

What is a research–practice partnership?

Research–practice partnerships are long-term partnerships among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners that draw the members into close, sustained relationships focused on a shared set of priorities. Members engage in research activities such as negotiating a research agenda or co-developing research and evaluation plans. In many cases, a subset of policymakers, practitioners, and community members maintain advisory roles on research projects staffed with researchers.

What will you gain from participating in a research–practice partnership?

Partnership members experience multiple benefits. The most common include increased capacity to do the following:

- Focus on a long-term research agenda.
- Implement rigorous research methods.
- Leverage research insights to keep staff informed and up-to-date on the field's lessons learned.
- Harness additional research capacity to support decision making and inform the implementation of policies and practices.
- Increase the relevance and usefulness of research products and tools.
- Partner with researchers who provide an independent voice, new perspectives, and external credibility.

Our experience tells us that this partnership structure can be powerful for partnership 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 strengthens practitioners' capacity to incorporate systematic inquiry into regular decision-making processes.
- Collaborative research with partnership 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 the access and use of research findings.
- Build a collaborative infrastructure and facilitate convenings for the partnership.



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.
- My organization would benefit from having partners to examine what is working, what can be improved, and what our next steps might be.

**If yes, you may want
to join a research–
practice partnership.**

Examples of AIR's work

Increasing Student Sense of Belonging With Ohio Partnership

AIR's Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest leads the Making Equitable Schools Audit (MESA) partnership in Ohio. By partnering with school districts in Ohio, REL Midwest seeks to develop, test, and refine the MESA approach. The data-informed approach for high schools will focus on improving student sense of belonging by reducing the use of exclusionary discipline policies and practices that inequitably affect students of color and students receiving special education services. By using the MESA approach, school and community leaders will identify and implement changes to existing policies, programs, and practices to ensure that all members of the school community experience a safe and supportive school environment.

Convening Research–Practice Partnerships to Study and Inform Pandemic Recovery Efforts

AIR is serving as lead organization for the Research on Education Strategies to Advance Recovery and Turnaround (RESTART) Network—a network focused on accelerating student recovery efforts post-pandemic. The RESTART Network brings together five research–practice partnerships from across the United States to share research findings, conduct needs-sensing activities, and foster engagement to bridge research, practice, and policy. As the network lead, AIR facilitates the collaborative activities of the research teams by organizing convenings, overseeing solutions working groups, and more. AIR is conducting research activities to complement the studies and is working to ensure the teams' findings reach policymakers, school leaders, and educators.

Improving Educational Equity and Opportunity Through a Research–Practice Partnership Network

The COVID-19 and Equity in Education (CEE) initiative at AIR is creating an in-depth view of how states, districts, and their communities—especially those with higher percentages of Black and Latino students and/or students experiencing poverty—responded to the pandemic. The CEE initiative is made up of a longitudinal database, ethnographic stories, a community of researchers, and a research–practice partnership network. The CEE Research–Practice Partnership Network comprises seven community-focused teams from four states (California, Florida, New York, and Washington) seeking to learn together and implement community-engaged research that deepens stakeholders' understanding of needs and challenges. AIR supports the CEE Research–Practice Partnership Network teams by providing customized resources and coaching support for up to 2 years as they develop their RPPs, as well as regular opportunities to share and learn from other communities across the country.

Strengthening Access to Computer Science Education

AIR's Center for Evolving Computer Science Education (CS@AIR) builds, uses, and leverages evidence to ensure that every student has access to inclusive and high-quality computer science (CS) education. CS@AIR's portfolio of projects includes researcher–practitioner partnerships, evaluations, micro-credential and educator professional learning programs, and alliances, consortia, and communities of practice. CS@AIR leverages researcher–practitioner partnerships with districts and states to advance local efforts in CS education. These partnerships may center on a particular grade band or span across preK–12 and focus on teacher professional development, classroom implementation, or systems change and policy explorations. Depending on the needs of the CS-related researcher–practitioner partnership, AIR may lead or serve as a research partner or evaluator in a researcher–practitioner partnership.

Why AIR?

We are the experts. Our staff have years of experience launching, supporting, and sustaining research partnerships 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 partnership 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 provide you not only with the answers to your research questions but also with supports that will build your agencies' capacity to move from research results to actions.

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