

Knowledge Value Mapping of National Organizations: A Knowledge Translation Strategy to Efficiently Communicate Research-Based Knowledge to Multiple Stakeholder Audiences

Joseph P. Lane & Juan D. Rogers

This issue of FOCUS describes the results from a series of comparative case studies exploring how selected national organizations, representing different stakeholder groups, can play an important role in communicating new research findings to diverse audiences. Knowledge value mapping helps understand the context of each organization's mission and the interests of their members.

Overview

Research sponsors and project investigators are increasingly tasked with communicating their findings to—and demonstrating evidence of knowledge use by—non-traditional audiences. This requires additional efforts to translate findings into language and formats appropriate for each target audience, and to identify channels for communicating these translated findings to the target audiences. For technology-based research knowledge, these audiences include clinicians, consumers, manufacturers, policy implementers and knowledge brokers. But how can an agency or investigator possibly reach such diverse audiences? The authors suggest one efficient approach is to communicate research findings through national organizations representing one or more target audiences.

However, this requires an understanding of how such organizations view and treat research knowledge, which can be determined through a technique called Knowledge Value Mapping (KVM). Do knowledge values differ between national organizations representing different audiences? Can a deeper understanding of knowledge values help sponsors, investigators and organizations better translate and communicate research findings to non-traditional stakeholders?

The Center on Knowledge Translation for Technology Transfer (KT4TT) conducted a series of comparative case studies on knowledge value mapping by interviewing spokespersons for six selected national organizations. The semi-structured interviews followed a ten-item questionnaire to characterize different ways in which each organization engages with research-based knowledge. Each participating

organization represents a particular stakeholder group, while all share a common interest in the research subject matter.

We found that each national organization considers the value of the research knowledge within the context of their organization's mission and the interests of their members. All are interested in collaborating with researchers to share relevant findings, while they vary along the following dimensions of knowledge engagement: create, identify, translate, adapt, communicate, use, promote, absorptive capacity and recommendations for facilitation. The study concluded that national organizations are appropriate channels for communicating research findings, and that these collaborations can help document evidence of use by the organizations or their members.

Background

Scholars who traditionally prepare publications for other scholars, now need to consider what new audiences might benefit from their findings. For projects generating technology-based innovations, these audiences typically include manufacturers, clinicians, consumers, policymakers and brokers. The diversity of audiences, and likely their value sets, raises a host of questions. How can one efficiently reach a wide range of audiences, each with different value systems regarding the awareness, interest and use of new knowledge from research? What other factors besides understanding the content of the knowledge may be at stake to encourage its use?

On a logistical level, it is not always feasible to communicate research-based knowledge directly to potential users on a one-to-one basis.

There may be one or more tiers of intermediary organizations that can serve as a surrogate for effectively communicating knowledge within the context and values of the target audience. For example, national organizations that represent a profession that depends on an area of scientific knowledge (e.g., physicians, clinicians, engineers), or potential knowledge beneficiaries (e.g., employers or recipients of products or services). National organizations understand and likely share the values of their constituencies, which they can represent to the knowledge creator. They already serve as a conduit for efficiently and effectively communicating relevant new knowledge to their members through professional meetings as well

as through the use of print or electronic media. Their internal credibility makes members more inclined to pay attention to materials received.

This study explores the extent to which selected national organizations can play a crucial role in communicating

new knowledge to diverse audiences, how their organization's context shapes their values regarding research-based knowledge, and how creating a detailed map of their respective values can help plan a knowledge translation strategy. All this is was done within the context of a field of assistive technologies for persons lacking the ability to communicate verbally.

Study of National Organizations Involved with AAC Assistive Technologies

This project focuses on the knowledge values of national organizations with members who have an interest in the identification, communication and application of research-based findings. We focused specifically on national organizations with a reason to be interested in findings from research

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studies in a specific area of assistive technologies, namely, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) technologies.

The value mapping of national organizations interested in AAC research findings reported here, was conducted as part of a broader randomized controlled trial (RCT) examining the effectiveness of three different approaches to communicating new research-based knowledge: 1) traditional passive diffusion; 2) knowledge dissemination; and 3) knowledge translation. This RCT compares stakeholder awareness, interest, and use of new AAC knowledge before and after experimental interventions. The broader intervention study is still ongoing.

