

Introduction to “Researcher Capability”

This second section offers constructive guidance on building your researcher capability. There are many ways in which you can do this. You have probably used some of these already in your ‘non-research’ life, and if so, would realise the benefits that each can bring. Some of these ways are the following:

- **Adopt an ethical approach**

Whatever research you undertake, you must have in mind the relevant ethical considerations. VET researchers need to comply with the ethical policies and procedures of their institutions (especially if within universities, through their Human Research Ethics Committees). A key way to build our understanding of these is to read and take to heart various codes of practice. The most immediate is to consult AVETRA’s own *Code of Practice*. For more detailed ethical guidelines, then read The National Health and Medical Research Council’s *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*. You will find these codes under “Ethics requirements & ethics applications” in Section 1.

- **Finding a mentor**

It is helpful to have a mentor when you are starting out on a research journey, someone you can trust and of whom you can ask questions when you are not sure of the way ahead. It may save you falling down any number of potholes! Each new researcher will have different needs, so the mentoring role may include being a teacher, guide, motivator, coach, advisor, sponsor, role model, referral agent or door-opener for you. The relationship can be face-to-face or online. If you are undertaking a higher degree through a university, this role will be one more formally called a supervisor. The *Building Researcher Capacity* program funded by the NCVER has had a mentor program embedded in it, whereby each early career participant has teamed up with an experienced AVETRA researcher to help them through the process of conducting a small project and developing an occasional paper that could be published by NCVER. Many of these occasional papers you can find on the NCVER website.

- **Networking**

This is another very useful way of building your capability. Try to participate in any relevant activities that are happening in your city/town, and make a point of getting to know more and more people. If you are teaching, then building networks through your learners, especially past learners now in the world of work, is a good way of expanding your horizons. Participating in conferences, particularly those with a research focus, is a very helpful means of not only developing your knowledge of research and how others go about it, but also meeting others who share the same professional interests as you. These interactions may well lead to collaborating on research activities. The section on “Relevant conferences” in Section 3 provides a number of such gatherings that you would find very helpful.

- **Peer support**

Peers can also be very helpful resources for you. They can assist in research activities, provide encouragement just when you are desperately in need of it, and generally help to support you.

- **Reading books, journals and conference papers**

Reading provides us with a great opportunity to enter into others’ worlds beyond our own. There are many books that cover the research process. A more up-to-date source is to read relevant journals, as articles in journals are normally published more quickly than books. The

section on Relevant Journals in Section 3 suggests a number of sources, and you can easily choose some that are in your field and explore them for ideas. Also, websites of conferences usually have sections where you can identify past conference papers of relevance (e.g. AVETRA's own website contains downloadable conference papers stretching back to 1998).

- **Learning from the insights of others**

The insights of others are invaluable in providing signposts and ideas that you might be able to build on, and in generally serving as sources of encouragement. There is nothing better, when you are feeling down or believe that you have reached a dead-end, than learning from someone else's struggles and from the ways in which they have pushed through and succeeded. This is motivating for us, and can inspire us to keep going. In this section, you will find stories of others just like you who started on their research journey and learnt along the way! Their narratives indicate that there is indeed light at the end of the tunnel! But unless you start, and keep persevering, you won't find it. And that would be a great pity!

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Adopting an ethical approach



Finding a mentor



Networking



Peer support

Insights into researchers' journeys



