and the timing and audiences for sharing, with considerations for power and privilege dynamics. Partners acknowledge that the knowledge they produce and share externally has been collaboratively created.

Dimension 4 Engage with the Broader Field to Improve Educational Practices, Systems, and Inquiry

In this project, partners...

4A

INCLUDE RELEVANT PERSPECTIVES IN DECISIONS TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE

Decisions to share knowledge from the partnership externally involve the input of all partners. These discussions can focus on the decision to share, methods of sharing, content shared, and timing and audiences for sharing.

4B

IDENTIFY WHAT IS USEFUL TO SHARE AND WITH WHOM

Partners identify diverse types of knowledge to share (e.g., findings, tools, methodologies, practices, theories, routines) and the multiple audiences that would find their work relevant.

4C

DESIGN AND FACILITATE SHARING COLLABORATIVELY

Partners representing different roles and organizations participate in developing what is shared and/or engaging others in the sharing process to the extent that they are willing and able.

4D

ENGAGE DIVERSE AUDIENCES TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE

Partners use both one-way and two-way approaches to engage with diverse audiences. Audiences include practice-, community-, and research-side groups and often overlooked groups like students, educators, and historically marginalized communities. RPPs establish and nurture connections with broader networks.

4E

RECOGNIZE PARTNERSHIP KNOWLEDGE AS CO-CREATED

Partners acknowledge that the findings, knowledge, tools, or practices they develop and share have been created collaboratively. This acknowledgment might come in the form of co-authorship, shared facilitation during presentation or meeting sessions, or public recognition, as appropriate.

Dimension 5 Foster Ongoing Learning and Develop Infrastructure for Partnering

RPPs prioritize the necessary learning and develop the critical infrastructure needed to support effective partnering. Because education research, community, and practice have traditionally operated in silos, bringing diverse teams together to engage in meaningful collaboration requires individual learning, organizational learning, and partnership learning.

These learning and infrastructure-building efforts are interconnected with the other dimensions and indicators of RPP health and effectiveness featured in this framework. Much of this learning occurs naturally during the partnership's work. However, RPPs can also proactively create opportunities, systems, tools, and routines to facilitate and enhance ongoing learning at the individual, organizational, and partnership levels:

- *Individual Level:* People within the partnership approach their roles with curiosity and a commitment to learning. Both through designed activities and ongoing engagement in partnership, there are opportunities for members to develop new knowledge, skills, identities, and practices aligned with the partnership's goals.
- *Organizational Level:* Entities like school districts, universities, and community organizations can establish new routines, norms, systems, practices, and roles to support authentic collaboration within the partnership.
- *Partnership Level:* The partnerships themselves require tools, routines, and roles to define their objectives, refine their inquiry methods, navigate their unique environments, and manage resources for collaboration. This should be done while paying attention to the dynamics of collaboration, the health of relationships, and the social, historical, and local contexts on an ongoing basis.

Dimension 5 Foster Ongoing Learning and Develop Infrastructure for Partnering

In this project, partners...

5A

ENGAGE FROM A LEARNING STANCE

Partners engage with curiosity, reflecting the belief that each member has something to learn from the collaboration.

5B

DEVELOP NEW SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND IDENTITIES FOR PARTNERSHIP WORK

Partners create opportunities for individual development of skills, knowledge, and identities to contribute effectively to collaborative efforts in the current project and in future work.

5C

PLAN AND REVISIT STRATEGIES, PRACTICES, AND ROLES TO MEET GOALS

Partners have clear goals and a plan for working together. Partners establish strategies, regular practices, and designated roles to identify, monitor progress, and adapt their project goals.

5D

ATTEND TO THE HEALTH OF THE PARTNERSHIP

Partners establish methods, regular practices, and designated roles to reflect on and foster the health of their partnership.

5E

GARNER ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

Participating organizations adjust their structures, policies, and roles and allocate resources to demonstrate value and support of partnership work.

Conclusions

In RPPs, members with different perspectives work together to address persistent challenges in education through the co-production and co-construction of knowledge through jointly determined research agendas. Their work squarely focuses on issues of local concern, and members challenge the traditional roles and ways of doing work in research. Although RPPs vary widely in their goals, composition, and approach, this paper offers an updated set of dimensions and indicators for RPP health and effectiveness shared by the RPP field broadly.

This revised framework—along with the accompanying tools, measures, and routines—can support existing RPPs in their work together, as well as new RPPs planning for collaboration. It can also be a resource for networks of RPPs who are engaged in joint work and for evaluators who support RPPs' improvement and learning efforts.

Future work can and should continue to ask questions of the interrelationships among these dimensions, potential developmental progressions along the dimensions, and how individual RPPs tailor these dimensions to their unique partnership contexts. Given the ways in which RPPs represent a transformation of typical research-practice-community relationships, further work is also needed to understand the learning that is necessary for all involved to participate in powerful ways.

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