Our aim here is to consider how knowledge value mapping of national organizations can help knowledge creators identify opportunities for communicating their research findings more efficiently and effectively than attempting to contact members of diverse stakeholder groups individually. This analysis involved three assumptions:

- A) National organizations are appropriate conduits for communicating research-based information to entire groups of individuals.
- B) These national organizations have specific value systems regarding research-based knowledge, which can be articulated through a semi-structured interview process.
- C) Mapping the knowledge values of national organizations will provide useful guidance on how best to communicate research-based knowledge to these organizations, and through them to their members.

Methods

Multiple comparative case studies

The project team identified five different stakeholder groups whose members were likely to be interested in new technology-related research knowledge: manufacturers, clinicians, consumers, brokers and public policy. The project team then

identified national organizations representing each of the five stakeholder groups, with at least a portion of members likely interested in new knowledge regarding adults (persons over 18 years old) who use AAC devices. A sixth organization—which happens to also represent members of the five other stakeholder groups—participated in a pilot test of the data collection instrument. The organizations representing the stakeholder groups are:

1. **Manufacturer Stakeholders** – Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA)
<http://www.atia.org>
2. **Clinician Stakeholders** – American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
<http://www.asha.org>
3. **Consumer Stakeholders** – International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC)
<http://www.isaac-online.org>
4. **Broker Stakeholders** – Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)
<http://www.ahead.org>
5. **Public Policy Stakeholders** – Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/>
6. **Cross-Sector Stakeholder (Pilot Study)** – Rehabilitation Engineering & Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA)
<http://www.resna.org>

Each national organization constituted a case for a multiple comparative case study design. We attempted to identify the core values of each organization that affect the flow of research results to potential beneficiaries in their constituencies. For this purpose, we conducted semi-structured interviews to understand how these organizations identify and apply research-based knowledge in order to determine the priorities that characterize their role in the flow of knowledge toward the context of use.

The interview protocol addresses 10 major questions or themes with multiple sub-questions to further elucidate each topic (see Appendix A in full article). The first seven themes focus on levels of knowledge use while the last three focus on related issues. A summary of results for each theme follows.

Theme 1 - Creating Knowledge: *Conducting research internally or funding others to conduct research for the organization.*

Research activity and research findings appear to be a valued asset for all six organizations included in this study. All but one reported engaging in some kind of research activity at least occasionally. ATIA is not currently engaged in any research, yet within the past year they formed a research committee to explore how best to integrate research activity and findings into this industry association.

As a Federal government entity, OSERS funds extramural research projects to improve quality of life for persons with disabilities, particularly to advance education, employment, rehabilitation and independent living outcomes, across all fields of application. ASHA conducts member surveys, maintains a national database of provider reported information, conducts literature syntheses, and sponsors external research activities, all of which support the practitioners in the field and their students in training.

As interdisciplinary organizations representing multiple stakeholder groups, ISAAC, RESNA and AHEAD orchestrate research activity funded by and performed by others. This includes practice standards development, professional development, and policy formulation. In addition, all but one organization (OSERS) publish peer-

reviewed journals containing reports of applied research studies.

In sum, these organizations may be considered critical intermediaries of the flow of research knowledge and are linked to the creators rather closely, act as brokers and communicators of research results, and have fluid connections with many actual and potential users. They are obviously important actors in the knowledge translation process, be it systematic and intentional or spontaneous and informal.

Theme 2 - Identifying Knowledge: *Searching for research findings that have already been generated by others.*

An organization may highly value research without conducting or sponsoring its own. Those actively seeking new research findings are the most receptive to receiving abstracts or articles on current work. One may identify the staff tasked with seeking new research and correspond to track their topical interests over time. For example, OSERS searches continuously for new findings to inform internal staff, support the content of grant/contract solicitations, update statutes and regulations, monitor grantee/contractor performance, and provide policy advice to Congress and the White House. OSERS is in a key position to leverage new research findings in multiple ways at a high level of visibility and potential impact.

ASHA continuously searches for new findings in support of three programs: 1) Informatics – requires updates on surveillance and epidemiological data for assessing need for, and impact of, AAC services and regulations; 2) Education – keeping members informed about current AAC findings; and 3) Dissemination – content for a column on

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current research findings in both print and e-zine publications for members.

