



Final  
Report

# TOWARDS A VIABLE COMMUNITY OF RESEARCH PRACTICE

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ACTIVITIES | RESULTS | PROSPECTS



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**“Towards a Viable Community of Research Practice: Activities, Results, Prospects”** report was prepared by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC)-Armenia Foundation, funded by the National Democratic Institute (NDI). This report was created to identify challenges and issues facing the research community in the social sciences and humanities, and to map the paths towards collaboratively finding solutions to them. The content of the report is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views of NDI.

This report is a translation version of the original Armenian one. In case of any inconsistencies across language versions, the Armenian prevails (refer to [www.crrc.am](http://www.crrc.am) for original language report).

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# GOAL AND EXPECTATIONS



This report summarizes the activities and results of the “Community of Practice”<sup>1</sup> project within the scope of 2022-2023 multi-component program funded by the National Democracy Institute (NDI) and implemented by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC)-Armenia Foundation.

The sub-project is, in fact, a continuation of the efforts and actions implemented for the development of the research community in Armenia, which were initiated back in 2021 by Socioscope NGO. Thereafter, in 2021-2022, the efforts were continued and developed as a result of the activities carried out by Socies Expert Center NGO. In 2022, as the “torch” was passed down to CRRC-Armenia, which took on this important mission by emphasizing the following expectation formulated in the final protocol of the 3rd “Research Ethics Forum”: *“The activation of the research community, the establishment of dialogue platforms present a real opportunity to uphold the principles of research ethics. The research community should be regarded as a standard-setting, deliberate, and informal monitoring body. Socializing with colleagues and cultivating a culture of independence while avoiding direct supervisory, disciplinary, formal procedures is equally important.”*

Guided by the vision summarized in the referenced paragraph, as well as based on the trends and achievements recorded during the previous activities, CRRC-Armenia aimed for a number of contributions during the implementation of this sub-project:

- intensify and deepen the communication between members of the research community;
- ensure a more multifaceted and diverse representation of actors related to research activities in the organized events;
- raise public awareness on the challenges and issues facing the research community;
- increase the readiness and capacity of the research community to jointly address common challenges and issues in research.

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<sup>1</sup> The full name of the multi-component program is “Focus Group Discussions, Nationwide Representative Survey and Community of Practice” funded by NDI.

# SCOPES

## (activities and methodology)



In order to achieve the stated goals, CRRC-Armenia planned and implemented the following activities:

- *brainstorming sessions* with the representatives of the research community;
- *“Open(-ended) Question” podcast* with representatives of research organizations and individual researchers involved in research practices;
- *research forum* with an expanded composition of representatives of the research community;
- summarizing the lessons learned from the implemented activities in a protocol and distributing the latter among the members of the research community.

### **Brainstorming Sessions: Uncovering the Problems**

The purpose of brainstorming sessions was to identify certain problems and solutions encountered in research practices with the help of representatives of organizations involved in research practices and individual researchers, and also to promote cooperation through discussions. Considering this, brainstorming sessions did not have a clear structure. These were not conventional focus group discussions or traditional solution-oriented sessions. Instead, these brainstorming sessions served as a platform for open conversation and debate. A platform with this character facilitates the freedom to forward ideas and to agree or disagree with each other, without the active participation of the moderator. The role of the moderator was mainly limited to ensuring the equal participation of participants in terms of expressing their opinion and following the time allotted for the discussion.

A key characteristic of the brainstorming sessions was that the topics of the discussions and, especially, their sub-questions were not predetermined. The topics and sub-questions appeared and became apparent during each preceding session or throughout the ongoing discussion. Therefore, out of 19 “raw” topics identified by CRRC-Armenia at the project’s inception, the 9 most relevant topics were zoomed in at, effectively becoming the subject of discussion during 9 brainstorming sessions with actors from the research community.

The following 9 topics were covered during the brainstorming sessions:

1. Do public opinion polls distort the research field?
2. To understand or to change reality? Where does the researcher’s role begin and end?
3. The key to effective donor-research organization collaboration.
4. Why does data remain in the “drawers”? Putting research potential to full use.
5. What should the professional community do to improve research education?
6. Beyond descriptive analysis: the challenges of data communication.

