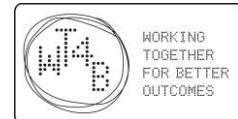


Working together for better outcomes: the role of research partnerships



The James
Hutton
Institute



Aim and audience

This guide is aimed at research partners from international, national or local government; small or large private or public companies; non-governmental organisations (NGOs); and the citizenry. It provides guidance for working with interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary researchers in order to achieve improved research outcomes through shared responsibility.

Helping you to make your collaborations successful

To aid more successful collaborative research partnerships: we propose you consider using our checklist of actions during these five stages of a collaborative process (Table 1). A number of these actions are posed as questions for you to ask yourself and your team. During our workshop, two values and a related set of principles were identified that underpin these actions (see right).

1. Values that can help deliver successful collaborations are: respect different viewpoints and other sources of knowledge, and be flexible and open to different ways of doing things.

2. Suggested principles that can help deliver successful collaborations include: engage, commit, build trust, advocate, communicate, participate, build capacity, reflect and ask questions, deliver, share outputs, and review and evaluate.

General requirements for collaboration

1. The process of establishing a partnership is as important as the outcomes to be achieved.
2. Collaboration needs to be well-facilitated allowing people to ‘open up’ and share issues. The role of the facilitator and facilitating organisation is to provide a safe space.
3. As a research partner, you can:
 - Help shape research funding agendas.
 - Have an input into determining research questions.
 - Insist that research is neutral, addresses all sides of a question and avoids asking for one-sided evidence.
 - Be sensitive to, and willing to learn about, constraints that researchers work under.
 - Work towards a collective view and avoid domination by special interests, including your own.
 - Share experiences of both successes and failures to help improve research processes and outcomes.
4. Individual projects in a larger programme of research may need to be ‘depressurised’, if the expectations on them are too high. This can be achieved by communicating the context of how each project fits into the bigger picture and ensuring that workloads and deliverables are equitably spread. Any non-negotiable issues need to be clearly articulated.
5. Networks, citizen science projects and other opportunities for social learning can help build citizen and other partner capacity for collaborative working.

Working Together for Better Outcomes (WT4BO) workshop outputs and details

WT4BO workshop website
bit.ly/WT4BO

Guidance notes for funders and researchers are available from the workshop website.

Published February 2016. Developed at the March 2015 workshop “Working Together for Better Outcomes” by 36 participants from 21 research, funding and end-user organisations.

Suggested citation: Katrin Prager, Christopher (Kit) J. A. Macleod, Laura Meagher, Gabriele Bammer, Katherine N. Irvine, Alister Scott, Sheila George, Eric Baird, Helaina Black, Tim Daniell, Mark Haffey, Hilary Homans, Jon Rathjen and Shamal Mohammed (2016). Working together for better outcomes: the role of research partnerships. Working Together for Better Outcomes, 26-27 March 2015, Edinburgh, UK, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.3250.4085.

Table 1: Checklist of thought questions and actions during the five stages of a collaborative process

We identified five stages in a collaborative process. These overlap, and there are feedback loops between stages, so the allocation of what action takes place when is indicative rather than absolute. The thought questions and actions will help you achieve your objectives.

Pre-collaboration stage	Beginning of collaboration	During collaboration	End of collaboration	After collaboration
				→
Why do you need to collaborate?		How do you enhance learning from the collaboration?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your objectives? • What is required to deliver these objectives? • What skills/expertise/resources are available in-house? • What additional skills/expertise/resources are required? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure feedback is an ongoing element. • Review your starting objectives and success criteria. • Allow for dynamic involvement in project and successor project. • Carry out post-project evaluation. • Build your capacity/plan for post-project utilisation of research results. • Stay engaged, keep connections alive to ease development of subsequent joint projects. 		→
Who could you collaborate with?				→
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask ‘who is needed around the table’, recognising that the ‘who’ might change over time? • Which researchers/public bodies/NGOs etc. to contact? • Who do you have good relationships with? • Who are good knowledge brokers? • Who are the end users? 				→
		How should you collaborate?		→
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage early to ensure that outputs are relevant. • Ask critical questions, including ‘what is in it for me’? • Communicate the issues that your organisation faces that research might be able to address and share your knowledge. • Build a collaborative process that is shaped by all in the partnership. • Identify win-wins which strengthen the collaboration. • Agree a plan for utilisation of research results (including impact plan and success criteria). • Agree and get signoff on individual roles and responsibilities of each partner and their commitment to input, attend meetings etc. throughout. • Consider a Memorandum of Understanding and a facilitator for complex or high risk projects. • Agree the process of communication and produce a communication plan including: regular steering group meetings, industry/policy events, visualisation of outputs, and co-authored scientific publications. • Participate in the review of these plans and processes. • Communicate findings widely. 		→