As inter-disciplinary and cross-sector agencies, both ISAAC and RESNA communicate research findings to maintain relevance to their various constituents, and to generate reference material within their core knowledge base. Both organizations use research knowledge strategically to inform public policy agencies. ATIA and AHEAD both search for new findings occasionally to support their journals and to maintain the dissemination of relevant findings to their members. As an industry-focused organization, ATIA seeks research information that companies can apply and is interested in brokering partnerships between researchers and companies that can use their findings.

Theme 3 - Translating Knowledge: *Paraphrasing research findings to make them more relevant or understandable to the target audience.*

These national organizations were reluctant to paraphrase the research findings of others. Only two organizations reported doing so either very frequently (ASHA) or frequently (OSERS). As a Federal agency spanning many topics and contexts, OSERS staff distills materials from multiple sources for communication to other internal staff, to other Federal programs, or to incorporate the findings into statutes, regulations or requests for external proposals. ASHA, as a professional and credentialing organization of clinicians, takes an active role in communicating research information to its constituents in special formats that involve interpretation of the research results for the needs of their audience.

Other organizations were less confident in their ability to translate findings without altering the original meaning and full implications of the

findings. They thought that any paraphrasing should be left to the potential user of the information. In cases where they find translation to be necessary, most contact the original author. However, as an organization closely associated with consumers, ISAAC prefers translation by experts from the stakeholder audience to ensure it is meaningful and relevant.

Knowledge translation practice shows that multiple audiences have different needs so the task of engaging in translation is not homogenous or static. As the findings move toward application,

adaptation to a context may require different capabilities.

The researcher may have a role in ensuring that the findings remain within the parameters of the study's rigor, while the potential users may have a role in ensuring high relevance to the

audience. ISAAC's position suggests collaborative translation in partnership with representatives of the target audiences.

Theme 4 - Adapting Knowledge: *Interpreting research findings to improve their fit within their organization's context.*

Three organizations adapt knowledge while three think adaptation is not applicable to them. Here again the crucial issue was the existence of internal capabilities to link the research to specific needs of their constituencies. Several organizations expressed even greater reservations about adaptation than about translation, considering the former to be synonymous with modification, which they generally avoid. This is further evidence of the respect that organizations exhibit towards research-based knowledge.

Both ISAAC and RESNA report occasionally adapting findings to their local context, such as when fostering dialogue between disciplines within their membership. ISAAC reported that further adaptation is left to their members.

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This is a direct consequence of the diversity of applications and needs within the consumer community. It is very difficult for one organization to have the capabilities to address all audiences at the same level of expertise.

RESNA's adaptation occurs in the preparation of position papers, standards/guidelines, quality indicators, and benchmarking where consolidating and reconciling a wide range of findings is necessary. Adaptation is seen as a step beyond translation when further effort is necessary to relate the knowledge to their members' own context.

As a Federal agency, OSERS adapts knowledge to collate and distill findings from multiple sources.

As part of its mission, OSERS adapts and applies research-based knowledge to demonstrate how Federal projects, programs and policies relate to persons with disabilities and their quality of life. OSERS represents the interests of their public constituencies within broader policy issues where those interests might not otherwise be considered.

Theme 5 - Communicating Knowledge:
Disseminating or demonstrating research findings through various media channels.

All six organizations report being highly engaged in communicating research-based knowledge. All view their electronic media (i.e., email, electronic mailing lists, websites) as prime vehicles for communicating research findings, while conference proceedings, presentations and workshops are equally popular approaches. Five organizations have their own peer-reviewed journals that constitute a direct mechanism for communicating research knowledge.

ATIA, ASHA and OSERS all report webcasts/webinars, and special interest groups, as frequently used methods of communicating research knowledge. ATIA and RESNA both use white papers or position papers frequently, possibly because they are common approaches for members from industry. ATIA alone reported using popular media (i.e. television).

As a government agency, OSERS reports using small group meetings with policy makers and staff members in Congress, the White House and Federal agencies, as a mechanism for communicating research findings about persons with disabilities which are relevant to broader statutory, regulatory or programmatic issues.