7. Interdisciplinary collaboration: exploring society together.
8. "Hello, we are conducting a survey..."
9. Research community: competition or cooperation?

### **"Open(-ended) Question" Podcast: Framing the Problems**

In order to publicize and problematize, the most relevant issues and their solutions identified during the brainstorming sessions. Together with invited guest representatives of organizations involved in research practices, and in collaboration with Boon TV, 9 thematic episodes of the podcast entitled "Open(-ended) Question" were recorded. The topics of the podcast were drawn from the challenges and questions raised during the brainstorming sessions. In order to provide wider awareness of the challenges discussed in the podcast and the possible ways to solve them, brief text responses related to each podcast were prepared in cooperation with Boon TV.

The 9 topics of "Open(-ended) Question" podcast were as follows:

1. Public opinion does (not) exist?
2. The researcher's role: to understand or to change?
3. How (not) to fund research?
4. Why does data remain in the "drawers"?
5. How (not) to educate researchers?
6. How (not) to analyze data?
7. How (not) to study society from across disciplines?
8. How (not) to knock on people's doors?
9. How (not) to compete in research?

### **Forum: Looking for Solutions**

In order to summarize, explore and find potential solutions to the results of the brainstorming sessions and podcast episodes, a research forum ("Peer-to-peer Learning: 4th Research Forum") was held. The forum featured an expanded representation of the research community and focused on in-depth discussion of specific topics. In total, 5 topics were discussed, the selection of topics was carried through preliminary polling among the participants.

The discussions of the 5 selected topics were carried out in, what we called, "Very Round-Tables" format. The essence of this format was to ensure the simultaneous participation of all those present at the forum, regardless of whether the participants were sitting at the round table at the time of the discussion of the topic, whether they sat on the front row or in other parts of the hall. The participants who were not sitting immediately at round-tables had the opportunity to share their observations and thoughts in the virtual room of the forum, which was broadcasted live on the digital screen located in the hall.

The event ended with a discussion of conclusive reflections to list the observations and proposed solutions generated during the forum.

The 5 topics discussed during the forum were formulated as follows:

1. In our country, the profession of a researcher is wrongly taught from the beginning, therefore, the problem lies in the process of educating/training specialists.
2. The political, value-related, normative, and ideological views of the researcher greatly affect the quality of the research.



3. Social research analyses are often limited to “passive” descriptions of data lacking in-depth analytical interpretations; this creates fertile ground for misunderstandings and manipulations of the data.
4. Data and research potential are not sufficiently used to solve specific and practical problems.
5. Social science and humanities researchers can “see” society better together, but they hardly cooperate with each other.

We consider it important to emphasize that the topics were formulated as a result of group brainstorming sessions with researchers within the framework of a one-year joint project of CRRC-Armenia and the NDI. They are drawn from the observations of the brainstorming participants and are mostly presented without editing. The wordings they appear in are strictly conventional/symbolic in nature and do not necessarily coincide with the perceptions of other representatives of the community. In this case, the questions and proposals that arise from the formulated problems and on which a common understanding has been demonstrated are what should be deemed most important. This also applies to the sub-issues and the proposals made by the participants in order to overcome them.



# RESULTS AND EVALUATION



“More or Less” is More than “Less or More”<sup>2</sup>  
(«Շատ թե քիչ»-ն ավելի շատ է, քան՝ «քիչ թե շատ»-ը)

## More participants, more sectors

In total, representatives from 18 research organizations (17 non-governmental and 1 governmental), 4 higher educational institutions, 13 grant-giving organizations (including 3 international organizations), 2 state institutions (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, National Institute of Labour and Social Research), 1 Media sector, 1 bank, 1 PR sector, 2 non-research NGOs, and 2 independent researchers. Altogether, 71 representatives from the research community participated in all the events. Of the 71 representatives, 11 participated simultaneously in two or three event formats. The attendees varied in research backgrounds, such as sociologists, social workers, social/cultural anthropologists, economists, statisticians, philosophers, linguists, journalists, internationalists, specialists in international relations, political scientists, management and education experts. The participants acknowledged that they had not yet participated in a discussion for researchers before with that many attendees from diverse backgrounds.

