



Promising Practices:

Developing and Sustaining Effective Partnerships

Fourth R Overview

The Fourth R includes a range of healthy relationships programming that have been shown to promote positive peer interactions and reduce dating and peer violence. There are many different programming components for different grades, as well as community-based versions. Some of the recent program components have a particular emphasis on promoting positive mental health. In addition, we have developed strengths-based programming that is uniquely designed to meet the needs of Indigenous youth, LGBT2Q+ youth, and vulnerable youth. Between 2010 and 2018 we were funded through the Innovation Strategy of the Public Health Agency of Canada. Across three project phases we developed new programming components, evaluated programs, made regional adaptations, and scaled up nationally. By 2018 Fourth R programs were implemented in more than 5000 schools and community organizations nationally.

Partnerships

Over the course of this project, we worked closely with diverse partners across the country. Some of these partnerships were based on previous working relationships and others were new. Sometimes we developed new relationships with partners of partners, and benefitted from those extended networks. We partnered with school boards, community agencies, public health units, postsecondary educations, policy makers and other researchers. These partners provided a critical national network for our scale-up of Fourth R programs. They guided us in adaptation processes and aligning with regional needs and opportunities to promote effective implementation and scale-up. Our partners included:

- School boards
- Community organizations
- Postsecondary institutions
- Funders
- Ministries and Departments of Education
- Indigenous community partners
- Policy makers
- Researchers

The purpose of this summary is to identify promising practices in the area of developing and sustaining effective relationships with school and community stakeholders. It is one of eight issue-specific summaries designed to share actionable, positive strategies to improve effectiveness in the mental health promotion and violence prevention efforts underway.



Promising Practices

Authentic partnerships take time and resources.

Relationship building needs to be intentional and requires dedicated resources for both time and money. Fiscal constraints have created a move towards virtual meetings, but in-person meetings remain a valuable tool in developing relationships. Even periodic in-person meetings create significant momentum that can be maintained through virtual mechanisms.

Understand decision-making processes for each of your partners.

Each of your partner organizations or systems has its own communication and decision-making processes. It is important to learn which individuals should be informed about decisions and which need to be consulted. The education system is quite hierarchical and although individual educators have much autonomy over their own classrooms, they are not able to adopt or implement programming at a larger systems level. Understanding the school board organization structure is a requirement for moving beyond classroom-by-classroom implementation.

Align with partners' mandates.

Many of our partners are interested in the Fourth R because it aligns with their work. These partners might focus on different aspects of the work, and it facilitates partnership success if you can use their particular framework. For example, educational partners might focus on the social and emotional learning components, whereas public health partners might be more interested in violence prevention. Understanding each partner's focus helps you use the right language and help them tell the story they need to tell to their other stakeholders.

Be aware that you cannot sustain the same intensity of relationships at all times.

Partnerships will wax and wane over the course of a multi-year project, depending on the phase of the work. It is not possible to maintain the same intensity of relationship with all partners at all times. There may be slower times based on the project or based on external challenges for a particular partner. It is important to maintain enough relationship continuity during slower periods of work that there is a connection when the opportunity arises to ramp back up again.

Provide timely feedback written in plain language.

Good partners provide feedback about project activities in a way that is both current and accessible to a wide audience. It is not helpful for school and community-based partners to receive a copy of a peer reviewed article 3 years after a project has finished. Ideally, feedback reports are created in a way that facilitates decision-making cycles (e.g., before the start of the next school year or budget cycle).

Partnerships: Fourth R Research and Resources

Over the course of this project we have developed numerous resources that include information and guidance about partnerships. We have also published several research articles and chapters for edited books.

Partnership Report

This report was developed on in-depth interviews with 11 stakeholders nationally. These stakeholders had strategic partnerships with our team over the course of the project.

Available at: <https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/docs/Partnership-Report.pdf>

Implementation Manual

The implementation manual includes numerous resources and considerations for partnering with school boards. It also identifies important considerations across the whole implementation cycle.

Available at: <https://youthrelationships.org/implementation-manual>

Engaging Aboriginal Youth Manual

This toolkit has many strategies and checklist to support respectful and effective work with Indigenous partners. There is a section on partnerships and numerous case studies. It is available in both English and French.

Available at: <https://youthrelationships.org/engaging-aboriginal-youth-toolkit>

Journal Articles and Chapters

Crooks, C. V., Chiodo, D., Dunlop, C., Lapointe, A., & Kerry, A. (2018). The Fourth R: Considerations for implementing evidence-based healthy relationships and mental health promotion programming in diverse contexts. In A. W. Leschied, D. Saklofske, & G. Flett (eds.) *The Handbook of Implementation of School Based Mental Programs* (pp. 299-321). Springer Publishing, New York, NY.

Crooks, C. V. & Dunlop, C. (2017). Mental health promotion with Aboriginal youth: Lessons learned from the Uniting Our Nations program. In J. R. Harrison, B. K. Schultz, & S. W. Evans (Eds). *School Mental Health Services for Adolescents* (pp. 306-328). London: Oxford University Press.

Crooks, C. V., Exner-Cortens, D., Siebold, W., Moore, K., Grassgreen, L., Owen, P., Rausch, A., & Rossier, M. (2018). The role of relationships in collaborative partnership success: Lessons from the Alaska Fourth R project. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 67, 97-104. DOI: 10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2017.12.007

Crooks, C. V., Exner-Cortens, Siebold, W., Rosier, M., & Baker, K (2018). Building capacity to implement teen dating violence prevention: Lessons learned from the Alaska Fourth R initiative. In D. Wolfe and J. Temple (Eds.) *Dating violence: Theory, research, and prevention* (pp. 503-521). New York: Academics Press/Elsevier.

Crooks, C. V., Snowshoe, A., Chiodo, D., & Brunette-Debassige, C. (2013). Navigating between rigor and community-based research partnerships: Building the evaluation of the *Uniting Our Nations* health promotion program for FNMI youth. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 32, 13-25, 10.7870/cjcmh-2013-016.