All of these organizations serve as conduits to communicate findings to varied and diverse stakeholder groups. On the one hand, they constitute an infrastructure for research knowledge flow that already plays a significant mediating role for the benefits of research to reach relevant stakeholders. On the other hand, they reveal the challenges that remain

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in expanding the channels for communicating research-based findings. It clearly points out that the work of knowledge translation is multidisciplinary and multidimensional, requiring a detailed understanding of multiple contexts on the part of sponsors and scholars alike.

Theme 6 - Using Knowledge:
Applying research findings to situations within the organization or among its body of members.

Beyond quantifying frequency of use, we solicited examples of knowledge use. Most examples included a new media format or the choice of a specific diffusion channel accessible to the relevant constituencies. In one case, the research result led to the implementation of an active

institutionalized mechanism of direct application in the constituency itself. Thus, knowledge translation involves not only the knowledge being translated, but also an understanding of the context in which the knowledge may be applied, and the means for communicating within those specific contexts, all to achieve the objectives of knowledge use and its documentation.

Four of the organizations reported use of research-based knowledge within the organization frequently or very frequently, while AHEAD reports occasional use. ATIA responded that the question was not applicable to them because, as an industry association, they focused on sharing findings with their constituents. All five knowledge users referenced academic journals as sources, while three (AHEAD, ISAAC & RESNA) also referenced websites, training seminars and conferences as sources. Three (ISAAC, ASHA & OSERS) also reported using findings from internal projects or commissioned/sponsored external activity.

Since knowledge translation is in essence a social communication problem, the use of multiple media channels is critical for widely disseminating research findings. Organizations seek knowledge through websites, training seminars, workshops and conferences. These represent opportunities for scholars to increase the likelihood that their findings will be detected and applied. So the traditional practice of reporting findings in a single scholarly article may have to give way to repeated mentions in abstracts or summaries in these alternative media and forums.

Theme 7 - Incentives for Seeking or Applying Research Knowledge: *Promoting the use of research knowledge among the membership.*

Given the range of knowledge use, it is not surprising that the organizations reported a variety of incentives for knowledge use. We provided four defined categories of incentives and requested that they specify any others in a fifth open category. Table 1 summarizes their responses:

Table 1. Incentives for Promoting the Use of Research Knowledge

| Incentive Category | No. of Orgs. | Organization | | | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| | | AHEAD | ASHA | ATIA | ISAAC | OSERS | RESNA |
| Workshops/webcasts; Preconference training | 6 | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Continuing Education Units (CEUs) | 4 | X | X | X | | | X |
| Discounts on conference registration | 4 | X | X | X | | | X |
| Certificates of course/ program completion | 2 | | | X | | | X |
| Other: | 2 | | | | | | |
| Strand advisors | 1 | | | X | | | |
| Electronic mail lists | 1 | | | | X | | |

These organizations clearly leverage the value inherent in operating education and training forums for members and constituents. Conferences, workshops, special interest groups and electronic mailing lists all provide opportunities to encourage awareness, interest and use of research-based knowledge – and therefore opportunities for researchers to communicate their findings.

The ATIA's network of Strand Advisors from other national organizations is particularly relevant for knowledge translation. These partners bring their own organization's particular expertise to the table. The interactions enhance the channels of knowledge flow as the staff of the organizations has greater exposure to the needs of other constituencies and the potential for application of research knowledge they come into contact with. They also increase the number of mediations for knowledge flow that they are able to facilitate in their area of interest. Finally, they provide researchers with insights about potential target audiences, and new collaborators for customizing the form and content of knowledge packages to stakeholder's values and interests.

Theme 8 - Measurement of Awareness, Interest or Application of New Knowledge.

Measurement is problematic even as a research issue, so it is not surprising that there is no standard approach to measuring knowledge use among internal staff, members or constituents across these organizations. However, in all but one of our cases a significant effort is devoted to some way of gauging one or more of these dimensions of

knowledge use. The four organizations conducting annual conferences (ATIA, ISAAC, ASHA, RESNA) conduct post-session evaluations to track audience perceptions of content delivered. AHEAD reports no formal efforts to measure knowledge use. ISAAC and ASHA track the impact factor ratings for their peer-reviewed journal. OSERS relies on the apparent influence of new knowledge as observed in grant application reviewed by internal staff. RESNA monitors requests for information on particular topics, particularly through electronic mailing list threads. The differences are obviously related to the different missions and constituencies of each organization.