## More issues, more comments, more solutions

Organizing multi-stakeholder discussions with expanded and diverse compositions allowed the CRRC-Armenia research team to identify a number of issues, some of which were not foreseen and some of which were not considered as topics in need of discussion. During the discussions, the participants referred to both already existing problems, most of which were raised by researchers on various platforms, and to problems that are difficult to identify or do not get enough attention. For example, most researchers highlighted the lack of qualified interviewers. They talked about the issue of training the interviewers and assigned blame to different parties. However, their low funding was not regarded as the reason for the issue they face. According to the researchers, it is due to the fact that the problem has not been previously raised from the perspective of the interviewers.

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2. In the perception of Armenians, “more or less” is identified with the state of adaptation (getting along). In this context, it refers to coming to terms with existing problems in research practices, in the best case, trying to overcome them with your own strength and connections, which is often associated with the feeling of loneliness and insufficient abilities. Meanwhile, frequent contacts with the research community members, comprehensive awareness of problems, constructive cooperation, etc., can lead not only to overcoming the feeling of loneliness and inability, but also to creating a more favorable environment and conditions for research activities, and implementing more innovative ideas. The idea of referring to this saying arose from the observation of one of the participants of the 4th forum that: “Now I more or less believe that we are going the right way”.

The presentation of counter-arguments by the representatives of various donor organizations participating in the discussions regarding the frequent criticisms addressed to them is important: for the most part, research practitioners remain unaware of them. Involvement of actors from various sectors and different roles in the discussions allowed the CRRC-Armenia research team to identify a wider spectrum of issues relevant to the research community, and to list more diverse interpretations and solutions to them. That indicates the fact that looking at problems from different viewpoints can be perceived differently by multi-stakeholders.

The numerous and diverse composition of the discussion participants facilitated the generation of a wide-range of problem-solving scenarios., which certainly increases the possibility of finding more effective solutions.

### **More specific formulations**

Following the dynamics of the discussions, we revealed a trend wherein descriptions of the problems, the comments and relevant explanations, as well as proposed solutions gradually transitioned from general formulations to more specific ones. Nonetheless, participants more clearly identified the causes of the problems, scopes of operation, ways of overcoming them, expected results, possible responsible actors, etc. This tendency was especially visible in the discussions organized within the framework of the podcast and the forum.

### **Wider awareness**

Discussions with numerous and multiprofile actors related to research practices allowed us to better understand the research challenges, approaches, and experiences in different sectors. On the one hand, it is crucial to find more avenues of cooperation. On the other hand, it is important to find more effective solutions to overcome their challenges.

### **More consensus**

During the discussions, there was a growing inclination to achieve a broader consensus on specific issues by identification and consideration of various aspects related to specific problems. The condition plays a crucial role in establishing collaborative platforms aimed at finding solutions.

### **More offers to collaborate**

One of the important results obtained during the discussions is the willingness to work together towards the solutions to various problems and cooperate with researchers from different sectors. In general, a total of 48 suggestions were made to solve varying problems. 14 suggestions out of total which refer to the perspective of cooperation. Among those suggestions, the most valuable ones are those that are focussed on successful experiences and having certain necessary resources


### **Higher self-identification**

For many participants, the concept of “(research) community” became more understandable and common. One of the participants, who also participated in the previous 3rd forum, enthusiastically admitted: “It became clearer to me what the research community means. That concept was very unfamiliar to me during the first forum ([in fact, the 3rd forum]), even today, at the beginning of the day”.

## **More discussions**

Many participants found the brainstorming sessions, podcast episodes, and the final forum useful in terms of raising and identifying issues, finding more effective solutions, as well as strengthening the capacity of the research community. They expressed their interest to continue organizing such discussions more often.

# PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS



During the concluding discussion of the 4th forum, the participants expressed their keen interest in CRRC-Armenia sharing the comprehensive list of solutions (online or through other means) that were discussed. These solutions encompassed various aspects, positions, interpretations, and resolutions pertaining to the challenges encountered in research activities. The insights were voiced during the brainstorming sessions, discussions, podcast episodes, and the final forum, highlighting commonalities in content and objectives. Therefore, we have categorized these ideas into specific clusters, which are presented under the following headings.

