

## **Promoting Police and Academic Partnerships for Mutual Advantage**

There is a long history of successful working relationships between police and academic researchers in Canada. Most lately, with impetus from Public Safety Canada's Economics of Policing initiative there is renewed interest in evidence-based research by police leadership seeking more effective and efficient ways of solving problems and achieving goals. This development accentuates the opportunities for establishing productive working partnerships with Canadian universities and colleges, particularly with institutions featuring strong justice and social service programs.

Good will and mutual trust are essential to any working partnership and while there will be many variations to the circumstances of police and their academic communities across Canada; experience tells us that adhering to a few proven policies and methods is the best guarantor of success. This paper offers basic guidelines for achieving shared goals with your research partner.

### **What to look for in establishing a partnership**

There should be a reasonable expectation of developing a partnership founded on trust and confidence with advantage to both parties; a win/win strategy. Each project should begin with a formal written agreement governing the working relationship between senior representatives of the police service and the potential academic partner. Be aware that there are inherent differences between the goals of academic researchers and the police service. The researcher is often attracted to broader more generalized questions that apply to human or criminal behaviour, while the police are more interested in questions that directly apply to the service and areas requiring focused attention. Understanding of this basic difference makes for a more effective partnership.

### **Guidelines for Structuring a Research Project Agreement**

Proposals should be judged on their relevance, need, urgency, and practicality, with an assessment of availability of information, estimated cost, personnel time and availability, file research, data management and privacy issues.

The agreement should essentially contain:

- A clear and direct statement of purpose
- A commitment to mutual trust and openness
- A commitment to project completion with a clear division of roles and responsibility between the parties
- Assurance of mutual commitment to actionable findings and recommendations.
- The names of highly motivated and pro-active research staff and project leadership with timelines governing assignments
- Time lines for key milestones and a completion date

- The specification of work space and working conditions that preserve the rights and protections of all involved persons
- Cost estimates for both parties and assurances of sufficient funding
- A specified method for managing and protecting data
- Provision for the academic partner to obtain ethics approval from their college/university
- A statement of academic intentions regarding peer review, publication and copyright
- Provision for a legal review of the agreement by either or both parties prior to signing off
- Description of a joint communications strategy
- A commitment by the police to communicate the rationale for the project to front line staff and others that may be involved
- A commitment to consultation by the partners prior to publication of all information releases, interim or final
- Description of a process for solving unforeseen problems
- Agreement that at an appropriate time, a formal meeting will be held to mark a milestone achievement in the project with recognition of key participants
- Agreement to a post-project assessment of lessons learned in managing the work, the relationship between the parties and all other facets of the partnership experience.

**What to avoid:**

- Research projects imposed by outside interests. When full commitment is lacking projects are doomed to under-achieve
- Agenda driven goals tainted by bias or lack of objectivity including internally inspired proposals
- Under estimation of bureaucratic barriers controlling human resources, finance, internal policy or legal restraints. A thorough assessment should be completed prior to a final decision
- Commitment to overly ambitious or unrealistic targets
- Careless vetting of unsolicited requests for a research partnership

CACP Members will find helpful documentation on the CACP Web Page made available by the Edmonton Police Service that is a “road map” for establishing a working protocol and procedures to guide the relationship with an academic partner. After sign in, click on CACP Research Foundation for access.