ASHA describes the most structured approach to measuring knowledge use. Every three years ASHA conducts a "Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices" survey, which includes questions about incorporating research-based evidence into practice. Over time this approach could provide a rich set of information regarding trends in research and in practice.

Overall, it appears that the field would benefit from an instrument capable of measuring awareness, interest and use of research-based knowledge. Our project has created a questionnaire to measure categories and levels of knowledge awareness, interest and use among audiences called "Level Of Knowledge Use Survey (LOKUS)." We are establishing the questionnaire's psychometric properties, and are applying it within the previously mentioned intervention project associated with this knowledge value mapping study.

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Theme 9 - Post-Graduate Training Among Organization's Staff.

Organizational literature suggests that the level of knowledge resident within the staff of an organization represents their ability to fully comprehend and apply advanced knowledge. Even organizations within the same field, or departments in the same organization, may not have equivalent capabilities for understanding and applying research-based knowledge.

Knowledge value mapping helps assess an organization's readiness to comprehend and apply such knowledge. In the cases reported there, the percentage of staff with post-graduate training varies widely. For example, ASHA (100%) and OSERS (95%) are extremely high, AHEAD (80%) is also very high. The remaining three organizations report percentages at 50% (ISAAC) or not tracked (ATIA and RESNA), which is expected as their diverse memberships include higher percentages of entry-level professionals, manufacturers and consumers. Post-graduate education is not necessarily a requirement for their professional or personal involvement.

Knowing the educational level of the staff helps an outsider calibrate the level of sophistication inherent in the materials they prepare for presentation to, or communication through, these organizations. However, since the ability to facilitate the flow of research knowledge to various constituencies involves both a basic comprehension of the research results in order to gauge their value to their constituencies, and the capacity to understand underlying and possibly changing needs of communities of stakeholders, organizations populated with staff having post-graduate training will be the best candidates for collaboration in knowledge translation.

Theme 10 - Collaborative Relations with Researchers.

All six organizations offered suggestions that clearly represent opportunities for increased engagement with them by individual researchers. As intermediaries in the knowledge flow process this is not surprising, since anything that facilitates their engagement at the interface with researchers will reduce barriers to the accomplishment of their mission.

All mentioned the need to have someone take the time to "translate" research findings from the academic language of the scholarly article to the practical language of the clinician, consumer or manufacturer. Given the reluctance to independently translate research knowledge reported in Theme 3, it is not surprising that the organizations seek assistance from the broader research community, if not from the original study authors themselves. They want someone familiar with the study to not only explain the findings, but also explain the implications of those findings for a particular audience, as well as describing a process by which the audience could implement the findings within an action framework.

Expectations for this translation task include using language appropriate to the audience, summarizing the findings in the context of a case example, preparing "distribution-ready" materials in user-friendly formats, and preparing multiple versions of the findings for communication through electronic media. Respondents speak of making the knowledge more "digestible" for their targeted members or constituents. This is partly a matter of effective communication but also a matter of convenience. To the extent a researcher delivers materials already tailored to a particular audience, the national organization can efficiently process that material for delivery to the audience

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at little cost in time or resources. All suggestions demonstrate an awareness of the value of research to their memberships.

Summary

All of the findings and related analysis are presented in greater detail in the published paper, **Engaging national organizations for knowledge translation: comparative case studies in knowledge value mapping** (Lane & Rogers, 2011), available via open access through the following *Implementation Science* link: <http://www.implementationscience.com/content/6/1/106/abstract>

The main finding is that all of the national organizations studied, due to their link to non-academic stakeholder groups, demonstrate attributes as critical mediators in the knowledge flow from research results to various uses, applications, and realization of potential benefits for research. However, with that said, the manner in which this mediation occurs is different for each one. The selected national organizations involved with the field of Augmentative and Alternative Communications value research-based knowledge in very specific ways that are tied to the interests of their constituencies. Most are involved in either creating knowledge or identifying it when created by others. Even though they all acquire research knowledge in one way or another, some perform research of their own while others engage

with research outputs to provide summaries or conversions to other media. They all recognize the challenge of interpretation of results for their constituencies while preserving the validity and quality of the original research. They were all very cautious about preserving the original content of research while paying close attention to the needs and priorities of their constituents.