Moreover, considering the overarching goal of this project to foster cooperation, we present the observations and solutions related to proposals and prospects for collaboration in a more detailed manner. By doing so, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the positions and recommendations on the *five key topics* extensively discussed during the 4th forum. We are convinced that categorizing topics present problems and potential solutions in a more versatile and refined manner.

We consider it important to emphasize that the topics were formulated as a result of group brainstorming sessions with researchers within the framework of a one-year joint project of CRRC-Armenia and the NDI. They are drawn from the observations of the brainstorming participants and are mostly presented without editing. The wordings they appear in are strictly conventional/symbolic in nature and do not necessarily coincide with the perceptions of other representatives of the community. In this case, the questions and proposals that arise from the formulated problems and on which a common understanding has been demonstrated are what should be deemed most important. This also applies to the sub-issues and the proposals made by the participants in order to overcome them.

## **Round-table 1. In our country, the profession of researcher<sup>3</sup> is taught wrongly from the beginning, therefore the problem lies in the process of educating/training a specialist**

The participants identified the following sub-issues related to the topic:

- Wrong disposition of professors/tutors towards students.
- Insufficient involvement of students in research practices.
- Scarcity or absence of interdisciplinary knowledge among students.
- Lack of practical researchers among professors/tutors.
- Gaps in non-formal education.
- Low demand for researchers.

The participants from the discussion proposed the following solutions and measures to overcome the listed problems:

**Changing the disposition of professors/tutors towards students.** There is a need to change the perception of professors/tutors and higher educational institutions toward students. Students should not only be considered knowledge recipients but also future researchers. This can be achieved by introducing research methods at the early stages of university education and allocating sufficient time and resources for research courses and internships. Involving students in the research activities of lecturers through coaching and mentoring could also foster a positive change. Participants also emphasized the importance of teaching research methods throughout the study, and encouraging students to periodically present their small research projects.

**Increasing student involvement in research practices.** To address this issue participants suggest to adopt passive exploratory measures, as well as to attempt to actively involve students in research projects.

- Passive measures include organizing visits to non-university organizations engaged in practical research activities, allowing students to familiarize themselves with the specificities of work processes.
- Active involvement can be facilitated through small research grants, such as providing student-research grants through public-private partnerships or corporate social responsibility initiatives.

**Providing interdisciplinary knowledge among students.** Given the growing demand for interdisciplinary research, alongside their specialized disciplines, students should have knowledge regarding approaches and methods from other fields. The lack of interdisciplinary cooperation is considered as an underlying cause of this problem. Considering this, the participants proposed to create a platform that invites regular discussions among representatives from different disciplines on diverse research approaches and methods, which includes active student participation.

**Increasing the number of practical researchers among professors/tutors.** The lack of professors with practical research experience hinders the development of students' research abilities. The suggested solutions include inviting specialists from independent research institutions or state

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3. One of the participants of the discussion considered it important to distinguish between researcher and analyst (Researcher vs analyst), because there is a need to realize the limits of each expert's knowledge. Only in this case, it is possible to think and talk about the cooperation of different sectors of the professional community.

research organizations and involving them in university educational programs. Additionally, initiating informal educational programs (such as summer-winter schools and specialized courses) involving experienced specialists could also be helpful in this regard. . Providing special training for professors lacking research knowledge is another potential solution<sup>4</sup>.

**Identifying problems in non-formal education and ensuring its effectiveness.** Non-formal education is considered an important alternative to university education in training future researchers. However, there is a need to develop efficient mechanisms to identify potential beneficiaries and increase their motivation to participate in non-formal education courses. To have such mechanisms in place, the participants suggest organizing joint discussions with interested researchers and research organizations to create a platform for cooperation

**Creating a high demand for researchers.** The lack of demand for researchers in the labor market is conditioned by the existing problems in the education system. The participants believe that improving the quality of education will lead to an increase in demand. Therefore, further cooperation should focus on proposing and implementing approaches to enhance the demand for researchers.

