Research Practice Partnerships (RPP) at AIR

What is a research alliance?

Research alliances are long-term partnerships among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners that draw the three groups into close, sustained relationships focused on a shared set of priorities. Members negotiate a research agenda, and a subset of policymakers and practitioners maintains advisory roles on projects staffed with researchers.

Do any of these ring true in your organization?

My colleagues and I are striving to improve outcomes for teachers, students, and/or their families.

My organization has limited capacity (i.e., time and resources) to analyze the data we collect.

My organization could benefit from learning what the evidence-base suggests we do to tackle particular issues.

My organization has staff members who would be able to co-develop a research agenda and provide critical feedback to researchers during the life of a project.

If yes, you may want to join a research alliance.

What will you gain from participating in a research alliance?

Alliance members experience multiple benefits. The most common include increased capacity to:

- Focus on a long-term research agenda.
- Implement rigorous research methods.
- Leverage others' research to keep staff informed and up-to-date on the field's lessons learned.
- Harness research power to support decision making and inform the implementation of policies and practices.
- Provide more relevant and useful research products and tools.
- Partner with researchers who provide an independent voice.

Our experience tells us that this partnership structure can be powerful for alliance members and researchers because:

- Including practitioners as advisors on our research teams bridges the divide between research and practice, resulting in a greater likelihood that research findings will be applied to practice.
- Practitioner involvement in research builds practitioners' capacity to incorporate systematic inquiry into regular decision-making processes.
- Collaborative research with alliance members informs our research process and the research itself, making use of policy and practitioner expertise to produce more relevant projects and products.
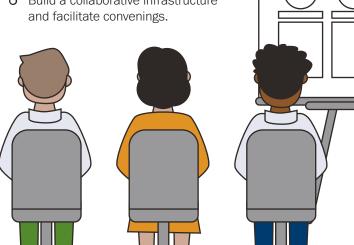
What services does AIR provide?

Depending upon our partners' research needs, AIR works with states, districts, and schools to do one or more of the following:

- Negotiate a coherent research agenda.
- Create data infrastructure and governance.
- Conduct collaborative research projects.
- Engage around results to increase research findings' access and use.
- Build a collaborative infrastructure and facilitate convenings.

AIR
AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®

Examples of AIR's work

Massachusetts Partnership for Improving Low-Performing Schools

This partnership consists of a group of projects aimed at improving state and district efforts to turnaround the state's lowest performing schools through a research-driven continuous improvement cycle. To improve school and district decision making, AIR provides consistent and reliable feedback to low-performing schools on an annual basis and develops useable data reports for districts to analyze the trends in needs among low-performing schools in order to improve resource allocation decisions. AIR team members work collaboratively with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) to develop a clear and concise rubric grounded in research. AIR and ESE also collaborate to refine the overall system of support for low-performing schools and districts by examining outcome data for evidence of impact and to deepen and share implementation strategies that work.

Cleveland Partnership for English Learner Success

AIR's Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest leads the Cleveland Partnership for English Learner Success (CLE-PELS). This partnership aims to (1) increase the district's capacity to access, conduct, interpret, and make sense of English Learner (EL) research and (2) support the use of EL research in decision making at the school and district levels. Specifically, partnership members will use research to understand and address the needs of a growing and increasingly more diverse EL student population in the district. To work toward this goal, the partnership developed a shared research agenda in a collaborative workshop. This agenda will guide current and future projects and will define the direction of the partnership.

> *"The collaborative nature of the research agenda-setting workshop allowed for meaningful discussion which helped me clear misunderstandings and validate some of my own ideas about research."*
>
> — *Partnership member*

Partnership with Boston Public Schools to Study Expanded Learning Time

AIR is working with Boston Public Schools (BPS) to study expanded learning time (ELT) in schools across the district. In the first year, the partners worked together to create interview protocols and speak with principals at ELT schools to develop an inventory of the amount of extra time added in these schools, understand how this time was being used, and determine the strengths and challenges underlying adding time to the school day. In the second year of the partnership BPS facilitated data collection to provide school attendance data and teacher and student climate survey data for all schools in the district across multiple years. AIR then used this data along with standardized assessment data to analyze the impact of expanded learning time on the students and teachers in these schools compared to those in non-expanded learning time schools in the district. Additional research projects are in the planning stages for AIR and BPS to continue to grow this partnership and learn more about impacts and best practices associated with expanded learning time.

Why AIR?

We are the experts. Our staff have years of experience launching, supporting, and sustaining research alliances across the country. We know how to listen to our partners' needs so that we may quickly gain an appreciation for their unique contexts and challenges. Our research alliance processes and tools enable us to streamline the work so that we are able to invest time in addressing districts' and states' most vexing research questions.

A true partnership. When you hire AIR, you hire a partner, not a consultant. We believe that by including your staff from the start—developing a research agenda and co-conducting the research—everyone not only will be engaged, but will take ownership.

One-stop shop. Our researchers and experts in practice—many of whom have worked in schools, districts, and state education agencies—work closely to not only provide you with the answers to your research questions but, supports that will build your agencies' capacity to move from research results to actions.

Want to learn more? Contact us:

Carrie Scholz
Senior Research
cscholz@air.org

www.air.org