Among the efforts that all organizations engaged in was the communication of research-based knowledge in a variety of media channels. They are growing in their ability to use Internet-related electronic media, social networking, special events, position papers, white papers, workshops and special meetings, among a large variety of possibilities. So together with the engagement with the content, a critical role of these organizations in knowledge translation is the creation of forums and social loci where interested parties focused on an area of research results can interact to generate an agenda for future translation development. Many of the mechanisms of communication with their constituencies via member surveys, special interest group reports, electronic mailing list feedback and formal reporting by grantees, among others, produce up-to-date information about the context of use. These could be studied carefully across organizations as a natural follow up to such a knowledge value mapping exercise.

CENTER ON KT4TT

The 5-year **Center on Knowledge Translation for Technology Transfer (KT4TT)** project (<http://kt4tt.buffalo.edu>) was awarded to the University at Buffalo (SUNY), Center for Assistive Technology (CAT) on October 1, 2008. SEDL and Western New York Independent Living, Inc., are partners in the project. SEDL's role focuses on utilization-oriented methods of dissemination, training, and technical assistance to effectively communicate with knowledge producers and knowledge users. This *FOCUS Technical Brief* is a product of the SEDL-KT4TT partnership.

The project focuses on three key outcomes:

- *Improved understanding* of the barriers preventing successful knowledge translation for technology transfer and ways to overcome these barriers
- *Advanced knowledge* of best models, methods, and measures of knowledge translation and technology transfer for achieving outcomes
- *Increased utilization* of these validated best practices by NIDRR's technology-oriented grantees



Center on Knowledge Translation for Technology Transfer

Other *FOCUS Technical Briefs* from the Center on KT4TT:

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<http://www.ncddr.org/webcasts/webcast27.html>

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Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge colleagues who contributed to the concepts expressed herein. This document is a product of the Center on Knowledge Translation for Technology Transfer (KT4TT) and is published by the National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR). KT4TT is funded under grant H133A080050 and NCDDR is funded under grant H133A060028 by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) of the U.S. Department of Education. The opinions contained in this publication are those of the authors and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

Recommended Citation

Lane, J. P. & Rogers, J. D. (2011). Knowledge value mapping of national organizations: A knowledge translation strategy to efficiently communicate research-based knowledge to multiple stakeholder audiences. *FOCUS Technical Brief*, (32). Austin, TX: SEDL, National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research.

Address Correspondence

Joseph P. Lane, MBPA
 Director, Center on Knowledge Translation for Technology Transfer
 Center for Assistive Technology, University at Buffalo (SUNY)
 100 Sylvan Parkway, Suite 400
 Amherst, NY 14228
 716-204-8606, ext. 211
 Fax: 716-204-8610
 E-mail: joelane@buffalo.edu

Authors

Joseph P. Lane, MBPA, is director of the Center for Assistive Technology established at the University at Buffalo in 1988. He is principal investigator of the NIDRR-funded Disability and Rehabilitation Research Project on Knowledge Translation for Technology Transfer (<http://kt4tt.buffalo.edu>). Mr. Lane directed NIDRR's Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Technology Transfer (<http://t2rerc.buffalo.edu>) from 1993 to 2008.

Juan D. Rogers, PhD, is associate professor of public policy and director of the Research Value Mapping Program at the School of Public Policy (<http://www.rvm.gatech.edu/aboutrvm.htm>), Georgia Institute of Technology. He teaches courses on science and technology policy, information management and policy, knowledge management, logic of policy inquiry, and bureaucracy and policy implementation.

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FOCUS: A Technical Brief From the National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research was produced by the National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR) under grant H133A060028 from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). NCDDR is funded 100% by NIDRR at \$750,000 per project year.

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Advancing Research, Improving Education



NCDDR's scope of work focuses on developing systems for applying rigorous standards of evidence in describing, assessing, and disseminating outcomes from research and development sponsored by NIDRR. The NCDDR promotes movement of disability research results into evidence-based instruments such as systematic reviews as well as consumer-oriented information systems and applications.

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