## **Round-table 2. The political, value, normative, and ideological views of the researcher greatly affect the quality of the research.**

The participants of the discussions identified the following sub-issues in the scope of the topic:

- vagueness of research goals and methods;
- researcher's dependence on the agenda of donor organizations;
- insufficient quality control of the research.

Overcoming the listed sub-problems is envisioned by the discussion participants with the following solutions and measures:

**Promoting clear presentation of research goals and methods in research reports and presentations.** In many research reports and presentations, research goals and methods are not clearly presented. This is often due to the lack of appropriate demand among the public and even the research community, which, as a result, leads to display of inappropriate approaches to research or scientific ethics during the actual research. First of all, the participants of the discussion see the solution of the problem in a mandatory, transparent and clear presentation of the research goals and methods in the research reports.

According to the participants, another viable solution is organizing activities focused on research ethics education and advocacy (ethics course, establishing an ethics committee, and conducting periodic discussions on matters of ethics).

**Reducing the possibility of researcher's dependence on the agenda of donor organizations.** Many researchers share the opinion that they are often excluded or solely included in a formal manner during the formulation of research goals of the programs implemented by them, and sometimes also in the development of methods to be employed. Sometimes a research component in the final results, as presented in the final report of the implemented project, holds purely formal meaning. Therefore, it is not uncommon that the research is carried out by inexperienced

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<sup>4</sup> In this regard, the participants draw attention to the fact that the training courses of professors within university programs often are formal and rarely examine issues related to research methods and methodologies.

researchers and with inadequate methodology. It is for the same reason that in the final reports of the project, the main purpose of the research and the utilized tools are not clearly presented. According to the participants of the discussions, potential solutions to mitigate or weaken the dependence on the agendas of the donor organizations include aligning the above-mentioned acquisitions with the donors and communicating the importance of one's own expert perspectives at the stage of submitting research applications. Creating such a platform with the purpose of protecting the rights and interests of community members with other actors of the research community, potentially serving as a solution to the sub-problem.

**Increasing the effectiveness of research quality assurance and control.** According to the participants of the discussion, the existence of the problem itself is largely due to the fact that alternative expert assessment mechanisms for the adequacy and effectiveness of the research results and the research process, in general, are rarely used or not used at all.

Research methods, obtained results and their effectiveness are often determined and evaluated by those conducting the research, which significantly reduces the possibility of having high-quality research.

In terms of increasing the possibility of high-quality research, it is important to use certain, in many cases internationally known, mechanisms of control, such as "peer review", "board review", and the creation of inter-institutional platforms coordinating the latter.

At the micro level, a solution to the problem can involve introducing specific indicators to reveal the bias of interviewers in the research guidelines, incorporating internationally applicable scales in the guidelines to reduce the manifestations of political and person-centered biases, properly implementing experimental (pilot) and test studies, etc.

### **Round-table 3. Social research analyses are often limited to "passive" descriptions of data without in-depth analytical interpretations; this creates fertile ground for data misinterpretation and manipulation**

Within the framework of the topic, the participants of the discussions identified the following sub-issues:

- quantitative research lacks accompanying analysis and methodology;
- lack of quality analysis,
- the language of the research results is inaccessible to the public, to the beneficiaries of the results dissemination, sometimes even to members of the research community;
- insufficient data transparency,
- the low ranking of sociology among the public.

The discussion participants envision addressing the listed sub-problems through the following solutions and measures:

**Presenting the accompanying analysis and methodology in quantitative research thoroughly.** According to the participants, one of the key reasons why research results (especially quantitative research) are subject to manipulation and misinterpretation is that they lack the methodology used and the accompanying analysis.

There are various reasons, ranging from the low quality of the conducted research to the constraints



imposed by the donor organization, tight deadlines for the implementation of the research, and deliberate attempts to manipulate the audience. Accordingly, a mandatory presentation of the methods used in the research, a (brief or extensive) analytical summary of the results, and a clear preliminary agreement with the donor organizations about the reasonable deadlines for the implementation of the different stages of the research are proposed as solutions to the sub-problem. In order to avoid overloading the reader and the main text, the methodology and tests can be presented in appendices.

**Creating mechanisms that will ensure the presentation of quality analyses.** The participants noticed that in some cases the results of the research have attached analyses, but due to not observing certain professional standards, "it is difficult to consider them as an analysis". In this case, the creation of peer reviews, review essays, and board reviews are also highlighted as a solution. *Peer review should become a budget-line in research budgets, both for internal research organizations and for donors. Peer review should be done not by random people, but by specialists.*

**Making the language of the research results as accessible as possible to the public, to the beneficiaries of the dissemination of the results, as well as to the members of the research community.** One of the key reasons for the manipulation and misunderstanding of the research results is the fact that the data and ideas presented in them are difficult to decode. In other words, they are presented in specialized professional-academic language. It is for this reason that many important published researches are inaccessible not only to the general public but also to the actors who disseminate their results (journalists, bloggers, YouTube page managers, etc.), and even to certain circles of the research community.

The participants of the discussion see the solutions to the sub-problem in a number of dimensions. For example, one of them is to publicize two versions of the research results, one for a professional (in-depth version) and the other for a non-professional (curse version) audience. Another proposal refers to the increase of data literacy among the public, particularly among journalists, and the implementation of certain educational programs in that direction. One of the remarkable solutions proposed is the attachment of a dictionary guide on concepts and methods used in the published research. Another important solution concerns the sharing of data about the studies and their results carried out in different research-professional circles with other circles, which can reduce the possibility of misunderstandings, and contribute to the development of cooperation between them. In addition, as another option of a solution is considered the joint development of common tools and standards necessary for the proper publication of results.

During the discussions, there was also an opposite proposal to lighten the descriptions of the method and of tests in the research results, with the reason that they complicate the process of comprehension of the results. Accordingly, the best solution for their presentation may be to present them at a separate address or page.

**Making the data as transparent as possible to a wider audience.** The results of published research are sometimes subject to speculation and misunderstanding, because the data used in them is not available to a wide range of stakeholders and has limited access. In some cases, the audience is simply dealing with the data/numbers used in the analysis. Therefore, the participants of the discussion emphasize the publication of the data underlying the research, even in the form of separate databases. In specific cases, taking security and other issues into account, the circulation can be organized through platforms created for intranet use.

**Increasing the low reputation of social science (especially sociology) among the public.** According to the participants of the discussion, the researches that are not carried out on the basis of speculative and rigid research criteria have wide consumption and success, because the rating

of sociology and sociological research is quite low among the public. The reasons for this vary, including the sub-problems mentioned above. However, the main reason is that the tendency of the general public to recognize reality based on the results of scientific research is low. Consequently, there is a need to advocate for the role and significance of social sciences, particularly sociology, in the recognition of reality among the public. This implies discussions with the active participation of members of the research community, as well as certain efforts aimed at developing joint solutions. Conducting long-term research and applying its results can be an indirect way of solving the problem, which will contribute to the solution of various community problems in the communities under scrutiny, thus also increasing the rating of the research. The last suggestion is also partially related to the problem discussed in Topic 4.

#### **Round-table 4. Data and research potential are not sufficiently used to solve specific and practical problems.**

The participants identified the following sub-issues related to the topic:

- Absence or unavailability of common databases and analyses;
- Lack of research questions coming directly from the state;
- Low ranking of researchers;
- Inconsistency of those commissioning research.

The participants proposed the following solutions and measures to overcome the listed problems:

**Creating a common database for data and analysis and making existing databases available to a wider public.** Participants noted the difficulty in finding research databases and analyses, especially academic studies through publicly accessible web-sites and resources. In some cases, it is necessary to open dozens of online windows and dig through them to find what you are looking for. They suggested the creation of a shared database or the development of a system that enables easy access to necessary materials using keywords.

**Facilitating the implementation of direct state orders.** According to participants of discussions, one of the main reasons why data remains in the “drawers” and is not being sufficiently used for the policy-making purposes is the lack of appreciation of the importance of research at the state level. To address this, they proposed increasing the accountability of policymakers and implementers. Namely, pre-delegated research aimed at solving specific problems, along with public reporting on the results, can help ensure the utilization of research findings in policymaking. Involving business and consulting structures as mediators can also be beneficial, as they can effectively communicate more efficiently the benefits of research conducted by individuals or private initiatives to policymakers. Furthermore, to enhance the efficiency of communication of research results with policy-making, it is suggested to involve experts from relevant ministries and departments in different stages of research projects.

**Enhancing the recognition of researchers.** Participants expressed concern that important studies often go unnoticed or insufficiently communicated due to the lack of visibility and trust in the authors. They suggested advocacy efforts to increase recognition, such as the establishment of allied media organizations dedicated to promoting research findings. Innovative approaches, such as featuring researchers in sitcoms or popular series, could also raise awareness. Additionally, the application and publication of rating scales could contribute to increasing the credibility of researchers.

**Improving the consistency among those delegating research.** The participants identified inconsistency among research commissioning structures, both public and private, as a barrier to effective communication and dissemination of research results. Therefore, they emphasized the need to consider communication and achievements in the post-research period as essential criteria for evaluating research quality.

## **Round-table 5. Social science and humanities researchers can “see” society better together, but they hardly cooperate with each other**

Within the scope of the topic, the participants of the discussions identified the following sub-issues:

- Being poorly informed about the activities performed by other actors involved in research implementation;
- Arrogant, sometimes “chauvinist” attitude towards other disciplines of social sciences;
- Lack of interdisciplinary knowledge;
- Lack of calls to conduct interdisciplinary research;
- Underestimation of the effectiveness of interdisciplinary research;
- Lack of accounting of successful experiences of cooperation;
- Lack of a common interdisciplinary platform.

To overcome the listed sub-issues, the participants of the discussions proposed the following solutions and actions:

**Increasing the awareness level of each other’s activities among the different actors conducting research.** The participants of the discussions believe that the scarcity of interdisciplinary cooperation is due to the activities of the actors conducting research within the framework of other scientific disciplines and the lack of awareness about these studies conducted by them. Sharing the information about the conducted and ongoing research projects through e-mail addresses or the option of creating and operating a unified online platform was proposed as a potential solution to this sub-issue. Recognizing representatives of different disciplines and maintaining offline connections with them is also important. In this sense, the various discussion platforms created by CRRC-Armenia were considered as an efficient platform.

**Reducing the arrogant, sometimes “chauvinistic” attitude towards other disciplines.** According to various observations, one of the factors hindering interdisciplinary cooperation is the contemptuous, sometimes dismissive attitude towards other disciplines, the manifestations of which are evident both in various university faculties, and by some research organizations in the practices of researching problems that require interdisciplinary approaches by their own efforts and only with methods familiar to them. Overcoming mentioned ‘vicious’ practices requires active discussions about their harmful impact and consequences. Only after recognizing this, will it be possible to develop and propose appropriate solutions.

**Increasing the level of interdisciplinary knowledge.** One of the unfavorable conditions for the development of interdisciplinary cooperation is the low level of awareness of different disciplines, of varying approaches and research techniques. According to the participants of the discussions, the solution to this problem is possible if several activities are done, e.g., in the educational programs of formal institutions expand the number of hours allocated to courses on different humanities and social sciences, on research approaches and methods typical of the latter, as well as tighten the mechanisms for the assessment of knowledge acquisition. Another, more short-term solution, is the organization of special courses for teaching interdisciplinary knowledge in an informal format.

**Creating an opportunity to conduct interdisciplinary research.** Different participants of the discussions believe that the lack of interdisciplinary collaboration practices is due to the fact that research commissioning organizations do not delegate such research projects. Therefore, the solution is to plan interdisciplinary-consortium research, which will promote the cooperation continuity with the participation of different research groups. The best option, in that sense, is the implementation of long-term research projects (three or more years). Delegates for such research projects can be not only international and local donor organizations, but also the RA National Academy of Sciences, universities, ministries, business entities, etc.

**Reducing underestimation of effectiveness of interdisciplinary research.** A number of participants attribute passive interdisciplinary cooperation to misconceptions about the benefits and the effectiveness of such cooperation and the lack of necessary experience<sup>5</sup>. Accordingly, the use of different occasions and opportunities for cooperation can contribute to the neutralization of such ideas and the initiation of new cooperation.

**Contributing to a wider dissemination of successful experiences of cooperation.** One of the sub-issues raised during the discussions is that various research organizations, on one occasion or another, have conducted interdisciplinary research involving researchers from different disciplines. However, these experiences were usually not publicized and advocated to the necessary extent, which could've served as an encouraging example for other research organizations and projects.


**Establishing an interdisciplinary common platform.** According to several participants in the discussions, interdisciplinary cooperation can be greatly enhanced through the creation of an association or institute composed of representatives from various disciplines and research organizations. It was noted that previous attempts to establish such an association had failed to make significant progress. Some participants emphasized that the future lies in the development of platforms and projects aimed at addressing specific problems, and therefore, efforts should be directed towards their creation.

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5. "...Cooperation with different specialists is difficult, because the worldviews are different, the methods are different, so cooperation is unsuccessful. Other specialists do not understand the economic philosophy, the way of thinking that comes over the years. For this reason, collaboration is difficult, particularly with mathematicians..."

"It seems that students study a thousand non-professional subjects, but it does not give them anything; they don't understand why they need that non-professional spectrum, they don't understand how it will help them later. There is no culture of having two academic supervisors. Supervisors "reserve their own" graduate students, they don't like it when another person cooperates with their student."

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The activities conducted under the subproject “Community of Research Practice” and their outcomes demonstrate that the Research Community has achieved a significant milestone in identifying and categorizing research practice issues. Numerous proposals have been put forward to address these issues. We also observe a strong desire and willingness among community members to collectively solve these problems. However, the proposed solutions often lack a clear delineation of effective mechanisms and subsequent steps. Additionally, the desire and readiness to address these challenges are not consistently accompanied by specific roles and responsibilities.

On the one hand, this can be attributed to the lack of necessary experience in solution mechanisms. On the other hand, it may also stem from concerns that the established mechanisms could potentially hinder independent research activities or be exploited by supervisors lacking competence or ethical principles. These factors currently hinder the further progress and development of the community and need to be addressed. As mentioned earlier, the community has reached a stage where solutions exist, but progress becomes impossible without establishing appropriate mechanisms. Therefore, the next stage of action should primarily focus on overcoming these barriers.

We are convinced that the aforementioned concerns primarily arise from the lack of necessary practical experience. Overcoming this gap will automatically alleviate these fears. The experience gap can be filled by documenting successful local experiences, drawing and internalizing upon international best practices, adhering to the adage of “not reinventing the wheel”. The implementation of this approach is proposed as follows:

1. Organize discussions on problem-solving mechanisms and coordination, highlighting successful international and local experiences, and utilizing various formats of successful discussions.
2. Invite participants with relevant experience or knowledge in these areas to contribute to the discussions.
3. To enhance the effectiveness of these discussions, center the topics around *smaller-scale cooperation platforms based on joint statement documents*, rather than focusing solely on establishing larger cooperation entities (institutes, associations, etc.). The discussions should address the specific challenges faced by research practices and the groups that have expressed greater interest in collaboration<sup>6</sup>. Potential topics may include:
  - How to conduct interdisciplinary research effectively?
  - How to improve the organization of researchers’ education and training?
  - How to enhance the effectiveness of interviews?

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6. If these small platforms are working effectively and there is a need to coordinate their activities at a higher level, the possibility of creating an association or institution at a higher level can be considered.

- How to communicate research findings to policymakers?
  - How to disseminate and publicize research results?
  - How to identify new approaches to enhance research and analysis quality?
4. Each thematic group should explore key questions related to coordination mechanisms, such as the coordinating body's structure, desired qualities, legal status, formation process, rotation of coordinating staff, and potential funding sources.
  5. When discussing cooperation platforms and mechanisms, it is essential to visualize the complete problem-solving and overcoming process. This includes describing the problem, its causes, the targeted object of resolution, tools and indicators, expected intermediate and final results, additional outcomes, as well as potential obstacles and risks.
  6. Facilitate communication and wide dissemination of the discussion outcomes and reactions through media channels, academic networks, and the dedicated platform created by the CRRC-Armenia Foundation for this purpose.



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